

Big guns and big lessons

THE GROVE REVIEW

By land, by sea, buy DVD

TWO top Royal Navy TV documentaries are available on DVD this month. More than two million people peeped tuned in to *Royal Marines Mission Afghanistan* (£16.99) and *Royal Navy Caribbean Patrol* (£17.99).

Both were aired on Channel 5 (the commandos' documentary recently, *Caribbean Patrol* followed HMS Manchester's final deployment in the summer and autumn of 2010), and both come from the lens of award-winning filmmaker Chris Terrill, a long-standing supporter of the deeds of the Corps and the RN.

For *Mission Afghanistan* he followed 42 Commando during six months on Operation Herrick H4 – when seven of the Blackhawk-based unit were killed in action.

Beyond filming 42, Terrill spent considerable time with their accompanying Army units, such as the Royal Engineer bomb disposal experts working with the green berets to render home-made bombs safe, and the 'engagement teams' working with Helmand's female population.

The documentary perfectly captures the spirit of 42 – and the dangers (especially from homemade bombs) faced during their six-month tour.

As for *Caribbean Patrol*, Manchester's curtain call was about as varied as any RN deployment has been in recent years – drug busting by night, storm chasing (prompting the immortal phrase "boffing my b*****s up" from one young matelot to describe one rough passage in the wake of a hurricane...) and ceremonial visits, notably the first visit by a Royal Navy warship to Cuba since before the Castro revolution.

That latter visit didn't feature in the original series, but is included as a DVD extra (with *Mission Afghanistan*, there's an uncut extra on the Jungle Sea Kings supporting the Commando mission in Helmand).

Thanks to the DVDs' publishers Brightspark we have five copies of each to give away if you're feeling lucky.

To win, tell us the name of Chris' previous DVD focusing on the Royal Marines in Afghanistan which was aired back in 2008.

Send your answer to dvdcompetition@navynews.co.uk or in the post to DVD Competition, Navy News, Leitham Block, HMS Nelson, Portsmouth, PO1 3HH. Please state which DVD you would prefer to win.

Entries must be received by mid-day on Friday May 11 2012. The usual competition rules apply.

ON BOXING Day 1943, in the Arctic darkness off the North Cape, British forces led by the Home Fleet flagship, the battleship Duke of York, caught and sank Germany's last fully operational capital ship, Scharnhorst.

This was the last time a traditional gun-armed British battleship engaged its own kind and was thus a significant turning point in Naval history, writes Prof Eric Grove of the University of Salford.

It is the subject of one of the volumes in Pen and Sword's Campaign Chronicles – Angus Konstam's *Battle of North Cape* (£12.99 ISBN 978-1848845572).

The author, as prolific in his works as his publisher is in their list, has provided a clear and exciting narrative of a fascinating and dramatic action.

The maps are very helpful to the reader in following more clearly the author's subsequent account. Making sense of naval battles is always a challenge as such actions are inherently complex with overlapping movements and constant changes of direction as convoys, squadrons and individual ships manoeuvre against each other.

The book's structure, a chronicle of each day from December 20-26, emphasises the drama of the two sides' actions as they moved towards their climax.

The author has written about naval warfare before but there are a number of niggling little mistakes, not so much in the account of the battle but in its background. The series editor Christopher Summerville failed to bowl them out.

The author refers to the ship of the commodore of convoy JW 55B, the bait that drew Scharnhorst out, as 'the admiral's flagship'. This is not strictly true. The commodore, retired Rear Admiral Maitland Boucher, may have been a flag officer but he was not officially acting as such with any authority over warships. Also, his 'Victory' ship *Port Kullyspell* did not displace 7,192 tons. That was her gross register tonnage, an index of volume; one gross register ton was 100 cubic feet. Merchant ships, unlike warships, are not normally described by their displacement tonnage.

The page on capital ship characteristics is also somewhat garbled. HMS Duke of York was a King George V class battleship but her design was not "the result of a compromise brought about by the London and Washington Naval Treaties of 1930 and 1936 respectively." Washington was 1922 and 1st London 1930. The 1936 treaty in question was the 2nd London Naval Treaty which indeed tried to limit new construction battleships to 35,000 tons and 14in guns – if all the major naval powers agreed. If not, gun size could be increased to 16in.

The date set for the

implementation of this 'escalator clause' was March 1937. The USA waited for this date but the important did new capital ship construction seem to Lord Chatfield's Admiralty that the first two new ships were laid down the very day the old treaties expired, January 1 1937. The 14in armament did facilitate a very high level of armour protection.

