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Dark Waters: An Insider's Account of the NR-1, the Cold War's Undercover Nuclear Sub

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Friedman's critical analysis of President John Kennedy's Cold War leadership.

With *The Fifty Year War* Friedman presents a new, provocative survey of the Cold War from a joint force perspective while keeping both sides of the Iron Curtain in mind. He again demonstrates why he is considered a leading commentator on international security issues.

Unlike Friedman in his broad landscape of Cold War history, David Winkler paints a much smaller aspect of the Cold War canvas. This is a fine work that details the long road to mutual respect, safety, and communication on the high seas between the U.S. and Soviet navies.

Utilizing previously classified official documents, other archival material, and personal interviews with senior participants from both sides, Winkler traces the history of confrontations between U.S. and Soviet naval forces—confrontations that often proved fatal. Eventually, these Cold War incidents demanded a solution lest the next such occurrence escalate into outright war. The solution was found in 1972, in the historic pact, known as the Incidents at Sea Agreement (INCSEA).

INCSEA provided a direct navy-to-navy channel of communication that would help to limit and avoid future occurrences. How necessary was INCSEA? Winkler's first chapter, "Playing with the Bear," clearly reveals how "hot" the Cold War actually was, unbeknownst to many at the time. During the Truman and Eisenhower administrations alone, over one hundred Soviet and U.S. airmen were killed in air-to-air contacts.

Throughout 1971–72, studies and negotiations took place that led to the signing of the INCSEA agreement by then Secretary of the Navy John Warner and

Admiral Sergei Gorshkov of the Soviet navy. Winkler skillfully illustrates how the successful negotiations were rooted in mutual respect and professionalism. This mutual understanding and respect, along with the signing of INCSEA, would do much to end naval harassment between the Cold War superpowers.

As Winkler points out, INCSEA truly "is one of the positive legacies of the Cold War." One should note that although *Cold War at Sea* represents first-class scholarship, the Cold War specialist is more likely to enjoy it than the armchair sailor. Nevertheless, with its superb chronology of Cold War naval incidents and excellent notes, this work will make a welcome addition to any serious Cold War library.

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Vyborny, Lee, and Don Davis. *Dark Waters: An Insider's Account of the NR-1, the Cold War's Undercover Nuclear Sub*. New York: New American Library, 2003. 243pp. \$24.95

Although ultimately worthwhile and entertaining, *Dark Waters* suffers from the strange paradox of inadequately describing underwater events that ought to be gripping while simultaneously portraying mundane and ordinary events in a marvelously compelling manner. Lee Vyborny was a new-construction plank-owner and member of the first commissioning crew of the U.S. Navy's small nuclear-powered submarine *NR-1*. Don Davis has written or coauthored eleven books.

Overall, the book well rewards its readers, but unevenly. An example of its bumpiness comes early in the prologue

when the authors state that in World War II “about half the U.S. submarines and the men who served in them were lost,” which, of course, is untrue. Although fifty-two U.S. submarines and over 3,500 of their heroic crewmembers were lost, this number represents a fifth (not half) of the submarines the United States sent to sea during that war.

Further problems arise when the book briefly describes the path that took Vyborny from being an ordinary high school graduate to becoming a crewmember of *NR-1*—the Navy’s smallest and most mysterious nuclear-powered submarine. The authors certainly do not devote excessive space to this part of the tale, but their telling of Vyborny’s early story is just a bit too self-conscious and self-effacing, lacking the easy confidence and pride that characterizes much of the rest of the book. Another criticism arises from an early passage in which Vyborny relates a 1964 deployment he made as a junior enlisted sailor on the nuclear-powered submarine *USS Sargo* to the Sea of Japan. Intended, one presumes, to rival the swashbuckling tales told in Sontag and Drew’s *Blind Man’s Bluff*, the story of the grounding, jam-dive casualty, and operational exploits of the *USS Sargo* simply are not conveyed in a manner compelling or even believable to those with their own submarine experience. One reads them wondering if they are true. For instance, the authors state that *Sargo* passed ten feet directly underneath a newly launched Echo II Soviet submarine to “determine if she was powered by standard diesel engines, or a nuclear reactor.” It is curious to think the U.S. Navy would use this method to ascertain the mode of propulsion of a

ship class that had already been in service for at least two years.

