



Ice Brothers

Sloan Wilson

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A novel, based on historical fact, about the Greenland patrol, which operated 1942-1945, during World War II.

Ice Brothers Details

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Author : Sloan Wilson

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From Reader Review Ice Brothers for online ebook

Ann says

I read this book to meet a reader's challenge--a book set on the sea. It was a very pleasant surprise. The story of Coast Guard operations along the coast of Greenland in WWII was a new story for me. I enjoyed the depictions of marine live on a small boat in the treacherous conditions of Greenland. The characters were compelling and the narrative was very interesting. I recommend this book.

Donna says

A Great Read

Fantastic story. It grabbed me from the start, and held my attention to the end. I'm not a fan of war genre, but this is more about the people, and how they grow and learn and adapt.

Zeb Kantrowitz says

Wilson was the author of “Man in the Grey Flannel Suit” and “A Summer Place” which were huge books and movies during the 1950s. During World War Two his was a member of the US Coast Guard and commanded ships in both the North Atlantic and in the Pacific. This book is based on his time on a converted fishing trawler that was stationed in Greenland.

Paul Schuman grew up in Wellesley, Ma and went on to Harvard. He had spent most of his summers working on ‘summer’ pleasure boats. Just before the war began he had married his high school sweetheart, but against her wishes he enlisted in the Coast Guard after Pearl Harbor. He was given a commission and sent off to be a XO (Executive Officer) on a converted fishing trawler that was to patrol the north Atlantic around Greenland.

Except for a list provided by the Coast Guard as to what clothing he was to Arluk (hunter in Inuit) is skippered by an experienced ice pilot Lt. Commander Mowry. He is known in the Guard as “Mad” Mowry, the ‘meanest’ drunk in the pre-war Guard. Schuman has a lot to learn and learn fast since Mowry makes no secret of his dislike for the un-trained ‘college boy’.

But that’s nothing compared to the way he treats the other “new guy”. Nathan Green was studying engineering at Brooklyn College when he enlisted (or was called up with his ROTC group). He is to be the communications officer, but doesn’t know the stern from the bow. Being Jewish, Mowry insists on calling him Greenberg, and denigrating him as a “sheeny” whenever he can.

The crew is the dregs of the Coast Guard, most having been released from the brig and brought straight onto the Arluk. (If it hadn’t been written in the fifties you would think it was a rip-off of the “Dirty Dozen”.) Their mission is to look for secret weather stations the Germans had set-up on the eastern coast of Greenland. Schuman and Green will have to learn about icebergs, blizzards and handling a ship in very short time.

Mowry's drinking will at some point make him unfit for duty, leaving Shuman as Captain. What proceeds from there is the making of an Officer. Good story and well written.

Zeb Kantrowitz zworstblog.blogspot.com

Susan says

Very well written and a thoroughly enjoyable story. I could feel the cold, hear the ice cracking, and the silence and fear of the (Germans) enemy.

Steve Condrey says

Awesome story about a forgotten war

Excellent reading for anyone interested in World War II, the Arctic, or seamanship. The only weakness is in the editing. Third-person omniscient is very hard to pull off and there were a few slips.

Chris says

Recently read for third time. Promoting book to 5-star status. One of my favorite WWII tales. Wilson depicts WWII Greenland vividly. Memorable characters and action: Small Boats Battle in Icy Waters.

The only book by Sloan I connected with. Highly recommend for fans of Herman Wouk. Also could appeal Jan de Hartog Atlantic WWII adventures.

Main characters: two young coast guard ensigns, one from a Great Depression impoverished upper class Boston family, a college student who is assisted at sea by a Jewish scholar whose wife has disappeared in Nazi occupied Poland.

The Captain

David K. Lemons says

I re-read this book. It was powerfully written and analyzes leadership, which is often the focus of sea stories.

Oleg Goncharenko says

I read this book more than 10 years ago and want to read it again. It really worth reading when you are young or want to read something new, being inspired with recently read book by Hemingway (Farewell to Arms).

Tim Freeman says

A decent read in the vein of "The Cruel Sea" or something by Douglas Reeman, but longer by far than either. The setting (Greenland) is out of the norm, obviously drawn directly from the author's own experiences in the war, but the setting added to the sense of isolation and relentless struggle against the elements and the enemy. Although some of the plot and character seemed a little borrowed from other tropes of naval fiction, overall it worked well in my opinion taking into account my bias for naval tales.

