

BOOK REVIEWS

BRUCE, C.J. *Invaders, British and American Experience of Seaborne Landings 1939 - 1945*. Chatham Publishing, London 1999. 288 pages, 20 photographs. ISBN 1 86176 045 0. Price £20
(reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

The book is built up from a very large number of personal reminiscences by those taking part in the amphibious operations of World War II together with linking passages by the author. The first half deals with the European theatre starting with pre war exercises using rowing cutters and continuing through the raiding operations which built up experience and developed equipment. The second half tells the story of the Pacific landings in similar style.

The heavy casualties may come as a shock to younger readers brought up on recent 'peacekeeping' operations where casualties were light. The appalling living conditions will also shock. British readers are probably unfamiliar with the bloody battles in the Pacific and should learn much from these accounts. The book is strongly recommended as a gripping account of a style of warfare, which could again become important.

FRANKLIN, Bruce Hampton. *The Buckley Class Destroyer Escorts*. Chatham Publishing, London 1999. 224 pages, 225 illustrations. ISBN 1 86176 118X Price £25.
(reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

The number of US built destroyer escorts was truly colossal – 1,005 were ordered of which 563 were completed. This book deals with the BUCKLEY Class with 154 completed, 46 of which served in the Royal Navy. The structure is simple, the first 60 pages provide a description of the design history and later changes. The remainder consists of a brief but complete service history of each individual ship. Remarkably, the author has found a photograph of every one.

In June 1941 the UK asked the USA for an ocean going escort for the RN. The USN had already given some thought to a cheap escort destroyer and BuShips under CAPTAIN E.L. COCHRANE had already prepared some design studies supported by RN wartime experience of escorts. The British request tipped the balance, the go ahead was given and the design was quickly finalized.

Machinery was seen as the major bottleneck and the first class (EVARTS) had four diesels driving two shafts through electric transmission. The BUCKLEYS had a turbo electric plant of General Electric design giving a speed of 24 knots, superior to most Atlantic escorts. It is interesting that the RN was initially suspicious of these advanced machinery plants thinking that it would be difficult to train wartime temporaries in their operation and fearing that they would be unreliable. A six weeks conversion course was arranged for engine room crews and no difficulties were experienced in operation whilst they proved considerably more reliable than the simple triple expansion engines used in most RN escorts.

The armament was three 3inch guns and a twin Bofors (not fitted in all RN ships) together with up to ten 20mm (replaced by 40mm later). RN ships carried 164 depth charges and later were given two Mk 10 with a 2,000lb charge as well as a Hedgehog. They were well subdivided with alternating boiler and engine rooms. Initially, there were numerous complaints from RN officers of rapid, heavy rolling, cured by much increasing the depth of the bilge keels and increasing topweight (more depth charges). Strangely, there seem to have been no complaints of rolling in the USN.

The individual histories are quite brief but informative. The British ships had names of captains of Nelson's day and the history usually begins with a reference to this captain. RN ships took part in 27 U boat sinkings, a score which is all the more impressive when it is realised that they entered service as the U boat war was almost over. Escort group commanders preferred a fast ship to prosecute a contact so that they could catch up quickly with the convoy possibly accounting for the DE's fine record. The photographs are generally of a high standard (To complete all 154 ships, a few poorer ones have been included). The book is very readable and recommended to all with an interest in World War II ships — I understand that a companion volume on the diesel engined ships is on the way.

GARDINER, Robert. *Warships of the Napoleonic Era*. Chatham Publishing, London, 1999. 160 pages, 100 plans. ISBN 1 86176 117 1. Price £30. (reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

This new 'Blueprint' series is produced in association with the National Maritime Museum in order to make available a selection of plans from their collection. The style of drawing used for these Admiralty draughts comprises a sheer plan in elevation, plan and section. Masts and rigging are not shown and the position of the armament is only indicated. (i.e. these plans alone are insufficient for model makers though they would be an essential start.) Plans spread over two pages have a small duplication to ensure that no detail is concealed in the spine. Thanks to the Royal Navy's success in capturing ships from most other navies plans taken off after capture are available for a wide selection of foreign vessels — indeed it is claimed that the Museum has a better collection of French draughts than is available in France!

The RN claims the greater part of the book, as it was by far the largest navy in the world. There are 30 pages on RN battleships in six rates, 16 pages on frigates in five groups, 31 pages on smaller vessels (including the Great Lakes fleet). France gets 15 pages, Spain 9, Netherlands 7, Denmark-Norway 9, other European navies 6 and the USA 8. As a representative section that on British 74 gun ships has 3 plans plus a structural drawing of *Pitt* to illustrate SEPPINGS' diagonal framing. There is a table giving the number in service or reserve each year and another table with particulars of typical ships.

