

BOOK REVIEWS

BRODHURST, Robin. *Churchill's Anchor*. Leo Cooper, Barnsley, 2000. 335 pages, 31 photographs. ISBN 0 85052 765 1. Price £25.
(reviewed by EUR ING David K BROWN, RCNC)

Historians of the Second World War at sea have generally been critical of the performance of Sir Dudley POUND as First Sea Lord. The author of this book endeavours to produce a balanced account of his work in extremely difficult circumstances – as someone is supposed to have said:

“He fought HITLER by day and CHURCHILL by night.”

His early naval career was typical of that of a very bright seaman officer, winning early promotion at each key step - commander at 32 and captain 5 years later. A little unusually, he specialized in torpedoes, not generally the route to the top in those days. He reached Flag Rank in 1926, aged 49, and by 1936 he was Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet. One would welcome more on POUND's role in planning the attack on Taranto.

CHATFIELD retired as First Sea Lord in 1938 and was followed by Roger BACKHOUSE. POUND was offered, to his delight, an extra year as C-in-C Mediterranean to be followed by retirement as Admiral of the Fleet. However, BACKHOUSE died in 1939 and amongst other senior admirals W.W. FISHER and R. HENDERSON died, SOMERVILLE was invalided and RAMSAY resigned following a disagreement with BACKHOUSE. This left POUND as the only serious contender and he took up the post of First Sea Lord in June 1939.

There have been doubts raised as to his health even in 1939 but the author quotes a number of people who knew him well and thought POUND was very fit. He did have the habit, even then, of closing his eyes during lengthy meetings but his forceful comments as soon as naval matters came up made it clear that he was following the discussion and not asleep.

The outbreak of war brought CHURCHILL to the Admiralty as First Lord, full of enthusiasm. CHURCHILL's first dream was Operation CATHERINE for which a battlefleet would enter the Baltic. POUND realized that direct opposition to CHURCHILL would be useless and agreed subject to reasonable but impossible conditions - such as Soviet agreement to repair damaged ships in Leningrad. He was to stall CHURCHILL many times in similar fashion.

The Norwegian campaign and others later led to complaints that the Admiralty were interfering in tactical control of the man on the spot. In particular, POUND's order to scatter convoy PQ 17 was clearly wrong with hindsight. On the other hand, POUND had access to intelligence, such as ENIGMA, which could not be made widely available. There is no doubt that he did over centralize and this is made clear in the book. (BACKHOUSE was probably worse)

The style is very readable and seems well supported by evidence. The author is a little prone to snap judgements - for example, writing of Jutland, he says

“That British ships were ‘obviously’ vulnerable to plunging fire.”

I and others would dispute this (pp.35). Nor would I agree that the French *Dunkerque* and *Strasbourg* were at least the equal of the much larger *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. (26,000 tons v 34,800. pp.148). These are minor problems and the book is recommended as a thoughtful review of a key player in the naval war.

DAVIES Brian. *Fly no more*. Airlife Publishing Ltd 2001. 264 pages, 82 photographs, 7 illustrations. ISBN 1 84037 273 7. Price £19.99 (reviewed by John SHEARS)

An excellent book, written in an easy and understandable style, which covers the author's naval career from 1952 to 1972. During that period he was to fly over 50 different fixed wing aircraft both as a Squadron Pilot and as a Test Pilot.

He joined the Navy near the start of the introduction of jet aircraft into the Fleet. From flying training he was selected for jet training and this required flying in the unpressurized METEOR Mk7 and all students had to undertake decompression tests before commencing the course. From the description in full of the effects these have on the human anatomy, it is a warning that some of the incidents in the book will be related warts and all!

There is a wealth of anecdotes in the book covering many periods of his career, for instance:

- 1st deck landing in a GANNET with two unsuspecting Chiefs in the back.
- Being asked to fly a GANNET in Malta by a team of scientists who had got the aircraft, trials team and weapon to the Island but appeared to have lost the aircrew.
- Being sent to America, as he thought, to evaluate BULPUP. On return his recommendation was not to touch it only to find that it had been bought and that he had to clear it for service.
- Sinking the Luce Bay target ship with a 2,000lb inert nuclear shape.

From 1968 he joined the PHANTOM IFTU and it is interesting to be reminded of the problems the Unit had to face. From there he was to become the CO 892 and one of the first of the Squadron's tasks was the Trans.-Atlantic Air Race. This as we all remember, the Navy won, but the support required completing the exercise was very complicated. One of the interesting statistics is the naval Support Team of 30 in America compared with the RAF's 180.

In 1972, with the end of fixed wing carrier operation in sight, he opts for the financially attractive redundancy scheme and a new career in civilian aviation. This book is thoroughly recommended to all those with an interest in naval aviation and a reminder of what it was like in that period.

FAWCETT H.W.; HOOPER G.W.W. (Editors). *The Fighting at Jutland*. Chatham Publishing, Rochester, 2001. 448 pages (234 x 156mm), 73 illustrations, 19 maps. ISBN 1861761791. Price £25.

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

Soon after the end of World War I the two editors, both naval officers, collected some sixty narratives from those who took part in the battle of Jutland with the aim of dispelling the public's ignorance of the heroism of those who took part. There was some official opposition to their work and it was published privately. Later a commercial edition was produced but this omitted many accounts and was somewhat expurgated. Chatham have now published the complete, original version with all the original illustrations and diagrams.

The essays are anonymous, from all ranks, though the majority are from officers, and have been edited and arranged to follow the chronology of the battle. These accounts bring vividly to life the bravery and the competence of those serving in

the Grand Fleet during the greatest action of the battleship era. The majority of the illustrations are action shots and help to create the atmosphere though the process of reproduction has not helped.

Even though I have a copy of the original, abridged edition I still enjoyed reading this complete version. It may be read from the point of view of general interest or as a contribution to history. As history, eyewitness accounts must always be checked; access to German records has shown errors in the original as have the exact location of some of the wrecks.

My own favourite story is of the destroyer *Spitfire* which was involved in a high speed, head on collision with what was thought to have been a German cruiser that left a considerable piece of her plating on the destroyer. *Spitfire* then suffered considerable blast damage from the German guns that could not be depressed sufficiently for the shells to hit. Post war analysis showed that it was no cruiser that she had rammed but the battleship *Nassau*.

Chatham have done a great service in making this book available at moderate price. I hope the Royal Navy will be proud of their forbears.

FINNIS Bill. *The History of the Fleet Air Arm, From Kites to Carriers*. Airline Publishing 2000. 176 pages. 98 photographs and illustrations. ISBN 184037 182X. Price £24.95.

(reviewed by Geoff HIGGS)

To compile the history of the Fleet Air Arm spanning almost a century is a formidable task. To attempt to do so in the space of 165 pages is ambitious indeed and the result could never be more than a thumbnail sketch. The author has drawn extensively from his list of sources and whilst much of the material is 'old hat', he has tied the salient events together to create a sound understanding of the subject.

The kite/balloon period leads to the very earliest developments of heavier-than-air craft involving ships, which the author perceives as 'In the Beginning'. He dwells appropriately on the opposition at that time from some factions of the Admiralty through 'lack of understanding': some might, perversely, refer to it as fear of losing the traditional naval hand on the tiller. Whatever the reason, things got off to a slow start.

From these early developments, the narrative jumps around a little. The 'Bureaucratic Battle' for control of naval air resources, a feature of the 1920/30 period and which largely stemmed from the establishment of the Royal Air Force in 1918, is followed by WW1. Quite why the sequence of events is reversed here is unclear but in the process the author appears to have overlooked entirely the twenty year steady progress made between the wars. There are one or two references to carrier design during this period in an earlier chapter but for any account of aircraft and operations from the inter war years the reader will look in vain.

By contrast the period of WW2 is well covered and in some detail – although perhaps there is a lack of balance here since it occupies over half the book. The noteworthy naval air action in the various theatres is given due prominence, as is its effect on naval warfare thinking. Concluding with the involvement of the British Pacific Fleet in the war against Japan the author touches on the initial difficulties in operating with the United States Navy but which were quickly overcome in the way that wars encourage.

From this point the author seems to have run out of steam. The period of over forty years from WW2 is condensed into a mere thirty pages. There are short accounts of the Korean War, the introduction of jet aircraft and the SEA HARRIER leading to the Falklands campaign but the general impression is of undue haste to complete the book. From time to time the author indulges in a number of gratuitous personal observations such as, 'We in Great Britain should not forget the debt we owe to the people of Malta' – quite so but. Not surprisingly with such a coverage, there are a number of errors which may irritate the cognoscenti as may his continual reference to 'planes'. And I had some difficulty with reconciling the photograph of a CHINOOK in the chapter dealing with naval helicopters as with the choice of a SWORDFISH and SEA METEOR as the sole examples in the section dealing with post WW2 carrier operations following the advent of the jet.

All this apart the book is well presented. There are a large number of excellent photographs and the numerous maps should greatly facilitate the readers understanding. Whilst the more knowledgeable may find nothing new here the general reader will find much of interest. He - or she - may particularly appreciate this condensed history in very readable form provided the price is not a barrier.

