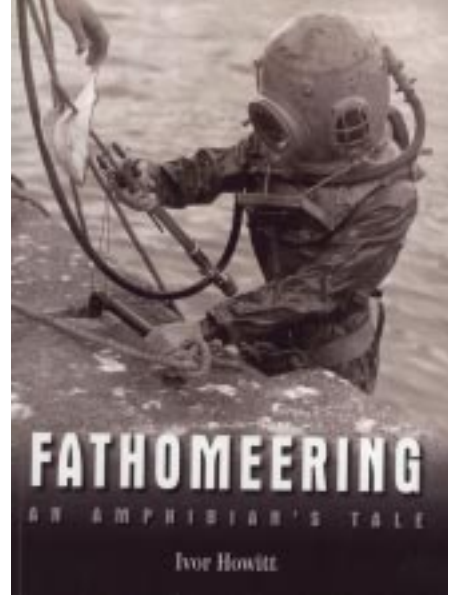


Ivor's Adventures



A bit of a splurge in this edition's 'Armchair Diver' and Jack

Morrison takes a look at three very different recent publications.

Ivor Howitt's enthralling tales of the early days of diving in

Scotland and Australia takes centre stage ...

Fathomeering - An Amphibian's Tale by Ivor Howitt

Published by Mountain Ocean & Travel Publications,
Email: books@motpub.com.au
ISBN 0-9758347-0-3

DIVING NOWADAYS is easy, there are schools and clubs all over the country eager and willing to train divers to whatever level they choose to go to. Equipment too is readily available and the choice can be bewildering; and it is reliable, safe and cheap, it was not always so.

To-day's diver takes all this for granted; we may adapt our gear slightly or change the configuration from the obvious but turn up at a dive site with DIY gear and, at best you will be laughed at, and more likely your diving officer will stop you from diving.

Hard to imagine then a time, not that long ago, when adventurous souls who wanted to see for themselves what was under the sea had to make their own equipment. I started diving in the 1960's and there were two shops in Scotland where you could buy diving gear and that was very limited, go back another 20 years to the 1940s and there was no commercially available dive gear.

Ivor Howitt was one intrepid adventurer who, with a few like-minded friends, determined to extend their adventures from the heights of the Scottish mountains to the depths of the North Sea.

We are fortunate that Ivor has

taken the trouble to record his story and even more fortunate that he has with great diligence and determination managed to find a publisher. The book is in four parts the first covers the period 1945-1950 in Aberdeen then 1950-1954 Australia, a sequel and finally an epilogue.

Fathomeering is a word Ivor thought up to describe in those early days what they were all about. His first 'dive' was in 1945 in a dam on a friend's farm his breathing apparatus consisted of a car foot pump connected by a length of hose to a modified gas mask. During the winter he made a double action pump from two pairs of tyre foot pumps mounted in opposition with non-return valves made from bottle tops and a longer hose to allow freedom to swim around.

In 1948 they formed the Amphibians although they did very little diving that year. By 1949 war surplus gear was becoming available; they bought two siebe-gorman helmets for £1 each and used the foot pump as an air supply. One piece frogsuits and submarine escape lungs allowed them to explore the coast south of Aberdeen and deep freshwater pools in the river Dee.

In 1950 the lure of warm clear waters led Ivor to immigrate to Australia where he continued to dive and take photographs. From pioneering the sport in chilly Scotland he was among the first to explore the diving in Australia.

However in 1954 he had to return to Aberdeen for family reasons. After that he travelled to New Zealand but homesick he returned home. During the voyage he met Mary who he married in London then went back to New Zealand, her home, and has been living there ever since. He never went back to diving.

Fathomeering is a book that for me works on several levels. It is of course a personal memoir of one man's early life and influences. There are many illustrations mostly in black and white although those taken in Australia are colour, not sure if that is coincidence or subliminal.

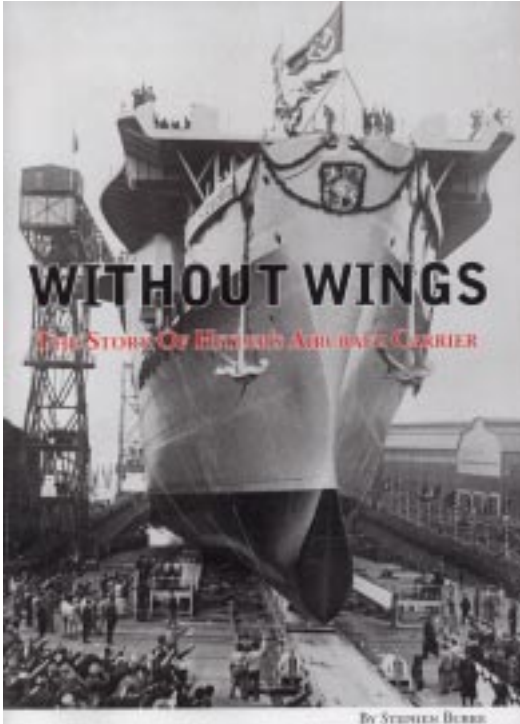
It is also a historical document, and we should be grateful that he has kept letters, invoices and receipts for everything the Amphibians bought in those early days. It makes fascinating reading.

However there is also a spiritual element the epilogue is entitled 'Exploring This That And The Other'. Like many who have spent their lives enjoying and being moved by the natural world the logical progression is to the inner world and finding peace. This section starts with the following quote, 'earthly beauty is a reflection of our inner spirit'.