Though the text is seen as secondary to the plans it is clear and comprehensive. The author has an extensive knowledge of the period, which he has used to advantage. I find his account of the 90-98 gun three decker particularly interesting. Most contemporary writers have attacked them as overcrowded and poor sailors. GARDINER portrays them as part of the eternal conflict between quantity and quality. They had sufficient accommodation for subordinate Admirals and numerous three deckers had a depressing effect on the enemy's morale.

Wisely, there is no great attempt to say which navies produced 'better' ships though national differences are explained. For example, in 1780 French battleships were some 27% greater in displacement than those of the RN. In frigates the heavier broadside of the British ships with numerous carronades largely offset the greater size of French ships. It is a most interesting book, which is essential to any serious study of the period.

GRIFFITHS, Denis; LAMBERT, Andrew; WALKER, Fred. *BRUNEL's Ships*. Chatham Publishing, London, 1999. 160 pages, 118 illustrations. ISBN 1 86176 102 3. Price £30.

(reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

This book has its origin in a one day Open Museum course at the National Maritime Museum when, over lunch, the three speakers agreed that their talks would form the basis for an interesting book. They are well qualified; a marine engineer, an historian and a naval architect, all of whom have written on the period. The work is not divided equally; GRIFFITHS gets 7 chapters, LAMBERT 3 and WALKER one only. The editor (Robert GARDINER) should, perhaps, be given some of the credit for welding these contributions into a homogeneous whole.

After the Introduction, Part I covers the formation of the Great Western Steamship Co (GWSS), BRUNEL and the Admiralty, iron shipbuilding (with a section on the little known *Vulcan*), the GWSS works and the *Great Britain*. Part II deals with the ships; *Great Western*, *HMS Rattler*, *Great Britain* and *Great Eastern*. All these chapters are fascinating with much material not readily available elsewhere. Rather surprisingly, *Great Eastern* gets much less coverage than the earlier ships and stops at the launch; another chapter would have been welcome. Technically, BRUNEL's three 'Greats' all marked major advance and were successful but all were commercial failures.

Credit is given to the Admiralty for advice on the structure of the *Great Western* based on SEPPINGS' diagonal style and the authors do much to dispel the notion of a feud between the Admiralty and BRUNEL. Certainly there were ruffled feathers early in the design of *Rattler* but, quite soon, all concerned were working well together. BRUNEL seems to have realised that much of the heavy vibration associated with early screw ships was due to the action of a two bladed propeller working behind a thick deadwood. He gave *Great Britain* a built up, six bladed screw which failed and was replaced with a four bladed solid unit.

The illustrations are both interesting and well reproduced and are an important feature of the book (thanks mainly to the National Maritime Museum). It is easy to read and well recommended.

Personally, I would not see *Rattler* as a 'BRUNEL ship' though he made an important contribution. She was a team effort, led by the Admiralty, with Thomas LLOYD, chief engineer at Woolwich as the driving force. I have read both the BRUNEL and Admiralty files on the subject for my own book *Before the Ironclad* and it is not easy to be sure of the correct balance.

KEMP, P. *Submarine Action*. Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 1999. 254 pages, 136 photographs. ISBN 0 7509 1711 2. Price £25.

(reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

The author tells the story of the submarine by topic, worldwide though with an emphasis on the Royal Navy. After a couple of introductory chapters on pioneer submarines and 'essentials' the main topics are:

- Propulsion
- Life onboard
- Torpedo
- Submerged and surface attack
- Mines
- Special operations
- Escape and rescue

- Midgets etc.

This approach works well in most cases but more dates are needed so that the general reader knows which war is being described. For example, on pages 64-5, there is an account of the sinking of *Pathfinder* on 5 September 1915 (a slip, it should be 1914) followed 'two weeks later' by the sinking of *Hogue*, *Aboukir* and *Cressy*. The next paragraph opens '*Barham* left Alexandria on 24 November....' without any hint that we have skipped quarter of a century and are in a different war.

The book is for the general reader with little technical content. The material is generally well known but with a fresh and exciting approach. I am surprised that the author sees 1-2000 yards as the opening range for gun action; in *Tabard* (1951) we would try for about 300 yards with a certain first round hit - but *Tabard* was the Champion gunnery submarine at the time! He perpetuates the myth that the German T5 was the first acoustic homing torpedo even though he does mention the US Mk24 which scored an earlier kill.

The photographs are splendid with many unfamiliar shots, particularly the internal views. The little known World War I Austrian submarines get a well deserved mention.

