In *Three Knots to Nowhere*, Ted E. Dubay nicely recounts the complete Fleet Ballistic Missile (FBM) submariner experience unique to the Silent Service. This narrative is delivered with remarkable clarity and realism—mixed with comforting nostalgia. Dubay, a nuclear-trained second-class electrician’s mate, served in the engineering department aboard the USS *Henry Clay* during the height of both the Vietnam War and the Cold War. The author explores beyond the technical to unveil emotions, camaraderie, sights, smells, and personal aspects of “Boomer” submarine life.[1] Dubay’s objectives are multifaceted. In a literary field devoid of a genuine depiction of the Cold War submariner experience, the author delivers an unrivaled picture of the enlisted man’s perspective. This feature sets the book apart from novels brimming with maverick submarine captains, CIA agents, and Cold War spies. The author equally aspires to help fellow submariners reclaim memories “ebbing away like fading echoes, never to return” (p. 2). Lastly, he aims to educate the layperson regarding the challenging reality of Boomer submarine service.

The 1960s and 1970s found the United States deploying ballistic missile submarines throughout the world’s ocean depths. This was the era of America’s “Forty-One for Freedom” FBM submarine, a history anchored between the famed Fleet submarines of World War II and the dawn of the comparatively luxurious Trident submarine. These Cold War FBM submarines were manned by men who volunteered to undergo intense training and psychological evaluations to serve in an inherently dangerous environment hidden and isolated below the surface of the ocean. The horrific loss of the attack submarines Thresher (1963) and Scorpion (1968) was a haunting testament to this reality. Charged with deterring nuclear war, Boomer boats and their crews secretly patrolled the seas as one arm of a three-pronged military force structure known as the American nuclear triad. These submarines are credited by some with preventing the nuclear Third World War many feared. Against the background of international...
tensions, the arms race, and potential Armageddon, submariners patrolled the oceans armed with weapons of unimaginable destruction, an apocalyptic theme this book forbids the reader to forget.

This is a timeless story of a submarine culture from a bygone era lost to the end of the Cold War. This book will be of interest to anyone seeking to understand the tale of the on- and off-crew experience exclusive to the FBM force. *Three Knots to Nowhere* is the author's memoir: a blend of historical preservation, a glimpse into the Silent Service, and an entertaining collection of sailors' sea stories. A distinct feature is a rare look into the activities of the “secret-secret” nuclear engineering spaces, a realm mysterious to even the most seasoned crewmembers serving in the submarine’s forward compartments. Dubay recites a chronological story of the episodic events in his Boomer submarine service filled with moments of sadness, happiness, excitement, jocularity, and yes, boredom. As a result of the author’s Navy rating, the account is nuclear-trained-centric. This allows the narrative to sometimes miss the varied experiences of the diverse enlisted ratings throughout the boat. Unfortunately, the layperson will gain but a modest understanding of the FBM adventure. Intimate familiarity with Boomer submarine life is a challenge without hands-on context. Rest assured, this does little to detract from the overall story. The author comes as close as one might to helping readers of every genre to grasp, through vivid imagery, a certain semblance of the FBM experience. In Dubay's recollections, I detect neither historical nor factual errors. Quite the contrary, the author’s are so commensurate with my own that they mirror my life on the USS *James Madison*, despite a fifteen-year separation in our service in the “Forty-One for Freedom” fleet. It is as if Dubay documents my memories. This extraordinary trait resounds throughout the book and assures the reader one receives a faithful interpretation.

The book closes with Dubay's honorable discharge from the US Navy. Despite many hardships inherent in FBM service, when a submariner reaches the end of a career, whether short or long, they appreciate a service accomplished amidst a special group. Dubay aptly recalls this sentiment, writing, “I met many wonderful people ... who contributed to my growth ... there were so many wonderful memories” (p. 207). The author's friend drives him in a battery-deprived VW Beetle to the Honolulu International airport.[2] Dubay recalls a solemn and seemingly lonely finale with the words, “I got out.... Neither of us spoke and he drove away.... I did not look back” (p. 208). This is a final true depiction of Boomer boat life. When complete, the end arrives suddenly. Absent the catalyst of FBM submarine camaraderie and friendship, sadly, special and cherished relationships with individuals with whom our lives were placed suddenly disappear into the fading echoes *Three Knots to Nowhere* does well to restore.

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Notes

[1]. Rarely do submariners utilize the acronym “FBM” as a reference to their ballistic missile submarine. Submariners would state they were assigned to either a “Boomer” or “Fast Attack” boat.

[2]. Honolulu International was the official designation until the airport was renamed in 2017 for US senator and World War II Medal of Honor recipient Daniel K. Inouye.
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