

1989

U.S. Small Combatants: An Illustrated Design History

Richards T. Miller

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

Recommended Citation

Miller, Richards T. (1989) "U.S. Small Combatants: An Illustrated Design History," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 42 : No. 1 , Article 32.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol42/iss1/32>

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.

Friedman, Norman. *U.S. Small Combatants: An Illustrated Design History*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1987. 500pp. \$46.95

In a 1968 *Naval Review* article on the subject of "Fighting Boats of the U.S.," the reviewer noted that "Ours is a blue water navy. From its earliest days frigates, ships-of-the-line, battleships, cruisers, and aircraft carriers have provided [the Navy] its prestige commands, its sources of leadership, and its monuments to engineering genius. Yet, the little craft—privateers, torpedo boats, patrol boats, and dozens of other specialized types—have proved every bit the equal of the big ships as breeders of sailors and taxers of naval architectural ingenuity." Norman Friedman, in his fascinating book *U.S. Small Combatants*, also notes that these craft lie outside the mainstream of U.S. naval strategy, outside the balanced fleet of capital ships, escorts, and submarines designed to project U.S. power abroad. His work thoroughly illustrates the reviewer's thesis that small craft have consistently taxed the ingenuity of naval architects; and his own thesis that their development has been driven by technology, particularly the technology of high speed—and by extemporized national strategy. Hence they generally have been developed in wartime haste only to be discarded in peacetime.

Utilizing the Navy's files, Mr. Friedman has been able to present richly detailed descriptions of the discussions between naval operators

and the material bureaus, and between private contractors and the Navy as real and perceived operational requirements evolved into characteristic requirements; conceptual, preliminary, and contract designs; and operational craft. He also presents detailed descriptions of the influence of foreign developments on the evolution of U.S. ship types—this is particularly true of PTs. The book offers thorough discussions of the engineering development of high-powered, lightweight propulsion engines for speed, lightweight guns and rockets for increased firepower, and hydrofoils for increased sea-keeping capability which made the development of many of these craft feasible.

As one who has been closely involved in much of the naval architectural development and construction of these craft, from a 1939-40 thesis PT design based on the Bureau of Construction and Repair's 1938 requirements, through the preliminary design of *Asheville* (PG-84), the design of Bell's SKMR-1 Hovercraft, and the design competition which resulted in *Plainview* (AGEH-1), the reviewer was particularly interested in the author's presentation of the interplay between the potential users and the developers of these craft—and at least one omission of an interesting story. Negotiations between Henry Sutphen and Irwin Chase of Elco and British Power Boats to obtain rights to build the Hubert Scott-Paine designed 70-foot PT are treated at some length. However, only one

brief sentence mentions that plans for British Vosper PTs were circulated to several builders in June 1941 for lend-lease procurement. Those plans had been purchased from Peter Du Cane of Vospers Ltd. by Chris Nelson of the Annapolis Yacht Yard with the same expectation as Elco, of selling boats to the British. When the passage of Lend-Lease thwarted those plans, Nelson relinquished his rights to the Bureau of Ships, and Annapolis became the lead yard, responsible for the complete redesign of all structural, mechanical, and electrical details of the boat for production in American yards.

The book is filled with nearly a hundred excellent inboard, outboard, and plan drawings, and some two hundred photographs to illustrate the craft discussed. Only the absence of hull line drawings prevents it from being a perfect source of information for model builders. The scope of Mr. Friedman's canvas, stretching as it does from pre-World War I years to the present, and covering some dozen categories of combatant craft, leads inevitably to the one criticism the reviewer might offer. The detailed discussions of developments sometimes are difficult to follow, and occasionally appear circular in nature. The fact that minesweepers, which surely are among the most essential of small combatants, are not included is regretted. However, the author promises their coverage in a future volume.

This book is the most comprehensive reference available on the

subject of subchasers, PT boats, gunboats, PHMs (hydrofoils), patrol boats, and the numerous classes of counterinsurgency and brown-water Navy craft developed for export and to serve the needs of the Vietnam war. Numerous tables list significant data on all of the craft; and a final appendix lists all commissioned U.S. small combatants (including PTs lend-leased to Great Britain and the U.S.S.R.) and their fates. It will appeal to naval architects, naval historians, and all who have served on, or who have a consuming interest in, small naval combatants.

RICHARDS T. MILLER
Captain, U.S. Navy, Retired

English, John. *The Hunts*. Cumbria, England: The World Ship Society, 1987. 108pp.

Ship monographs usually describe a single ship, class, or type of warship, emphasizing design history and technical details, and devote only a small amount of space to ships' histories. However, in this neat little book the emphasis is on the individual histories of each of the 86 vessels that comprised the "Hunt" class escort destroyers. It is an unusual tribute, one that has not been paid to this numerically large class of warship.

A total of 86 Hunts were constructed in England between 1939 and 1943. Officially classed as "escort destroyers," the Hunt class was conceived as vessels "suitable for both fleet and convoy duties."