

**A.J. Chapman. *The War of the Motor Gun Boats. One Man's Personal War at Sea with the Coastal Forces, 1943-1945.* Barnsley: S. Yorks: Pen & Sword, [www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk), 2023. vii+163 pp., illustrations, appendix, index. UK £14.99, US \$29.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-39902-008-4.**

The war at sea in the Second World War encompassed many different aspects of that struggle. Much has been written about the war waged by German U-Boats in the Atlantic and as well, the battles involving the surface fleets. Much less has been written regarding a critical part of the war at sea: the confrontations between German Schnellboots (S-boats – torpedo boats), generally known as E-Boats for “Enemy Boats”) and the British Royal Navy’s Coastal Forces. In *The War of the Motor Gun Boats*, A.J. (“Tony”) Chapman has written a memoir of his part in the war at sea.

When the Second World War broke out in September 1939, the British Royal Navy had very few assets to patrol the British coasts. By contrast, the German Kriegsmarine (“war navy”) had a force of well-designed E-Boats available to confront British shipping. Quickly, British shipbuilders developed several boats that would carry the brunt of the coastal war. British coastal forces had three basic classes of combat boats: Motor Torpedo Boats (“MTBs”) which were meant to attack enemy shipping by launching torpedoes. MTBs at first were not heavily armed with machine guns or heavier weaponry, so Motor Gun Boats (“MGBs”) were developed to escort MTBs and attack German E-Boats. These craft tended to be small in size, made of wood, and fast. A third type of coastal force boat, the Motor Launch, (“ML”) was larger than MTBs or MGBs but heavily armed. (It should be noted that as the war progressed, MTBs were progressively up-gunned and MGBs carried torpedoes, so the distinction between MGBs and MTBs became essentially non-existent.) Throughout the Second World War, the E-Boats and MGBs, MTBs, and MLs were fierce opponents.

Author Chapman joined the Royal Navy in 1942 after living through the early bombing of Great Britain. As a teenager, he volunteered as an ARP messenger and spent many nights in air raid shelters during the 1940-1941 Luftwaffe Blitz. During one particularly arduous night bombing raid, he earned a commendation for carrying messages while bombs were falling near him. When Chapman reached the age of 17½, he realized he faced the British draft. Not wanting to be called into the British Army or Royal Air Force, he went to a Royal Navy (RN) recruiting station, enlisted, and was given a choice of RN branches. He was classified as a radio operator and was told he would be called up when he turned eighteen.

Six months later, Chapman was officially part of the RN. His description of RN basic training is valuable as it preserves a part of the military too

often overlooked in history. After basic, he was assigned to HMS *Attack*, an RN Coastal Forces base and further assigned to a ML designated for rescue operations. One anecdote in the book – in Chapman’s first sea cruise, he immediately suffered from sea sickness – a condition he never fully overcame in his RN career.

After that introductory period, the RN assigned him to a MGB, and it is here that the narrative takes shape. The rescue ML saw little action aside from rescue operations; the MGB was in the thick of things. His descriptions of the actions between E-Boats and his MGB are vivid and illuminate just how vicious was the war waged between British and German coastal forces.

Later, Chapman was assigned to duty in the Eastern Mediterranean. This is a valuable contribution to history, as the war in the eastern Mediterranean is little-known after the 1941 German invasion of the island of Crete. (One slight exception – the British invasion and subsequent German recapture of the islands of Kos and Keros in the Dodecanese has attracted some attention from military historians.) Chapman served in the Mediterranean from 1943 through the German surrender in May 1945, and his narrative makes it clear that duty in the eastern Mediterranean was no backwater of war picnic. His descriptions of landing commando parties, traveling in international waters within reach of German coastal artillery, and the ever-watchful presence of the Turkish military, anxious to preserve its nation’s neutrality. (Turkey eventually did declare war on Nazi Germany in 1945, too late to have a marked effect on the war.)

Chapman first wrote this book in 1979 so his grandchildren would have some remembrances of the part he played in the Second World War. He put it away for seven years, rewrote it in 1986, and then, with the help of fellow Coastal Forces veterans, rewrote the manuscript a third time. It is good that he did so, for this book captures the life aboard Coastal Forces’ vessels – the cramped conditions, the heat of the Mediterranean, his ever-present bouts of seasickness, all vividly bring the reality of Chapman’s war to the reader. He writes well and the illustrations add to the narrative. *The War of the Motor Gun Boats* fills in another piece of the great struggle that was the Second World War.

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**Glynn Christian. *The Truth About the Mutiny on HMAV Bounty and the Fate of Fletcher Christian*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen and Sword, distributed by Naval Institute Press, [www.usni.org](http://www.usni.org), 2021. xiv+214 pp., illustrations, bibliographic essay, index. UK £19.99, cloth; ISBN 978-1-39901-418-2.**