

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

with sub-classes and a few of the destroyers dated back to the First World War. Some of the destroyers were large, built to challenge their potential rival, the French Navy. The remainder of the destroyers was medium-sized and some dated to the First World War. The variety of classes made for difficulties in logistics, maintenance, and service.

Moreover, the RM destroyers, in addition to lacking range, had other faults; very few RM destroyers had radar and most carried only a light battery of torpedoes. Most critically, the guns of the RM destroyers were sited closely together, causing the shock waves from fired shells to interfere with simultaneously-fired shells and, therefore, causing salvo dispersion. Anti-aircraft and antisubmarine capabilities were likewise lacking in the RM destroyers. Further, the RM High Command was reluctant to risk RM ships in combat as Italy had little prospect of replacing ship losses. Overall, the story of the RM destroyers in the Second World War is not a happy one.

The RM destroyers and their crews fought the vital convoy war in the Mediterranean. Since the 1911-1912 Italo-Turkish War, Italy had Libya as a colony, with most of its population against the Mediterranean coast. Thus, the need to protect convoys supplying Libya from mainland Italy was paramount. Added to that was the need to attack British Royal Navy convoys supplying the island of Malta. The RM destroyer fleet appeared in every major Mediterranean Sea battle. Further, the RM had seven destroyers based at Eritrea in the Red Sea. This small force posed a problem to the British, as the seven RM destroyers could have interdicted British shipping going through the Red Sea to the Suez Canal. While those destroyers did no damage to the Royal Navy, they did force the Royal Navy to allocate some resources for approximately a year. (When it became clear that Italian East Africa would fall to the British, the seven RM destroyers undertook various sorties and their crews then scuttled their ships to avoid capture.)

Stille's work follows in the style of his previous two works on the RM, *Osprey New Vanguard #182: Italian Battleships of World War II*, and *Osprey New Vanguard #258, Italian Cruisers of World War II*. The latter was reviewed in *TNM/LMN* XVIII, no. 3 (2018). He begins with a description of the design and development of the RM destroyers, their weaponry and radar, and then descriptions of the major RM destroyer actions—the Battle of Calabria, the Battle of Cape Spartivento, the sea battle of Matapan (which Stille titles as a “debacle,”) convoy battles, the First and Second Battles of Sirte, the last period of RM actions, and the actions of the seven RM destroyers in the Red Sea.

The book then proceeds to delineate each class of the RM destroyers. A table shows the destroyers in that class, when each destroyer in that class was built, when the keel was laid down, when it was launched, when it was commissioned, and its eventual fate. Following that table are brief narratives

of that class's armament and operational history. A final table shows the specifications for that class—displacement, dimensions, propulsion, range, and crew. A final section entitled “Analysis and Conclusion,” followed by a very useful bibliography and index, completes the work.

Stille writes well and his narrative keeps the reader focused. The many photographs add to the narrative and give the reader many visual connections to the subject. Several colour side view plates, two colour plates of RM destroyers in action, plus a good centerspread colour plate of the RM destroyer, *Da Verazzano*, help keep the reader's interest in the narrative.

This book, when taken with Stille's two earlier works on RM ships (mentioned above) bring life to a lesser-known aspect of the Second World War at sea. They can be a useful quick reference for the expert in the field, while the reader unfamiliar with the RM will find these a good introduction to this naval service. While this book on RM destroyers and Stille's other works cannot be considered revisionist history of the RM, they do help to refute the often-held belief that the Regia Marina was of little consequence in the Second World War. *Italian Destroyers of World War II* is a work recommended.

Robert L. Shoop
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Jon Sutherland and Diane Canwell. *Churchill's Pirates: The Royal Naval Patrol Service in World War II*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen and Sword, www.pen-and-sword.co.uk, 2020. vi+244 pp., illustrations, appendices, bibliography, index. UK £15.99, US \$29.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-52679-651-6.

Bottom line up front – this book has flashes of brilliance but could have been much better. Verbose and repetitive, as well as being padded out with barely relevant information, it is only the first-hand accounts that save it from being merely pulp history.

That said, the authors have produced a reasonable history of the Royal Naval Patrol Service and the thousands of men and the many hundreds of ships involved. These include assorted trawlers and other vessels taken up from trade during the war to operate as minesweepers, convoy escorts, anti-submarine vessels, stores carriers, and whatever other random tasks the Admiralty could come up with. The service replicated in many ways its First World War forebears who also get a lengthy (perhaps too lengthy) description.

When war came in 1939, the Royal Navy lacked sufficient vessels particularly for mine-sweeping and convoy escort duties. Formed in 1939 at HMS *Europa* near Lowestoft, England the Patrol Service Headquarters, known as the “Sparrows Nest” quickly recruited many fishermen and their