Konstam follows the British tradition of calling Scharnhorst a battlecruiser. The Germans classified her and her sister *Gneisenau* as battleships and they were protected to a very high standard, comparable to that of the later 15in gun German battleships. Indeed Scharnhorst proved as difficult to sink with gunfire as Bismarck.

The term battlecruiser is best kept for heavily-gunned ships with cruiser levels of protection such as the classical WW1-era ships or the later large cruisers such as the American Alaska class or the abortive Soviet Stalingrads.

I also do not think Scharnhorst was originally conceived as a long-range commerce raider. She was built with a low forecastle and straight bow for operations against France and Poland in the Baltic and North Sea. After Hitler's hopes for peace with Britain proved to be illusory she had to be taken in hand for a new Atlantic bow to be fitted and her forecastle raised. Sadly, the otherwise-impressive cover painting of her being sunk clearly shows her in her original configuration with her straight bow and low forecastle in the right foreground. Given their often radical changes in appearance one has to be very careful with artistic impressions of German WW2 ships.

The author very competently uses a wide variety of sources but doesn't list or reference them. He clearly understands the variables of naval warfare and, rightly, commends the skill, thoughtfulness and judgment of British C-in-C, Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, whose manoeuvres, dispositions – and calculated risks – drew Scharnhorst to her destruction.

He also does not join the bandwagon of condemning the German commander Rear Admiral Bey for his actions. Poor Bey (who had seen his destroyers annihilated at Narvik in 1940) was in receipt of highly-contradictory orders as to the degree of aggression he had to show. He knew the honour of the German Navy was on the line and took one risk too many. As so often with German officers in similar situations facing a superior British enemy, he paid the price along with all but 36 of his ship's company.

Perhaps Bey thought he could use Scharnhorst's speed to get him out of trouble. Indeed this strategem might have worked if Duke of York's fire had not finally

slowed her down at extreme range when it seemed the German battleship was getting away.

Doubts have been expressed about the overall effectiveness of Duke of York's fire. There were issues with her complex 14in gun systems, which – like those of all the class – were prone to defects.

I remember in a previous account that I edited that this may have been a problem but Konstam rather glosses over it. Duke of York's gunnery records (with quite a significant number of shots shown as ordered but not fired), are easily available in print and are worthy of a little analysis.

Overall, however, *The Battle of the North Cape: The Death Ride of the Scharnhorst* is very good value and deserves a place in any library.

IN LT Cdr Frank Ledwidge's excellent and devastating critique of the British performance in Iraq and Afghanistan, *Losing Small Wars*, (a book which should be on the reading list of everyone interested in the sad story of British strategic performance – or lack of it – over the last decade) special praise was reserved for Brig (now Maj Gen) Andrew Mackay and the tour of duty in Afghanistan of his 52 Brigade.

Mackay took an original approach, studying the people among whom he was fighting and whom he was supposed to influence. The result was a high degree of success and only 13 fatalities during a deployment, which also included the retaking of Musa Qala.

The "population was the prize" but, as Mackay found, the trouble was there was little or no source of advice from within the MOD on the social dynamics of the region so that the Brigade could apply dynamic influence at the tactical level.

What little advice that was available from the Defence Academy (rather than from the MOD's relevant section which actually opposed such assistance being given) helped in the setting up of 'Non Kinetic Effects Teams' which could respond to local factors at brigade, battalion and company level that allowed ordinary soldiers, "strategic corporals and privates" to act in ways that maximised influence over the population.

Mackay then teamed up with a kindred spirit, Cdr Steve Iatham, a Naval officer with an impressive record, both in recent operations in Sierra Leone, Iraq and Afghanistan and distilling their lessons into the literature.

The major theme of Iatham's work was the loss of the information war in Iraq and the need to put 'informational effect' at the centre of operational command rather than let it remain at the periphery. In 2009 Mackay and Iatham cooperated in an important paper, 'Behavioural Conflict: From General to Strategic Corporal'.

This they have now reworked into a 203-page study, *Behavioural*

Conflict: Why Understanding Peoples and Their Motivations Will Prove Decisive in Future Conflict (Military Studies Press £18.95 ISBN 978-1-78039-468).

The study has the imprimatur of a foreword by no less a man than US General Stanley McChrystal who, in what turned out to be a somewhat-stormy tenure of office in command of ISAF in Afghanistan, did much to transform American attitudes to understanding the Afghan people and try to get them on side.

As he says, all counter insurgency is "local" and victory "begins in the village and the neighbourhood." He frankly states that many ISAF activities were based on flawed assumptions, such as mistaking blood feuds and the emotional residues of years of conflict for insurgency. Often well-intentioned ISAF operations just made the situation worse.

