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Book Review

History of Russian Underwater Acoustics, Oleg Q. Godin, David R. Palmer. World Scientific Publisher Ltd., UK (2008). 1211pp., ISBN: 9789812568250

In retrospect what we are taught at school is pretty parochial, especially if it is history, and we tend to be a bit obsessed with who did things first in all fields. It is always a shock to find that perhaps what we learnt was not the whole truth. When there has been a great divide between powerful nations there is plenty of time for parallel evolution on each side. This book provides a historical window for those of us in the West to gain some insight into the roots of Russian underwater acoustics, whether military or civilian in application. It consists of a collection of short articles (84 articles at about 14 pages each, 1211 pages in total) by Russian authors speaking from first hand experience. Although mostly about ships, submarines, huge hydrophone arrays and sound sources, it is written at a layman level and very readable. There is something here that would interest every present day professional underwater acoustician. As the Preface to the English Edition, by editors Godin and Palmer, notes, the Russian original was written to commemorate the 300th anniversary in 1998 of the Russian Navy. After introductions by M.V. Zhurkovich and Academician L.M. Brekhovskikh there is a 50 page "Brief History of Russian Hydroacoustics" starting in the 18th century (not forgetting the inevitable Leonardo da Vinci reference) after which we are taken on a ride through all kinds of acoustic equipment designed for the Arctic and Black Sea environments from First World War days up to the 1950s, 1960s, and later. There are many interesting black and white photos of these sonar systems in manufacture, being towed to their mooring sites, and so on, not to mention portraits of some of the people who perhaps ought to be better known to us than they are. In addition there are a couple of more review-style papers with extensive references, for instance on the development of propagation theory and on ocean noise.

Fascinating reading for acousticians and sonar engineers.

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