

REVIEWS

Niklas Zetterling & Michael Tamelander. *Tirpitz: The Life and Death of Germany's Last Super Battleship*. Oxford: Casemate, 2013. 360pp. ISBN 978-1935149187 (Paperback). Price £11.99.

With its glossy, bold red cover, it would be easy to be sceptical about this book. However, within the cover is contained an inclusive discussion of the German battleship *Tirpitz* and its experiences during the Second World War. The book is very much a popular rather than academic history. The bibliography is extensive and includes both archival and secondary sources. It provides a grand narrative of the *Tirpitz*'s efforts against Allied convoys to Russia, beginning with *Operation Nordneer* and ending with the *Tirpitz*'s destruction by air attack in late 1944. It is a very dynamic narrative and examines actions and events including various Arctic convoys, the attack on the St. Nazaire dry dock (*Operation Chariot*), the Royal Navy's X-Craft mini-submarine attack on *Tirpitz*, and the aftermath of *Tirpitz*'s sinking. The book provides very little in the way of an argument or analysis, other than the conclusion that the *Tirpitz* did not complete its mission to disrupt the Arctic convoys. The feel of this book will be familiar to those who have read works like Pierre Berton's *Vimy*, in that it is based on good primary and secondary research, and it is presented as a compelling story. The perspective on the narrative is also strikingly Nordic, which is most noticeable in the way that the various individuals and communities are described.

There are a small number of things that unfortunately do detract from the experience of reading the book, mainly related to editing. While the narrative is well-written, there are number of typographical errors and odd word choices that are noticeable enough to be distracting. Considering that this is a second printing, it is unfortunate that the authors have not corrected such issues from the first edition. The structure of the book is chronological and it is presented as a series of episodes. Some episodes are divided in such a way that chapters of only five or six pages lie alongside chapters of more than 40 pages. As a result the switch between chapters can occasionally be jarring. There are also, at times, impositions on the narrative that seem out of sorts with the purpose of the book. For example, the authors criticise Admiral Fraser for his role in the design of the *King George V* class of battleships and in particular their inferior speed to the *Scharnhorst*. These asides are unnecessary distractions from the central *Tirpitz* narrative.

Overall this book is recommended, but it is what it is; a rather entertaining read on a topic that should probably receive more attention than it has, both in terms of the *Tirpitz* and of the Arctic convoys. There is a good balance between detail and narrative that make the book accessible to those unfamiliar with the *Tirpitz*. The typesetting is clear, and the book includes a number of excellent photographs and maps that complement the narrative. It is highly recommended as fun reading for a

popular and academic audience, but the narrative focus might limit the value and utility for the latter.

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