

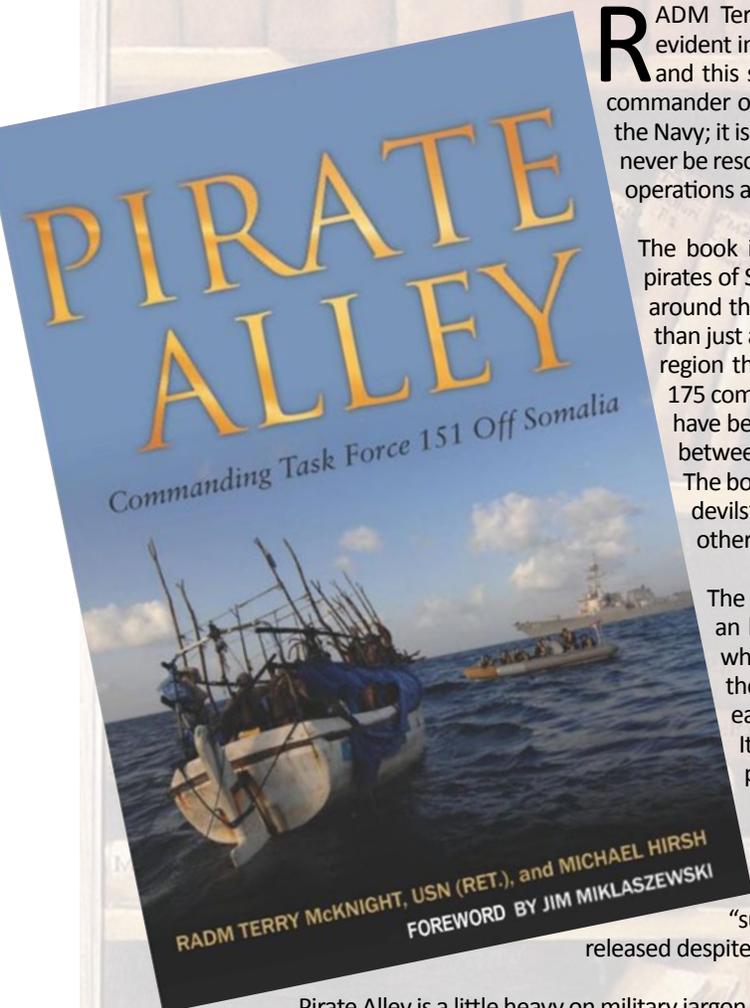
TURNING PAGES

~ book reviews of interest to the aviation professional

Pirate Alley: Commanding Task Force 151 Off Somalia

By RADM Terry McKnight, USN (Ret.) and Michael Hirsh. U.S. Naval Institute Press, U.S. Naval Institute, 291 Wood Road, Annapolis, MD 21402. p272. Available in hardcover and ebook at <http://www.usni.org/store/catalog-fall-2012/pirate-alley>.

A book review by CW3 Jared Jones



RADM Terry McKnight knows his craft well, and his passion for this topic is evident in *Pirate Alley*. He has a long and rich history in the United States Navy, and this serves him well as he looks back and examines his time as the first commander of Task Force 151. But his story is more than reflection of 31 years in the Navy; it is an ultimatum: U.S. Policy must change or the true issues of piracy will never be resolved. *Pirate Alley* is a must read for anyone interested in current naval operations and, more specifically, the challenges faced in fighting piracy.

The book is a compelling piece of non-fiction that explores the modern day pirates of Somalia and the unique security issues of that area, specifically in and around the Gulf of Aden. It doesn't take long to realize that this story is more than just about fighting pirates on the high seas - it is about stabilizing a specific region that has far reaching global effects. In the last five years alone, over 175 commercial vessels have been hijacked and more than 3,000 of their crew have been taken hostage. To further complicate matters, links have emerged between the pirates and transnational criminal networks and terrorist groups. The book digs down to the root causes of piracy while at the same time plays devils' advocate. For some, piracy has become a necessity of survival; for others, a chance to rise above the poverty stricken masses.

The authors are not afraid to "tell it as it is," with no punches pulled. It is an honest and insightful look at this seafaring crime, and clearly shows why more must be done to make a difference. The book brings to light the great difficulty of the situation, and shows that there are really no easy answers. The authors do, however, offer several possible solutions. It becomes clear that there are numerous complexities of prosecuting pirates. Among these: securing evidence, bringing in witnesses, half broken court systems in Africa, or something as seemingly simple as finding real estate to jail suspected or confirmed pirates. One of the biggest challenges the Navy struggles with is the "catch and release" of pirates; a bizarre and counterproductive U.S. Policy in which "suspected pirates" who are more or less caught in the act are often released despite the overwhelming evidence against them.

Pirate Alley is a little heavy on military jargon but does a good job of explaining the terms. The book isn't the action packer thriller that the title may initially imply and is not to be confused with the book of the same name by Stephen Coonts, but it is full of facts and points of view from authorities who understand piracy, Somalia, and the culture of eastern Africa and the Middle East. The authors employ an interesting choice of dialogue - questions asked and points made are exchanged between the text of the book and quotations from interviews - forming a kind of dialogue between the authors and the experts. Much of this dialogue comes from Jatin Dua, a Ph.D. candidate at Duke University, who was able to get an inside look at Somali pirate villages. Other highlights of the book include a detailed account of the SEAL Team 6 rescue of Captain Richard Phillips of the Maersk's Alabama.

This is a story not just about the actions of our Navy, but the joint efforts of many nations, to include China and Russia, and how we are all working together to make a difference. *Pirate Alley* is a good read and recommend it to anyone interested in global security, joint operations, or of course, modern day piracy.