LEFEAUX John. *Whatever happened to the Hovercraft?* Carnegie Publishing Ltd. 130 pages (240 x 16mm), 17 photographs, 3 Maps. ISBN 1 85821 850 0. Price £11.95.

(reviewed by John SHEARS)

The author joined the Royal Navy in 1939, trained as a Marine Engineer, specialized as an Air Engineer and became a Maintenance Test Pilot. In 1963 he was the Executive Officer at HMS *Raleigh* and at a Mess Dinner met the Commercial Manager of the Plymouth Division of the Western region of BR. Later they were to meet again on the *Golden Hind*, where he discovered that the gentleman had been selected to manage a new BR subsidiary that would operate hovercraft.

This meeting also involved discussions about what qualifications would be required to become the Chief Engineer. Having agreed to write those qualifications (which were a summary of his CV), he then applied for and got the job. On the day he took up his appointment he was handed a letter to be read and signed for forthwith. This stated that as there was not a copy of the BR Rule Book to issue to him and that he was not to go on the railway lines without a qualified escort!

The book then follows the author's career from the early start to his retirement as Managing Director. At the beginning everyone had a lot to learn about how to operate a hovercraft service. The company cut their teeth operating SRN6s between Cowes and Southampton and Portsmouth. These routes were to be closed down when the large SRN4 came into service.

The book is a good insight into the operation and development of the SRN4 hovercraft. The author covers choice of operating bases, selection of cabin crew, technical development, training of flight crews etc, but the names of those involved can get confusing at times. He also covers the French N500, which they tried to operate and must be one of the least well known and remembered hovercraft that was built. There were sales visits to Morocco, publicity visits to the pool of London and across the Channel with all the accompanying pitfalls.

In the case of the cross Channel hovercraft, one of the major factors for their demise was the price of fuel combined with uneconomical engines. Once again

we see a British invention allowed to go to the wall, whilst other nations take up the idea.

This recommended book only covers Hoverspeed and the author briefly mentions the work of the Hovercraft Trials Unit at *Lee on the Solent*. It is hoped that someday someone will write about that work and disclose the real reasons why the SRN4 variant did not have a chance in the selection of the Single Role Minehunter.

MESSIMER Dwight R. *Find and Destroy. Antisubmarine Warfare in World War I*. Chatham Publishing 2001. 257 pages, photographs, 19 charts and diagrams, 2 intriguing Appendices, a plethora of notes and a comprehensive bibliography. ISBN 1 55750 447 4. Price £25.
(reviewed by Iain HIME)

Antisubmarine Warfare (ASW) was in its infancy when war broke out in 1914, as indeed was the art of Submarine warfare itself, but by 1918 all the fundamentals of equipment and tactics that were later used in the Battle of the Atlantic had been explored. MESSIMER examines them all together with the organizations of the participants and does so on a very broad front. He pays particular attention to the macro issues of economics and political will because as he so rightly points out ASW is all about getting the shipping to its destination. If submarines fail to break the lines of supply, for whatever reason, then the ASW battle is won.

MESSIMER has made the best possible use of his facility with the German language and so the book is extremely well balanced with both sides views on 'what' happened and 'why'. Even better, he succeeds in satisfying the serious reader searching for details and hard facts and the casual reader who enjoys stories about war at sea. Personal accounts from submarine survivors of both camps add reality and colour to the straightforward accounts of the ASW battle.

I found the examination of the war in the Home Seas of most interest and, fortunately, this takes up some three-quarters of the book. MESSIMER then examines the other ASW theatres and, while the sea stories intrigue I got the impression that the author felt obliged to cover these areas but his heart was not really in it. And why, for heaven's sake, did the publisher put those drawings and maps in Part 6 when you really needed them in Part I? Nonetheless, a book well worth reading.

PRESTON, Anthony. *The Royal Navy Submarine Service - A Centennial History*. Conway Maritime Press 2001. 192 pages (245 x 185mm), 205 illustrations. ISBN 0851778917. Price £19-99.
(reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

Commemorative books are rarely of interest but this one is different. For a start, the author knows his subject and his sources. Many of the excellent photographs come from the collection of the Submarine Museum.

The book opens with a substantial introduction taking the history of the submarine up to the purchase of the HOLLANDs for the RN. There are then five chapters, each beginning with an introduction followed by a day-by-day chronology. This is interspersed with short articles on events such as the loss of *Thetis* and by short descriptions of the submarine designs of that era. It is an unusual format but seems to work well.

There are so many facts that it has not been possible to check them all but only one error has been spotted. *Swiftsure* is said to have dived to '50% more than her crush Depth'. Even if crush depth means operational depth it still seems unlikely.

