

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,

it was a consequence of a series of decisions, some made decades earlier, which left the Royal Navy poorly prepared to defend its longstanding naval supremacy from the aircraft of the *Kidō Butai*. His book offers a description of the developments that led to such a humiliating decision, and how the Eastern Fleet rebounded from its nadir to challenge Japanese domination in southeast Asia.

Stephenson underscores the extent of this fall by opening his narrative with the Grand Fleet's triumphant acceptance of Germany's High Seas Fleet's surrender at the end of the First World War. Though the Royal Navy had maintained Britain's naval supremacy in yet another global conflict, no sooner had it done so than it faced the prospect of a new and financially ruinous naval arms race, this time with its wartime allies. Yet the successful post-war effort to restrain capital ship construction through arms limitation treaties was offset by the growing role played by new technologies, in particular the airplane. Here Stephenson highlights the irony of the Semphill Mission's all-too-successful efforts to lay the groundwork for Japanese naval aviation, one that the Royal Navy would soon have cause to regret.

This might have mattered less had Great Britain developed naval aviation into the powerful arm it became for the Japanese in the Second World War. Instead, the combination of the centralization of military aviation in the Royal Air Force and the decision to employ aircraft carriers as a component of the battle fleet instead of its centerpiece ensured that the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) was well behind its Japanese and American counterparts in this area by the end of the 1930s. Though the limits of British carrier aviation were soon evident in the war against Nazi Germany, it was not until Japanese aviators sank the capital ships of Force Z in December 1941 that the consequences of this became clear. As a result, when Somerville faced the Japanese in April 1942, it was with a fleet that was gravely outmatched by the strike power of their aircraft carriers. Given these circumstances, Stephenson regards Somerville's decision to withdraw as the correct one, even though it conceded much of the Indian Ocean to the Japanese.

It would be over a year and a half before Somerville attempted to challenge their presence in its waters. With many of the capital ships reassigned to the Mediterranean and the North Atlantic, the remaining vessels were occupied with training, escort duties, and providing support for amphibious landings. While the wide-ranging scope of Stephenson's narrative in these chapters turns his book into more of a general account of the entire Indian Ocean theatre during the Second World War, he never loses sight completely of the activities of the diminished Eastern Fleet, much of which involved adapting to the new model of naval warfare pioneered by the Japanese and the Americans in the Pacific. The main obstacle the fleet faced in doing so was with their

planes, as the inadequacy of British models made the use of American carrier aircraft in the region essential for success. This put the Royal Navy in direct competition with the United States Navy for available production, however, which constrained operations until the spring of 1944.

The test of the reconstituted Eastern Fleet came that April. With the assistance of an American carrier, the fleet attacked military and industrial targets at Sabang and Surabaya in the Dutch East Indies. Intended as diversions, their impact on the war was minimal given the ongoing degradation of the Japanese air and naval forces further east. Nevertheless, the strikes provided valuable experience for the newly trained personnel, preparing them for their subsequent employment in the final campaigns against Japan as part of the British Pacific Fleet.

In his introduction, Stephenson states that his goal with this book is to provide a narrative history of the Eastern Fleet. He makes no claims to advance any radical thesis, and his work relies exclusively upon published sources and the secondary literature familiar to specialists in the field. Yet this undersells his success in describing a major factor in the eclipse of British naval power in the twentieth century. While his digressions into such tangential topics as espionage activities in Goa can distract from this, the book overall serves as a good introduction to British naval operations that are far too often given scant coverage in general accounts of the naval history of the Second World War.

Mark Klobas
Phoenix, Arizona

Mark Stille. *Italian Destroyers of World War II*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, www.opspreypublishing.com, 2021. 48 pp., illustrations, tables, bibliography, index. UK£11.99, US \$19.00, CDN. \$25.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-4728-4055-4.

In Osprey *New Vanguard* No. 292, *Italian Destroyers of World War II*, Mark Stille completes his trilogy on the surface units of the Regia Marina (RM-Italian Royal Navy) in that great world conflict.

The RM went to war in 1940 with 59 destroyers; an additional 5 destroyers were added to the RM inventory during the war for a total of 64 destroyers. For its time, the RM had one of the largest destroyer fleets in the world. Naturally, the RM destroyers were built for service in the Mediterranean with the emphasis on speed, not endurance. The destroyers were intended for duty on the relatively short Italy-to-Albania run and the somewhat longer but still short Italy-Sicily-Libya run. That duty meant that the RM destroyers had a relatively short range and were not capable of penetrating the eastern or western Mediterranean. Moreover, the RM had 12 classes of destroyers, some