

able for a paperback with a retail price of less than CDN \$20.00. Overall, the book can easily be commended to both casual and professional readers. While McDonald's bias can be felt throughout the entire book, if it is viewed as evidence of his devotion to and love of the subject, it becomes not a weakness but a strength.

Ingo Heidbrink
Norfolk, Virginia

Peter J. Marsh. *Liberty Factory: The Untold Story of Henry Kaiser's Oregon Shipyards*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Seaforth Publishing, www.seaforthpublishing.com, (Distributed by Naval Institute Press), 2020. 256 pp., illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. US \$59.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-5267-8305-9.

Shipyards on the Pacific coast of North America produced merchant vessels and warships in significant numbers and record times during the Second World War. Shipbuilding there went from very modest levels out of economic depression and limited rearmament to volume delivery under war conditions in short order, in response to operational demands against the Axis powers of Japan, Germany, and Italy. West-Coast-built ships carried vital war supplies across the Atlantic to keep Great Britain in the fight and enabled large fleets on the other side of the Pacific and Indian Ocean to sustain themselves and undertake major amphibious landings on Japanese-held territories. Although numerous West Coast cities, companies, and individuals contributed to this effort, Kaiser's emergency shipyards in Oregon and Washington State received special attention from Larry Barber, marine editor of a local newspaper *The Oregonian*, after 1940. Peter Marsh, who inherited a collection

of photographs, clippings, and jottings after Barber's death, has put together a tribute to those shipyards and the ships constructed in them.

The book is divided into three parts covering the three principal shipyards—Oregon Shipbuilding Corporation, Kaiser Vancouver, and Kaiser Swan Island; production techniques and employment in those shipyards; and descriptions of other related Portland area industrial concerns engaged in wartime production on behalf of the United States Navy, Maritime Commission, and Royal Navy. The numbers and scale were impressive by any measure of industrial achievement, and the Kaiser corporate culture introduced innovations to speed production by applying existing construction and management experience in other fields. Oregon Shipbuilding Corporation constructed the British-inspired Liberty ship, then switched to the faster Victory design and naval auxiliaries; Kaiser Vancouver built a mix of Victory ships, landing ship tank, escort carriers, attack transports, and troop transports; and Kaiser Swan Island exclusively concentrated on T2 tankers. The wartime population of Portland grew by nearly a third, with the influx of shipyard workers from other parts of the United States, which put pressure on housing, transportation, and city planning, the Kaiser corporation being somewhat of an entity unto itself. It paid high wages, brought women and African Americans into the shipyards against the wishes of the dominant American Federation of Labor boilermakers union, offered access to free food in centralized cafeterias, and set up scientifically-based subsidized daycare centres. In spite of the focus on Henry Kaiser, the real architect of success in shipbuilding was his son Edgar Kaiser, who oversaw operations in the Portland and Vancouver shipyards as vice

president and general manager. Henry Kaiser, however, known for his shameless self-promotion and grand-standing, overshadowed his competent and loyal family member.

Liberty Factory is primarily an illustrated rather than scholarly book. Marsh provides a general narrative, without references, on general events and figures related or unrelated to shipbuilding in Portland and summarizes chronologically entries from Barber's journal and coverage in *The Oregonian*. Consequently, much is provided in regard to technical details of individual ship types, launching ceremonies, and special interest stories, common to a journalist with public access to information. Reference is also made to the Kaiser corporate serial periodical *The Bo's'n's Whistle*, distributed in the wartime shipyards for the information of workers and now available digitally through the Oregon Historical Society. Such sources have limitations and stay close to the corporate brand, though do provide certain details on workers and life in the shipyards otherwise forgotten. By far, previously unpublished original photographs from Barber's collection and additional information in the accompanying captions are the real strength of the book. Surprisingly, the annotated list of further reading at the back does not include Christopher Tassava's *Launching a Thousand Ships*, completed as a PhD dissertation at Northwestern University in 2003 and digested in the journal *Enterprise & Society* (December 2005). Tassava has also published articles on such issues as welding cracks in Kaiser-built ships that are addressed in the book. Beyond generalized statements, Marsh makes only passing mention to shipbuilding in California, Puget Sound, and British Columbia and elsewhere in the United States and Great Britain, to put the

Portland and Kaiser contribution into context. Agency shipyards, such as Calship and Marinship, reached comparable levels of productivity and volume in producing standardized ships and experienced similar problems in mass production using newly recruited and semi-trained workforces.

Henry Kaiser's achievements in wartime shipbuilding are popularly well-known and somewhat over-exaggerated, in keeping with his own propaganda. The true untold story was Edgar Kaiser's Oregon shipyards, if the sub-title was slightly varied. Marsh has missed an opportunity to provide a biography of Edgar Kaiser and really delve into the operation, management, and demographics of workers in the three Kaiser shipyards located in the Portland area. Edgar, who studied economics and left the last year of university to work his way up the Kaiser corporate hierarchy to greater positions of responsibility, provided the know-how and quiet confidence to make wartime shipbuilding successful. Authorities in the Navy Department and the Maritime Commission quickly recognized that Edgar Kaiser, rather than Henry Kaiser, was the steadying influence in management and implemented the creative ideas. In that sense, the story of Edgar Kaiser's Oregon shipyards still remains untold.

Liberty Factory is a nicely illustrated large-format book that will appeal to readers interested in wartime shipbuilding and local history, particularly on the west coast of the United States and in Oregon. Seaforth has done a very fine job on lay-out and the black-and-white photographs that grace the pages. For that reason alone, it is well worth the cover price.

Chris Madsen
North Vancouver, British Columbia