

Mediterranean. The omnipresent threat of danger drives most of the narrative and the main body of the text.

This is an easily accessible volume for someone unfamiliar with Operation Pedestal, or the larger war in the Mediterranean, who is interested in an historical account without being overburdened by technical details. While discussing the tactics used to attack and defend the convoys, Hastings keeps things general enough that casual readers will not get bogged down in strategic issues, while providing enough detail to keep students interested in such things involved in the narrative. The text allows readers to follow the flow of the events without explaining how submarines, aircraft, and torpedoes actually work. While those familiar with the action surrounding Operation Pedestal might not find anything revolutionary here, Hastings' research will still enhance their understanding of the events and challenges faced by the Malta convoys.

For casual readers wanting an entry into the subject, the book has a lot to offer. Students looking for a more in-depth academic discussion, however, may find the work somewhat lacking. Fortunately, Hastings provides an extensive bibliography for further exploration – unfortunately, none of the endnotes are referenced within the main body of the text. This makes correlating a specific endnote to a reference in the book extremely difficult. If by design, it takes away from the usefulness of this work for academics; if in error, it should be corrected through careful editing of future editions.

While not shedding new light on Operation Pedestal itself, this book opens an accessible, well-researched porthole onto a dramatic and important series of events that students of naval and military history might not have previously considered exploring.

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David Hepper. *British Warship Losses in the Modern Era 1920–1982*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Seaforth Publishing, www.pen-and-sword.uk.com, 2022. 424 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. UK £30.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-39909-766-6. (E-book available.)

A very interesting and extremely well researched reference book concerning the loss of Royal Navy and other Commonwealth naval ships, from 1920 through to the Falklands War. Each entry provides the ship's details, date of loss, commanding officer, and a narrative detailing how the vessel was lost.

Second World War losses make up the bulk of the book and describe the campaigns fought such as Norway, Dunkirk, and the Atlantic through to the final fighting in the Pacific in 1945. Some entries are quite lengthy, others less

so. While many losses were from enemy action, rock, tempest, and fire also took its toll as well as the foe. In some cases, blue on blue actions occurred, such as the first Royal Navy loss of the war, on 10 September 1939, when the submarine HMS *Oxley*, operating on the surface, was mistaken for a German U-Boat by the submarine HMS *Triton* and torpedoed with the loss of 52 of the ship's company.

The well-known losses such as HM Ships *Hood*, *Repulse*, *Prince of Wales*, and other capital ships are covered, but so are the small trawlers, motor torpedo boats, and mine-sweepers. The losses of the minor landing craft, known only by their number, during actions such as the Dieppe raid, Operation Torch in North Africa and D-Day, are also included, but with less detail about how they were lost and personnel killed or missing. The sheer number of landing craft lost on D-Day is quite sobering.

Equally noteworthy are some major incidents where poor planning and leadership led to serious losses. The one that stands out for me is the Ostend fire on 14 February 1945, where 12 Motor Torpedo Boats (MTB) were destroyed by fire and explosion. Some 64 crewmembers were killed and another 64 injured, with nine Belgian civilians also losing their lives. This accident was caused by an unsupervised and overworked Royal Canadian Navy motor mechanic attempting to fix an engine problem which saw high octane fuel pumped overboard. A spark, from an unknown source, ignited the fuel and within an hour the bulk of the MTB squadron had been destroyed, although some quick thinking and brave personnel managed to get other boats to safety. This and other vignettes are excellent and reveal the heavy losses incurred by the Commonwealth navies during the Second World War.

The pre-war period, 1920-1939 had, as would be expected, far fewer losses but of the 38 vessels lost, ten were submarines with a total of 402 personnel drowned. HMS *Thetis*, which was lost during diving trials on 1 June 1939, contributed 99 of those who perished. The submarine was later raised, renamed *Thunderbolt* and then lost with all hands on 14 March 1943 when sunk by Italian warships in the Mediterranean; becoming a vessel that was sunk twice.

Post-Second World War losses were also minimal, with less than 100 vessels lost due to various reasons. Again, submarine incidents took their toll, as did bad weather with the Australian patrol boat HMAS *Arrow*, sunk during the destruction of the northern Australian port city of Darwin on Christmas Day 1974 by tropical cyclone Tracy. Two of the ship's company died.

The destroyer HMS *Saumarez* fell victim to a stray German mine in May 1946 while operating off the coast of Albania and the frigate HMS *Berkeley Castle* met an unfortunate end in 1953 when undergoing a refit. The vessel was in dry dock when a tidal surge caused extensive flooding at the Sheerness dry dock and the ship was swept off its support blocks and capsized. The damage

was extreme and *Berkeley Castle* was “written off.” Training incidents saw several losses with the Motor Launch ML 2582 sunk, with only one survivor, when a Dutch F-84 aircraft failed to pull up during a mock attack and crashed into the vessel. The Australian destroyer HMAS *Voyager* was sunk during a collision with the aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne* during nighttime flying exercises in February 1964 with the loss of 82 of the ship’s company.

The book ends with the analysis of the Royal Navy losses in the 1982 Falklands War. The RN lost two destroyers, two frigates, a landing ship-logistics, and a landing craft medium in this short but sharp conflict. Several other RN ships were damaged in this “close run” short war. For those seeking more information on British ship losses in the Falklands, the recently published *Abandon Ship: The real story of the sinking’s in the Falklands War* by Paul Brown is an interesting and sobering read.

I noticed a few minor glitches in the book such as the omission of the RAN minesweeper HMAS *Warrnambool*, sunk in September 1947 while conducting post-war mine clearance. Additionally, for completeness, in the Falklands War section, inclusion of the loss of *Atlantic Conveyor* (taken up from trade and with a mixed RN/merchant navy crew) could have been considered.

That said, this is an excellent reference book for the naval historian and those with an interest in the war at sea during the Second World War. Highly Recommended.

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Kenneth V. Jack. *Eyes of the Fleet Over Vietnam. RF-8 Crusader Combat Photo-Reconnaissance Missions.* Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, www.casematepublishers.com, 2021. 230 pp., illustrations, appendices, terms and acronyms. US \$39.99, UK £35.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-63624-074-9.

Since the days of hot-air balloons, aerial reconnaissance has been a critical part of warfare. With the development of the airplane, camera-carrying observers spotted enemy formations. As aircraft changed from fragile biplanes to metal monoplanes, it was natural that cameras would be installed in them.

The Second World War saw the development of dedicated, or even specialized, photoreconnaissance aircraft—the most famous being the photo-reconnaissance versions of the famed Supermarine Spitfire. Unarmed, without cannons or machine guns for defence, the photo-reconnaissance aircraft depended upon speed and manoeuvrability to avoid enemy aircraft.

This format of unarmed photo-reconnaissance versions of fast fighter airplanes was repeated when jet fighters became available in the late 1940s and