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Book Review

by
L.H. Pyke

The Intrigue Master – Commander Long and Naval Intelligence in Australia 1914-1945. Barbara Winter, Boolarong Press, Brisbane, 4105, Queensland, Australia, 1995 339pp. ISBN 0 86438 1846

"Commander Long was a most unusual naval officer". That quote about Commander Rupert Basil Michael ("Cocky") Long, O.B.E., RAN opens this book by naval historian, Barbara Winter. Thereafter, she uncovers a fascinating story of intrigue centred on Australia's war time Director of Naval Intelligence.

As a basis, the authoress describes the early years of Long, who was born in Melbourne in 1899 and won a scholarship to join the Royal Australian Navy in 1913. After many postings, Long was given the task of District Intelligence Officer, Sydney, in 1934. He was reputed to be gregarious and almost never drank alcohol but encouraged his social friends to do so. "He became a patient, tactful, persuasive manipulator and wirepuller", Barbara Winter observes and reports that, largely, what Long wanted, Long got.

In the lead-up to World War 2, this book reported that Long ran between 150 and 160 undercover agents - "of whom little trace remains". He set the scene for a coastwatch service at the time, using reports from various people like government officials, employees of shipping agents and some aborigines, many of whom lived in our remote ports and worked along our distant coastlines. Barbara Winter documents very well this tense phase of Australian war preparation and shows how Commander Long fitted himself for the work of naval intelligence.

In a similar manner, the recorded papers on Long's organisation of the Coastwatch services. Using the dwellers of the Pacific Islands and New Guinea, give a most interesting insight into that aspect of Australia's involvement in World War 2. It is fitting that this book is published when we are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war in the Pacific. This story is about Australian and other operations in that war, and uses the life of Long as a very useful vehicle.

As Director of Naval Intelligence, Long was traced by Barbara Winter through most theatres of war, with her usual painstaking efforts to secure perfect documentation. Even Long's efforts to keep Australian eyes open to United States General MacArthur's movements and strategies were told in her book. As Sir Asher Joel, one of Long's original appointees to the Navy Special Branch, remarked, "This book is, at times, quite frightening". This tome is yet another laudable achievement by this naval historian authoress to record details of the war history, and other epic stories of our nation.

An interesting book packed with facts and information on covert operations of our defence. Maps, clarifying appendices and an excellent index add to the value of this milestone. The print is rather small and there could be more illustrations but, to a researcher, the biography is well-referenced.

A handy history for a collector of naval memorabilia and an essential acquisition for public libraries.

Enquiries: Mrs Barbara Poniewierski

39 Winston Road, Sheldon, Q. 4157

Telephone: 07 2063214

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