

## Book Reviews

Maurice Cocker. *Royal Navy Submarines 1901 to 2008*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen and Sword Maritime, www.pen-and-sword.co.uk, 2008. (Originally published 1982.) 136 pp., illustrations, tables, appendices, bibliography, index. UK £14.99, US \$29.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-52679-190-0.

This second edition of a book first published in 1982 is a basic reference book on the subject of Royal Navy (RN) submarines from the inception of the technology to the present. It is high level in that it covers the essentials of the designs over the past century, without getting into every detail associated with modifications or refinements within basic classes. It also has minimal information regarding operational histories of the boats described in the book, leaving that to other, readily available accounts. The one historical detail it does include is a brief listing of the fate of the individual boats, with those not noted presumably surviving to be scrapped in the normal course of events.

Both editions include a brief forward, the first by Vice-Admiral Sir Lancelot Davies and the second by Admiral Sir James Perowne, along with a

concise introduction to the topic within the Royal Navy. There is no intention whatsoever to provide an account of the role of submarines in RN thinking or its evolution over time, with experience gained with this new weapon of naval warfare that emerged in its nascent form in the last years of the nineteenth century. With these perhaps too brief preliminaries out of the way, Cocker presents (generally) a two-page summary of each class of boats operated by the RN, starting with the Holland design of 1901. There were five boats in this class, which were essentially experimental craft intended more as proof of concept than as frontline assets to be used in war. Results were sufficiently encouraging to continue with this novel class of warship by designing and building successor classes in the decade plus run-up to the Great War. Accounts for each class generally include a line diagram of the design, a table of specifications and performance metrics, and a number of notes that vary in detail based on need. Photographs and a list of the losses of each class rounds out the information provided.

The book notionally covers submarines that served in the Royal Navy, but

there are entries for vessels that were intended for foreign navies. The S and W classes prior to the Great War were Italian designs, built in British yards, for the Italian navy. The reason for their inclusion here is not entirely clear – admittedly two of the S-class boats served for a few months with the RN prior to being turned over to the Italians in 1915, but this incidental service was brief and presumably connected to Italy's uncertain adherence to its alliance obligations to Germany and Austria-Hungary at the time. It also includes information on German U-boats that were used for trials purposes after both world wars to help improve British designs. As there was never any intention to include them in the RN submarine inventory, their inclusion here is a little idiosyncratic.

A significant drawback to the book is the absence of a narrative that links the various designs to each other, and how the art of naval architecture evolved with experience, an absence the more regrettable in that the author is a naval architect. This is particularly unfortunate in the period prior to the Great War when technical evolution was both dramatic and remarkable. When one considers what now seems the extremely primitive Holland design of 1901, with the E class of 1912, one can only be astounded. The book would have benefited enormously from a discussion, however brief, of the improvements implemented in the A through D classes that clearly led to the highly successful E class. How this was achieved would have been a useful addition to the book. Indeed, the lack of such information is glaring where you have a number of classes comprising one or two boats, followed by subsequent classes that profited from the lessons learned by their predecessors. One is left to assume or guess.

The evolution of British submarine design is an interesting study and, by the

nature of this account, easily followed in its basic trajectory. Some fascinating side trips included the notion of submarines accompanying a battlefleet resulting in designs that were comparatively speedy on the surface but suffered significant shortcomings in traditional submarine functions. Later still, the M class of 1917 incorporated a 12-inch gun, with one of the class having the gun removed and replaced by a hanger and a seaplane. After each shot the submarine needed to surface to reload – although it could apparently fire with the barrel poking out of the water (along with the conning tower). Another class, the X1 class of 1923, featured two turrets and was clearly experimental with a view towards an anti-merchant-shipping role. It was a failure and the concept was not repeated.

Notwithstanding some of the reservations noted, the book is a helpful guide to the Royal Navy's submarine fleet over the past 120 years and will provide a quick reference for anyone needing to know the particulars of a given class. It is also a sobering reminder of the number of losses of RN submarines in both wars, as well as a steady series of peacetime losses due to misadventure. The courage and fortitude of submariners is a byword throughout the naval profession (a point which we have been reminded of with the tragic loss of the Indonesian submarine KRI *Nanggala* 402 on 21 April 2021), but the very first were extraordinarily brave to put to sea in the contraptions of the day as is well attested in Cocker's useful, if short, reference book.

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Howard J. Fuller. *Turret versus Broadside: An Anatomy of British Naval Prestige, Revolution and Disaster 1860-1870*. Warwick, UK: Helion &