

1984

United States Navy Destroyers of World War II

Richard F. Cross

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

Recommended Citation

Cross, Richard F. (1984) "United States Navy Destroyers of World War II," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 37 : No. 3 , Article 23.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol37/iss3/23>

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.

of dollars—young men who pay the price daily for our nation's need to deploy forward its Navy. All this and more is here.

One of the first things any author or speaker must do is to decide what he is not going to say or write. Some Navy specialists, such as the land-based air antisubmarine warfare community, may feel slighted at there being no photographs of P-3Cs. Some might wish for more shots of underway replenishment, exploding weapons, heavy weather operations, etc., but they will appreciate the book in toto as a beautiful photographic tour de force.

Others might find fault with Ned Beach's tendency toward clichés, but his style makes *Keepers of the Sea* meaningful to a much larger audience. In fact it would be a superb gift to parents and friends from the plains and mountains, who still have difficulty imagining how we spend our time at sea. Some copies will be going from Newport to Vermont for just that reason. (If you're an Institute member it's only \$36.00) This book will provide many hours of enjoyment to the old sailor, the modern steamer and to those as yet uninitiated. Any American will be proud of the Navy shown here.

D.G. CLARK
Captain, US Navy

Reilly, John C. Jr. *United States Navy Destroyers of World War II*. New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 1983. 160pp. \$16.95

Definitive published material on the US Navy's warships—the objec-

tives behind their designs, the designs themselves and the successes and limitations of those designs—has been all too scarce until very recently. One might have considered this lack almost a national trait since most developed countries, even those suffering defeat and heavy loss, have produced highly specific combatant ship design histories. Perhaps the foremost in all these efforts was Dr. Oscar Parkes' *British Battleships* published in 1956, which still sets a world standard. But there are also the excellent Italian series organized according to ship type, published during the sixties, and, more recently, the German submarine studies by Eberhard Rossler. Not to be ignored are the extraordinary British works on destroyers by Edgar March, and on cruisers and battleships by Alan Raven and John Roberts; the French efforts by Henri Le Masson and the extensive work of the Japanese. All have the common thread of access to official correspondence, plans and photographs.

Until the midseventies, however, similar design studies of US warship types were rare, superficial, and incomplete. One reason for this may have been the reluctance of US publishers to support works which required extensive research for what was perceived as a very limited market. The Naval Institute professional and nonprofit, was more concerned than other publishers with the missing technical histories. As a result, after an extended gestation period, they published Robert O. Dulin and William H. Garzke's *U.S. Battleships in World War II* in 1976, followed four years

later by the same authors' *Allied Battleships in World War II*. Most recently the Institute has produced *U.S. Destroyers* by the prolific Norman Friedman, its most ambitious design history to date. This volume's drawings by A.D. Baker and definitive accounting of each design, based on official records, approach the quality of the best German and British works. Its only major flaw is that it is late by some twenty years. Now in this late flood of technical histories, comes a second definitive US destroyer work which covers much the same subject but over a more limited time span.

United States Navy Destroyers of World War II by John C. Reilly, is an outstanding work. Furthermore, at \$16.95 it is an exceptional value. Within its covers is the best collection of photographs of the war years' destroyers yet published; even better, most are dated, greatly increasing their worth. The author pays attention to detail while maintaining a good overview of the Navy's design objectives. He has divided US destroyers into four generations: the 68 pre-World War I "broken deckers"; the mass produced four-stack flushdeckers of World War I; the London Treaty ships of the thirties (DD 348 to 420); and finally, the *Benson*, *Gleaves*, *Fletcher*, *Sumner* and *Gearing* classes. The book deals almost exclusively with the ships of the last two generations.

Each class, starting with the eight ships of the *Farragut* class (DD 348-355)

of FY 1932-33, is described in its own chapter. With the aid of referenced official documentation, the developing requirements of each class are outlined, providing a feel for the give and take between Opnav's requirements, normally as represented by the General Board, and the technical bureaus which were called upon to develop the design. As each class is reviewed, including pictures from commissioning to the end of the war, an impression can be gained as to how dynamic destroyer design was, particularly during the immediate prewar period. Unthinkable now, then there was a new destroyer class each year with significant changes from their predecessors.

These ships up through the early *Benson* and *Gleaves*, bore the brunt of the war's demands through 1942 after which the first *Fletchers* began reaching the fleet in the Pacific. The latter's larger size permitted greater flexibility in adjusting their armament and control systems to meet the rapidly increasing Japanese air threat. The *Fletchers*, arguably the best all around destroyer class of World War II (measured in fighting ton miles, say), were followed by the *Sumners* and their near sisters, the longer legged *Gearings*. All are covered by Reilly in detail, there being 16 continuous pages of *Fletcher*-class photographs alone.

The final years of the war saw the operational emphasis for destroyers in the Pacific shift from surface actions to carrier task force escorts. This led to picket duty during the invasion of Okinawa. The kamikazes and Bakas

encountered then and there led to even greater emphasis on anti-aircraft armament and warning capability on the destroyers as the invasion of Japan was considered. The resulting increased 40 mm installations as well as the specialized *Gearing*-class radar picket designs are covered adequately.

There is a final chapter covering official ruminations on future destroyer designs based on the lessons of the war. The new ships always, as now, were larger than their predecessors. The book's conclusion provides a thoughtful review of fleet escort thinking on into the postwar years. Finally, there are appendixes on destroyer stability, war damage, basic Navy organization for 1934 and 1944, and lastly, a summary of destroyer characteristics by class. There is no listing of individual destroyer names and numbers. Perhaps there could be some criticism of the chronological detailing of events which occasionally overlap or are repeated. A complete reading is required to ensure capturing all of the detailed design considerations covered.

Destroyers in World War II should be in the library of anyone concerned with destroyers, past or future. Much of the information contained has been unavailable for too long. All we need now is to convince the publishers to print these priceless photographs on better paper.

RICHARD F. CROSS
Alexandria, Va.

Mannix, Daniel P. IV, ed. *The Old Navy: Rear Admiral Daniel P. Mannix*

Published by U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons, 1984

III. New York: Macmillan, 1983.
294pp. \$16.95

Compiled from letters, journals, and diaries, an excerpt from this memoir by Rear Admiral Daniel Pratt Mannix III has appeared in *American Heritage*, and the book has been selected as an alternate choice by both the Military Book Club and the Naval Institute Press. This does not, of course, guarantee that *The Old Navy* will necessarily be to everyone's liking. Some people may question the admiral's memory in spots, just as others may wince at his old-fashioned anecdotal style. Nonetheless, Daniel Pratt Mannix IV has done a commendable job in editing his father's papers. With assistance from the Naval History Division, he has produced a beguiling memoir of a navy moving from post-Civil War insularity to the threshold of world power.

The memoir opens in 1882 with recollections of Mannix's childhood in China as the son of a Marine captain on loan to the Chinese government as a torpedo expert. It concludes with his final cruise in command of a destroyer squadron in the Levant, a cruise which witnesses the consolidation of Turkey under Kemal Ataturk.

Most intriguing, and highly symbolic, is an early chapter concerning the Spanish-American War. Granted leave from Annapolis in order to take part in the war, Midshipman Mannix hustles aboard the USS *Indiana*. At the Battle of Santiago Bay, he watches a dejected Admiral Cervera being taken into custody, "I never