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"Combat Fleets of the World 1988/89: Their Ships, Aircraft, and Armament," "Almanacco Navale 1988"

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The treatment of the Age of Automation, 1945 to the present, seems superficial when compared to the fundamental insights for earlier eras. Perhaps this is the result of so many technological changes since the Second World War; or perhaps some of the fundamental interactions between technology and war in this era are still obscure. Whatever the cause, it suggests that a great deal is yet to be said on the subject of modern technology's relation to war.

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Baker, A.D. III, ed. *Combat Fleets of the World 1988/89: Their Ships, Aircraft, and Armament*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988. 908pp. \$96.95

Giorgerini, G., and Nani, A., eds. *Almanacco Navale 1988*. Genoa, Italy: Istituto Idrografico Della Marina, 1988. 1092pp. \$59

These two large volumes are awesome compilations of data and illustrations on the world's navies. As anticipated in the review of the previous edition of *Combat Fleets* published here (*NCWR* Summer 1987, p.129), *Combat Fleets 1988/89* arguably now has overtaken the longtime "standard reference of the world's navies," *Jane's Fighting Ships*, as the best single encyclopedia of naval vessels. Their opposite number from Italy, *Almanacco Navale 1988*, adopts a somewhat less ambitious

format but succeeds nonetheless in providing a wealth of information and many unique illustrations.

The trend over the past decade or so for naval annuals to become huge, very expensive books reflects several factors. One of these is the proliferation of navies: there are many more independent nations now than 100 years ago. Brassey's *The Naval Annual* of 1886 tabulated data for ships of 32 nations; today, *Combat Fleets* includes 160 nations! Another factor is the growing tendency in naval annuals to account for subsidiary craft of almost any kind, most of which were ignored in Brassey and Jane (though not in Clowes' *The Naval Pocket Book*) in the early years of their publication.

How do these reference books compare in terms of accuracy? To some degree, this is unknowable. How, for example, does one find authoritative data on ship displacements, torpedo loads, etc.? As a practical matter, the degree to which the books' data reflects photographic evidence, takes advantage of the rather voluminous periodical literature, and draws on official and shipbuilder public releases determines the level of accuracy achieved.

Combat Fleets is arranged alphabetically by country. Each nation's entry includes introductory data and narrative on shipboard weapons and other systems, naval aircraft, and (for a few major navies) shipbuilding programs by financial year. The book contains about 3600 photographs, including almost 600 of Soviet ships and aircraft alone, and

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140 drawings. A good number of photographs (and drawings) of major vessels are quite large, filling half a page each. Notes in the captions show that the photographs have been studied carefully. The data entries by ship type include both detailed tabular data and, in many cases, textual commentary. The treatment of key dates (construction orders, keel laying, etc.) is much more complete than *Almanacco*, which only gives years for three events: keel laying, launch and completion. Although fewer plans are provided than in the *Almanacco*, they are generally much more detailed than those in the Italian book.

Almanacco Navale is divided into two major parts: first, the coverage of the world's warships by country, and second, a set of six appendices that cover oceanographic and hydrographic research ships, naval aircraft, missiles, guns, torpedoes, and radar. The coverage of naval weapons and radars is tabular in format, and interesting; for example, an estimated maximum range (target type unspecified) is given for many radar systems. There are some 1300 photographs (22 in color), including 160 of U.S. Navy ships and 180 of Soviet ships. In addition, about 750 ship classes are illustrated by line drawings (66 of U.S. Navy ships and 126 of Soviet vessels); and there are 20 3-view drawings of aircraft, 13 summary pages of major combatant ship silhouettes for recognition purposes, and five color pages of national flags. Most information is

tabular with relatively little evaluation or comment.

Almanacco Navale has some information unavailable elsewhere. For example, it lists codenames—one presumes the NATO designations—for the various sonars carried aboard each class of Soviet submarines, such as "Shark Fin" and "Whale Tongue." What the average reader can make of this is unclear, but it does permit, assuming it is accurate, speculation about similarities and differences among classes.

Combat Fleets is readily available in the U.S. through the Naval Institute Press. *Almanacco Navale*, on the other hand, is not marketed in the U.S. and must be special-ordered. As a result, it is little known. It contains a full English language translation of the two-page key to reading the data tables, as well as an insert card with French, German, and Spanish equivalents for key terms. Assuming that one could obtain the book at close to its Italian price, it is a worthwhile investment. *Combat Fleets*, however, delivers much more information (including almost twice as many illustrations), more than commensurate with its somewhat higher price.

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Fisher, David F. *A Race on the Edge of Time*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988. 370pp. \$19.95

Nissen, Jack and A.W. Cockerill. *Winning the Radar War*. New York: