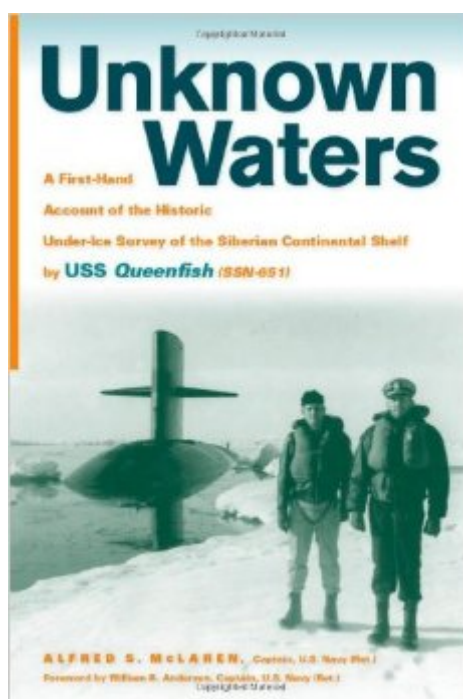


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# Unknown Waters: A First-Hand Account Of The Historic Under-ice Survey Of The Siberian Continental Shelf By USS Queenfish (SSN-651)



## Synopsis

Normal0falsefalsefalseEN-USX-NONEX-NONEMicrosoftInternetExplorer4Charting the Siberian continental shelf during the height of the Cold War This book tells the story of the brave officers and men of the nuclear attack submarine USS Queenfish (SSN-651), who made the first survey of an extremely important and remote region of the Arctic Ocean. The unpredictability of deep-draft sea ice, shallow water, and possible Soviet discovery, all played a dramatic part in this fascinating 1970 voyage.Â Covering 3100 miles over a period of some 20 days at a laborious average speed of 6.5 knots or less, the attack submarine carefully threaded its way through innumerable underwater canyons of ice and over irregular seafloors, at one point becoming entrapped in an "ice garage." Only cool thinking and skillful maneuvering of the nearly 5,000-ton vessel enabled a successful exit. The most hazardous phase of the journey began 240 nautical miles south of the North Pole with a detailed hydrographic survey of an almost totally uncharted Siberian shelf, from the northwestern corner of the heavily glaciated Severnaya Zemlya Archipelago to the Bering Strait via the shallow, thickly-ice-covered Laptev, East Siberian, and Chukchi seas.Â The skipper of the Queenfish had been trained and selected by Admiral Hyman Rickover and, inspired by this polar experience, McLaren became one of the world's foremost Arctic scientists, studying first at Cambridge University and then obtaining his doctorate in physical geography of the Polar Regions from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Captain Fred McLaren's well-told story about cold war submarining in the 1960s, and through to the

early 1970s, is a good read for armchair travelers, arctic explorers, and scientists. McLaren has provided lots of good photos that help humanize the book. *Unknown Waters* provides a first-hand account of life and exploration in a nuclear submarine, the *Queenfish*, while it and its crew explored and mapped important and remote regions of the Arctic Ocean. The Arctic-Siberian Shelf Expedition of the 1970s represents the bulk of the story. McLaren, using the first person, describes in fascinating detail how a giant nuclear attack submarine operates under thick polar ice and makes its way between icebergs that penetrate long distances below the surface. Chapter 11 is of special interest to the layman; it includes the submarine surfacing at the North Pole and how it got there. McLaren provides a lot of photos of the surfaced submarine with crew members, including McLaren, posing with Jack Patterson dressed as Santa Claus on August 5, 1970. It was nice to read a personalized description of the legendary Admiral Rickover and how he selected his submarine captains, an ordeal for any self-respecting naval officer. McLaren sat through 15 interviews with Rickover and thus became an expert on where to sit for an advantage and how to respond to challenging questions. The reader will end up with a good feeling and lots of respect for the Admiral. McLaren has provided a good index of 11 pages that can help the reader to back into the book to find favorite stories.

CAPT McLaren's splendid account of USS *QUEENFISH*'s historic under-ice survey is well-written and gripping. As a former submarine sailor and arm-chair Antarctica junkie---I had little difficulty translating the submarine-speak and ice-speak. Some who have reviewed made the point of the "trade language"---I would offer the potential reader the following: CAPT McLaren's explained (more than once) the more esoteric terms---and had the grace to include an exhaustive glossary. I plan to purchase this book for one of my children--who has never served on a boat---and advise marking the glossary for quick reference. The prose is somewhat repetitive, but the nature of their work was repetitive. CAPT McLaren managed to make a topic that had potential to be dull and boring into a riveting story of a time not so long ago when submarine skippers had no leash. Based on the story and a few people of acquaintance who know of CAPT McLaren, I could recommend this book for up and coming leaders---regardless the vocation. By all accounts, CAPT McLaren was/is thoughtful, honest, and courageous---good attributes for anyone, particularly anyone in a position of leadership. Highly recommended.

A good, serious book about oceanographic exploration. Of the several books in print on nuclear submarines in the cold war, McLaren's "*Unknown Waters*" is by a good margin the most thorough,

serious account of actual submarine operations, in this case in the Arctic. Calling it a "cold war" book would, however, be misleading. Its focus is on the scientific exploration and charting of the shallow seas north of Siberia. The author is impressively qualified to convey his material - an accomplished submariner and naval officer, a research scientist, President Emeritus of the Explorers' Club - this fellow is a true Renaissance man. Readers looking for daring exploits in the face of hostile Russians would do better to pick up Edward Beach's "Cold is the Sea," or a Tom Clancy novel. The Soviet Fleet is only mentioned in passing in "Unknown Waters." The focus of the narrative is unquestionably exploration by nuclear submarine of waters that were in 1970 almost totally unknown. As a former naval officer, deeply interested in maritime engineering, cartography, and oceanography, I found myself enthralled. That said, this is not a book for those whose interests do not run in similar directions. It is an aficionado's book - the writing, though clear and competent, is not inspired and the structure of the plot is more diary-like than I suspect some would enjoy. Those minor faults should not detract from a genuine appreciation of this book and its author, provided one takes them on their own terms: this is not Sean Connery flying a 25,000 ton "Red October" at insane speeds and impossible depths through fantasy canyons of digital rock - "Unknown Waters" is a painstakingly careful groping in the dark by a team of highly trained professionals, with no extraneous expressions of angst or drama, in a real-world exploit of science, technology, and the human spirit.

In writing my review I feel that I need to warn some readers about the nature of Dr. McLaren's writing style. As some low star reviewers point out, it's military report writing and is somewhat dry. But the story he tells transcends all this. McLaren also manages to convey a great deal of information about the Arctic along the way. But the first thing you learn is that even nuclear submarines designed to survive under hundreds of feet of ice and water are really just fragile bubbles. The way the author writes conveys an ordered and matter-of-fact style of training, management and thinking which must become second nature to any military officer if he and his crew are to survive, let alone succeed in their mission. In short, he can't write his memoir any other way and still be true to the experience; the style should be considered a component of the story. If you want a salty sea-faring tale of Cold War daring-do, look elsewhere. This book is much more about exploration. All that being said, I tore into this book and read it in two days while on a Caribbean cruise. Before I read it, I had very little interest in the Arctic or the people who explored it. I found the fact that so little was known about the Arctic Ocean as late as 1970 to be incredible and fascinating.

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