

Steven J. Zaloga and Adam Hook (illustrator). *Allied Warships vs the Atlantic Wall: Normandy 1944*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Books, www.ospreypublishing, 2023. 80 pp., illustrations, maps bibliography, index. UK £15.99, US \$23.00, CDN \$31.00, paper; ISBN 978-1-47285-415-5. (E-book available.)

No. 128 in Osprey's Duel Series focuses on the 25 June 1944 action between the German Batterie Hamburg, which was part of the Atlantic Wall near Cherbourg, France, and a naval bombardment group led by the USS *Texas*. Steven Zaloga, a military historian with a technical background in defence and the arms trade, is the author of several books in other Osprey series, including three volumes on the genesis, purpose, and effectiveness of the Atlantic Wall, D-Day fortifications in Normandy, and a battle history of the defence of Cherbourg against the Americans. Adam Hook, who collaborated with Zaloga on the last two volumes in the Fortress Series, furnishes commissioned colour artwork depicting battle scenes and side profiles of casements, ships, turrets, and ammunition.

The illustrated book follows the series format that delves into the weapons, tactics, and context behind a particular action, battle, or campaign. After a short introduction and chronology, unnumbered chapters describe the design, construction, and organization of the German coastal artillery fortifications, and evolving Allied ideas on naval shore bombardment before and during the war. It also describes the action between the battleship group and battery, the strategic situation surrounding the Normandy landings, and the outcome of the afternoon battle with some technical analysis. It ends by describing the respective post-war fates of the battery (reversion to private property) and the *Texas* (museum ship). The text draws extensively upon archival sources, but references are not given, similarly to other books in the series. A bibliography of further reading is provided.

Perhaps more propaganda than real defence, the string of coastal fortifications comprising the Atlantic Wall lay only partially finished by June 1944, strongest on those parts of the coast where an Allied landing was considered more likely. The British and Americans generally avoided defended ports and other strongpoints during amphibious operations, based on hard-earned experience from the commando raid against Dieppe, French resistance to landings in North Africa, and the retaking of Sicily and withdrawal of German and Italian forces across the Strait of Messina.

The naval bombardment mission gave older warships like the USS *Texas*, first built in 1914, a new lease on life as naval operations turned decisively toward carrier aviation and submarine warfare. Counter-battery fire from warships accompanying landing beach forces served to distract coastal batteries, directing attention away from more valuable transports and, if lucky,

silencing the threat from land-based artillery long enough for the build-up of forces ashore. Due to the inherent inaccuracy of munitions and methods of the period, and advantages of fixed defences on land over moving ships at sea, the likely result of shore bombardment was to suppress, rather than destroy outright, opposing artillery batteries. Protective concrete casements were almost impervious to bombs due to their thickness and strength, and open kettle pits were easily cleared of debris and guns put back into action short of direct hits. Again, the fact that the Germans had neither sea nor air assets to effectively counter Allied landings and sink Allied warships left the burden on coastal defence batteries that eventually ran low on ammunition and were left with exhausted crews. Allied warships on the other hand could be switched out and return to bases in the United Kingdom for repair and replenishment once their part in the operations was completed.

Zaloga weighs the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Batterie Hamburg versus the USS *Texas* in combat. Separate purple text boxes provide background on Vice Admiral Carleton Bryant, commanding Bombardment Group 2, and Captain Charles Baker of the American battleship, as well as the reserve marine artillery officer *Oberleutnant* Rudi Gelbhaar in charge of the German battery. Unlike other books in the series, little information is given on the personnel manning the 240 mm gun battery and the warship since the focus remains predominantly on construction details and the guns. Due to the absence of surviving German records after the surrender, Zaloga reconstructs the likely procedures and firing sequence during the engagement using Kriegsmarine doctrine manuals. Ships logs and war diaries on the American side however exist, giving details down to the hour and minute.

The USS *Texas* and another battleship, USS *Arkansas*, had been originally tasked with a fire support mission against the Batterie Gatteville and several other gun positions, but aerial reconnaissance revealed limited activity at their pre-assigned target and it was decided to put the naval ships at the call of the army, which employed forward observer teams to spot and correct fire from seaward. The *Arkansas* fired first with 16 armour piercing rounds against Batterie Hamburg, which responded with its own salvos hitting or near missing the American warships several times over the next three hours. Although the Germans subsequently claimed to have sunk no less than three warships during the artillery engagement, the entire naval bombardment group retired from the area. *Texas* suffered with only minor damage to the conning tower and there was more extensive damage to the destroyer *O'Brien*, which had been straddled by shells that knocked out its radar and killed persons on the bridge and an anti-aircraft gun crew.

The analysis chapter concludes that the Batterie Hamburg still remained operationally effective by the end of the engagement and enjoyed better

accuracy in firing than the warships' guns, but in the end only 5 shots out of some 98 fired found their marks. The presence of the artillery batteries around the strategic French port nonetheless deterred further amphibious landings and naval operations off the coast. Cut-off and isolated from the rest of the naval fortress at Cherbourg, Batterie Hamburg first fired on advancing American tanks and then negotiated a surrender.

Allied Warships vs the Atlantic Wall is another solid contribution in Osprey's Duel Series that offers an engaging and informative narrative and stunning illustrations and photographs. Hook's drawings are slightly cartoonish in appearance but are accurately rendered and appropriate to the content. The book, though focused on a single engagement between large battleships and one coastal artillery battery, would be quite useful for staff rides and battlefield tours in Normandy that walk the ground of German defences in occupied France and consider Allied attempts to overcome them. This short primer is recommended for readers interested in the Second World, amphibious landings and subsequent operations in Normandy, and for those looking for obscure technical details of the guns and hardened coastal defences of the era.

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