KOOP, Gerhard; SCHMOLKE, Klaus-Peter. *Pocket Battleships of the Deutschland Class*. Greenhill books, London, 2000. 224 pages, 347 photographs, many line drawings and maps. ISBN 1 85367 402 8. Price £25.
(reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

This is a companion volume to the authors' *Battleships of the Bismarck Class* and the similar Scharnhorst class, previously reviewed, and has the same virtues and problems. The Treaty of Versailles allowed Germany to retain a few elderly pre-DREADNOUGHT battleships and, in time, to replace them with ships of displacement not exceeding 10,000 tons. (It is not clear whether metric or Imperial tons was meant but after the Washington Treaty it was reasonable to accept Imperial tons giving the same limit as the cruisers of major powers). It was expected that this limit would lead to slow coast defence ships of limited capability and endurance.

Germany attempted by using advanced technology to produce potent warships within this limit. Weight saving involved the use of welding throughout which was to give problems as the steel used was not entirely suitable for welding and procedures were not fully developed. (It was probable that poor welding exacerbated the severe damage to the stern of *Lutzow* when she was torpedoed - as with *Bismarck* and *Prince Eugen*). The authors claim 15% in structural weight which seems rather high - 10% was more typical of early welded ships. Long endurance was achieved by the use of diesel engines, a very novel feature of their day.

Their actual displacement was greatly over the limit. The first, *DEUTSCHLAND*, was 10,600 Imperial tons, perhaps an excusable error with a design team lacking recent experience and with so many novel features. The later ships at 11,550 tons and 12,340 tons were clearly a deliberate breach of the treaties. With six 11in guns and a speed of over 26 knots it was believed that they could run from any ship which could defeat them (except the three British battlecruisers) and sink anything which could catch them. They had an immense influence on naval thinking but, gradually, it was realized that their threat was over-rated. A DNC study of 1939 concluded that one could be defeated by two COUNTY class cruisers - the battle of the River Plate had been 'won' many times in the tactical school before the war.

Their main machinery consisted of eight 9 cylinder two-stroke diesels with a maximum speed of 450 rpm in four engine rooms geared in two gear rooms to two shafts. (Maximum shaft speed 250 rpm). With one motor per shaft they could reach 13 knots for 17,400 miles. There were a number of teething troubles, which do not seem to have been entirely cured. They did generate severe vibration and, from other accounts, the authors may have under-stated this problem. Vibration of the director is said to have accounted for *Graf Spee's* poor gunnery at the River Plate.

As with the earlier books, the photographs are superb. There are numerous photographs of the ships under construction and in service with a fair number of internal views showing life on board. I particularly liked the photograph of *Graf Spee* with a dummy B turret and a second funnel. The quality is generally high except for some of the action shots. There are fairly detailed accounts of the active service life of the three ships.

LATHOM, C.; STOBBS, A. *Pioneers of Radar*. Sutton Publishing. Stroud, 1999. 279 pages, 107 illustrations. ISBN 0-7509-2120-X. Price £19.99. (reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

This is the story of the early days of radar or, more specifically, of TRE (Telecommunications Research Establishment) as told by the early pioneers. Their memories have been recorded by CHiDE, the Centre for the History of Defence Electronics at Bournemouth. There are 58 such stories and they are fascinating; the writers range from the very top to the bottom of the staff. Obviously there is a good deal of overlap but this adds to the fun as the view from the top may differ from the worm's eye view – there are even husband and wife accounts.

The content is quite technical as scientists and engineers are writing for their colleagues but it is generally clear and the authors have added explanatory notes in a few places. Above all it is a book about people and I found the selection procedure the most fascinating part of the story. It was the old boy network at its best; professors already involved named their best students who were recruited with the minimum of formality. It worked well, it is clear that the intellectual atmosphere was extremely stimulating and they gave of their best. There are brief notes of the post war careers of the contributors and the great majority rose high – a Nobel prize in medicine, seven Knights and two Ladies and high positions in industry at home and abroad.

The book is highly recommended but particularly to those involved in R & D planning. (Note that Naval radar had a different history though there was considerable interaction).

LONDON Peter. *RNAS Culdrose*. Sutton Publishing 1999. 128 pages, 153 photographs. Paperback. ISBN 0 7509 2230 3. Price £10.99 (reviewed by John SHEARS)

This is another title from Sutton's 'Photographic History of Aviation' and is a must for anyone who has or is serving at *Culdrose*. The introduction (10 pages) gives a potted version of the Air Station. It was first identified in the summer of 1942 by a team of Admiralty surveyors as a probable site for a new airfield for the RN. The Admiralty purchased the 750 acre site during February 1944.

