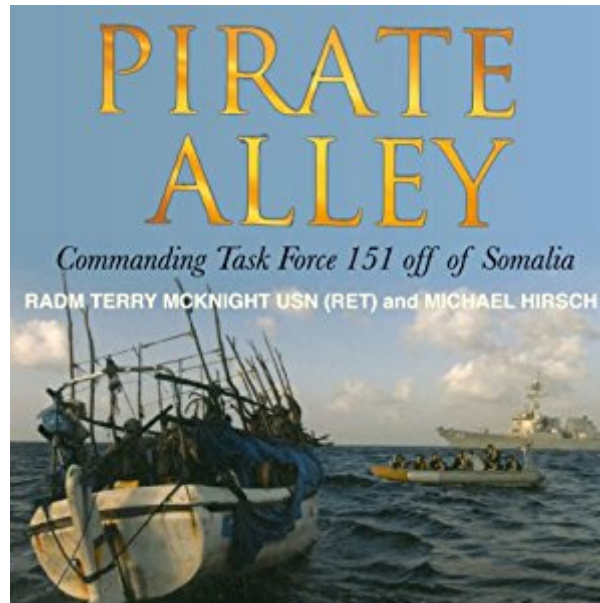


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# Pirate Alley: Commanding Task Force 151 Off Somalia



## Synopsis

Rear Admiral Terry McKnight, USN (Ret.) served as Commander, Counter-Piracy Task Force - Gulf of Aden. He wrote the first draft of the Navy's handbook on fighting piracy while serving as the initial commander of Combined Task Force 151, an international effort to deploy naval vessels from several nations in a manner designed to prevent piracy in the Gulf of Aden and farther out into the Indian Ocean. McKnight personally commanded operations that disrupted several hijackings in progress, and resulted in the capture of 16 Somali pirates. That's when he ran head-on into the bizarre U.S. policy of catch-and-release, and realized that there's a lot more to fighting piracy than just catching some skinny youngsters armed with AK-47s and RPGs. After his tour in the waters off the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, he retired from the Navy and began seriously researching the subject. As a result, he and his co-author, journalist Michael Hirsh, have put together a very readable book that serves as a comprehensive introductory course on the subject. *Pirate Alley* includes a behind-the-scenes look at the SEAL Team 6 takedown of the pirates who had kidnapped Captain Richard Phillips of the *Maersk Alabama*. It also reveals what a young PhD candidate from Duke University found during three months on the ground in Somali pirate villages. *Pirate Alley* explores every aspect of Somali piracy, from how the pirates operate to how the actions of a relative handful of youthful criminals and their bosses have impacted the world economy. The book examines various answers to the question: "How do you solve a problem like Somalia?" It explores the debate over the recently adopted practice of putting armed guards aboard merchant ships, and focuses on the best management practices that are changing the ways that ships are outfitted for travel through what's known as the High Risk Area.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I see there is also a novel by Stephen Coonts with the same title. Not to take anything away from Mr. Coontz as I am an avid fan, but RDML Terry McKnight has done a great job of explaining the successes and challenges of the developed world in combating the current threat of Somali piracy in the Indian Ocean. The Admiral is a straight-shooter and most willing to provide his opinions, even when they might be viewed as controversial in today's "politically correct" world. Some of his frustrations with the "catch and release" scenarios - where the very same adolescent thugs (some call them pirates, I don't agree they even deserve that title) are picked up time and time again - would be enough to frustrate just about anyone, not to mention the Commander in charge of the counter-piracy task force. It would be interesting to see what the general American population would think, if they were made aware that we have been catching and releasing these criminals, only to catch them again and again...It was also gratifying to see the Admiral's willingness to express his opinions on some controversial current Navy programs, such as the new Littoral Combat Ship, or LCS. His quote from the old I Love Lucy show, where Desi Arnaz says "Lucy, you've got some 'splainin to do..." is entertaining and spot-on, when it comes to LCS, and other programs like it such as the new Mobile Landing Platform (MLP), which also has questionable value and significant challenges, regarding it's ability to support the operations for which it is designed..The Navy should add Pirate Alley to the next list of required reading coming out of the CNO's office, and this book should be mandatory for all junior Navy Unrestricted Line Officers. It is a most interesting read for the general public as well, as it provides a great synopsis of a significant concern, and what we and our allies are doing about it.A great read, highly recommended, and well done to RDML McKnight!

This book is a genuine account of direct actions taken and the issues impacting the battle against piracy in the modern world. Pirate Alley is the name that has been given to an area off the coast of Somalia where large numbers of merchant ships transit and large numbers of pirates have established their modern day business of piracy.In telling the story, the book allows a view inside the US national security apparatus that most of us are totally unaware happens regularly. Even off the coast of Somalia the day to day operations are mired in complicated political and operational issues that directly impact the ability of US and coalition forces to deter piracy. There are issues of policy that have direct impact on US domestic politics. There are the many facets of US foreign

policy that often conflict with one another. There are a multitude of legal issues including Law of the Sea, International Law, and the domestic laws of the US and the laws of each individual partner nation. Diplomacy extends to the United Nations, partner nations, and interactions with governments that may or may not be complicit with the pirates. There are the economic issues of the processes required to support and maintain the business of piracy that impact the entire country of Somalia in both positive and negative ways. The author uses his experience as the Commander, Task Force 151 to weave all of these issues into a telling account. I have enjoyed reading the book. For those of you not acquainted with maritime, military or national security issues, they are readily explained so that even the novice reader can understand. I highly recommend this book.

It is pretty clear that the author has some interesting things to write about, but does not know how to get them out. The book jumps from storyteller to storyteller, sometimes multiple times per page. This makes it choppy and kills the flow. The book talks way too much about policy and chains of command. We all know they exist and are cumbersome, but we don't want to read about them. Despite the fact that I really wanted to read this book I gave up halfway through, which is pretty rare for me. There has got to be a better book written on modern piracy.

I have a hard time reading books by professional military people because they often get tangled up in details and use a lot of confusing, alphabet-soup acronyms. That's not really the case here, although the retired Navy admiral who wrote "Pirate Alley" (with a journalist's help) certainly gives you a factual, basic textbook on how dirtbag Somali pirates operate. It turns out they are both sophisticated and stupid - they're well-financed and organized by gangs in Somalia, but the drugged-up kids and lowlifes with AK-47s who go out to prey on shipping lanes are not exactly MIT graduates. Admiral McKnight commanded an anti-piracy task force in the Gulf of Aden, so knows well what he is talking about. He describes various missions against the pirates and offers advice on how to protect against, and negotiate with, the Somali gangs. Although it is a little heavy on the details, I liked this interesting book.

I liked the idea of this book. The author is probably the most experienced person to narrate such an exciting story on the high seas. No doubt, there is no-one else in the world with his unique perspective - having seen all the action up close. He also has the insights to present a much higher level view of the conflicts that are occurring in this part of the world. However, I found the flow of the book very difficult to follow. The author quotes many many sources, slipping in and out between the

first person (himself) and the many experts that he quotes throughout the book. In places, he obviously cut&paste's an incident report. I found it very confusing to follow. It seemed to get worse as I progressed through the book. So much so, that I stopped at chapter 4. I had no idea who was 'speaking' and the context of the 'stories' throughout seemed to get lost in the action. Nice try - but stick to catching those scurvy pirates rather than writing about them.

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