

Bernard Edwards. *Running the Gauntlet: Cargo Liners Under Fire 1939–1945*. Yorkshire, UK: Pen & Sword Maritime, www.pen-and-sword.co.uk, 2022. 220 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index. US \$39.95, cloth: ISBN 978-1-39909-786-4. (E-book available.)

Prior to the Second World War, the British Merchant Navy dominated global commercial shipping. Comprised of more than 4000 merchant ships, these ships accounted for almost two-thirds of global commercial shipping. Most prominent, and at the top of the fleet were the fast cargo liners that maintained regular, advertised service between ports. They were capable of twelve knots, were sturdily built, and well-maintained. They were officered by career-minded sailors who frequently had many years of dedicated service under one company flag. These ships became crucial to Britain's economic survival and their speed enabled them to sail alone, taking risks that other ships could not and would not assume.

Bernard Edwards writes a fast-moving and engaging narrative of the story of these remarkable ships during the war years. The author of many books on the sea, Edwards is well-suited to write on this topic. Having spent more than forty years at sea and commanded ships in global trade, he understands well the challenge faced by the ships that were willing to “run the gauntlet” and take their chances against the threat of Nazi raiders, warships, and U-boats. Edwards presents his story in fifteen chapters filled with first-person accounts and eight pages of black and white photos.

Rather than presenting an overall history of the British cargo liners during the war years, the author presents vignettes from that history, offering stories of success and failure in evading destruction. In so doing, he illustrates the breadth and variety of wartime experiences of these ships and crews.

The story begins with the 30 September 1939 sinking of the SS *Clement* by the German pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee* very close to Recife, Brazil, and far from the growing war in the Western Approaches. Eight months later, *Clan Macalister* was sunk after delivering ALCs to Dunkirk and while attempting take British troops off the beaches. While not technically one of the “little ships,” *Clan Macalister* had responded quickly to the call for assistance to the Royal Navy in Operation Dynamo.

Three months after the Dunkirk evacuation, Blue Star Line's *Auckland Star* was completing a voyage from Sydney, Australia, with 11,000 tons of frozen meat, grain, steel, and lead for Britain's war effort. Eighty miles off Valentia Island, Co. Kerry, it was zig-zagging at 16 ½ knots when it was torpedoed by the famous U-99, commanded by Kapitänleutnant Otto Kretschmer, who would later become Germany's top U-boat ace.

From the North Atlantic to South Atlantic, to South Pacific, and Indian

Ocean, from the Mediterranean to the Tasman Sea, cargo liners continued their voyages throughout the war, carrying vital resources for the British and Allied war effort, often sailing alone. Each chapter tells the story of a ship at war, some victorious and some sunk. While the tales of some of the ships may be familiar, others are less so, making their recounting helpful in understanding the many facets of the merchant marine war at sea.

Chapter Four, "Under the Southern Cross," is a good example of the long war at sea, recounting the sinking of the New Zealand Shipping Company's freighter *Turakina* in the Tasman Sea by the commerce raider Orion. *Turakina* was only one of the raider's many targets during a 16-month voyage of over 125,000 miles, accounting for 73,000 tons of sunk Allied merchant shipping. Though not a high amount of tonnage by U-boat standards, it disrupted commerce in areas of the globe where the war was not visible daily. Chapter Seven, "The Merchant Gunner," recounts the successful efforts of the German auxiliary cruiser *Kormoran* against merchant shipping until its 19 November 1941 challenge by HMAS *Sydney* which resulted in the controversial engagement and sinking of both ships.

Edwards transitions his chapters well, giving a flowing narrative that connects the stories in each chapter with the larger account of the ships. Whether writing of running the blockade to resupply Malta (Chapters Nine, Ten, Twelve), or the challenges of the 6,000-mile journey from Southampton to Cape Town (Chapter Eleven, "Union Castle at War"), the author presents an interesting narrative.

Chapter Thirteen, "Dangerous Waters, Dangerous Times," recounts the sinking of the SS *City of Cairo*, owned by the Ellerman Lines of London. A veteran of the UK-South Africa-India trade, *City of Cairo* was torpedoed on 6 November 1942. Out of 302 people aboard the ship, 6 crewmen died in the sinking, and almost a hundred died in lifeboats over the next few weeks. Seven died after being rescued. Each of the lifeboats had heroic and harrowing tales of survival. One lifeboat was at sea 51 days before its two remaining survivors, a female passenger and the third officer were rescued. He would die several months later when *City of Pretoria*, on which he was being repatriated, was sunk by U-172.

Being a merchant marine officer or crewman aboard more than one ship that was sunk was not an uncommon experience during the war. Thus, in several chapters, we read of the experiences and courage of merchant mariners whose wartime experiences not infrequently found them in conflict in many parts of the world, making their war a reflection of the larger world war.

The book is good recounting of the experiences of these ships, especially during the early part of the war before convoys became prevalent. Edwards' book adds to the growing literature of the merchant navy at war and provides

ample illustrations of courage and determination by mariners who spent their lives at sea and were dedicated to their mission, their company, and their country. Through his narrative and the presentation of first-hand accounts, Edwards succeeds in his goal of an accurate and engaging history.

Timothy J. Demy
Newport, Rhode Island

Andrew R. English. *The Laird Rams: Britain's Ironclads Built for the Confederacy, 1862-1923*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., www.mcfarlandbooks.com, 2021. v+207 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. US \$45.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-4766-8276. (E-book available.)

During the American Civil War, the Confederate states hastily constructed and bought a navy to challenge superior Union naval forces that enforced a blockade and descended on coasts to seize territory and strategic locations such as ports. The first naval clash between opposing ironclads incorporating improved armour and gun arrangements into designs occurred at Hampton Roads in March 1862. Due to limitations in industrial manufacturing and shipbuilding, Southern authorities could not build new ships quickly enough and to sufficient quality in performance, and instead, looked to friendly shipyards in neutral foreign countries in Europe to augment the Confederate fleet. The cruiser CSS Alabama, launched from the John Laird and Sons shipyard on the River Mersey at Birkenhead, undertook a series of raids in European waters, inflicting privations on Union shipping until it was finally hunted down and sunk off Cherbourg by the USS Kearsarge in June 1864. Two ironclad turret ships, clandestinely built at the same Laird shipyard, have generally garnered far less attention and suffered a disparaging reputation amongst contemporaries and historians. British seizure and purchase prevented the ships from entering into Confederate service, and equally important, kept them out of French or Russian hands, as European navies raced to add ironclads to their respective fleets. The ships, suited for operations close to coasts and lifting the Union blockade, were incorporated into the Royal Navy and spent their remaining decades of service in progressively unremarkable duties close to home and at far distant stations of the British Empire. Andrew English, an American intelligence professional and graduate of the Air Command and Staff College as a former air force officer, counters the view that the Laird ironclads can be judged failures by looking at the entirety of their chequered careers in light of innovation and technological advances. The book is derived from English's 2016 doctoral dissertation finished at the University of Exeter. As an historical reenactor, English helped to build and pilot a replica nineteenth-century