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Recent Books

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RECENT BOOKS

Osborne, Eric. W. *Cruisers and Battle Cruisers: An Illustrated History of Their Impact*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2004. 283pp. \$85

“Men and women who operate cruisers [today] do so in an environment where the future of their ships is questionable.” It is an ironic state of affairs for a warship type that has the “most lengthy stories” of any, save only the battleship. Like its companion volumes in the publisher’s Weapons and Warfare series, it defines and describes the type and traces its evolution (in this case from its “prehistory” in the Age of Sail), in the not only military but historical and social context (an area where this volume is especially strong), up to 2004. All this accounts for a little more than half the book, by bulk; the rest is a tabulation of cruiser classes, with specifications, summaries of historical highlights, and in most cases black-and-white photographs. In this section the rapid transformation of the “cruiser” type in the late nineteenth century is especially striking—from the *Vauban*, much like the U.S. screw steamers of the Civil War, to the *Dupuy de Lome*, which looks like nothing so much as a

crocodile in a children’s book. Glossary, selected bibliography, and index.



Polmar, Norman, comp. *The Naval Institute Guide to the Ships and Aircraft of the U.S. Fleet*. 18th ed. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2005. 672pp. \$89.95

This series forms, with the *Jane’s* family and *Combat Fleets of the World*, the standard reference in the field—anyone familiar enough with the subject to need such a book is already aware of its use and value. The eighteenth edition adds chapters on littoral combat ships and unmanned aerial vehicles, and updates on carrier air wing composition, prepositioning ships, submarine rescue systems, unmanned undersea vehicles, the MH-60R/S helicopter, and the Coast Guard’s DEEPWATER program. The volume contains 918 photos and 114 other illustrations, general and ship-name/class indexes, and appendixes (four of them tabular, plus essays on the Arsenal Ship and transformation).



Rasor, Eugene. *English/British Naval History to 1815: A Guide to the Literature*. Bibliographies and Indexes in Military Studies, no. 15. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004. 913pp. \$119.95

Sixteen years ago, Eugene Rasor published an invaluable guide to naval history in his *British Naval History since 1815* (Praeger, 1990). He has now supplemented that work with a new guide, *English/British Naval History to 1815*. The new work differs from the earlier work, not only in being a “prequel” of nearly twice the size but in having for every entry an annotation that assesses its reference value. Together, Rasor’s volumes provide an unmatched reference guide to British naval history for interested readers, students, and scholars of naval history, of all levels and interests. Rasor’s new volume is particularly welcome because of the 2005 bicentenary of the battle of Trafalgar. While that commemorative event has produced a large number of new works that will need to be considered in future bibliographical studies, Rasor is aware of many research works in progress and has incorporated as many as he could into this bibliography. The 4,124 entries in his alphabetical listing of the most important scholarly and printed materials on the full range of topics in the naval history of England and Great Britain from the earliest times to 1815 is conveniently linked to and prefaced by a 373-page historiographical narrative. His authoritative introduction is helpfully divided into numerous chapters and subsections devoted to specific periods and major thematic topics. This will not only serve as a guide to

what has been written but provide a stimulus to what yet needs to be done on this subject.



Sorley, Lewis, ed. *Vietnam Chronicles: The Abrams Tapes, 1968–1972*. Lubbock: Texas Tech Univ. Press, 2004. 917pp. \$50

In 1972, when General Creighton Abrams returned to Washington from Vietnam to assume the duties of Army chief of staff, he brought along some two thousand hours of tape recordings of briefings and discussions made during his four-year tenure as Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). The tapes were classified and sealed after his death in 1974. Sorley, while writing Abrams’s biography, became aware of the tapes, and they were made available to him for use in his 1999 *A Better War*. Screening the tapes, Sorley produced some 3,200 handwritten pages of notes, much more than he could use. This work, then, is an annotated collection of excerpts from those notes. Many themes concerning strategy, tactics, intelligence, etc., emerge in this work and provide the MACV view of the war from the perspectives of Abrams, his senior commanders and staff officers, and Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. They will be of use to scholars and researchers of the 1968–72 period. For a broader perspective of the war see William Gibbons’s *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War* (edited by Edward Keefer), which describes and analyzes U.S. policy, or the State Department’s official record of U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy during the Vietnam War.