

Rediscovering the USS Alligator: The U.S. Navy's "Lost" First Submarine

By: Daniel J. Basta

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One could argue, based on Daniel J. Basta's informative preface and first chapter for *Rediscovering the USS Alligator: The U.S. Navy's "Lost" First Submarine*, that this more contemporary text is a pseudo-supplement or printed commentary to Discovery Science Channel's 2007 documentary, *Hunt for the U.S.S. Alligator: U.S. Navy's First Sub*. Written as a harrowing narrative, the book provides readers with a comprehensive history of the mystery and objective truths surrounding the possible disappearance of what is generally considered "the first U.S. Navy submarine to be constructed and the first to be deployed on a combat mission" (2) in the mid-1800s; and a first-hand account of one group's attempt to find its sunken wreck, if indeed it exists. Ultimately, Basta authors a gripping and impressive work that speaks to the power of curiosity, the significance of naval history, and humanity's drive to become better educated about our connections to technology and its problematic relationship to the environment.

The lore behind the U.S.S. Alligator, what Basta claims to be a forgotten industrial piece of American warfare, is that the submarine was lost at sea during a nor'easter in 1863 and was not thought of until a short article was written about it in a Civil War magazine in 2002. This article rekindled an interest in the subject matter, which led to “detective work” by its expert readers and an extensive trek to find the submarine’s remains. The book, unlike the article, is a theoretical timeline that starts with the American Revolution and the dreamers’ and engineers’ fascination with the possibility submarines could be produced, and ends with the present-day, as divers and historians on sea-worthy boats still hold out hope that one day they will find this allusive treasure. Yes, the book is about the U.S.S. Alligator, but what makes it a strong narrative is both the mystery and the journey surrounding the finding of this drowned behemoth.

And, it is important to mention a narrative is only as good as the person telling the story. Basta is a masterful and passionate narrator, presenting to readers his wealth of knowledge about the U.S.S. Alligator as well as his understanding of water-based warfare. At times his excitement gets in the way of the story’s construction; but, sometimes the most compelling stories are not told in a linear way. Basta does repeat himself on occasion, but again, orators have done that for generations, lest listeners forget a detail or two. His discussions about history and science and marine exploration just pop off the page, along with his

strategic use of illustrations, photography, and newspaper clippings to help readers visualize the arduous voyage his crew went on. The work, thus, is easy to follow and accessible to audiences who may not be as proficient in the complicated scientific aspects of the search.

Thus, *Rediscovering the USS Alligator: The U.S. Navy's "Lost" First Submarine* is a must read on all levels. Part historical drama, part thrilling mystery, part science non-fiction, this work is a well-rounded statement on the human's capacity and essential need to seek out and educate ourselves about the strange and unique things that fascinate us day by day.

Quill says: Read *Rediscovering the USS Alligator: The U.S. Navy's "Lost" First Submarine*, not only if you are interested in submarines, but also if you are interested in the art of good storytelling.

For more information about *Rediscovering the USS Alligator: The U.S. Navy's "Lost" First Submarine*, please visit the publisher's website

at: atmospherepress.com/books/rediscovering-the-uss-alligator-by-daniel-j-basta/