

visit” (viii). Whether walking the chalk cliffs of the Needles to St. Catherine’s Oratory, which looks like a space rocket, or reading about Nab Tower, where the base of the light which was shorn off by a cross-channel ferry, you are bound to find something attention-grabbing, informative, and motivating in here, whether you travel by car, bus, boat, or never leave your chair.

Eric Troels Wiberg
Boston, MA

Robert Kershaw. *Dunkirchen 1940. The German View of Dunkirk*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, www.ospreypublishing.com, 2024. 352 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. UK £10.99, US \$16.00, CDN \$22.00, paper; ISBN978-1-4728-5439-1.

Robert Kershaw presents a detailed account of the battles that ended at Dunkirk in June of 1940, largely from the German point of view. A decisive event during World War II, Dunkirk was, in many ways, a victory for the two antagonists. The book is a meticulous description of the German blitzkrieg of France and the Low Countries during the early phases of the war in Europe. This was the reconquest of the territory by the Germans 22 years after the Armistice that ended World War I. The well-equipped Germans successfully defeated the French and Belgians over a formidable quagmire of canals and easily flooded fields. The British, against overwhelming odds, managed to successfully withdraw much of its army across the English Channel to fight another day and ultimately prevail some five years later. Although a great deal has been said about this event, including a well-received motion picture, the author focuses on a series of leadership miscalculations that occurred in the German Army and Air Force during the weeks that preceded these historic actions.

The most renowned episode concerned Hitler’s controversial “halt order,” which provided an evacuation window that ultimately saved many “Tommies,” but also allowed the German marching infantry, their sometimes horse-drawn artillery, and their vital logistical support to close a gap behind the relatively fast-moving panzers. Also, during this time, the United States was reluctant to enter a European conflict. If the Germans managed to capture the British and Canadian forces, an invasion of the British Isles would likely have occurred and been successful. That outcome would have changed the world.

Kershaw reveals that the halt order was a major flaw in the complicated Nazi system of command and control. The OKW (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* or Armed Forces High Command), OKH (*Oberkommando des Heeres* or Upper Command of the Army), and tactical commanders in the field

were often ill-informed about each other's objective(s), concealing major flaws in planning and execution. Panzer generals at division and corps level wanted to attack and exploit their gains as quickly as possible. Infantry commanders were pleading for a brief pause to enable the slower moving troops to catch up. Hitler and his close advisors wanted to slow down the Panzer formations, but there was no unity of intent. Simply looking back at the outcome from the German's later point of view, it is challenging to see what the German Army (*Heer*) and Air Force's (*Luftwaffe*) capabilities were and whether they were ultimately employed in an appropriate tactical manner. Kershaw's text helps in remedying this historical imbalance by addressing the role of these poorly thought through tactics in the many catastrophic events that followed.

Dunkirk's geographic significance varied between the combatant nations. For the Belgians, it was a potential resupplying point for a counter offensive. The French viewed it as a fortified base from which to support an attack on a German thrust that might threaten Paris. The British, however, saw it as a transit camp for a sea route to home and safety. Finally, the Germans needed these coastal channel ports as resupply and reinforcement points for their control of this portion of western Europe.

As the German advance progressed, with heavy fighting between the forces, exhaustion took its toll and there was reluctance to risk life and limb when victory seemed so close at hand. With the impending collapse of the French forces, most German soldiers assumed that the British would surrender because escape to their homeland appeared improbable. Operations against Dunkirk were being prosecuted in an almost desultory manner despite German awareness that the British were slipping through their fingers and crossing the Channel. However, these escaping troops "were the vital seed corn for any future British Army, the experienced trained cadre around which it could expand" (p. 222). The German high command seemed to lack any urgency to finish off the British forces, and there appeared to be little difference between a land victory and total annihilation of the enemy.

Dunkirchen 1940 is a thought-provoking and extremely well-researched and well-written book about this turning point in the history of World War II. Kershaw's prose and his selection of quotes from veterans who participated in this event are frankly riveting. At times readers might feel that they were perusing the script for scenes of the film *Saving Private Ryan*. "With deafening crashes, bomb after bomb does destructive work. Red flames flicker in various places, thick smoke and sand clouds rise skywards, and large chunks of masonry spin through the air. The effect is overwhelming" (p.172). One note for the readers of TNM is that the maritime history in the book is thought-provoking, but scant. The book briefly touches upon the sinking of British destroyers and mentions the armadas of nondescript Dutch schuyts, tugboats,

drifters, and innumerable small craft. Still, it offers an unusual background to help one understand how and why the famous sea lift was accomplished. This work helps redress an historical imbalance by clarifying the complexities faced on both sides. I enthusiastically recommend Robert Kershaw's excellent work to those who wish to know more about this turning point in World War II from a unique and important perspective.

Louis Arthur Norton
West Simsbury, CT

Angus Konstam (Jim Laurier, illus.). *Royal Navy Home Fleet 1939-41: The Last Line of Defence at Scapa Flow*. Oxford, UK, www.ospreypublishing.uk, 2024. 80 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index. Price US \$23.00, CDN \$31.00, paper. ISBN 978-1-47286-1-148-1; and,

Enrico Cernuschi (Edouard Groult, illus.). *Italian Battlefleet 1940-43: 'La Squadra', the Pride of the Regia Marina*. Oxford, UK, www.ospreypublishing.uk, 2024. 80 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index. Price US \$23.00, CDN \$31.00, paper. ISBN 978-1-47286-0-59-0.

A relatively new offering from Osprey Publishing is a series describing various "fleets" operated by a variety of nations during the twentieth century. Thus far there are ten in the series, with the Konstam volume representing the fifth and the Cernuschi the sixth. There are more being contemplated, including one that takes the story of the Home Fleet to the end of the Second World War. Conceptually, the notion of exploring a given fleet within a broader navy is an interesting approach to analyze the interplay between types of ships, their base or bases, and their operations under the pressures of war. Too often in more typical studies of warships that focus on technical or design elements, operations and performance is downplayed. This series attempts to provide both an exploration of the ships as well as how well they fulfilled their roles in wartime conditions and, as such, provides a useful companion to other Osprey series that examine, for example, ship types directly.

Organisationally the series addresses four specific areas: purpose; fighting power and technology; the "how" of operations; and combat and analysis. This is followed by very brief suggestions for further reading (more below) and an index.

Konstam's assessment of the British Home Fleet in the first years of the Second World War will be explored first. It covers the period from the war's opening to the immediate aftermath of the *Bismarck* sortie in May 1941. The function of the Home Fleet was to deal with the German surface threat and