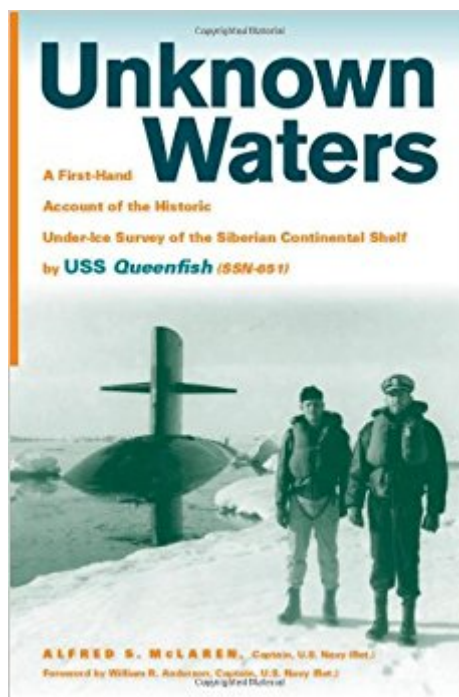




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Unknown Waters: A First-Hand Account Of The Historic Under-ice Survey Of The Siberian Continental Shelf By USS Queenfish (SSN-651)



Synopsis

Charting the Siberian continental shelf during the height of the Cold War This book tells the story of the brave officers and men of the nuclear attack submarine USS Queenfish (SSN-651), who made the first survey of an extremely important and remote region of the Arctic Ocean. The unpredictability of deep-draft sea ice, shallow water, and possible Soviet discovery, all played a dramatic part in this fascinating 1970 voyage. — Covering 3100 miles over a period of some 20 days at a laborious average speed of 6.5 knots or less, the attack submarine carefully threaded its way through innumerable underwater canyons of ice and over irregular seafloors, at one point becoming entrapped in an "ice garage." Only cool thinking and skillful maneuvering of the nearly 5,000-ton vessel enabled a successful exit. The most hazardous phase of the journey began 240 nautical miles south of the North Pole with a detailed hydrographic survey of an almost totally uncharted Siberian shelf, from the northwestern corner of the heavily glaciated Severnaya Zemlya Archipelago to the Bering Strait via the shallow, thickly-ice-covered Laptev, East Siberian, and Chukchi seas. — The skipper of the Queenfish had been trained and selected by Admiral Hyman Rickover and, inspired by this polar experience, McLaren became one of the world's foremost Arctic scientists, studying first at Cambridge University and then obtaining his doctorate in physical geography of the Polar Regions from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

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Customer Reviews

—“Dr. Fred McLaren, former submarine commander and prominent arctic expert, combines a rigorous operational background with extensive academic training to tell us about the early

pioneering days in the Arctic Ocean when the Cold War made certain far north research difficult. A four year former President of the Explorers Club, he has achieved an international reputation in Arctic research. It is indeed rare to find a first hand accounting of this work written by a 'dreamer' and 'doer'. Highly recommended reading about a little-known chapter of US explorations of the far north.

-Don Walsh, International Maritime Inc.

"Unknown Waters, the story of the hazardous exploration by the USS Queenfish, is a splendid adventure. Captain McLaren's spellbinding account of his unparalleled voyage into the unknown beneath the ice off Siberia constitutes a treasure house of knowledge never before conceived of a dark and forbidding part of the globe. Audacious as well as entertaining!"

-Clive Cussler, Chairman, National Underwater & Marine Agency

"Captain McLaren, a highly decorated submarine officer and one of the world's foremost Arctic scientists, has written a riveting account of the first hydrographic survey of the Soviet Union's Siberian coastline by a nuclear submarine. Unknown Waters is a valuable addition to the history of arctic operations by United States submarines describing hazardous operations in shallow, ice-covered waters with irregular bottoms and deep ice drafts. Dr. McLaren skillfully weaves into the exciting operations an interesting description of the seas and islands north of Siberia including early explorations of this Northern Sea Route so important to Russia."

-VADM. John H. Nicholson, USN (Ret.), commanding officer, USS Sargo (SSN-583)

Alfred S. McLaren is a retired U.S. Navy Captain, recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal and two Legions of Merit, President Emeritus of The Explorers Club, Senior Pilot of the SAS Aviator submersible, and Director of Sub Aviator Systems, Redondo Beach, California. He and his wife reside in the mountains above Boulder, Colorado.

