materials of former merchant mariners as source materials for social history research into the maritime industries.

Ingo Heidbrink
Norfolk, Virginia

Gimblett, Richard H. and Karl Gagnon. *Guardians of the North: Canadian Warships and Maritime Aircraft, 1910–2025*
Dundurn Press, 2025
xi + 400 pp., illustrations, endnotes, index, appendices
ISBN 9781459755550 (hardcover) CA$60.00, US$45.00, £35.00;
9781459755567 (e-book)

This is an excellent book. It offers serious scholarship and research presented in a light anecdotal manner. The casual reader with a passing interest in the navy will find a pleasant read and the student will find useful insights. It is also an important book by reason of its post-1945 discussion; the official history of that period, although completed, is unlikely ever to be published because of the difficulties of the post-2001 reclassification of some US documents. Given its approach of discussing the political and policy origins of classes of ships, this book breaks new ground going beyond collective individual ship histories with which we are all familiar. Likewise, the incorporation of maritime air assets as part of naval forces is also new and important. I vividly remember the intense opposition I encountered when in 1996 I insisted that a municipal Battle of Atlantic service should also honour the maritime air contribution and losses.

The book is divided in three parts of unequal length: ships, shipborne aircraft, and finally RCAF-operated maritime patrol aircraft. The numerous chapters are generally short which means it is easy to "dip" into the book, returning later. Richard Gimblett's writing is easy and illuminates many colloquial terms once widely known such as the Esquimalt blue boats and "Dunc's diner." The "additional reading" provided at the end of each chapter, along with the bibliography, is a very useful feature.

Each chapter begins with Karl Gagnon's very careful and precise scaled line drawings of the ships or aircraft discussed. They provide a consistent standard of illustration that cannot be found in photographs. It is unfortunate that the academic conventions of attribution in text, that form the basis of comments such as mine – "extensively researched" or "serious scholarship" – do not extend to illustration. The level of detail in Gagnon's drawings, for example of the early armed yachts or the comparisons of ships pre- and post-

conversion, can only have been based on considerable research.

Intentionally or otherwise, this work in my view highlights three things. First in chronological order is the very real need of suitable platforms for training junior personnel. This manifested itself the first time in the early years of the Second World War when yachts were taken up; even those unsuitable for being armed or coastal defence were nonetheless valuable for initial shipboard training. (The Fulford family of Brockville gave up their forty-year-old yacht *Magedoma* for that use. Not mentioned here, the yacht probably proved of too limited use to be retained for long, but that it was taken up is evidence of the need.) That need was forgotten and even in the "defence-shrinking days" of the 1970s, junior officer navigation training requirements outstripped the spaces at sea so the YAGs (Yard, auxiliary, general) were pressed into service. As a brand new instructor, I took classes to sea in them. A gyro pelorus and rudimentary chart table were fitted at the stern. The lesson that a real need had to be addressed may have been learned with the Orcas.

Second, this training shortfall was a small symptom of the very real national neglect of defence. That governments of all political stripes could ignore necessary spending says volumes about the electorate that allowed it to happen. This is evident in the series of stop-gap vessels whose acquisition is recorded here. The most egregious shortfall is probably the failure to have timely replacements for the supply ships. While the work around solution may have been adequate, it is concrete evidence of lack of political will. The stop-gap replacement of ageing ships with commercial vessels must not be confused with the 1982 Falklands emergency that saw STUFT – Ships Taken Up From Trade – to augment the Royal Navy's expeditionary force. The Cunard liner *Queen Elizabeth 2* used as a troop transport and the container ship *Atlantic Conveyor*, later sunk, used for aircraft transport, are two examples.

The third thing that struck me from reading this book was how, when given the resources, at one time Canada had clearly "punched above its weight" in terms of research and development. From quickly following the Royal Navy's lead, for example in the conversion to the DDE type of ship that was fought from an enclosed operations room where a variety of electronic information could be displayed, rather than the captain directing from an open bridge, Canada was briefly a leader in such things as sonar. The Argus aircraft was also an important innovation. This work was supported by repurposed or newly-built research vessels, now retired and not replaced. The authors allude to the consequences of not keeping abreast of new technology. The inadequate Canadian surface radar in corvettes "was rationalized [by the naval staff] against the fact that their primary benefit arose from just being on the scene, offering the threat that any sort of surface escort was sure to give

a U-boat pause on closing a convoy to attack" (64). Unfortunately, as Rob Fisher pointed out, U-boats equipped with an EW radar detector could identify the RCN corvette as a hole in the convoy screen (see Robert C. Fisher, "The Impact of German Technology on the Royal Canadian Navy in the Battle of the Atlantic, 1942–1943," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 7, no. 4 [October 1997]).

One can only hope that the Carney government's commitment to defence spending is realized and continued with successor governments. That would create a future navy worthy of its heritage so carefully detailed here. The excellence of the authors' work has been recognized by both CNRS with the Keith Matthews Award for the Best Book of 2025 and NASOH with a John R. Lyman Book Award – a rare achievement.

William Glover
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Grant, Rick. *Broadside: Halifax's Wartime Pilot Boat Disaster*
Formac Publishing, 2025
136 pp., illustrations, maps, index
ISBN 9781459508101 (softcover) CA$27.96; 781459508118 (e-book) CA$16.99

The incident happened in late March 1940 near what was in the early war years, guardedly termed "an east coast port." An incoming freighter, the Donaldson Line steamer *Esmond,* bound to join a convoy being assembled and destined for England, collided with a wooden pilot schooner, the *Hebridean,* leaving nine dead in the water, all pilots or crew aboard the pilot boat. The steamer was not damaged. The tragedy, lost in the clamour of war, barely remembered in Halifax and perhaps hardly known at all elsewhere, is the subject of *Broadside*.

In examining the story, Rick Grant tells us much about the ships and men involved and a good deal about pilotage. Harbour pilots seldom have lead roles in the dramas of the sea. At best they have brief cameos, moving the plot from scene to scene. Piloting is a skill requiring experience and knowledge and in the furious activity in Halifax with merchant and naval ships arriving, assembling in convoys, and departing every five or six days, the port's 22 pilots were overworked. Thirty-one convoys had left Halifax in the six months preceding April 1940.

The author is a Halifax-based journalist with an ability to write a good story and a journalist's nose to ferret out personal details which add to the