The new station was provisionally named RNAS *Helston* (HMS *Chough*), but was named RNAS *Culdrose* (HMS *Seahawk*) in April 1947 when it was finally commissioned. The name *Culdrose* came from the farm near where the Commanding Officer's house was built.

The author has selected a few of the many accidents that have happened at the station. Of these the shooting down of Station flight's MARTINET by a SEA FURY whilst target towing and Hookey WALKER's landing in the field of broccoli are two of those listed. He also claims the first SAR rescue in 1953, which is not strictly true as this is claimed by a HOVERFLY at *Thorney Island* on 4 May 1946.

The remaining chapters are a pure photographic record. The choice of photographs gives a good feel of the air station and its activities. Obviously there will be some in that selection where the reader may disagree with the caption. For this review I will pick out two for comment.

1. On page 42 we are told the tip of the wrecked *Warspite* is just visible. Due to the standard of the print, this reviewer could not see it!
2. On page 79 we are told it is September 1972 and in the background is a Station Flight WHIRLWIND. This does look like a Mk7 and when I left Station Flight in 1967 I am certain that we had only Mk9s.

Apart from these minor niggles, if you want to see bent aircraft, then the fixed wing chapter is for you. My favourite is the SEA OTTER on page 46.

MAY, W.E. *The Boats of Men-of-War*. Chatham Publishing with the National Maritime Museum. London, 1999. 128 pages, 106 illustrations. ISBN 1 86176 114 7. Price £20.

(reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

COMMANDER MAY's book was first published as a Museum monograph in 1974 and the new book uses the original text and notes in their entirety - 'obvious' errors corrected. Simon Stephens of the Museum has added the tabular material, illustrations and their captions for the new book.

The story goes back to the 15th century with very large 'boats', up to half the keel length of their parent ship, which were too big to be hoisted and were towed behind. Boats were very important in the sailing navy, part of the weapon system in boarding or coastal attack, used to bring fresh water out or other stores and in the deployment of kedge anchors.

Some of the important developments described include the introduction of davits from about 1790 though the curved iron davit did not appear until 1820. The swivelling crutch was introduced in 1820. The name whaleboat appears around 1756 but its general introduction to the RN dates from the end of the century. This double ended boat proved invaluable for work in the surf during the navy's suppression of the slave trade.

There were experiments with steamboats from about 1850 but general introduction was from 1864. (I would put in a plea for the White's survey launch of 1861 in *Sylvia*) The bigger steamboats became small torpedo boats and were also given a gun to protect anchorages against enemy torpedo boats. These picket boats were big and heavy - there is a spectacular photograph of the failure of a hoisting derrick.

The numerous illustrations are well selected and complement the text. The book as a whole forms a fine record of an important aspect of the RN of yesteryear.

McGOWAN Alan. *HMS Victory*. Chatham Publishing 1999. 222 pages, 59 photographs, 14 illustrations, numerous drawings. ISBN 1 86176 111 2. Price £40.

(reviewed by John SHEARS)

As the cover states, this book is the ultimate reference work for historians, model makers and enthusiasts. This reviewer doesn't come under any of those headings, but was interested in finding out more about this great ship,

One of the first impressions is that it is ideal material for the TV Programme, *Call my Bluff*. But having discovered the glossary of terms at the rear of the book, 'futtocks', 'wale' etc, were explained but some such as 'spircketting' remain a mystery. It is noticed that the 'Portsmouth Team' when stating that *Victory* has outlived all her successors, they only mention *Warrior* as the only exception and seem to have forgotten the *Trincomalee* being restored at Hartlepool, I hope it isn't a case of 'not being invented here' syndrome. Apart from this omission, the first chapter gives a very clear and concise description of life, promotions etc. within the Royal Navy in the 18th century.

The order for *Victory* was placed on 15 June 1759 and compared with modern contracts, this order can only be described as being concise and to the point! In 1765 she was floated out for trials and although initially assessed satisfactory, she later proved to be an excellent sailor. In those days repairs were classified as small, middling or large and the history of the ship is followed in detail which includes all refits, modifications and repairs. During one period having been at sea for 2 years, only maintained by the crew, she just required three weeks in dockyard hands, which can only be described as good value for money.

Once the story reaches the point where the decision was taken to preserve her and place her permanently in dry dock, the description of the restoration is covered in great detail and can become quite a hard read. But despite this one can pick up the odd snippets, for instance washing the decks with fresh water causes more damage than seawater. Then from 1954 there is a table listing the annual totals of Death Watch Beetle – how that is done with such accuracy remains a mystery.

As mentioned at the beginning, this book is for the enthusiasts and historians, but it is still recommended for anyone interested in the ship and wanting to know that bit more about her.