William R. Anderson was skipper of USS Nautilus (SSN-571) during that vessel's 1958 achievement of the North Pole and historic Pacific to Atlantic crossing of the Arctic Ocean. He was subsequently awarded the Legion of Merit by President Eisenhower and, following his retirement from the Navy, elected to the U.S. Congress from Tennessee for four terms. He died in 2007 and was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

This is not great literature, seafaring or otherwise. Those seeking the next "Moby Dick" please go elsewhere. If you seek rousing true tales, you might start with Farley Mowat's "The Grey Seas Under". Captain McLaren gives a solid, under-stated, important accounting of the pioneering under-ice survey of the Siberian continental shelf done within the confines, constraints, and dangers

of stark Arctic and Cold War realities. It stands as tribute to the men, machine, and organization. For those in the know and laity alike, one comes away with an insight into the excellence of this particular boat and crew, and of what many consider to be the best design and build of any submarine, the Sturgeon class. It is both sadness and celebration - the need, the boat, the mission, all come and gone, the voyages undertaken silently and courageously, crews retired and on final patrol, the boats scrapped and largely forgotten. We go blithely about our lives, unawares, unthinking, unknowing, of the undertakings under the sea. Well-earned is the moniker "Silent Service"

In writing my review I feel that I need to warn some readers about the nature of Dr. McLaren's writing style. As some low star reviewers point out, it's military report writing and is somewhat dry. But the story he tells transcends all this. McLaren also manages to convey a great deal of information about the Arctic along the way. But the first thing you learn is that even nuclear submarines designed to survive under hundreds of feet of ice and water are really just fragile bubbles. The way the author writes conveys an ordered and matter-of-fact style of training, management and thinking which must become second nature to any military officer if he and his crew are to survive, let alone succeed in their mission. In short, he can't write his memoir any other way and still be true to the experience; the style should be considered a component of the story. If you want a salty sea-faring tale of Cold War daring-do, look elsewhere. This book is much more about exploration. All that being said, I tore into this book and read it in two days while on a Caribbean cruise. Before I read it, I had very little interest in the Arctic or the people who explored it. I found the fact that so little was known about the Arctic Ocean as late as 1970 to be incredible and fascinating.

A good, serious book about oceanographic exploration. Of the several books in print on nuclear submarines in the cold war, McLaren's "Unknown Waters" is by a good margin the most thorough, serious account of actual submarine operations, in this case in the Arctic. Calling it a "cold war" book would, however, be misleading. Its focus is on the scientific exploration and charting of the shallow seas north of Siberia. The author is impressively qualified to convey his material - an accomplished submariner and naval officer, a research scientist, President Emeritus of the Explorers' Club - this fellow is a true Renaissance man. Readers looking for daring exploits in the face of hostile Russians would do better to pick up Edward Beach's "Cold is the Sea," or a Tom Clancy novel. The Soviet Fleet is only mentioned in passing in "Unknown Waters." The focus of the narrative is

unquestionably exploration by nuclear submarine of waters that were in 1970 almost totally unknown. As a former naval officer, deeply interested in maritime engineering, cartography, and oceanography, I found myself enthralled. That said, this is not a book for those whose interests do not run in similar directions. It is an aficionado's book - the writing, though clear and competent, is not inspired and the structure of the plot is more diary-like than I suspect some would enjoy. Those minor faults should not detract from a genuine appreciation of this book and its author, provided one takes them on their own terms: this is not Sean Connery flying a 25,000 ton "Red October" at insane speeds and impossible depths through fantasy canyons of digital rock - "Unknown Waters" is a painstakingly careful groping in the dark by a team of highly trained professionals, with no extraneous expressions of angst or drama, in a real-world exploit of science, technology, and the human spirit.

This is a very interesting account of taking a sub to the pole and all that entails! New slant on things.

As a former Queenfish sailor, Dr. Mac was the XO and signed my Dophin certificate when I became qualified. His writing was great reading on the expedition the Queenfish took surveying the Arctic sea floor. The excerpts in opening chapters reveal the strengths the officers and crew have to undertake to be a submariner. My gratitude to 'Mac' for writing this book and his efforts for becoming an Arctic expert.

This book is a dry and tedious read for the layman, but with patience, turns out to be exciting and worth the read for those tenacious enough to stick with it. Anyone into accuracy, detail, and military protocol will appreciate this account of a dangerous and chilling (no pun intended) tremendous accomplishment. There really is no other way to properly present this information. It does not need to be sensationalized, and I fear readers will be seeking a quick thrill and miss learning about this incredible accomplishment. This book deserves appreciative readers!

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