

Kirby, Bruce. *The Bruce Kirby Story: From the River to the Sea*. Rowayton, CT: Kirby Smith Publishing, 2021. 293 pp., illustrations, glossary. US \$29.95, paper; ISBN 979-8-48979-180-9.

Recreational and competitive sailing engages hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of participants all over the world. The work of designers, builders, and sailors has its own body of literature which, although frequently of a very high quality, does not always result in peer-reviewed, academic presentation. Popular journals, such as the now-discontinued *Maritime Life and Traditions* and *WoodenBoat* are sources of well-researched and well-written historical articles but do not often appear in bibliographies. By the same token, non-academic monographs, especially those documenting the more recent period, are often overlooked as sources for nautical history.

Such may be the case with the recent publication of *The Bruce Kirby Story: From the River to the Sea*. Kirby, who died in 2021, was a Canadian yachtsman and competitive sailor who represented Canada in three Olympic Games. His greatest legacy, however, will probably be as a designer. The Laser sailing dinghy, which he developed in 1969, became an international class sailed in over 120 countries and well over 200,000 of the diminutive single-person racers have been produced. The boat is currently the Olympic single-hander class boat. In all, Kirby designed 62 boats during a 50-year period and these designs, which included America's Cup challengers and custom yachts, account for another 8,000 boats. Kirby's contribution to the sport of sailing was recognized by his appointment to the Order of Canada, the nation's highest civilian honour, in 2019.

The Kirby story sheds a good deal of light on the development of recreational sailing and racing in the period of the second half of the twentieth century. Kirby was a practised writer who worked for many years as a journalist, initially in the newspaper world, and later in specialist sailing magazines. Written as a memoir the volume does not purport to be a definitive history of the period but rather, a very personal account of one individual's encounters with the sailing world. As such, it is, by and large, a very readable and intriguing inside view of life within the yachting community, a community which spans local club recreational racing and cruising through to the highest levels of international match racing. The scope of Kirby's involvement in all these areas both as a competitor and developer is remarkable.

Opening with an account of family sailing at Ottawa's Britannia Yacht Club, Kirby recounts his beginning in competitive racing with the International 14 class in the late 1940s. This led to his first design efforts a decade later, improving the racing craft within the class- established limitations. The story

of the Laser began in 1969 and continued through a series of modifications which established it as one of the most popular small boats ever built. During the 1970s, he developed a wide range of designs for small yachts, such as the San Juan 24, the Kirby 25, and Kirby 30, and the Sonar, many examples of which are still being sailed competitively and recreationally nearly half a century later. Kirby designed the 12-Meter America's Cup challenge boats *Canada I* and *Canada II* and the book gives Kirby's take on the America's Cup competition in the 12-Meter era. The book also sheds some light on the business of small-boat production and how the progression from design to marketing can spell success or failure. Sometimes, as Kirby observes with regard to the 14-foot Pixel, one of his favourite designs, the boat just does not catch on.

Originally begun as an autobiography, after several years Kirby's health began to fail and he dictated several additional chapters to Mark Smith in the period before his death at age 92. He is a good story-teller and his wry take on things results in many good anecdotes of sailing life. To some extent, however, the volume appears incomplete as there are chapters in Kirby's life that remained unwritten. The book was compiled by Mark Smith and the word "compiled" is used here with some justification. Smith identifies himself as a designer not as an editor and is careful to assert that he dared not edit Kirby's work except for punctuation, spelling, or chronology. While this self-published book is well designed and presented with a pleasing selection of illustrations, it might well have benefitted from a firmer editorial hand as regards the contents.

Besides the memoir chapters, which are both entertaining and informative, the volume includes several sections or chapters which contribute to other aspects of the story. Among the more interesting are a listing of all of the Kirby designs and a selection of eight favourites with his detailed commentary. Some of these additions fit in less comfortably with the tone of the book and seem as if they may have been included to bulk up the volume. For example, the chapter on the popular Norwalk Island Sharpie design includes a lengthy 24-page account of an Australian sharpie adventure, which did not involve Kirby, reprinted from a sailing magazine. Short remembrances of several memorable figures in the sailing world such as Ted Turner, Uffa Fox, and Paul Elvstrøm are hung out as a separate chapter when they might better have been included within the narrative.

Overall, the book is an enjoyable and informative read, especially for someone who is involved in small-boat sailing. The book also gives us a window into the behind-the-scenes developments in international class racing and manufacturing – particularly interesting is Kirby's account of how

the laser class design rights have been managed – or mismanaged – over the years. With more interest in the history of recreational and competitive sailing this volume will become an important resource.

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Angus Konstam. *Warships in the Spanish Civil War*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Books, www.ospreypublishing.com, 2021. 48 pp., illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. US \$26.00, paper; ISBN 978-4728-4866-6. (E-book available.)

Angus Konstam sets out to cover 58 warships and their activities prior to and during the Spanish Civil War from April 1936 to July 1939. He condenses highly complex alliances and covers Spanish navies from centuries ago to their defeat in Cuba and Philippines in the 1898 Spanish-American War, from which the fleet never recovered. The early civil war played out from North Africa to Iberia, the Balearic Islands, even involving the North Sea and Adriatic. The final year of Spain's naval war against itself was narrowed down to the Western Mediterranean, at which point Franco and his allies in Italy and Germany overwhelmed the Republicans, backed by the USSR and volunteers.

The strength of this book lies in being dispassionate, fully-illustrated and well-captioned. Konstam's conclusion informs his thesis: "The naval war ended with a whimper rather than a bang. It had always been ...secondary to the land campaign, but ... without it, and the supplies it helped escort into the country, the Republic would have been hard-pressed to resist the Nationalists for so long" (34-35). It is a great relief that Konstam immediately steers readers through the minefields of politics and jargon and designates "communists, anarchists and trade unionists" as *Republicans*. Although they won an election, the Republicans managed to alienate the "Church, landowners, and monarchists, who along with the fascist-nationalist Falangists," became *Nationalists*, firmly under General Franco. The Republicans started out with vastly more naval ships yet suffered from fewer officers, a diffuse command structure, and ship yard delays.

The timeline centres on Franco entering Peninsular Spain, breaking the coup's stalemate with the Nationalist Army of Africa. The Republican failure to stop him, despite their having capital ships and he merely a few gunboats was probably the most critical error of the war, a war won by avoiding each other's fleets rather than provoking pitched battles. The fleets included battleships, heavy cruisers, dreadnoughts, destroyers, submarines, and torpedo, hydrographic, sail-training, patrol, river, fishery protection, patrol, river, custom boats, as well as tugs and seaplane tenders.