



Ironbottom Sound: Proceedings of the Gun Club

Grover Hartt III

FriesenPress

(342pp)

978-1-03-832715-4

Part of a continuing series, Ironbottom Sound is an insightful and sincere historical novel about a military man pulled between his sexual orientation and his sense of duty.

In Grover Hartt III's historical novel *Ironbottom Sound*, a gay navy lieutenant experiences frustration through stillness.

In 1942, Scott is a near-model American lieutenant. He is ambitious, intelligent, and, above all, calculating. However, the secret of his sexual orientation creates a barrier between him and his fellow officers. When he is given an assignment on the *Washington*, a naval ship stationed in the South Pacific, his ability to cope with stagnation is tested to maddening extremes.

Naval combat in World War II is covered in terms of weeks-long stretches of paranoid boredom punctuated by occasional instances of mortal terror. Scott awaits letters from Emmet, his long-distance love. Over the course of the novel, he learns when it is time to act and when something is worth the wait.

The grounded story thrives on an ever-present sense of unease and tension, both internal and external. The setting is well established, making use of military terminology and covering naval equipment and practices with care. Scott narrates, and his expertise builds credibility. Indeed, his technical knowledge even adds subtle levels to his characterization, as with his perfunctory descriptions of the *Washington* and her layout.

Beyond this, Scott is a complex hero—often at odds with himself and frustrated by his internal contradictions. He is a loyal servant to a country that despises him for his sexual orientation, leading to relationship complications:

Scott thought to himself that the odds of them ever seeing each other again were uncertain at best. The odds of finding some time alone again were even more remote. But what difference did it make? ... It had been a wonderful day.

He longs for action and for passion, but his circumstances beg him to stand back and observe. This tension is omnipresent, resulting in anxiety even in chapters where little happens. And Scott's rare moments of contemplation and vulnerability shine, creating deep emotional resonance. Grammatical errors interrupt the flow of some scenes, though, and they become more prevalent in the book's second half; some quotation marks are omitted, sentences appear sans transitional words, and malapropisms (such as the use of *desert* for *dessert*) occur.

Ironbottom Sound is a subtle, tense, and thought-provoking historical novel about a gay military man with a distinctive point of view.

JAMES EDWARD COOK (January 6, 2025)

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