PRESTON, Anthony (Editor). *Warship 1999 — 2000*. Conway Maritime Press, London, 1999. 208 pages, 110 illustrations. ISBN 0 85177 724 4. Price £30.

(reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

Publication of this issue of the annual has been delayed by change of ownership and office moves but it is worth waiting for. The mixture is much as usual but the articles are of high standard. One which particularly caught my attention was the transit of the Lombok Strait by an RN squadron in 1964 when a tough line combined with a token, face saving concession de-fused a very nasty situation.

There is a strong 19th century flavour with LAIRD'S Rams, the Russian war coastal force and their operations in the Sea of Azov, a little recognized success for the RN (with some French assistance). There is a detailed account of Russian armoured cruisers and of the Brazilian ironclads with a detailed study of the battle of the Yalu (1894).

Later ships described include the experimental Japanese cruiser *Yubari*, the French battleships *Dunkerque* and *Strasbourg* and the RN steam gunboats of

World War II. For their day, their steam turbine machinery was extremely advanced but was the Achilles heel as it was so easily disabled. The illustrations are well selected and clear — some of the Russian cruiser pictures are exceptional in clarity.

There is the usual section on naval news, book reviews and a photo supplement. The authors comprise a nice blend of experience and new men. Everyone interested in warships will find something to enjoy and will learn as well — though I still prefer the original quarterly format.

REYNOLDS, L.C.; COOPER, H.F. *Mediterranean MTBs at War*. Sutton Publishing, with the Imperial War Museum, Stroud, 1999. 216 pages, 97 illustrations, 8 maps. ISBN 0 7509 1817 9. Price £25.
(reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

This is a companion volume to the successful *Dog Boats at War* by REYNOLDS (Reviewed in Volume 38:1 of the *Journal*) and in very much the same style. SCOTT-PAINE and his British Power Boat (BPB) company built the first RN MTBs of the second World War era in the late 1930s mainly for service in the Mediterranean. They were withdrawn when Italy did not enter the war and there is a fascinating account of their return via the French canal system. With Italy in the war a rag bag of Thornycroft boats was assembled but they were mechanically unreliable and were soon eliminated by air attack at Crete.

A new flotilla was equipped with US built ELCO craft to a BPB design. Four of these were soon lost in the Tobruk raid but the remainder began to establish the place of the MTB. By July 1942 the first Vosper MTB arrived. The first boats were built under difficulty and several were damaged whilst being carried to the Mediterranean but later boats were reliable and powerful.

The MTBs moved forward with the armies — North Africa, the Aegean, Adriatic, Ligurian sea with increasingly successful results. I found it interesting that it was found that minelaying was found more effective than torpedoes during the Tunisian campaign. Later the CCR magnetic pistol and effective US radars swung the balance back to the torpedo. Losses were heavy, of the 109 boats in the Mediterranean 35 were lost. Air attack was the biggest single cause with 11 losses though accidental losses due to weather, collision and grounding totalled 13. They are reported to have fought 149 actions though the authors contend that this is an under estimate. There is a fascinating supplement on the Hong Kong flotillas and their crews' 3 month trek across China to Rangoon.

The book is very readable and tells the story of gallant and successful actions, which are little known. The photographs are a most valuable part of the book. There are plenty of high quality photographs of the boats but these are supplemented by numerous contemporary snap shots of boats and their crews at sea and in harbour which, paint a vivid picture of life in an MTB.

Tailpiece

An ex Italian MAS boat captured in the attack on Malta was brought into RN service under the name XMAS!

WHEATLEY, Joseph; HOWARTH, Stephen. *Historic Sail — The Glory of the Sailing Ship from the 13th to the 19th Century*. Greenhill Books, London, 2000. 208 pages, 91 colour plates (10 other illustrations). ISBN 1-85367-399-4. Price £40.

(reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

Joseph WHEATLEY has been drawing ships since he was a boy but later he began to produce carefully researched and very beautiful coloured drawings of sailing ships. Ninety one of these drawings are reproduced in this large format book (Page size 313 x 323mm – 14 x 15in). These are each faced by a short text written by the well known historian Stephen HOWARTH.

The great majority of the drawings are profiles though there are a few more spirited ones and some structural sections. References are given as to the source of the material used. A few are composite portrayals of a type rather than an individual ship. There is a reasonable distribution with date; all ships are European with a slight bias to British. Length and beam are the only particulars given though the armament is sometimes given in full for warships. There is a useful glossary.

The price is not unreasonable for a very handsome book with 91 large colour plates — I expect a number of copies will be dismembered and the pictures framed.
