

Dunn, Steve R. *Steam Yachts at War: The Naval Deployment of British & American Armed Yachts 1898–1918*

Pen and Sword, 2024

272 pp., illustrations, notes, index

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Steve Dunn's book *Steam Yachts at War* is as elegant and comforting as the luxurious yachts which he describes. Of the nearly 700 steam yachts in the world at the outset of World War I in 1914, we learn that the governments of the US and the UK requisitioned or bought nearly half of them. Three hundred steam yachts were brought into service and in surprising ways and places. Dunn tells us their story in a chronological and geographical order which seems fractured in places yet allows the reader to dip into the story at intervals. In these pages are over 160 engaging and high-quality images, some of which are tantalizingly labeled "location unknown" or "yacht unknown" as if to engage the reader in solving mysteries.

Usually the absence of charts and maps in books of maritime history would be challenging, however in this case they are needed less. This is because of the fractured and specific ranges of action assigned to each ship and the global nature of their work. US yachts served in Europe, the Mediterranean, Europe and the North Sea. European yachts served in South Pacific colonies and from Ceylon to Japan and Australia. In one case, an Australian officer, Lt. Col. Paton, voyaged to remote New Guinea in mid-October 1914 to apprehend a storied German steam yacht named *Komet*. He approached quietly at dawn in a small launch to demand and receive the converted warship's surrender – his German counterpart was semi-clothed and still shaving when surprised!

The highly readable action takes place in Zanzibar and North Africa, the Mediterranean and Caribbean Seas, Dardanelles, North Sea, US East Coast and many places in between. There are impressive and highly detailed appendices showing seven plans of vessels.

The sub-title widens the aperture a bit on this first-of-its-kind history: *The Naval Deployment of British & American Armed Yachts 1898–1918*. That is because the Americans led the way on shanghaied private yachts to swing the naval battle at Santiago Bay in the Spanish-American war which began in 1898. We learn that the former J.P. Morgan mega-yacht *Corsair*, as USS *Gloucester* under Lieutenant Commander Richard Wainwright, dove into action in the Cuban-based battle, taking on gunboats with great alacrity despite only having one engine. The yacht and its crew defeated them and rescued Spaniards from *Pluton*, *Almirante Quendo*, and others, serving admirably. Similarly, the ex-

yacht *Josephine*, as USS *Vixen*, bought by the navy for \$150,000, took on the massive cruisers *Infanta Maria Teresa* and *Viscaya* and prevailed.

The overall theme is that these floating palaces of new money (one club's inventory of steam yachts shot up from a handful to several dozen in just a decade or two) were quickly wrenched from their owners' hands and put to patriotic service. Though the US Navy paid well for yachts in the Spanish American War, often it seems that for later wars they were requisitioned, stripped, armed, used, beaten up and even sunk, and returned in deplorable state, often with financial losses. Dunn deftly depicts how the most enduring and essential parts of these transfers were the people who managed, led, and operated these behemoths. He traces the stories of the yacht's officers, engineers, and deck and cabin crew who moved their experience between private gilded worlds and the dangerous work of war and warships. Many found themselves in harm's way and helped guide the yachts out of danger, while others perished. The thesis is that bastions of wealth like the "ultra-stooty New York Yacht Club" – its members went from owning four steam yachts in 1870 to 20 just two decades later – were raided and their monuments to "conspicuous consumption" converted to use by the military-industrial complex. Some of the crossovers from commercial to naval service include *Brown Mouse*, formerly a British trawler, which was burned and lost as a decoy ship and included in the roster of steam yachts armed and sunk during and after the war. Dunn is the author of *British Naval Trawlers and Drifters in Two World Wars*, and he admirably covers the preventable tragedy of over 200 soldiers returning to Stornoway in the Hebrides on 1 January 1919 (not in 1918 as stated). Crammed aboard the converted steam yacht *Iolaire*, it became overwhelmed in horrible weather. Near port the yacht turned at the wrong time and ripped its bowels out on the Beasts of Holm (*Biastan Thuilm* in Scottish Gaelic). The yacht foundered and just 79 persons were able to claw their way ashore. The following day bodies washed ashore in front of their homes. Already deprived of 1,000 men by the war, the loss of the *Iolaire* resulted in some 600 fatherless children as well – after the war had ended.

The book covers many aspects of this special service from engineering and armament to logistics and manning, and as the jacket cover states, from "stewards and deck hands [to] warriors at sea." Fifteen British yachts received prize or salvage money and over 20 US yachts – with names like *Guinivere* and *Harvard*, *Alcedo*, *Corsair*, and *Sultana* – served in the French and Mediterranean waters in 1917–18. *Guinivere* struck a ledge during escort work and was sunk and scrapped. We learn of many fabled yachts, from *Aloha* the sailing and steam monster to the British *Basilisk*, *Brittania*, and *Columbia*, as well as the US ships *Eagle*, *Fire Queen*, *Ituna* and *Tuna*, *Vergemere*,

Laurentic (lost off Ireland with a treasure of gold bullion), the USS *Maine*, the Brassey's *Sunbeam*, *Westward Ho*, and many more. Some crafts that do not have attention shone their way in this book include the *Celtic* (later USS *Sachem*, built by Pusey & Jones), or the *Ballymena*, made famous by the song. These omissions are compensated for by coverage of great builders and designers such as George Lawley & Sons, Camper & Nicholson, Herreshoff Manufacturing, William Cramp & Sons, Babcock & Wilcox, Cox & Stevens, Burmeister-Wain, and Swan Hunter.

In the era of larger-than-life personalities and pocketbooks, the text is entertainingly laced with such celebrities as German Kaiser Wilhelm II, British King William IV, Viscount Guinness, Commodore Vanderbilt, King Umberto I of Italy, Winston Churchill, J. Pierpoint Morgan, the Marquess of Curzon, Francis Bacon, and Admiral Jellicoe, all of whom receive mention.

Before reading Dunn's account, many of us may not have been aware of the US First Patrol Squadron in European waters in World War I, much less that it was composed of US-built steam yachts. Thanks to Steve Dunn's persistence, research, and highly readable combination of text and image (in the Seaforth Publishing way) we are enjoyably brought up to speed. Bravo Dunn, and to those who served stoically and dangerously, seeking out, attacking and on several occasions sinking enemy U-boats, well done!

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Elleman, Bruce A. *The ABCs of Cold War History: Anglo-America, Bloc Sovietique, China, 1919–1994*

First Hill Books, 2025

83 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index

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The ABCs of Cold War History puts China at the centre of the Cold War. At 69 pages and printed under a hybrid pay-to-publish model, *The ABCs* is located in the tradition of timely pamphlets that furnish readers with hefty ideas for the salon. The conceptual framework faces off continental powers that seek spheres of influence with superior armies versus maritime powers that seek trade with naval supremacy. The book concludes with “the fourteen-point strategy” for United States-China relations after 1949 and lessons learned for a US-China cold war (64–65). These ideas are relevant to anyone who thinks about the recent turn of the US National Security Strategy away from promoting global