



Duty

Jim R. Lane

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Worst kind of mess in the Navy. Like a cancer. Catch one and he implicates ten others. Chase them down. Investigate. Discharge them and hope to hell you get them all or it will only start over again—at least that's what they said in Military Justice School.

So begins the odyssey of Lieutenant Mark Palmer, Legal Officer to the USS Modoc, through the United States Navy's homophobic house-cleaning procedures. Palmer reluctantly accepts the duty he owes to his commanding officer, Captain Bennet, who wants Petty Officer Lamm court-martialed and the devil be damned with the truth of the accusations. But Lamm is not only a good officer, he is a good man, and Palmer's heart is not in the task assigned him. The more he investigates, the more he doubts the charges leveled against Lamm by a young crewman. Yet, the captain compels Palmer to prosecute Lamm, and Palmer is wrenched by his duty to his commanding officer, to the Navy itself and to his conscience. As the trial begins, Palmer finds himself prosecuting a man he believes is innocent, almost hoping he is acquitted... but the captain has stacked the deck.

The reader of this psychological thriller becomes a part of the crew, feels the tension caused by the accusation and "the cancerous web of fears and suspicions among all crewmen." Palmer is a self-searching and imperfect human being, who struggles with what his duty truly is. As the story unfolds, Palmer's verbal and intellectual combats with the captain, then with the Executive Officer, Lamm and Lamm's appointed attorney, singe the pages.

The author is a twenty-year veteran of the Navy, and his novel rings as true as a sledgehammer against a battleship's hull.

ALAN J. COUTURE (September / October 1999)

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