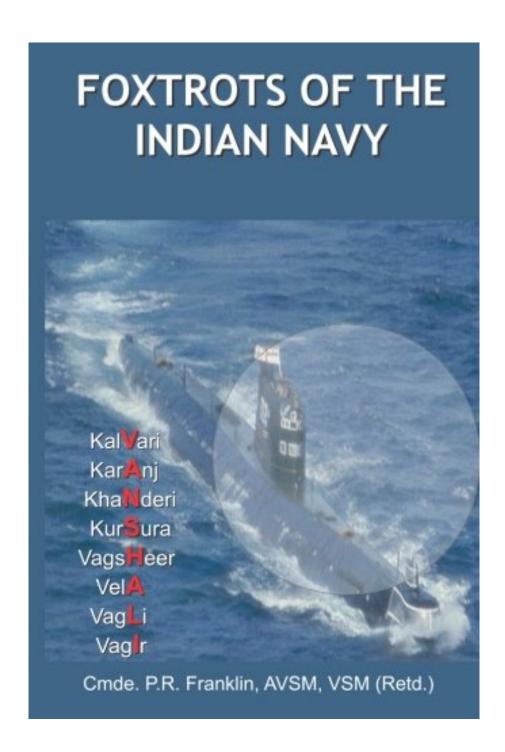


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About the Author

Commodore P.R. Franklin, AVSM, VSM, did his submarine training in Vladivostok, in erstwhile USSR. He commissioned the third and the sixth of the eight 'Foxtrot' class submarines that the Indian Navy purchased, and sailed them from Riga, Latvia, to India round Africa in the late sixties/early seventies. He subsequently commanded two of them. After a few squadron appointments both afloat and ashore, he headed the submarine arm as Director Submarine Operations in Naval Headquarters. Among his other appointments in the navy, he commanded the Training Squadron training officer cadets of the Indian Navy, INS Venduruthy in Kochi, was Naval Assistant to the Chief of the Naval Staff, the Naval Advisor to the Indian High Commissioner in the United Kingdom, and the Naval Officer-in-Charge Tamil Nadu & Pondicherry. A graduate of the Defence Services Staff College, he also served as Directing Staff in that institution. He did the higher command and staff course in the former Marshal A.A.Grechkov Academy in Leningrad (renamed now as the N.G. Kuznetsov Academy in St. Petersburg). He was awarded the Vishisht Seva Medal in 1995 and the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal in 2001 by the President of India. After retiring from the navy after 36 years of commissioned service, he was a consultant for a brief spell to a private Indian company while it produced a Submarine Control Simulator for the Indian nuclear propelled submarine, INS Arihant. He is also the author of the book titled 'Handbook of Submarine Operations'.

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Cmde. P.R. Franklin, AVSM, VSM (retd.) narrates some true accounts of the Soviet Foxtrot submarines that were in Indian Navy service. The names of the eight Foxtrots have been anagrammed to arrive at the name "Vanshali", which is the central submarine character of these narratives. The book covers a spectrum of the activities of Foxtrots in the service including facets of training in the USSR, taking possession, bringing them to India, wartime and peacetime activities, and finally beaching a Foxtrot for display as a museum. The book has interesting revelations of a brush with a nuclear submarine in the Arabian Sea and of an Indian submarine's predicament when confronted with the situation of meeting up with the American Carrier USS Enterprise when it entered the Bay of Bengal during 1971 Indo-Pak war.

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent anecdotes on a Cold War Warrior By KRISHNA JAGA Books exclusively on the Indian Navy's third dimension - the force multiplying submarine arm- are very rare - and this is probably the first by an Indian Navy submariner on this formidable Cold War warrior.

This is a very welcome first anecdotal history of the Russian Project I 861 (Nato code name Foxtrot) - Indian Kalvari/Vela class submarines which pioneered India's submarine arm .

Commodore P.R. Franklin, the author and submarine commander, was trained in the former, commissioned and commanded two of these Foxtrots and has penned these historical anecdotes which serves as a tribute to these robust subs..

The author has coined an anagram of the 8 Foxtrot submarines (INS Kalvari, Khanderi, Karanj, Kursura, Vela, Vagir, Vagli, and Vaghsheer) into one main protagonist - the INS Vanshali to retain confidentiality and ensure a fast paced travails and tribulations of this sub. While this is not a historical book ,in terms of an official history or a chronological sequence of dates and events - it serves as an anecdotal history without specific dates and is bound to evoke nostalgia from the crew who served and the reader who would be awed by the exploits.

The author states that the fledgling Indian Navy had been promised one sub from the advanced Oberon class by the UK in the mid 60's who subsequently demanded a huge sum ,disagreed on the payment terms and ultimately reneged on the same and it was the Soviets who offered the diesel electric Foxtrot class on much more lucrative terms which also included the barter of bananas and shoes!! All the initial complement for this submarine arm were volunteers who were brave enough to accept the challenges and risks of being a submariner.

The opening chapter describes the Foxtrot Class ,with a layout diagram on the topology of the submarine. This cold war warrior was designed to traverse an astonishing 36000 nautical miles (halfway around the world) without refuelling and was designed for extreme endurance for upto 40 days of continuous patrol . The durability of this class is confirmed by the fact that not a single submarine was lost during its operations from the late '60's till decommissing in 2006.

We learn of the many hardships during the initial training in the Soviet Union when food was scarce and some of the "misadventures" and escapades of the team - also the arduous journey of crossing Africa (since the Suez canal was closed due to war) and the calling at many ports - Canary Islands , Nigeria with an interesting geo-political description of the times.

The most interesting and sensational disclosure of the book is straight from one of the many Tom Clancy /Patrick Robinson thrillers - ie how one of the Foxtrots came close to firing a torpedo at a foreign "nuclear" submarine during the 1971 Indo- Pak war.

The Foxtrot "INS Vanshali" which was patrolling the Arabian sea detected a Sonar signature of a submarine. It was identified as being of foreign origin and in "hostile territory" and the acoustic signature suggested it was possibly nuclear powered and as per the prescribed rules of engagement, Vanshali's commander could not engage unless it was engaged or fired upon first.

INS Vanshali went into battle stations and the hunting engagement almost reached a thrilling finale when the other sub "blinked" and disengaged. What was this mystery foreign submarine? Was this part of the formidable US Seventh Fleet? Possibly we will learn one day when the naval records are declassified or another submariner recounts his memoirs.

Cmde Franklin ,who has also written an authoritative book on "Submarine operations" for the National Maritime foundation, has included chapters on the complexities of undersea warfare, deception on the fleet exercises and torpedo practice firings which gives an amazing insight into the mind of a Foxtrot submarine commander who did not have sophisticated instruments like GPS and today's decision making tools to assist him.

The pace of the book is bound to keep the reader spell bound and the author has interspersed the serious narratives with a few anecdotes which are quite hilarious, like the unusual mascot selected for the Foxtrot fleet, more serious encounters with smugglers, near collisions etc. Also of interest is the tale of the Indian shipyards servicing foreign Foxtrots (possibly Egyptian), only for the Israelis to sink them in war and comment on the unusual teamwork - "You repair them, we sink them".

The life of a submariner is exciting, uncertain and stressed, vividly described by the constraints of confined spaces, rationing of basic necessities like water, electricity etc and the reader can feel the thrill and uncertainties of submarine life where split second decisions are needed and a single wrong decision can have fatal consequences.

Cmde Franklin also states that if the Navy had been more decisive ,the Foxtrots would have played an impact full role in the "71 war - but on most occasions it was very conservative and risk averse. He reasons that despite the clean chit given by the Soviet trainers , India's operating chiefs were not confident of their ability and possibly feared diplomatic repercussions from an untoward incident .

The author has kept this largely anecdotal within the Foxtrot fleet when he could easily have drifted into an autobiographical mode. Also he has refrained from mentioning any of the hostile countries by name and careful to avoid revealing operational doctrines, but in another startling disclosure which will ruffle a few feathers, reveals the subterfuge employed by a few in the Foxtrot fleet to avoid the fleet exercises and possibly hide their shortcomings.

There are some important lessons for the Navy to imbibe and with the induction of the nuclear powered submarines like the Akula and Arihant class , the navy will play a major deterrent role. However, the author states that the diesel electric submarines like the Foxtrot and newer classes like the Scorpene , Amur etc will still have a long future due to its versatility and ease of use especially for operations in the Asian countries. Also its interesting to note that during the mid-life upgrade process , Indian battery technology was found to be superior to that of the Russians and these batteries were shipped to be utilised as critical replacements.

So what became of the Foxtrots? As is customary and poignant they were scrapped, however in an exemplary move, the INS Kursura is now a "beached" museum in Vishakapatnam and available for the public to visit and visualise a submariner's life. This is quite laudable when considering the tragic scrapping of the INS Vikrant inspite of public petitions and lobbying and the Indian navy could not allocate the fifty crore rupees (approx USD 10 million) needed to convert the veteran aircraft carrier into a museum.

Incidentally the US also has acquired a Foxtrot and its on display at Long Beach , CA. The author's wish is for the Navy to continue the tradition of naming its newer subs with the previous Foxtrot subs - as was done for the Vikrant and esp followed by US/UK navies like the ubiquitous HMS Ark Royal .

For further reading ,I would recommend Time Life's Hunters of the Deep (1991) as a basic primer of submarine warfare and modern history, Norman Polmar's Cold War Submarines (2005) for additional details and Joseph Chacko's excellent Indian submarine history "Foxtrot to Arihant" published by Frontier India

(2015).

To summarise, I would commend it as an excellent buy, a must read and a great addition to the small genre of Indian Naval History. The few improvements I can think of, are inclusion of photographs (currently less than half a dozen), some preferably in colour and a bolder font facilitating easier reading, and perhaps an index/references for further reading.

Nevertheless the book deserves more publicity and readership and is a great addition to the genre of Indian Naval History - albeit an anecdotal one.

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