Eric_W says

A very interesting novel about a little known part of WW II, that of the Greenland Ice Patrol. Comprised mostly of trawlers, they were commanded by either old-time ice fishermen or wet-nosed and inexperienced peacetime yachtsmen. The novel is based on Wilson's experience around Greenland. The fictional Wilson (Paul) was appointed as executive officer to a very experienced Mowrey, an old-timer with a terrible drinking problem, but one who could read ice conditions like no one else. The radio officer had no sea-experience at all but he had a loathing for Germans after his Jewish wife and child had disappeared somewhere in Germany. He happened to be an electronics genius, however, a skill that was to be more than valuable later on.

A sister trawler has disappeared off the east-coast of Greenland with only a lifeboat filled with machine-gunned sailors remaining. His commanding officer having been taken off the boat for alcoholism problems, Paul and Nathan, his now executive officer, are sent east to fight the Germans and dismantle whatever weather station equipment they had established. Knowing weather conditions over Greenland was crucial for air operations in Europe so both sides wanted the advantage. Greenland, part of Denmark, which had quickly surrendered to the Germans, declared a sort of independence from Denmark and was claimed by both the Axis and Allies. It was an icy wasteland inhabited (barely) by Eskimos. Wilson spends a lot of time describing the Eskimo culture and their total lack of understanding for the animosity between the two sides. His descriptions of the ice and their culture I found quite interesting, especially their attitude toward sex, totally uninhibited and devoid of any monogamous impulses, the children considered children of everyone and cared for by everyone, their emphasis being on survival and laughter -- not a bad way to get through life except for the frigging cold.

Lots of ruminations on war, hatred, why people fight and love. I enjoyed the book very much.

Alaine says

I only got up to chapter five. I was interested in this book because my grandpa served in Greenland, but the story is unfolding too slowly for me.

Michael says

Engrossing read.

Northwestreader says

Ice Brothers is a World War II story that begins during the surge of patriotism following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Paul Schuman, a recent college graduate and a newlywed, signs on as a Coast Guard Officer and gets deployed on the Arluk, a fishing trawler-cum-ice breaker, heading to Greenland. It is primarily his journey we follow as he evolves from a seasick inexperienced officer who knows very little about the Greenland Patrol and even less about leadership to a competent and commanding leader.

This is the story of how Greenland was impacted by WWII and how WWII impacted Greenland. This theater is not well known: it is not the subject of novels and movies like the European Theater or the South Pacific. But there was indeed military action in Greenland; the Germans had key weather stations in Greenland that radioed weather information that allowed the Germans to plan their bombing missions over much of Europe.

This is the story of a group of oddly matched men who are crammed together on a small Coast Guard ship and must learn how to operate under less-than-perfect circumstances. The ship is poorly equipped, the men are not particularly trained for their positions, the weather is frigid beyond anything they have ever experienced, and, although they are part of the Coast Guard, they are left primarily to their own resources and ingenuity to battle the Germans.

Along the way, the reader becomes acquainted with the majesty, the awesomeness, the brutality, and the power of the ice that makes up Greenland and its coastline. Although they were deployed to fight a war, the men of the Arluk often had to do major battle with the ice.

Wilson's writing is smooth and easy to flow through. The characters are well defined and developed. They are human and fallible. They wrestle with real issues. Many of the battles they fight are personal ones, situational ones, although, of course, there is a big combat scene towards the end of the book with weapons and fire and deaths.

This is a thick book – 500 pages—but every page was worth the read. Although this book was written 3 ½ decades ago, it is not the least bit dated. Highly recommended.

Donna Davis says

Sloan Wilson was a veteran of the second world war, and he served in the Greenland Patrol. Here he uses his knowledge of the place to create an entirely unique setting. In fact, Greenland itself is very nearly a character in Ice Brothers. This book deserves 3.5 stars , and as usual I have rounded it upward, as I generally do when I am unable to denote a half-star. Thank you to Net Galley and Open Road Media for the ARC.

At the start, I was torn. Although I enjoy both historical fiction and military history a great deal, I deliberately avoid World War II stories that take place in the Pacific theater. My reason is that I don't like to

see Japanese people referred to with racist slurs, even though I know that at the time it was commonplace among many Caucasian members of Allied nations. The "J" word is every bit as offensive to me as the "N" word is. I understand that there was a time when Euro-Americans freely bandied both terms about. However, most editors have the sense to remove it and substitute a less heinous term these days, unless the use of the term serves an important purpose in the story. (For example, check the use of anti-Semitic language by the villainous skipper, Lowery, against whom we develop the bright and personal Nathan Green, who hears his name misused one time too many and vows to change it back to "Greenburg" once he is back in the US.)

So I wanted to read this book, about which little description was available, for two reasons: one was the setting, which will serve as the hook for a lot of readers. What did I know about Greenland? I didn't even know it was Danish territory! A trip down my upstairs hallway to the large world map hanging on the wall there confirmed the story's assertion: sure enough, right there underneath the word "Greenland", writ large albeit in parenthesis, it says "Denmark". How typically North American of me to have assumed it was Canadian! I surely needed to learn more, and good historical fiction is the most enjoyable way to learn many things.

