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A Most Fortunate Ship: A Narrative History of Old Ironsides

John B. Hattendorf

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are well known to anyone who has read much in this field.

Throughout Peebles' narrative, he makes a strong case that the U.S. government and the companies involved have done a masterful job of keeping the very existence of each of the black airplanes a secret for many years. Isolated, inaccessible, and restricted facilities, small and compartmented groups, deception, and public denial were effective in maintaining secrecy. However, at the end of the book Peebles takes the other side of this argument, throwing down the gauntlet at the feet of UFO believers. He strongly doubts the existence of Aurora, the rumored hypersonic spy plane, because it is intertwined with the issue of UFOs and rumors of captured alien flying saucers. The only person who publicly claims to have seen Aurora also claims to have seen nine alien saucers, together with their crews, at a super-secret facility at Groom Lake. Peebles apparently feels compelled to discount the Aurora claim in order to avoid giving credibility to the alien saucer story. However, about the only "evidence" he offers for the nonexistence of Aurora is that the U.S. government continues to deny it, which is exactly what we would expect if we are convinced by the previous accounts in this book.

Peebles launches into full-debunk mode when discussing Aurora, but his credibility is hampered by his heavy reliance on an unidentified "private source" and various notoriously unreliable e-mail messages evidently downloaded from an America On-Line discussion group. However, in the end he switches sides again and makes a case that the secret projects continue. Thus he concludes that they "represent

technological breakthroughs that will gain for the United States an advantage over an enemy in any potential future conflict. The secrecy surrounding these projects is necessary. They must be hidden, they must be guarded by extraordinary means, as would any treasure." Perhaps Aurora is one of these.

PORTER HALYBURTON
Naval War College

Martin, Tyrone G. *A Most Fortunate Ship: A Narrative History of Old Ironsides*. Revised edition. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1997. 440pp. \$35

In 1980, when the first version of this book appeared, reviewers called it the definitive study of the U.S. Navy's most famous ship, written by a man who was its fifty-eighth commanding officer between 1974 and 1978. Seventeen years after the first edition, as *Constitution* set sail in Boston harbor for the first time since 1881, the Naval Institute has published a revised and expanded version of the book.

The new book is attractively designed and larger than the original. Unlike other writers about the ship, Martin has been evenhanded in examining *Constitution's* two-hundred-year career, giving a full examination of it during and after the War of 1812, as well as of the events leading up to it. The author has thoroughly tested his previous work in the light of some significant new evidence. In particular, he has been able to give a more detailed description of the preparation and building of the ship and has revised his accounts of its three most famous battles in the War of 1812.

Most notably, Martin has radically altered the standard account of *Constitution's* engagement with HMS *Java*, showing that Captain William Bainbridge had been caught off guard and allowed *Java* to rake *Constitution*.

Equally interesting, Martin describes *Constitution's* several cruises in the Mediterranean, its round-the-world cruise in 1844–1846, its years with the Naval Academy in Newport during the Civil War, and even its very brief service as flagship for Commodore Stephen B. Luce's Apprentice Training Squadron in 1881. Those associated with the Naval War College will be interested to learn of the ship's repeated returns to Newport, from its first visit in 1798 to its last under sail in November 1881, when the ship caught fire and went hard aground on Goat Island. It visited Newport again, under tow, in 1931.

Martin's account of the various efforts to restore the ship and return it to its appearance at the time of its most famous battles is an interesting saga in itself, revealing much about the development of historical restoration as well as the change in attitudes about the service. Perhaps the most interesting insight of all is that the most recent dry-docking and restoration (1992–1995) revealed that the ship had been originally built with diagonal riders to strengthen its hull.

Scholars will regret that this beautifully produced new edition lacks the author's extensive quotations from original documents, detailed footnotes, and full bibliography. In the interests of economy, these are preserved only in a manuscript edition of the book, available to interested researchers at the USS *Constitution* Museum in Boston.

Nevertheless, this is a carefully researched study and a model of the genre that is often termed "ship biography."

JOHN B. HATTENDORF
Naval War College

Sheppard, Don. *Bluewater Sailor: The Memoirs of a Destroyer Officer*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1996. 334pp. \$24

Bluewater Sailor presents a warm and personal story of a mustang (ex-enlisted) junior officer aboard USS *Henshaw*, a fictitious *Sumner-Gearing* destroyer, in the late 1950s. For the hundreds of thousands who served in this type ship, the story makes a generous contribution to reliving the exciting days of yesteryear. Those who have never been to sea can receive vicariously the experience of doing so. The author takes the reader aboard with the character Ensign Stoddard as he reports to his first duty station after receiving his commission. The reader grows and matures with the ship and crew during Ensign Stoddard's initial tour. *Henshaw* is the author's creation, but it is no less real for that; the supporting cast members are easily recognizable as human. The ship is strong and secure and never lacks for human warmth within its steel sides. *Henshaw* is typical in configuration but like all ships unique in its personality. The officers and crew, with their idiosyncrasies, failings, and strengths, are not fictional but big as life. Once on board, Stoddard sails through the predeployment preparations for *Henshaw's* western Pacific deployment. He develops into an outstanding department head, the *Henshaw* into a mission-ready ship