I can't definitively say reading this book will lead you to find inner peace, it might, but it will certainly entertain and amuse and make you think.

Jack Morrison

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Without Wings - The Story of Hitler's Aircraft Carrier by Stephen Burke

Available online from stephenburke@withoutwingsonline.co.uk £10.99

ONLY WHEN I received this fascinating book did I realise the German Navy never had any aircraft carriers. After the First World War the British, American and Japanese navies very quickly saw the potential of aircraft based at sea, the

Germans, or should that be Nazis did not.

They put their faith in big, fast battleships like *Bismarck*, *Tirpitz*, *Graf Spee* and more importantly their most successful naval weapon the U Boat. There were lots of reasons for this; They did not for example have experience of building large ships other than battleships, and aircraft carriers are more like ocean liners than battleships.

Their shipyards were too small; they only had one slipway capable and their hierarchy could not agree who would command what. Göring as head of the Luftwaffe insisted all aircraft would be under his command. However they did decide to build four the first being the *Graf Zeppelin*.

She was launched in 1938, and measuring over a quarter of a kilometre in length, she was the largest ship ever built by Nazi Germany. She was designed to be the most modern carrier aircraft in the western world, and

as such was feared by Great Britain's Royal Navy.

Afloat and 85% complete as the war began, a combination of steel and manpower shortages, conspired to have the necessary work, needed to complete her, suspended. As the war neared its end and with the Russians sweeping through Poland and not wanting this formidable ship to fall into their hands the order went out to scuttle. She sank in the river and settled on a sand bank however serious

damage had been inflicted to her engines and bulkheads and, although the Russians re-floated her, she could never be repaired.

After the war they towed her out into the Baltic to use as a target and eventually sank in deep water. Recently she has been discovered by Polish engineers searching for oil.

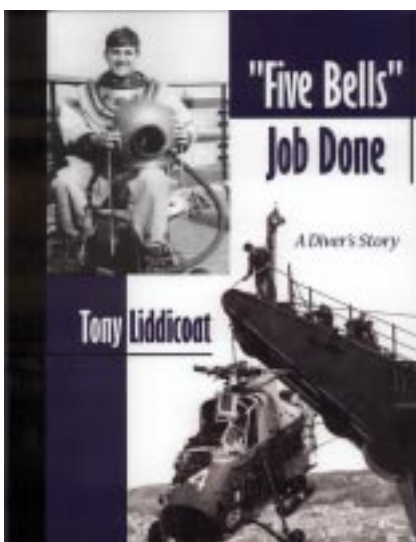
Stephen Burke has been diving since he was 14. His interest in wrecks and naval history began after diving the World War I German fleet at Scapa Flow, and many other wrecks around our coast both military and merchant. He read a description in a naval encyclopaedia of the German aircraft carrier *Graf Zeppelin* which fired his imagination.

Those few lines were enough to ensure several years of research resulting in this book. While it could be argued this is simply a case of collecting and presenting facts, there is a lot more to 'Without Wings' than that. Stephen not only gives us the hard facts but the story behind them.

By adopting a simple style the reader is able to see all the background politics, it quickly becomes clear this project was not considered important to those in power. Career naval officers who were not Nazis could see the need for aircraft carriers but they were overruled by people like Göring.

I really enjoyed this book and read it in a day. There is no diving involved as no-one has actually dived it yet, it is lying in 80m so is within range of technical divers but the hard bit will be getting permission from the Polish authorities. Until you get the all clear from Warsaw you must content yourself with reading about Hitler's aircraft carrier in this excellent book.

Jack Morrison



Five Bells, Job Done by Tony Liddicote

Publisher AuthorHouse, www.authorhouse.co.uk £9.90

TONY LIDDICOAT is remarkable in that he has excelled in three different areas of diving, military, commercial and recreational. His career has taken him around the world diving in rivers, lakes, canals, most of the world's oceans and even a nuclear reactor.

The title 'Five Bells Job Done' refers to a military rope signal used to let the surface support know the diver has finished his task and is surfacing. Tony has an easy conversational style that makes his book a light enjoyable read.

I wondered at times how he could remember in such detail where and when things happened but then I realised military and commercial divers have a legal requirement to keep logs of all their dives. Tony joined the army as a teenager and during swimming tried a dive mask and was immediately hooked. He gives the reader a good idea of the variety of work army divers carry out and the variety of conditions, mostly bad, they have to put up with.

We also, toward the end of his second stint in the army, learn a lot about the intransigent and downright vindictive nature of the officers he, and many others, had to suffer, 'lions led by donkeys' - a true saying indeed.

Not all his diving was unpleasant and he has nothing but good to say about the occasional jobs he has had here in Scotland, and a few visits to Belize. In 1981 during one of his visits to Belize he carried out a rather risky in-water therapeutic decompression treatment of an American diver Dick Alba. This rather hairy exercise carried out at night in a storm led to him being awarded 'Diver of the Year' by Diver magazine.

His army diving career at an end Tony joined a local club and an army diving club and found out that the services are not the only place you meet institutionalised intransigence. Although he had more instructor qualifications than you can shake a stick at none of the recreational training agencies would let him teach until he has gone through their course.

The same applies to ScotSAC - something I've never quite understood - but this is a book review not an editorial so I'll refrain from controversy. I really enjoyed reading Tony's adventures almost as much as he enjoyed living them.

Jack Morrison