

The Sea is at Our Gates: The History of the Canadian Navy, by Tony German. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990. Illus. with photos and maps. Pp. 360. \$39.95 cloth.

In the past decade, a growing number of Canadian scholars and writers have turned their attention to naval history. The result has been a bountiful harvest of books and articles on aspects of Canadian naval history. Understandably, many of these studies have concentrated on the RCN's contribution to the Allied cause during the Second World War, especially in the Battle of the Atlantic, the "U-boat" war. Marc Milner's *North Atlantic Run*, Michael Hadley's *U-Boats Against Canada*, both published in 1985, and, more recently, David Zimmerman's *The Great Naval Battle of Ottawa* (1989) have not only added significantly to our knowledge of the RCN in wartime but have also stimulated interest in the history of our naval forces.

Two collections of essays, *RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1968* (1982) and *RCN in Transition, 1910-1985* (1988), edited by James Boutillier and W. A. B. Douglas respectively, cover a wide range of subjects and together constitute an excellent contribution to Canadian naval historiography. *Salty Dips*, memoirs and reminiscences published in three volumes by the Ottawa Branch of Naval Officers Association of Canada between 1983 and 1988 and the many sea stories related by Hal Lawrence and James Lamb in a number of fine books are further evidence of interest in matters naval. The fiftieth anniversary of the Second World War has stimulated more general interest among ex-sailors of all stripes and, since virtually all of the extant RCN records from 1910 to unification in 1968 are now in the custody of the National Archives or at the Directorate of History, National Defence, there is every indication that this interest will continue to grow in the years ahead. Appropriately enough, National Defence's staff historians have embarked on a three-volume official history of the RCN.

These studies aside, however, only G. N. Tucker, the navy's one-time official historian, attempted a broader synthesis of naval history, but his two volumes, published in 1952, fall short of a complete story. Tony German, ex-RCN, is the first writer to take the long view of RCN history. In a very skilful manner, and relying heavily on the growing bibliography of RCN publications, German has produced a first-rate, popular account of the navy from its modest inception in 1910 to the end of the Cold War in 1989.

German's first four chapters summarize the origins of the RCN, its very limited role in the First World War and the sluggish but gradual growth

during the interwar years. The high water mark in the history of the RCN is, of course, the Battle of the Atlantic, and German is a great booster of the navy and its accomplishments at sea. He is not blind, however, to a variety of problems that plagued the navy from equipment deficiencies, lack of training, poor ship maintenance, and a higher command that sometimes seemed to forget that a war was going on in the North Atlantic. Much of this was due to inexperience and the rush of events but, in spite of this, the navy's accomplishments represented a solid contribution to the Allied victory. German's account of the war years is vivid and convincing, and well it should be, since he himself participated in some of the events.

The final third of the book is devoted to the RCN since the Second World War. German looks at the lows — mutinies — and the highs — Canadian naval efforts in the Korean War. He describes a navy that found a place for itself in the postwar uncertainties of the Cold War and was becoming more experienced and efficient at every turn. The development of naval aviation, improvements in anti-submarine warfare, and professional leadership of the highest quality made the Canadian navy a valued member of the NATO alliance. This is borne out in German's excellent account of naval participation in the Cuban missile crisis. By the early 1960s, the RCN was a highly efficient and confident navy.

The years that followed were not nearly so kind. In 1964 Paul Hellyer, Defence minister in Lester Pearson's Liberal government, began tinkering with the Armed forces — tinkering that would ultimately lead first to integration and finally to unification of the Armed Forces. The RCN was especially hard hit, and German's account of the navy's resistance to the changes forced upon it is equally hard hitting at the politicians. Hellyer "savaged" the Navy, in German's opinion, and the retrenchment which followed during the Trudeau years simply reduced the navy "to a shadow of its lusty self" (292).

German also examines a number of issues affecting the navy in recent years: the role of women in the navy, the impact of bilingualism, the rank structure, and so on. If nothing else, German establishes the benchmarks that future historians of the navy will have to take into account.

Tony German laments for the navy that once was, and might still be if it had not been for over-zealous, budget-paring politicians. In spite of all its trials and tribulations, however, the navy carries on in the best of naval traditions. That German feels Canada needs a strong and efficient navy goes without saying; the "sea at our gates" is an excellent image that underlines the fact that we are a maritime nation with ocean on three sides.

With Tony German, no holds are barred. He states his opinions clearly and pointedly and he can tell a good yarn. He has done an enormous amount of research in archival and published sources, and the result is an excellent synthesis of eighty years of naval history in Canada, a book that will surely serve as a starting point for any future historian of Canada's navy.

National Archives of Canada

GLENN WRIGHT