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Merchantman? Or Ship of War

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130 Naval War College Review

Today a new breed of technically-oriented editors has appeared, supported by organizations with resources. These men are doing an excellent job of describing the world's navies which are now much more complex than formerly. Ships have been joined by aircraft, electronics, missiles and various forms of nuclear power, all of which need some form of statistically-oriented description. Reported are the hardware components which implement the maritime policies of the world, too little understood by those both in and out of the service but which, because of the awesome power involved, excite great interest. So now there are several annuals available to English readers: *Jane's*, *Combat Fleets* and *Weyer's*, all of which are excellent, each in its own way. *Jane's* has recovered in quality under John Moore and is published on the best paper of the three. Both *Jane's* and *Almanaco Navale* present recognition silhouettes, presumably to help with whatever is on the horizon. *Jane's* are poor and not to a common scale; *Almanaco's* are very good and to scale, but one wonders about the real need for either. All of these books have become large, heavy tomes which would be difficult to use on any bridge or CIC. These types of books have moved in the direction of the ships they describe for they are not only bigger but very expensive—and not for the casual reader. Thus there are increasingly detailed descriptions available to fewer and fewer casual readers describing an increasingly complex set of interactive naval

systems. Impressive progress in doing this has been made, but one wonders what James C. Fahey would do. His first *Ships and Aircraft* cost 50 cents and could fit in your coat pocket. Yet each page contained a staggering amount of information. No such periodic review of the world's navies currently exists or, perhaps, can exist. I suspect Fahey would say that it could be done.

RICHARD CROSS
Alexandria, Virginia

Gibson, Charles Dana. *Merchantman? or Ship of War*. Camden, Me.: Ensign Press, 1986. 214pp. \$18.75

Written by a licensed master mariner (any ocean, any tonnage) who started his career during World War II, *Merchantman? or Ship of War* is succinctly described by its amplified title: *A Synopsis of Laws; U.S. State Department Positions; and Practices Which Alter the Peaceful Character of Merchant Vessels in Time of War*. In recognition of the fact that ships and their embarked crews are an entity, much of the content of this 214-page volume is devoted to the status of these seamen when, to meet military requirements, ships are requisitioned or operated directly by the U.S. Government.

The author presents, in the first 84 pages of the book, a brief account of the use by the Federal Government of privately-owned merchant ships during wars in which the Nation was involved up to the year 1918. The second section of 48 pages is an

evaluation of the practices followed during World War II. Gibson concludes that "American merchant seamen who served in oceangoing service during World War II performed their duties under a legal framework which, in light of all recognized international law, placed them into the role of combatants integrated within the armed forces of the United States." The book provides a source for legislative action in recognition of the hazardous nature of the merchant seaman's vocation in wartime and argues for benefits appropriate to those granted the honorably discharged member of the Armed Forces. Casualty rates sustained by the U.S. merchant marine in the first year of World War II were the highest of any group supporting the war effort.

Throughout the book, Gibson is judicial and rational in his presentation. He shows how much the Navy has depended upon merchant shipping in time of war and quotes administrative orders which authorized military and naval commanders to give orders to merchant ships and to have disciplinary control over merchant seamen in overseas areas. He also deals at length with the difficult problem of determining when—and in many cases if—merchant ships become part of the military force.

As a layman rather than a qualified practitioner of maritime law, Gibson showed courage in undertaking this formidable task that, to this reviewer's knowledge, has not been attempted before. Because of the

technical and legal basis of the book, its appeal is unavoidably narrow and of questionable interest to the general public. Also, despite the author's effort, the book is not without warts: there are an inexcusably large number of misspelled words; the author's system for citations is erratic and incomplete; and the bibliography is not annotated. Yet, Mr. Gibson must be credited for his pioneering spirit and energy in assembling such a volume of diverse documents on this subject. While his purpose in compiling the book is transparent, an attempt to bolster the case for giving military veteran status and benefits to merchant seamen of the World War II era, it still does not detract from the technical value of the book.

LANE C. KENDALL
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Krieger, Michael J. *Tramp: Sagas of High Adventure in the Vanishing World of the Old Tramp Freighters*. San Francisco, Calif.: Chronicle Books, 1986. 143pp. \$35

Plan an evening to sit down with this book. A pipe, snifter of brandy, friendly fireplace, and a good atlas are appropriate. Prepare yourself to embark on a journey into an aspect of seafaring that is marked by high adventure, hard work, little glamour, and even less profit.

As you page through this comfortable, well-layed out book, you will be enthralled by the text and the photographs, especially the photographs. Tales of the past, both real