

H-Net Reviews

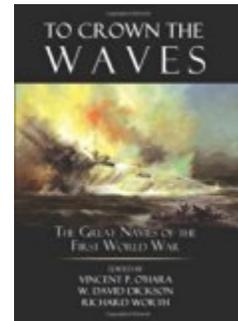
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Vincent P. O'Hara, W. David Dickson, Richard Worth, eds. *To Crown the Waves: The Great Navies of the First World War*. Washington DC: Naval Institute Press, 2013. Maps, tables, illustrations. 360 pp. \$37.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-61251-082-8.

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Navies in a World War: A Solid Prequel

With *To Crown the Waves*, editors Vincent P. O'Hara, W. David Dickson, and Richard Worth make their second foray into a detailed comparison of major navies engaged in global conflict. A comparison of the major navies of the First World War is important because, as the editors contend, after the armies achieved stalemate on the continent the war was won at sea. Therefore, understanding the belligerents' navies is essential to achieving understanding of the war. In their previous venture, *On Seas Contested: The Seven Great Navies of the Second World War* (2010), the editors followed a formula that allowed for a ready comparison between the major navies engaged in the war. They follow the previously established pattern in their most recent book.

Each of the major navies (Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Russia, the United States) is covered in its own chapter while the two smaller navies (Japan and the Ottomans) are combined in a chapter that also briefly discusses the navies of Greece and Brazil. The chapter authors, representing five nations, are all experienced historians chosen for their expertise, access to archives, and language fluency. Their combined expertise produces a history of the navies that a single author could not hope to accomplish.

Every chapter is similarly arranged under major topics to cover the nation's relevant naval history, organization, methods of war fighting, wartime experience, and how the navies evolved during the conflict. Within each

major heading such topics as mission, construction philosophy, fleet organization, intelligence, logistics bases, industrial base, demographics, training, culture, doctrine, weapons, and tactics are covered in some detail. They are all also clearly indicated with appropriate section and paragraph headings, making locating the information straightforward. Ironically, when an author deviates from the format—such as omitting a section on culture, as is the case in the chapters on Great Britain and the United States, or combines training and culture under one heading, as with the chapter on Italy—the difference is readily apparent. The result is a book that is an excellent reference for easy comparison of the major navies engaged in the First World War.

Despite my observation that some authors give short shrift to naval culture, the fact that the volume incorporates this often neglected aspect of naval performance is of real benefit to understanding how rapidly navies learned during the war. I also appreciate the sections on the evolution of weapons and tools during the war. This section in each chapter is the star. The other aspects of the chapters give a reader enough background and situational awareness to better understand the navies' operational plans and how those plans had to evolve with the course of the war. The editors pen in the conclusion that the book shows the “rapid, often awkward, and sometimes different ways in which navies integrated new weapons and tools” and how “peacetime evolution is followed by wartime revolution” (pp. 321, 322). These

are not idle boasts; the book delivers.

The book is filled with tables and photographs. By design it is lightly footnoted, a feature that probably helped with editing but which does not help one find sources for subsequent research. The sources for data in some tables is hit-or-miss, sometimes clearly indicated and sometimes not disclosed. The writing also indicates that the authors are familiar with and used numerous primary sources. For example, in the section on Russian navy culture, an officer, Konstantin Benkendorf, is directly quoted without citation (p. 231). In contrast, the section on intelligence includes a quote from the Naval General Staff that is given an appropriate citation (p. 222). The different treatment given by the authors to the source material is simply enigmatic. The book does, however,

provide short but relevant bibliographies of secondary sources for each chapter.

The editors sought to create a reference for ready comparison—based on method, organization, and tables. This is the book’s notable strength; it does this extremely well. I would consult it often if I had a question about a navy that I was reading about in another work. While it can stand alone, this is an excellent supplement to other histories of the First World War. Even better, when coupled with the previous book, *On Seas Contested*, because many of the engaged nations are the same (France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States) one is able to make comparisons over the first half of the twentieth century spanning two world wars.

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