

Admirals under Fire: The U.S. Navy and the Vietnam War

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In his final chapter, “The Submarine and Sex,” Medhurst documents the painstakingly slow process of including women in submarines, especially in the United States. Women first appeared in submarines only in fiction, as in Verne’s *Nautilus*; it would take decades before the practice became reality. Again, Medhurst provides a comprehensive review of women on submarines in literature, film, and the real world.

For those who prefer audiobooks, beware that Medhurst’s treatment often flows freely among real-world events such as the 1919 Treaty of Versailles limiting the number of submarines a nation could build and the fictional world of literature and film.

In the printed versions of the book, the shift back and forth between fiction and reality is made quite clear, but in the audio version, to which one might be listening while partly occupied otherwise, it is a bit easier to get confused about what is real and what is not.

In sum, anyone with even the mildest interest in submarines will find Medhurst’s *Sub Culture* a worthwhile read.

GEORGE “BUD” BAKER



Admirals under Fire: The US Navy and the Vietnam War, by Edward J. Marolda. Lubbock: Texas Tech Univ. Press, 2021. 496 pages. \$49.95.

Military historian Ed Marolda’s already-distinguished, ongoing review of the Navy in the Vietnam era continues with his newest work, *Admirals under Fire: The US Navy and the Vietnam War*. The author tells the story of five four-star admirals—Admirals Harry D. Felt, Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Thomas H. Moorer, Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr., and

James L. Holloway III—who were key leaders in bringing the Navy through the Vietnam War period and into the post-Vietnam era. Marolda pulls no punches in presenting an objective, well-researched and -referenced work that presents the information directly and succinctly and in an organized way. Such a treatment has been lacking in previous examinations of the Navy’s senior leadership and its role in Vietnam.

Through a series of thirteen chapters, the author addresses the respective background, personality, and magnitude of responsibilities of each admiral, as well as the geopolitical environment with which he dealt—or avoided doing so. This book is essential reading for the veteran historian, in that Marolda did personal interviews with or gained access to the files of each of his main subjects, some of which had not been available previously.

The strength of Marolda’s work is that he lays out an objective for his work, then stays with it. His introduction refers to the assertions of flawed leadership found in H. R. McMaster’s *Dereliction of Duty* (1997) and Jeffrey Record’s *The Wrong War* (1998), then declares that his book intends “to address the accuracy of those assertions and assess the success or failure of the leadership exercised by” the five admirals (p. xx).

The author examines the admirals (all were Naval Academy graduates and were proven warriors) without playing favorites and lets the reader decide what was the most important aspect of their respective times in office. Admiral Felt, Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command (CINCPAC), 1958–64, saw the communist threat in the Cold War context but was not a proponent of immediate extensive military involvement

in Vietnam. He proposed a “graduated escalation,” which indeed happened after he left command. However, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and others in the political realm marginalized the admiral, his influence reduced by their distrust of the military.

Admiral Sharp, CINCPAC, 1964–68, took over from Felt. The Gulf of Tonkin incident happened under his watch and provided the reason to commit the nation to war. The McNamara documentary film *The Fog of War* (2003) is well worth viewing to hear the recording of Admiral Sharp saying “I think” in response to whether he was sure of the second attack on the Navy ships by the North Vietnamese in 1964. Under his watch, the massive buildup of American forces in Vietnam occurred, reflecting America’s belief in its ability to win a conflict against any lesser foe. Sharp proposed using naval gunfire against targets in North Vietnam rather than sending planes into hotly defended areas, given the predictable subsequent casualties, but with a few exceptions McNamara ignored him. Thus, this admiral too suffered the resistance to his advice and lack of respect from the nation’s civilian leadership that Felt had sustained.

Admiral Moorer, eighteenth Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), 1967–1970, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), 1970–74, inherited a Navy that was dealing not only with war but with civil unrest and racial and drug problems, and he served under a new set of civilian leaders. His ability to deal with those problems and leaders would propel him to becoming the first Navy CJCS.