Mackay and Iatham set out a clear and well-argued analysis of how understanding local people and the societies they inhabit is crucial to achieving any form of success in recent "wars among the people".

In these conflicts, one is primarily trying to achieve changes in the behaviour of people of very different cultures, not physically destroy the local population. Attempts to concentrate just on killing insurgents will often only result in provoking more hostility and defeating the strategic object.

16 Air Assault Brigade's highly 'kinetic' first tour in Helmand did much to set up the hostile situation in the province with which later brigades have had to deal. This may have created a useful little counterweight to shield the Army in the SDRS but it hardly contributed to the declared aim of 'stabilisation'.

The authors discuss 'The Evolving Character of Conflict' beginning with the commissions in the Balkans in the 1990s where information management and perceptions were key. The authors could have made more of the Bosnian Moslem forces targeted their own civilians in order to drum up pressure for greater action against the Serbs.

Also the authors' interesting critique of how Milosevic used an information strategy with some success in the Kosovo conflict could have been strengthened by a clearer recognition that he did score a major victory. He might have lost Kosovo but the foreign 'peacekeepers' that he was told to accept in all Serbia were confined to the breakaway province. The Kosovan guerrillas had also used information well to provoke the Allied intervention in the first place. These extra points, however, only confirm the authors' basic thesis of the centrality of the information dimension in these conflicts in affecting the behaviour of the participants.

After an interesting discussion of subsequent conflicts – Sierra Leone 2000, Lebanon 2006, Gaza 2009, as well as Iraq and Afghanistan – the authors move on to a more general (and very sensible) analysis of dealing with the challenge of communicating

with people of different cultures and their motivations.

They make some cogent criticisms of the British Government's narrative still used to justify the Afghanistan presence. They also stress the need to analyse the target audience and what it really cares about.

Although Afghanistan is tribal the locals really care more about land and regions, "so influence campaigns vested in tribal culture may well resonate but be less successful than ones focused on geography and land usage."

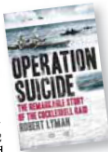
The authors then make the case for information and influence work to be properly institutionalised and the creation of personnel in the Armed Forces specially trained in media, information and psychological operations.

They argue powerfully that these professionals should be put in more influential positions in command structures so that in future conflicts we might get it more right than we have done recently. They have a very strong case.

The study concludes with a chapter by Dr Lee Rowland which stresses the possibilities of exploiting behavioural science to enhance the impact of information operations and a postscript by the authors stressing the need to empower those in the front line so they can effectively affect the behaviour of those with which they are in contact, learning rapidly from mistakes. In this context they point to the problems created by a politico-military chain of command weighted down by bureaucracy and the limits of UK political and military direction.

Surely the latter is key. No matter how good the men and women on the ground are in 'behavioural warfare', if the strategy is deficient or non-existent, success is likely to prove impossible.

In this sense the book provides a very good companion to Steve Jermy's volume on strategy (reviewed recently in these pages). Both should be read by all those involved or interested in the future of armed forces of this country. Things can only get better!



Heroes by name – and nature

IN MAY 1943 aerial images of smashed German dams were carried by newspapers around the world.

The 'Dambusters' raid is legend – and books on it are legion.

Five months before was the Royal Navy's own Dambuster attack – padding up the Gironde in canoes (or 'corkies') to blow up German shipping using limpet mines.

Operation Frankton – better known as the 'Cockleshell Heroes' – has never enjoyed quite the same status (or such substantial literature); there was no contemporary publicity surrounding the December 1942 raid, although it was given the Hollywood treatment in the mid-50s.

Robert Lyman's *Operation Suicide* (Quercus, £18.99 ISBN 978-0-85738-2405) is one of a handful of books which details the entire raid and bloody aftermath (only two of the ten raiders survived, the

rest were killed or executed by the Germans as 'spies' under Hitler's infamous Commando Order).

Raid leader Blondie Hasler and fellow survivor Bill Sparks left accounts (and Hasler many personal papers), and the author has mined British, French and German archives extensively.

The result is probably the definitive account of Frankton – but one not weighed down by all the research. It rips along at a cracking pace, bringing the raid and protagonists vividly to life.

As for the 'Cockleshell Heroes' tag, Hasler hated it (he suggested 32 alternative titles); he also hated the eponymous film ("largely fiction") although he praised the book upon which it was very loosely based.

"Overused as the term now is," writes Lyman, "they were indeed true heroes."

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