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200,000 Miles aboard the Destroyer

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off. *Johnston* received 4,700 pounds of incoming ordnance within the space of one minute. It wrecked half of her machinery, yet she continued at 17 knots. . . . After accumulating damage for two and a half hours, she wallowed so helplessly that her crew couldn't even properly scuttle her; they simply opened her watertight doors and let her flood."

Worth says of the American diesel-driven *Cannon*-class destroyer escorts that they "rolled as badly as the *Evarts* type," an earlier class of destroyer escort that he reports was prone to "lurid" rolls. The Navy, according to Worth, considered the *Cannons* the least successful of its several destroyer escort classes. I did not know the Navy's official opinion on those ships, but having a little experience in one of them, I found it an easy opinion to share.

Discussing briefly another class in which I sailed, the 173-foot American submarine chasers, Worth reports accurately that they were "wet forward and generally uncomfortable in heavy seas." Indeed, in a head sea of any magnitude, solid water often swept over the pilot-house. With the sea on the beam the ship proved a deep roller. Still, these little ships "proved seaworthy enough," and, Worth adds, "the navy viewed them as a success." This also is an easy opinion to share.

With a substantial library of good books on the fighting ships of the last century and a half, I am glad to add Richard Worth's *Fleets of World War II* to my collection.

FRANK UHLIG, JR.
Naval War College



Robinson, C. Snelling, *200,000 Miles aboard the Destroyer Cotten*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 2000. 320pp. \$35

As a midshipman in the 1960s, I discovered J. Bryan's *Aircraft Carrier*, the classic World War II nonfiction "diary" of life aboard the USS *Yorktown* (CV 10) in 1945. It remains a great source of insight into the everyday lives of the men of Task Force 58 at the height of the Pacific War. As a junior officer in destroyers, I sought out similar nonfiction work describing life aboard "tin cans" during the war, but I found only two books, both novels. Not until Robinson's *200,000 Miles aboard the Destroyer Cotten* have I read anything as good as J. Bryan's book.

This book comprises Robinson's recollections, bolstered by deck logs and his archive of letters to his parents, of his experience as a junior officer in *Cotten* (DD 669). As such, it is an amalgam of specific details, his immediate appreciations, and his present-day reflections on the men he served with, the events of those years, and the ship itself.

Ensign Robinson was commissioned via the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps at Harvard University in late spring 1943. He was assigned to the precommissioning crew of *Cotten*, which was then under construction at the Federal Shipyard in Kearny, New Jersey. *Cotten* was a "war emergency" *Fletcher*-class unit, with built-in modifications based on the wartime experience of earlier sister ships. Laid down on 8 February 1943, the ship was launched and commissioned in just 165 days. Ensign Robinson began his service on *Cotten* as the typical junior officer, with a bewildering series of assignments while the ship was

fitting out in Kearny. Ultimately, he was assigned as assistant first lieutenant with a battle station at “Sky 2,” directing 40 mm anti-aircraft guns.

Cotten was quickly dispatched to the Pacific Fleet and began its combat career as part of Operation GALVANIC, the November 1943 invasion of Tarawa and Makin. The ship screened the escort carriers and performed antisubmarine warfare patrols.

While Robinson provides some historical framework to the ship’s operations, the strength of the book is the insight it provides into the daily life of a destroyer wardroom during this extraordinary time. As the war progressed, *Cotten* was assigned to Destroyer Squadron 50 and participated in the great Central Pacific campaign, continuing from Tarawa all the way to Okinawa. The ship performed all the classic destroyer duties, such as screening the fast carriers and steaming with the battle line, at the same time coping with weather, overdue maintenance, and, of course, an implacable and terrifying enemy. Robinson’s descriptions of depth-charging sonar contacts and engaging low-level torpedo bombers reaffirm the adage about war being “hours of boredom and seconds of terror.”

Robinson learned about the insularity of destroyer life, and he describes it well. He depicts how the world seemed to collapse into the restricted horizons of the wardroom and watch teams, and recalls vividly his quest to qualify as a fleet officer of the deck. He evokes some of the exhilaration of high-speed destroyer shiphandling in fleet operations, at a time when destroyer divisions maneuvered at a standard distance of five hundred yards and were constrained by

nothing except gross tonnage and the occasional floating mine.

Robinson ends the book with an epilogue that tells of *Cotten*’s Cold War service. He also includes appendices that discuss the characteristics of the *Fletcher*-class destroyers and the *Cotten*’s awards, as well as a glossary.

There is a minor error in one photo caption, and the maps could have been better, but these are minor quibbles. The book’s greatest strength is Robinson’s recollections of his experiences in *Cotten*, providing an evocative and accurate depiction of a valuable part of a great naval campaign. While the book is not quite the “DD version” of Bryan’s classic, it is well worth reading, particularly by destroyer veterans.

WILLIAM COOPER
Chula Vista, California



Moretz, Joseph. *The Royal Navy and the Capital Ship in the Interwar Period: An Operational Perspective*. London: Frank Cass, 2002. 292pp. \$57.50

The Royal Navy is often held up as an example of a military organization that failed to innovate in peacetime. Its critics maintain that naval officers spent the interwar years preparing to refight the Battle of Jutland when they should have been thinking about the new operational challenges presented by aircraft carriers and U-boats. At the root of the problem, these critics argue, was an increasingly irrational devotion to the capital ship (a term that encompasses both the battleship and the battle cruiser). In recent years, however, historians have challenged the image of an intellectually stilted and hopelessly reactionary officer corps. *The Royal Navy and the Capital*