But these criticisms pale in comparison to Vyborny’s success in relating how he and eleven other immensely dedicated men who made up the first *NR-1* crew worked in the physically demanding environment of the Electric Boat shipyard to oversee the construction of the small submarine. This is the section in which the book truly shines, as readers get a rare firsthand glimpse of how a crew, believing with justified conviction that they are elite, come together to become shipmates and expert operators of a complex, expensive, amazing machine. Vyborny and Davis’s work is again excellent when it tells some of the Admiral Hyman Rickover anecdotes that Vyborny witnessed during Rickover’s reign over all the Navy’s nuclear-powered vessels. The authors balance perfectly Rickover’s bizarre idiosyncrasies against his awesome effectiveness and offset the fear he engendered against the respect he earned, neutralizing his routinely acidic abrasiveness with his child-like wonder at the sights of the deep visible from *NR-1*’s small windows. Also masterful is the authors’ depiction of the routine when operating *NR-1*, the sacrifices inherent in living for weeks in a small enclosed space, eating preprocessed food for days on end, standing miserable surface watches, and all the other mundane aspects of extended life underwater in close proximity to a nuclear reactor. These portions of the book are indeed well told and will resonate with those who have gone to sea.

As good as their depictions of the ordinary are, Vyborny and David convey the dangers of *NR-1*’s unusual and exceptional missions and experiences in a less forceful and riveting manner. Perhaps readers have become overexposed

to and jaded by these kinds of exploits, or perhaps *Dark Waters* pulled some of *NR-1*'s punches due to classification considerations. Regardless, the action sections, though worth reading, are not up to the high standards of the rest of the book. Still, Vyborny's insider account of how *NR-1*'s first crews built and operated their ship fully pays back the reader's investment. *Dark Waters* should be on every submariner's bookshelf, even if it tells its extraordinary tale a bit unevenly.

WILLIAM S. MURRAY
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Bateman, Robert L. *No Gun Ri: A Military History of the Korean War Incident*. Mechanicsburg, Penna.: Stackpole, 2002. 288pp. \$22.95

On 11 January 2001, Secretary of Defense William Cohen announced that in June 1950, U.S. soldiers "killed or injured an unconfirmed number of Korean refugees . . . in the vicinity of No Gun Ri." This announcement preceded the release of an investigation convened in response to an Associated Press article that documented the massacre of hundreds of Korean civilians by U.S. soldiers under orders. The article eventually earned a Pulitzer Prize for the Associated Press and thrust the story to front-page news.

For nearly fifty years, the No Gun Ri incident languished in the backwaters of military history. Despite understandable Korean interest, few American researchers delved into this difficult period until early 1999, when AP correspondents Charles Hanley and Martha Mendoza uncovered a "smoking gun," a confessed U.S. Army massacre

participant, and broke the story to a readership anxious to hear about U.S. wartime atrocities.

The truth is not so simple, however. According to Bateman, the AP was working with inconsistent or incorrect information and knew their version was questionable before the article was published. Concurrent with the Army's investigation into the incident, Bateman (an experienced infantry officer himself) examined what transpired at No Gun Ri and tried to resolve the discrepancies between what he knew of 7th Cavalry history, the soldiers who were there, and the details of the AP story. From his investigation and his subsequent writings, Bateman has captured important aspects of the military reality of that time, the frustrations associated with presenting unimpeachable history about a fifty-year-old event, and the dangers of a free press run amok.

Bateman's treatise is divided into two major sections: first, a soldier's review of the tactical situation at the end of July 1950 and the military record of the events at No Gun Ri; and second, a less relevant examination of the Associated Press's publication of the original story. The military analysis is generally solid and clearly backed by an infantry soldier's appreciation for the life-and-death challenges that faced young men of the 7th Cavalry in the early days of the war. Bateman relies on U.S. primary sources, extensive interviews, and reconnaissance photographs to debunk many "facts" reported by the AP and a group of former Korean refugees who are now parties to a four-hundred-million-dollar lawsuit against the U.S. government. Unfortunately, Bateman also draws a number of conclusions