Admiral Zumwalt, the nineteenth CNO, 1970–74, the youngest ever appointed (at forty-nine years of age), became CNO from being the Navy’s top admiral

in Vietnam. He was a self-promoter who would run afoul of the president and other civilian leaders. A visionary innovator, Zumwalt tackled the myriad of problems facing the Navy and made tremendous progress—outside the conventional ways of command.

Admiral Holloway, the twentieth CNO, 1974–78, received favorable comments on his leadership in battle but also was someone with the political savvy to bring the Navy forward from Vietnam into the larger Cold War confrontation. After he left the service, he received credit for his efforts to moderate many of his predecessor’s overzealous mandates and bring stability to the Navy.

In discussing the strengths and weaknesses of these admirals, the author relates how they interacted with military leadership, but most critically how they as commanders interacted with the country’s political leadership. Many decades later, the energy expended and the frustration experienced in those dealings—in a failed effort—leave the reader wondering how such dedicated, intelligent leaders could not bring about the “win” they sought.

From the moment I started reading this book I was captivated by the research and detail. Marolda provides new perspectives on the Navy’s leadership in a period that is key to understanding today’s Navy. He incorporates subplots of history, delivers straight common sense, and offers political lessons at all levels. The foreword to the book is by former Secretary of the Navy John Lehman, and constitutes a resounding approval of and recommendation to read Marolda’s work. I fully concur with Secretary Lehman. As an Army Vietnam veteran, like Marolda, I found that to understand better the Navy’s significant

role from the beginning to the end of the Vietnam War—not to mention the war as a whole, the Navy, and our nation—this book is a tremendous contribution.

ALBION A. BERGSTROM



Persians: The Age of the Great Kings, by Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones. New York: Basic Books, 2022. 448 pages. \$35.

As one of two case leads for the Naval War College’s study of the Peloponnesian War, I was looking to expand the case from simply studying the thirty-year conflict between Athens and Sparta to examining broadly the 125-year competition among Athens, Sparta, and Persia. Thus I was excited to read Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones’s *Persians*, which seeks to tell the story of the rise and fall of the Persian, or Achaemenid, Empire using “genuine, indigenous, ancient Persian sources to tell a very different story from the one we might be familiar with, the one moulded around ancient Greek accounts” (p. 5). It illustrates how little I knew about the Persian Empire that the section in which I was most interested takes up less than 10 percent of Llewellyn-Jones’s history.

Llewellyn-Jones uses disparate sources—Persian, Greek, Hebrew, and Egyptian histories, as well as bureaucratic records, royal inscriptions, and even pictographs carved on cliff faces and palace walls—to trace the history of the Persian Empire from 600 to 330 BCE. He leaves the reader with three important takeaways. First, the unitary nature of the Achaemenid dynasty was both its strength and its weakness. While there never were rival dynasties with extensive resources to challenge the emperor’s rule

during his reign, each succession drew multiple claimants to the throne from within the same extended family, and the eventual winner of this contest was forced to spend a great deal of blood, treasure, and time both destroying any trace of his rivals and burnishing his credibility. Second, partly as a result of this (relatively) orderly succession, the Persian Empire either maintained its size or expanded—there was never any decline in size. Although Persia’s inability to conquer Greece in the Greco-Persian Wars of 490–479 BCE was a defeat, Llewellyn-Jones points out that Greece was never part of Persia proper, and—sadly for a Peloponnesian War case lead—Persia was a much less important factor in the Peloponnesian War saga than Egypt, the Middle East, or western India. Finally, despite the wealth and power of the Persian Empire, Alexander was able to dismantle it in just a few years, although his assumption of Darius III’s claim to be “the king of kings” leaves an implication that the empire lived on, albeit in Hellenistic guise.

Persians features a family tree of the Achaemenid dynasty, maps, numerous drawings, and two sections of full-color photos. The family tree and maps would have been improved with small editorial changes, such as adding dates for the various emperors’ reigns, and the addition of more and more-detailed maps to highlight the regions and cities discussed in the text. Despite these minor foibles, the book is a quick, engrossing read that covers a lot of ground.

It also is a strange amalgam of popular and scholarly history. Routinely, sources are acknowledged but not cited, save for epigraphical sources that are cited using a detailed shorthand. Nonacademic readers may not be concerned about