The photographs are splendid. I particularly like a shot of a building slip at Barrow with six A Class in various stages of assembly at the end of World War II. Barrow thought that their system of pre-fabrication was superior to the German procedures whilst Chatham claimed to be better still.

PRESTON, Anthony (Editor). *Warship 2001 - 2002*. Conway Maritime Press, London, 2002. 208 pages, 197 illustrations. ISBN 0 85177 901 8. Price £30. (reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN RCNC)

This is the twenty fifth year of issue for Conway's *Warship* and it must be a surprise each year to find so much new and interesting material.

Steve MCLAUGHLIN contributes a fascinating article on how the Russians attempted to co-ordinate the fire of three pre-DREADNOUGHTs against the *Goeben* in 1914. Not entirely successful but the action of Cape Sarych in 1914 was the only action of pre-DREADNOUGHTs against a DREADNOUGHT. Keith MCBRIDE stays on the pre-DREADNOUGHT theme with a detailed account of the KING EDWARD VII class whilst from that era Peter BROOK tells the story of the USN's annihilation of the Spanish squadron at Santiago. George MOORE describes the post war BLACKWOOD class frigates (Type 14) with some assistance from their designer, Arthur HONNOR.

Many enthusiasts would see the French *Algerie* as the best of the inter war 8 inch gun cruisers - well armed, good protection and a genuine 10,000 tons – and she is described by John JORDAN. Other articles, all interesting, cover Armstrong built ships, RN First class cruisers, Australian colonial navies, Swedish torpedo cruisers, the Romanian Navy in World War II (more than you think) and the Role of the RN 1856–1871. Finally, there is your reviewer's article on British World War I mines, including magnetic and acoustic weapons. I think I am the only writer to have had articles in every one of the 25 years of publication.

There are the usual book reviews, notes and a review of the year. I've said it before but 'if you enjoyed previous issues, you will enjoy this one'. Draft articles for 2003 are well advanced.

RAMSAY David. *Lusitania, Saga and Myth*. Chatham Publishing 2001. 308 pages, 20 illustrations and photographs, 1 chart. ISBN 1 86176 170 8. Price £20. (reviewed by Iain HIME)

This is David RAMSAY's first book. I hope he writes some more! He read history at Cambridge from whence stems his interest in the two World Wars and CHURCHILL who plays a pivotal part in this story. A Cunard director who said the reasons behind the sinking have never been adequately explained spurred him into researching this book. And this is as good a tale of intrigue, luck, bad luck, heroism, steadfastness, lies, opportunism and loyalty as any red-blooded Hollywood mogul could hope for. It certainly offers more scope than the 'simple' story of the loss of the *Titanic*. It takes no leap of imagination for the average naval officer to recognize the problems and dilemmas CAPTAIN William TURNER faced. Nor is it too difficult to believe the actions and reactions of the hopelessly immature and ineffective naval staff compounded by a First Sea Lord past his

(great) prime who had no truck for his (even greater) egocentric First Lord whose eyes were elsewhere and off the ball. Add the KAISER and the German Military High Command, mix in a love lorn PRESIDENT TRUMAN and little wonder it has taken this long to gather all the facts.

The saga starts by plotting the rise and rise of Cunard and the great transatlantic liners up to the start of the Great War and the cutthroat rivalry between the UK and German Merchant Marines. But by page 51 the scene is set, the die is cast and *Lusitania* is starting her final voyage. There is plenty of heroism in the sinking and subsequent rescue operations – it took the crew of the Courtmacsherry lifeboat three and a half hours to row to the scene – and all are covered in ample measure. But the meat of the book is in the aftermath, in the Inquiries, the reactions of the many participants in the three major powers and in the debunking of myths and the reasons why. And to round it all off we find out what happened to the players and passengers with the passage of time. All in all, a page turning, cracking good story.

WILLIAMS, David. *Naval Camouflage 1914 - 1945, A Complete Visual Reference*. Chatham Publishing, Rochester, 2001. 256 pages (29 x 25cm), about 350 illustrations. ISBN 1 86176 154 6. Price £40.
(reviewed by EUR ING David K. BROWN, RCNC)

This book describes the work of camouflaging warships in two World Wars and also the related but opposite scheme of dazzle painting. While the author concentrates on the RN and USN there are substantial sections on schemes used by other major navies. Dazzle painting (devised by the artist LIEUTENANT Norman WILKINSON) did not make the ship less visible but made it difficult to determine the course and, sometimes, where the ship ended. False bow waves helped to make it difficult to estimate speed.

