

of these minor warships tended to be lieutenants or junior commanders, who often were dealing with circumstances well beyond what their training and experience had provided for. The isolation and the need to use one's initiative without reference to senior naval or political officials made for a lonely and often risky existence. Not all decisions taken in this environment were wise or prudent. On other occasions the gunboats were attached to fleets and participated with credit in, for example, the 1882 Bombardment of Alexandria and the 1896 Bombardment of the Sultan's Palace at Zanzibar.

The gunboats that form the subject of this book were the epitome, however, of the numerous vessels condemned by Admiral Sir John Fisher as '...too weak to fight and too slow to run away...' and so were scrapped after 1904. Their function was taken up by light cruisers, which were altogether more capable warships. Yet gunboats performed an important function of maintaining the *Pax Britannica* in Britain's favour for approximately five decades. These gunboats were omnipresent around the world's trouble spots where they kept the peace, provided security, and thereby delivered the necessary tranquility to permit orderly (and profitable) commerce. It is a fascinating, albeit short, introduction to the topic and it provides a useful primer on a key tool for the *Pax Britannica*.

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Angus Konstam. *Big Guns in the Atlantic. Germany's Battleships and Cruisers Raid the Convoys, 1939-41*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, www.bloomsbury.com, 2021. 80 pp., illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. US \$22.00, paper; ISBN 978-1-4728-4596-2. (E-book available.)

In 1939 the British Navy was forced to fight what amounted to two distinct naval wars. The first one was waged against German U-boats and is familiarly known as the Battle of the Atlantic. This was a continuous struggle for control of the sea fought across the vast stretches of the Atlantic. It is the story of the convoys, the air gap, and of course the U-boat wolf packs. The other war was a struggle against the German surface fleet, designed to confine the fleet as much as possible in German ports, and to find and sink ships when they sortied. This surface conflict was often a cat and mouse game involving hours of patrolling punctuated by dramatic battles, such as the hunt for *Bismarck* or the Battle of the River Plate. Such encounters tend to produce very specific histories discussing the select actions of participating ships, but nothing systematic and cohesive.

In an effort to overcome this, Angus Konstam provides a compact study of

German surface operations for the initial years of the war, from 1939-1941. As a museum curator and author of over 50 books, mainly in military and naval history, Konstam brings years of research in a variety of areas to bear on the Kriegsmarine in the Second World War. Sadly, what had the potential to be an incredible history, falls well short of this. Restricted by the Osprey formula of only 80 pages, despite lavish illustrations and pictures, the text really cannot do justice to such a large history. Broken up into six major areas focusing on initial strategy, the planning for the war, the Atlantic sorties, and the aftermath, analysis, and conclusion the text simply produces a precis of events with no depth to the study. Covering operations by *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, *Admiral Scheer*, and operations Nordseetour and Berlin, it provides the reader with many dramatic and exciting moments which seem designed to entice more than to explain.

Particularly frustrating is the absence of any citations. Photographs, illustrations, maps, and detailed information appear but not one reference indicates where anything came from. The result is an interesting read but one with little to no research value. The book seems aimed at young adults with an interest in the subject but is certainly of no use to anyone with the serious intent of doing further research. In essence, it is a starter book that I would not recommend for anyone with more of an interest than that.

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Mark Lardas. *Truk 1944–45. The destruction of Japan's Central Pacific bastion.* Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, www.bloomsbury.com, 2021. 96 pp., illustrations, map, chronology, bibliography, index. US \$24.00, CDN \$30.00, paper; ISBN 978-1-47284-585-6. (E-book available.)

This work is the 26th entry in Osprey's Air Campaign Series and author Mark Lardas' 34th overall contribution to the Osprey catalogue. In this latest publication, Lardas examines the reduction of Japan's military facilities at the Truk Atoll via the naval air campaign that began in February 1944. Presented in the standardized Campaign series format, the text begins with a brief introduction to Truk's pre-1944 significance followed by a chronology of key events related to the atoll from 1914 to 1986, with the latter naturally focusing on the war years. Lardas covers the equipment and capabilities of both the Allied and Japanese forces along with the air campaign objectives themselves before analyzing the campaign and its aftermath. Maps, sketches, period photographs, and computer renderings are used throughout the work for visual reference. A short note on surviving aircraft, further reading, and an