

Alexander Hill and Paul Wright (illustrator). *Soviet Cruisers 1917–45: From the October Revolution to World War II*. Oxford, UK: www.ospreypublishing.uk, 2024. 48 pp., illustrations, tables, bibliography, index. UK £12.99, US \$20.00, CDN \$27.00, paper; ISBN 978-1-47285-933-4. (E-book available.)

In the early decades of the Soviet Union, the Red Navy – or the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Fleet – went through revolution, civil war, limited fiscal and industrial circumstances, purge, invasion, desperate defensive actions, victorious offensives, and the ambitions of a ruthless dictator. By most measures, the Soviet navy was more makeshift, extemporized, and lacking in capability than other major and minor navies of the period. Always in the shadow of the Red Army, the Soviet navy essentially performed coastal defence and a multitude of tasks thrust upon it by circumstances. The constraints of geography meant concentration of developed bases and units in the constricted Baltic and Black Seas close to the Russian heartland and population, even though the Soviet Union also had access to the Arctic and Pacific Oceans, where infrastructure was rougher or non-existent. Attention was given to building destroyers, submarines, and torpedo boats, and repairing or finishing existing warships left from the Imperial Russian Navy and obtained from foreign sources. Alexander Hill, a Cambridge-trained military historian and professor at the University of Calgary, focuses on one particular type of warship – cruisers, in the Soviet inventory from the Russian Revolution up to the end of the Great Patriotic War as no. 326 of Osprey’s New Vanguard series, which puts particular emphasis on technical aspects and operational history. Original commissioned artwork in the book is provided by Paul Wright, a well-respected marine artist and graphic illustrator.

The small book, coming in under fifty pages in length, follows the standard format for the series and provides a richly illustrated and engaging narrative introducing select cruisers employed in Soviet service up to the conclusion of the Second World War. The Bolsheviks gained control over Tsarist cruisers and used them to seize and consolidate power in Petrograd and defend their position against White and foreign interventionist forces during the ensuing civil war. The *Aurora*, among the most famous warships in the world and now preserved as a museum ship in St Petersburg, fired the shot that started the revolution while anchored in the Neva River and the rest, as they say, is history. A fine colour three-dimensional cut-away shows internal and external features of the cruiser as configured in 1917. Sailors from the *Aurora* guarded the Petropavlovsk fortress and fought the Whites during the civil war, with the cruiser eventually relegated to training and diplomatic duties, surviving merciless German bombing and shelling in the Second World War and later

restored. The *Oleg*, another former Tsarist protected cruiser operating in the Gulf of Finland and sunk by a British motor torpedo boat on 18 June 1919, also gets a full-colour side profile. The Tsar's former imperial royal yacht, laid down in Denmark as a cruiser auxiliary, became the minelayer *Marti* and survived the German siege of Leningrad to be used as a target for training in 1943. A colour side profile of the converted cruiser at the start of the war depicts its dramatic change in appearance and functionality.

Influenced by Italian design and assistance, the Soviets embarked on building their own cruisers in the Kirov class, two ships the namesake *Kirov* and *Voroshilov* under Project 26 and the remaining ships *Maksim Gor'kii*, *Molotov*, *Kalinin*, and *Kaganovich* of the improved Project 26-bis. These warships were split between the Baltic, Black Sea, and Pacific fleets, where, in the first two theatres, the Germans inflicted a heavy toll during operations in support of the Red Army and protection of the seaward flank. Two side profiles note the differences between two representative Project 26 and Project 26-bis ships. Under the terms of the August 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Soviet Union purchased the Admiral Hipper-class cruiser *Lützow* in an incomplete state with plans to finish it at Leningrad and incorporate it into the Red fleet. German prevaricating and Adolf Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 meant the now-renamed *Petropavlovsk* was no more than an immovable floating battery served by electricity from shore, but its guns fired to stem the German advance on the city. Bombardments from German heavy artillery ranged in on the unfinished warship, which sank at its moorings after being abandoned by the crew. Refloated, the *Petropavlovsk* participated in Soviet offensive operations against the retreating Germans in January 1944. A number of Project 68 cruiser hulls under construction at the start of the Great Patriotic War were subsequently completed after hostilities as the Chapaev-class. Other post-war cruisers were gained as war reparations from division of the German and Italian fleets amongst the victor powers.

Soviet Cruisers 1917-45 continues the high standard in format and illustration found in other Osprey titles. Accompanying photographs in greyscale and colour are well-chosen and relevant to the text. Fifteen tables give valuable information and specifications of individual ships and classes of cruisers in the Soviet navy during this time period. The artwork by Paul Wright, including the *Aurora* fatefully firing its gun on 25 October 1917 and loading of army artillery onto the *Krasnii Kavaz* using the ship's aircraft crane, are nicely done. As is common with other Osprey titles, the text has no references, but a select bibliography of entirely Russian-language sources is included at the end, which might have been made more accessible by including at least a few English-language books and articles. In particular, John Jordan's *Warship* annual has contained over the years a number of related chapters on

Soviet technical developments and warships. This Osprey offering provides readers with a basic summary of some technical aspects and operational histories of early Soviet cruisers, which can be placed in the context of wider naval developments before and during Admiral of the Fleet Nikolay Kuznetsov's tenure as People's Commissar of the Soviet Navy. Kuznetsov's main achievements were outlasting Stalin and sheltering the naval service from the worst ravages of the regime, thereby laying the basis for the remarkable reforms and expansion under Admiral of the Fleet Sergey Gorshkov at the height of the Cold War.

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Angus Konstam, illustrated by Adam Tooby. *British Lend-Lease Warships: The Royal Navy's American-built Destroyers and Frigates*. Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2024. 48pp. New Vanguard Series no. 330. Photographs, maps, tables, charts, further reading.

This book is a concise, highly graphic account of the acquisition and modification of US-built destroyers and escort vessels under the US Lend-Lease Program and their operation in the British Navy in the Battle of the Atlantic in World War II. The book is built around a range of innovative graphics. The striking cover illustration is one of two artist's representations that dramatize important actions. It shows an onrushing destroyer at the instant a depth-charge pattern explodes in the defence of Convoy HG 76. The vessel is HMS *Stanley*, one of the 50 four-stack destroyers transferred in 1940 to become the Town class in British service. The second shows HMS *Trollope*, a Captain-class frigate, in action with E-boats in defence of shipping off the Normandy beachhead in 1944. The Captain-class frigate is the other major class covered, which was made up of ships of USN's Buckley and Evarts classes of destroyer escort.

The "Design and Development" section traces the history of the vessels. Most coverage is of the "Four-stackers" throughout their early history in the USN and mothballing following World War I to final disposal. There is a description of the development of specifications for modern escorts which had similar characteristics: 280 to 300 feet in length, 20 knots plus, and modern anti-submarine armament. This was the Destroyer Escort in USN classification and became the frigate in British service.

"Royal Naval Employment" details the modifications made to adapt the Four-stackers for convoy escort work and their disposition among escort groups. Full-paged, coloured diagrams show the evolution over time from fleet destroyers into escorts or, for a few, to long-range escorts. A full two-