

Quentin Russell. *Mediterranean Naval Battles that Changed the World*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen & Sword Maritime, www.pen-and-sword.co.uk, 2021. xiii+236pp., illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. UK £25.00, US\$42.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-52671-599-9.

Given that several different civilizations throughout history have flourished around the Mediterranean Sea, it is not difficult to imagine that region at the centre of a number of naval conflicts between nations; from the ancient Greeks against the Persians to the terrors of the Second World War, the Mediterranean has been the stage of the most interesting clashes at sea. The struggle for sea power and dominance is, in fact, deeply connected to the development of nations in human history, yet very few books present this struggle, especially in the case of the Mediterranean. One of the few studies is the classic *A History of Sea Power* written by William Stevens and Allan Wescott published in the 1940s. It was a pleasant surprise to read *Mediterranean Naval Battles that Changed the World*, Russell's perspective on six naval battles set in the Mediterranean Sea that affected not only the balance of power between the nations involved, but also the world (or what was known as world at the time of the narratives.)

The author presents an extremely detailed analysis of naval strategy of the period, the ships, contemporary naval technological advancements, and also the events surrounding the battles, that makes their stories even more interesting. Six different conflicts are examined: the Battle of Salamis (480 BC), the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks that ushered in the Golden Age of Athens; the Battle of Actium (31 BC), which pitted the forces of Mark Antony and Cleopatra against the Roman naval forces on the coast of Greece; the Battle of Lepanto (1571) where an obstinate Ottoman fleet fought a Catholic Alliance for dominance of the Mediterranean; the Battle of Aboukir Bay (1798) between the British and the French naval forces in Egypt; the Battle of Navarino (1827) where again the Ottoman forces fought for control in the Mediterranean against a coalition of British, French, and Russian naval forces defending the independence of Greece; and the last, Cape Matapan and the Battle for Malta (1940-1942) during the Second World War; a narrative featuring the ambition and movements of Italian naval forces in the region during the war. Those who are anxious to know more about ancient warfare will enjoy reading this book as much as the Horatio Nelson and Second World War enthusiasts. Whether naval historians or not, I believe readers will highly appreciate the quality of Russell's writing.

The strongest aspect of the book is Russell's ability to humanize his narrative, bringing out the human aspects behind the major naval battles and technological advancements of very different eras. This is particularly important today, as science struggles with negationist and other retrograde and

negative concepts of society. Readers can expect a humanistic, but also deeply researched analysis of naval battles. For example, the study of the Battle of Actium (31 BC) recounts the relationships and dramas between Mark Antony, Cleopatra, Cesar Augustus, and Rome that surrounded the battle. This was the story that captured the attention of another author named Shakespeare in another time, prompting him to dramatize the history for theatre.

Russell also depicts the struggles of a young Commodore Nelson, a rising naval star, who, at 41 years old, had already sacrificed an eye and an arm fighting for the Royal Navy. He draws brilliantly from the life of Nelson and his mission of “search and destroy,” revealing the intrinsic anxiety of the endless “search” while emphasizing his genius, his insecurities, his bravery and his little note to Lady Hamilton. The reader can find these subtle, peculiar and delicate details on every page.

The weaker aspects of the book are, firstly, the maps that are located in the initial pages and not among the narratives, which forces the reader to flip back and forth. Secondly, this is not an introductory book: beginners in the naval strategy/history field may find some difficulty with the prolonged details of battles and historical contexts. This, however, makes the book perfect for researchers, especially those in search of more material about ancient naval battles.

Andrea L. F. Resende de Souza
Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Charles Stephenson. *The Eastern Fleet and the Indian Ocean, 1942-1944: The Fleet that Had to Hide*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen and Sword, www.pen-and-sword.co.uk, 2020. ix+320pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliographical note, index UK £25.00, US \$42.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-52678-361-5.

On 12 February 1942, Vice Admiral James Somerville assumed command of the Eastern Fleet, the designation for the Allied naval forces in the Indian Ocean. The vessels under his command consisted of the greatest agglomeration of British naval power in the Second World War up to that point, including three aircraft carriers, five battleships, seven cruisers, fifteen destroyers, and over a hundred aircraft. Yet when the Imperial Japanese Navy conducted a raid in the Indian Ocean just two months later, Somerville ultimately chose not to engage the enemy and instead withdrew his forces, granting a strategic victory to his opponents.

Though Somerville’s decision has received far less attention than the more dramatic fall of Singapore, it was no less momentous a demonstration of the decline of British power in the region. As Charles Stephenson explains,