

1996

Sumner-Gearing-Class Destroyers: Their Design, Weapons, and Equipment

WV Garcia

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Garcia, WV (1996) "Sumner-Gearing-Class Destroyers: Their Design, Weapons, and Equipment," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 49 : No. 3 , Article 14.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol49/iss3/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

This work remains an authoritative reference, now fully updated. It will be of particular interest to naval architects, historians, and battleship buffs, especially when combined with Friedman's *U.S. Battleships*, also published by the Naval Institute Press. Line drawings from official plans, in sufficient detail for model-building, are included for every class covered, and there is good photography of all ten ships of the three battleship classes built in those years. This is particularly important for the *South Dakotas*, which saw lots of action but really existed only during World War II. Unfortunately, the ships' plans are no longer foldouts; they have been reduced to one page, which makes them more challenging to understand. Also, the inboard profiles of the *Montana* class have been inadvertently exchanged for those of the *South Dakota*.

Despite its substantial price, this is a book worth owning.

RICHARD F. CROSS III
Alexandria, Virginia

Sumrall, Robert F. *Sumner-Gearing-Class Destroyers: Their Design, Weapons, and Equipment*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995. 289pp. \$59.95

In 1975, prior to the introduction of the *Spruance*-class (DD 963) destroyer, a phrase prevalent on the waterfront was, "When you're out of FRAMs, you're out of destroyers." In 1958, with the emergence of the post-World War II Soviet submarine threat and the introduction of high-performance jet air-

craft, the FRAM (Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization) program was introduced to preclude block obsolescence. It was the final alteration stage in the life of the class that also provided a "test platform" for the early versions of several missile and electronic countermeasures systems installed in destroyers today. The FRAMED destroyers of the *Sumner-Gearing* class, originally constructed for World War II service, became the mainstay of the surface force for thirty years following the end of the war. It was no wonder that the passing of this class was viewed as the end of an era by the hundreds of thousands of personnel who had served in the 168 units. Indeed, the *Sumner-Gearings* epitomized the general-purpose versatility of a naval warship and rendered yeoman service far above and beyond design expectation.

Robert Sumrall provides a worthy historical account of the political considerations and naval vessel design specifications that led to the commissioning of USS *Allen M. Sumner* (DD 692)—the first of the class—in January 1944. A requirement to increase cruising radius made an additional 160 tons of fuel storage necessary, which in turn caused the *Sumner* class to be lengthened by fourteen feet. The USS *Gearing* (DD 710), commissioned approximately one year later, although technically the first of its own class, was essentially a stretched version of DD 692. The short-hulled *Sumner* and the long-hulled *Gearing* were tactically identical and differed only in endurance.

There are three major components to this book: a general background of ship design that led to the *Sumner-Gear-*

ings, the design of the *Sumner-Gearing* class, and its numerous conversions and modernizations. The chapters dealing with armament, fire control, radar, electronics, sonar, engineering, and damage control provide technical details that illustrate the multimission capability of the ship's basic design and the specific improvements subsequently implemented. As threat perceptions changed, so did missions, which, along with weapon improvements, resulted in conversions from the basic DD hull. *Sumner-Gearing* units became destroyer minelayers (DM) and minesweepers (DMS), as well as the better-known radar picket (DDR) and escort (DDE) variants.

The book's illustrations, tables, and drawings depicting the various stages of equipment and hull modifications are first-rate. They not only reflect the author's extensive knowledge of naval architecture and marine engineering but guide the reader through the intricate and diverse modifications. The generous use of graphics helps the reader visualize the way it was and how it was changed.

While this book offers a comprehensive and technically accurate review of the *Sumner-Gearing* class destroyer, it does not address the issue of the human element, life at sea of the 274 crew members. This class of ship was built to fight. Its service in three major wars was marked by a pragmatic, functional approach, both in the initial design and the changes that followed—little in the Fleet Rehabilitation and Maintenance Program was associated with habitability.

For those who think they knew these ships, this book will demonstrate just how much we took for granted. For the thousands who served in these ships for over forty years, this work will provide a cruise to days gone by. A technical, professional library is incomplete without it.

W.V. GARCIA
Captain, U.S. Navy, Ret.
Escondido, California

Van der Vat, Dan. *Stealth at Sea: The History of the Submarine*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995. 374pp. \$30

This book provides an overview of the history of the submarine, from the first "inventions and devices" of the fifteenth century through the nuclear-powered, technological marvels of today. Van der Vat devotes the bulk of his attention to the period 1900–1945, thoroughly describing submarine developments preceding both world wars and submarine operations during them. The years before 1900 and after 1945 are covered in a brief prologue and a short epilogue, respectively. The book's title is somewhat misleading, however, for there is little analysis of the inherent stealth of the submarine or of the struggle waged over the years between submarines and the antisubmarine warfare (ASW) forces intent on overcoming their stealth.

Dan van der Vat is a former correspondent with the London papers *The Times* and *The Guardian*. He has published several books on naval history, including excellent works on the Atlantic and Pacific submarine campaigns of