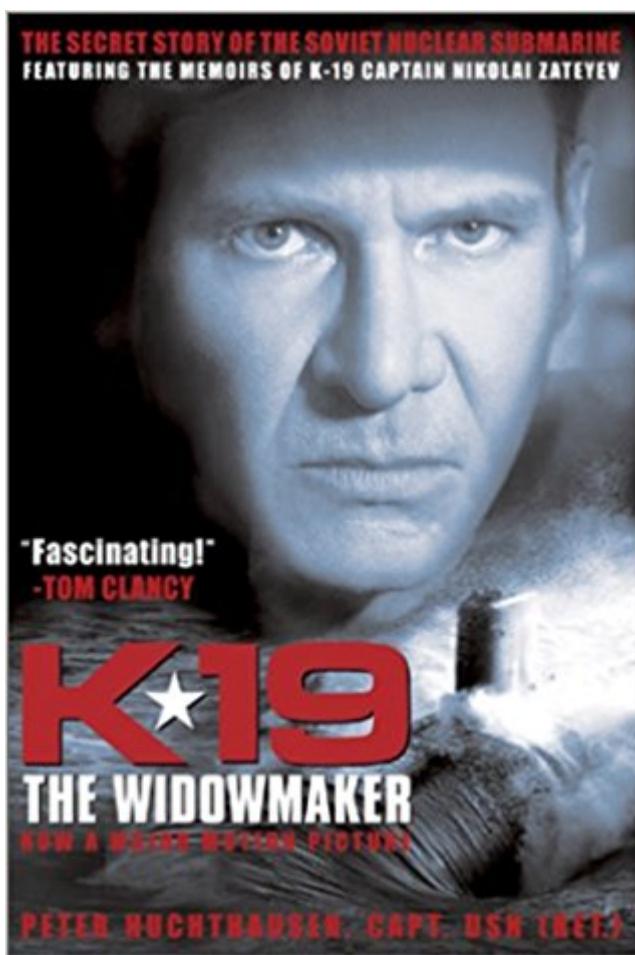


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K-19 THE WIDOWMAKER: The Secret Story Of The Soviet Nuclear Submarine



Synopsis

An account of one of the Cold War era's most harrowing nuclear accidents documents the maiden voyage of the Soviet nuclear submarine, during which a serious reactor leak spurred a perilous race against time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A companion to the feature film of the same name, *K-19: The Widowmaker* tells the hair-raising story of the Soviet submarine that nearly caused a nuclear meltdown in 1961. The sub developed a leak as it was heading toward the North Atlantic, and only the ingenious efforts of the crew eight of whom died within days from radiation poisoning staved off a global disaster. Author Peter Huchthausen, a retired U.S. Navy captain and former naval attaché in Moscow (as well as a technical adviser on the film), recounts the fateful events and also describes the making of the film. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

This book recaps the near-meltdown of a nuclear reactor in 1961 aboard the first Soviet ballistic missile boat, the K-19. The captain, Nikolai Zateyev, wrote a memoir of his career, which is extensively excerpted here and gives a glimpse into the Soviet nuclear navy and the shoddily constructed ships that Zateyev was given to command; a defective seal nearly sank the K-19 on a shakedown cruise. Worse was to come, with sufficient radioactive drama to inspire a forthcoming film (with the same title) starring Zateyev look-alike Harrison Ford. After the accident was contained

by the certain-death heroics of men who repaired the reactor, Zateyev found the culprit in the near cataclysm: incompetent welding. Not that the knowledge improved safety: author Huchthausen, a retired U.S. Navy expert on submarines, embeds Zateyev's tale of woe within the context of a series of submarine accidents culminating in the *Kursk* sinking of 2000. A likely lure for maritime mavens. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

"K-19: The Widowmaker" by retired USN Captain Peter Huchthausen is a worthwhile companion to the movie and provides much of the factual background omitted from the film, which was based on the events revealed here. I was a fan of the film overall, but would have preferred a strictly factual retelling without altering the biographies of the crew and some of the interpersonal drama that was seemingly exaggerated for the big screen. Having said that, I have no reservations about the book, as it is a quick and compelling read that covers far more than simply the K-19 and its trials. At the outset I'd like to mention that in the Soviet Navy K-19 did have a nickname but it wasn't "The Widowmaker", it was the much more straightforward "Hiroshima". Thankfully due to the bravery and ingenuity of the Soviet submariners a larger nuclear tragedy was averted on July 4, 1961, and the book focuses on this specific case and in general on the difficult conditions faced by members of the Soviet navy (particularly in comparison with Rickover's nuclear navy in the US). There are other great books on Cold War nuclear submarines that are more comprehensive than this, but the real gem here is that it contains large and very insightful passages from the memoirs of the K-19's Captain, Nikolai Zateyev. That he was a brilliant leader is a given, but his insider critiques of the Soviet navy are both scary and informative. The book discusses a number of other Soviet naval calamities, many of which were never known about in the West due to strict military security protocols. Finally, the book covers the disposition and ongoing environmental threats related to the decaying Russian nuclear infrastructure: this is a problem that will not be resolved for generations, and before reading this book I didn't completely grasp the scope of the situation, which is grave indeed. I highly recommend "K-19: The Widowmaker" by Peter Huchthausen as an insightful exposé on the K-19 accident specifically, but as a critique of Soviet submarine design, construction, and operation in general. Rarely has an indictment of an institution been as well told or scathing.

Captain Huchthausen makes a brilliant and captivating history which raises this submarine crew to hero status no matter what country you live in. One of the members of K-19's crew, Vasily Archivpav, later sailed on B-59 in October 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis.. Vasily was the fleet commander of a flotilla of 4 diesel-electric subs, all carrying nuclear tipped torpedoes. The

captain of B-59 had authority to fire his torpedo along with the assent of the political officer. Because of his horrible experience on K-19 a year earlier he overrode their order to fire, preventing WW III. This singular incident had a different outcome because of the crew of K-19. Frankly, there should be a World Memorial in every country for the heroism of these two Russian commanders, at least one in Moscow and one in Washington DC, Captain Zateyev and fleet commander Archipav. SALUTE!

As an older book, it never ceases to amaze me the perspective of an insiders view of nuclear submarines (Soviet), and the need to rush into production numerous models that weren't fully tested. It shows the military and I know even ours, the penchant to cover up messes, make scape goats, all the usual political ploys. the appreciation doesn't come from the insiders view or we are better than they are. the appreciation stems from they were highly dedicated and they believed with all their heart and soul they were defending their country against all enemies both foreign and domestic. As a young officer in 1970, I viewed the Soviets as a brainwash hoard waiting to overrun us. I never saw us through their eyes. Bravery comes in the form of a 19 year old sailor who gave his life to save his shipmates, bravery comes from a young officer who did the same. Their bravery comes from love of life and country. I recommend you read the book, see the movie by the same name and view life through glasses that aren't rose colored.

Absolutely OUTSTANDING history of Russian submarine development. Detailed discussion of Soviet nuclear submarine disasters, and the incredible amount of nuclear material that yet remains to be disposed of in a responsible and acceptable manner.

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