

## Sub Culture: The Many Lives of the Submarine

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might experience moral *bruising* from killing but need not experience moral *injury*. He relates this understanding to a surgeon who must perform a lifesaving limb amputation: “a hard thing has to be done to prevent the advent of an even harder thing” (p. 165). In this case, the doctor is not performing a lesser of two evils (i.e., the Niebuhrian paradox) but rather the greatest *possible* good.

The author concludes by prescribing a proactive and holistic moral and spiritual preparation, to include teaching the tenets of just war, for our nation’s daughters and sons *before* they join the profession of arms (e.g., in religious faith groups and theological educational institutions), *before* they deploy to combat zones (e.g., ethical, moral, and spiritual fitness training within boot camps, officer-accession points, and unit predeployment training), and *after* they return from war (e.g., communal commitments to moral formation and servicemember and veteran care).

For those who subscribe to the just-war framework, especially within the Western, Augustinian, and Thomistic theological tradition, LiVecche’s work provides a helpful explanation of the limitations of a purely clinical model of moral injury, why and how it is just and charitable for those in the profession of arms to use lethal force in pursuit of a just cause, and how the just-war tradition might serve as a potential prophylactic against the debilitating effects of moral injury—what the author calls “damage prevention” (p. 198). For those who do not hold to a classic just-war position or who view moral injury through a predominantly medicalized lens, LiVecche’s thesis and recommended action steps likely will not resonate. However, given that the just-war tradition also traces its

roots to Roman jurists and philosophers such as Cicero, finds expression in contemporary secular thinkers such as Michael Walzer, and undergirds much of our modern-day international laws of war, LiVecche’s contribution remains beneficial in evaluating the impact of the Niebuhrian paradox on the moral foundation of those we send into harm’s way. Therefore, *The Good Kill* will benefit anyone concerned about the current moral-injury crisis, especially those responsible for training and caring for those who will fight and win our nation’s future wars.

JONATHAN ALEXANDER



*Sub Culture: The Many Lives of the Submarine*, by John Medhurst. London: Reaktion Books, 2022. 250 pages. \$22.50.

In his latest book, British author John Medhurst offers a comprehensive look at submarine culture from multiple perspectives. He examines life as viewed from the perspective of submariners: those who have served on submarines, beginning with experimental submersibles, propelled through the water by humans, up to the present day of modern diesel (i.e., conventional) and nuclear submarines. Yet Medhurst also views the subject from the military perspective: that of the military staffs that employ submarines as a stealth weapon (fast-attack submarines, designated SSNs) and as a doomsday weapon (ballistic-missile submarines, designated SSBNs).

But Medhurst does not stop there. He also examines submarines from a political perspective: how nations display their statuses in the world via the numbers and types of the submarines

(e.g., conventional, nuclear, and ballistic-missile) in their national inventories. Unlike nuclear weapons, which countries claim either to have or not to have, the submarines in a nation's inventory provide a more visible and measurable indicator of its political power.

This scope covers what I, a retired submariner who commanded an SSN in the 1990s, was hoping to get out of the book. I read it partly out of curiosity to see how accurate it was, and I was not disappointed. But Medhurst goes further than I had anticipated. His comprehensive review of submarine culture includes examining submarines in literature and film, from Jules Verne's iconic *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1870) to modern-day stories such as *The Hunt for Red October* (1984), *Crimson Tide* (1995), and *Hunter Killer* (2018). Although much of popular literature finds its way into film, Medhurst's review also includes many fictional and nonfictional written works that have not been adapted (including many of which I was unaware).

It is in this portion of the book that Medhurst really shines as he adeptly contrasts the differences between real life on a submarine and the versions portrayed in literature and film. He also sets the political backdrop that shaped certain films, such as the casting of a Soviet Typhoon-class SSBN as *Red October* and a modern U.S. SSN as *USS Dallas* (pp. 78–81). Medhurst connects the submarine duel played out in the film made from Clancy's book to the real-world Cold War politics played out between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Readers already familiar with submarine history will recognize the comprehensiveness of Medhurst's work, which covers landmark events that include

John Holland's first-ever submersible built for the U.S. Navy; the launching of the first U.S. nuclear-powered submarine, *USS Nautilus* (SSN 571); the first ballistic-missile submarine, *USS George Washington* (SSBN 598); and the disaster that struck the Russian submarine *Kursk*. If something significant to submarines happened in the real world, it is in this book.

If perfecting the submarine changed the character of war at sea, then marrying the submarine with intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) changed the character of war writ large. SSBNs represent a nation's ultimate "big stick." Their very existence nullifies in advance any first strike that aggressor nations might consider. To deliver nuclear weapons, nations can employ three different means: aircraft, land-based missiles, and submarines. The combined delivery system often is referred to as the *nuclear triad*. By developing *George Washington*, the United States became the first nation to establish such a nuclear triad. Their ability to launch multiple ICBMs while still submerged makes SSBNs the undetectable leg of that nuclear triad. The significance of the SSBN cannot be overemphasized, and Medhurst captures this reality in his book. In 1960, when *USS George Washington* successfully completed the first-ever submerged launch of a Polaris ICBM, its commanding officer sent a radio message to President Dwight D. Eisenhower that stated, "Polaris—from out of the deep to target. Perfect" (p. 69). I found Medhurst's portrayal of the SSBN as a doomsday weapon fascinating. While serving on two different SSBNs, I never dwelled on what would happen if we ever had to launch our ICBMs—but it is a nightmare scenario.

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