The second reason for my interest was that it was described as a story in which the protagonist hunts for a Nazi ship. GOOD. So, Japan is unlikely to surface, and I can comfortably read without the story exploding in my face.

So when I hit the "J" word, which was not at all important to the story, but thrown in perhaps as set dressing or to set the tone of the story, I was shocked. The further extraneous reference by a character in the story who asserted that "...those little yellow bastards can't fight" made it worse. (Of course, there was no reference to the internment of Americans of Japanese descent; extraneous material here is limited to that which is ugly and prejudicial.) I told myself I would take a break and read it a little bit later.

Every time I remembered my obligation to Open Road and Net Galley, I picked up my e-reader, but I had other galleys and other obligations, and each time I thought I would give Sloan's work another try, I found myself reading a different ARC instead. This persisted for over a month; I can usually finish and review a book faster than that, unless asked to hold my review for publication.

Finally, I had to make a choice. I went back and reread the introduction. I steeled myself and forged onward. It's a good thing that the plot, setting, and character development were so well done, because that word was used about ten times, and it never contributed a single thing to the story itself.

All right; let's look at the story, then.

I know very little about watercraft, and was delighted with the accessible, instructive manner Sloan used to clarify the various types of ships and boats and the nautical terms that are most commonly used. I was also surprised and bemused by the stratification of resources apportioned to the Coast Guard as opposed to the Navy, with the Coast Guard serving as the poor cousin that receives whatever the Navy doesn't need. The ingenious ways in which our fictional Coast Guard officers and crew work around the lack of resources, often not at all legally, must have had at least some basis in fact. I found it really interesting, and it drew me closer to the story as I sympathized with the men on the trawler (The Arluk).

Sloan's approachable way of describing Greenland's weather and geography were also really useful.

Greenland is a dangerous place to sail. Today it is different than it was during that time period. I did a web crawl and was horrified to see how much of it has melted now. Back then, at least, it was possible for a

sturdy ship to weave its way into a fjord (which is like a peninsula made of water that pokes into the ice mountains), and then have everything freeze, and the ice might crush the ship and its crew against the mountains. The ever-present tension of a possible encounter with Nazis created a sense of suspense that made the book hard to put down after a certain point was reached, even with the racist terminology, which continued to grate and became worse when Paul and Nathan discussed the loyalties of the "Eskies" or "Eskimos" with the Danish inhabitants. The Inuit people were treated as cartoon characters, and the static, repeated description of their faces as round and copper-colored and their mentality as "child-like" made me wonder where this capable writer's otherwise outstanding skill with varied language had gone. Yet the story still tugged at my interest, and so I made a note in my e-reader and forged on.

Another facet of the story that kept me reading late into the night was the ambiguity of the Danish residents of Greenland, and in particular, the character of Brit. Were these folks really held by force by the Nazis that we could not even see, or were they complicit? Whose side were they on? Would Brit betray Paul to them? When he acceded to her request to see the ship, and she curiously nosed into every odd corner, asking technical questions about the engine and radar, I wanted to pick her up bodily and toss her off the ship!

Sloan was a strong writer for a very different time. His work could still be really compelling, but I doubt I am the only reader who will take exception to the racial slurs that do nothing to drive the plot or develop the characters. I hope either his heirs or his editors will go in and update this work. It can only improve the story to do so.

Recommended, with the qualifications mentioned.

Becs says

'The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit' spent WW II alternating between the tropics and the coast of Greenland. Ice Brothers recounts his days as skipper of a ship patrolling the treacherous waters around Greenland. It's hard to say which tour of duty he found the most dangerous, but this one seems to be the one that resonated with him most of his life.

Kris Rhodes says

Interesting story, good storyline, learning about Greenland in World War II was awesome and the characters had authentic depth and grew with the story. Might be worth a read of another of Sloan Wilson's books.

Joe Rodeck says

How much can you say about WWII in the Greenland theater? 537 pages worth?

Much of this book is a copy cat of *The Caine Mutiny* with its over-the-top abusive alcoholic captain and shipboard scandal--in this case, Who stole the booze?

Hermans Melville and Wouk have nothing to worry about.

All talk/no action; and no Nazis in the vicinity until page 324. A squandered opportunity since Greenland history and Eskimo culture should be interesting.

The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit is a favorite; but this one has little of it's wit, cynicism, economy with words, or style.

Fredrick Danysh says

In the backdrop of Greenland men and women with connections to a Coast Guard ice trawler encounter the tragedies of war and the humanism of people.