The first two parts of the book describe approved schemes by country of origin, numerical order and, generally, chronological order. The third part contains essays on camouflage research and trials, the specification of paint schemes and colours and on implementation. Model makers will be pleased that most World War II paints are identified in terms of 'Humbrol' paint numbers.

The RN seem to have made early attempts at camouflage in 1915 – though one may see the adoption of grey paint (black for destroyers) in 1906 as an early attempt at reducing visibility. The 1915 schemes were freelance ideas by individual captains. By about 1917 there were more formal guidance on both camouflage and dazzle. The USN had a more scientific approach but their schemes seem to have ended up very similar to the more intuitive approach of the RN.

World War II followed a somewhat similar pattern with initial designs by freelance before official schemes coming later. Peter SCOTT devised the Western Approaches scheme in 1940, which later became official for all North Atlantic ships. (This scheme was identical on the two sides). It was particularly intended to reduce visibility at night, the designer realizing that light colours were needed.

The general conclusion seems to have been that actual value was slight but it could do no harm and might have a beneficial effect on morale.

The numerous photographs are absolutely splendid. Wartime colour photographs are non-existent for World War I and rare for World War II but the author has used post-war preserved ships to help towards a total of 14 colour photos. (Unfortunately including the anachronistic *Belfast*). The black and white pictures

are clear and well chosen while the large page size has helped to do them justice. A little more on the effect of film type (Panchromatic or ortho) and exposure on the rendering of colour into black and white would be welcome).

This book is an essential reference for model makers (Beware! The schemes for the two sides of a ship were usually different.) and for photograph collectors of the World War periods. The book stops at 1945 and hence there is no mention of the two peacetime navies, which camouflage their ships. During the Falklands War your reviewer was asked by the Staff to advise on the value of camouflage, but passed this question to SIR Peter SCOTT, sailor and bird painter, who had devised the most effective schemes of World War II. See from above, the wake is far more conspicuous than the ship itself much reducing the value of camouflage.

WRAGG David. *The Fleet Air Arm Handbook 1939 - 1945*. Sutton Publishing 2001. 263 pages, 104 photographs, 50 illustrations. ISBN 0-7509-2599-5. Price £25.

(reviewed by Geoff HIGGS)

This slightly unusual title has an almost official ring. The author, however, has impeccable credentials. He has written numerous books on aviation and maritime history and his style, which befits that of a former journalist, will immediately appeal to most readers.

This is not another book on WW2 Fleet Air Arm operations - although several chapters are devoted to this - more broad brush treatment of the naval scene in general including the build up to producing naval aviators, recruitment and training, service conditions, naval organization and so on. It is a colourful portrait of naval life at the time as experienced by the Fleet Air Arm's new recruits as they settle in to unheated nissen huts at recently established naval air stations. The two mile walk to the wardroom in the depth of winter in the northern wastes of Scotland and then, eventually the often cramped accommodation in ships directly under a noisy flight deck. Plenty of nostalgia here for the old and bold but it does the heart good.

This is all very worthwhile reading. Much of it has an agreeable personal touch reflecting the author's passion for maritime matters which stems, not from his own direct experience but that of his father to whom the book is dedicated. For most readers, however, the main import of the book is likely to be the extensive coverage and wealth of detail devoted to the naval squadrons, aircraft carriers and shore bases. The comprehensive description of all naval air squadrons includes aircraft type, short accounts of their war time activity and names and dates of commanding officers. Naval air wings and carrier air groups are identified from the time of their inception. A full list and description of all British aircraft carriers is given and this is followed by a survey of naval air bases, both home and overseas including a section on that crucially important innovation, MONAB (Mobile Naval Air Bases). There were for example, fifty one naval air stations in the UK and a further thirty or more overseas at the conclusion of WW2. But to put this in perspective, there were of the order of thirty aircraft carriers at that time - most of the escort type, a measure of the rapid expansion from the humble beginnings of 1939 when seven were available of which four had been officially due to retire.

The numerous photographs are excellent both in choice and quality. There are some errors, one or two in particular that could have been avoided. The author in discussing distinguishing flags for Flag Officers awards an Admiral the Standard of St. George with three balls. Personally I never heard of an Admiral so well

endowed! He then reduces an Admiral of the Fleet to no balls (on the St. George Standard) instead of the Union Flag – although largely academic these days. In another section there is an upside/down photograph of the instrument panel of the HARVARD trainer with the caption ‘the student pilot’s view’. I’m still puzzling this one.

This book is a useful addition to the growing number written about a branch of the Royal Navy that remains very much in the forefront of public interest. Its limited scope will particularly appeal to those with fond memories of the time but also to anyone with an interest in a period of the greatest change in naval air warfare.
