

H-Net Reviews

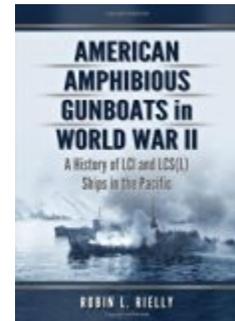
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Robin L. Rielly. *American Amphibious Gunboats in World War II: A History of LCI and LCS(L) Ships in the Pacific.* Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013. 408 pp. \$45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-7422-6.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



Almost every Second World War documentary introduction shows a few seconds of the vessels that are the focus of Robin Rielly's *American Amphibious Gunboats in World War II: A History of LCI and LCS(L) Ships in the Pacific*. Typically, they flash on screen for a few seconds, rockets streaming from their decks, and then they are gone. What were those "rocket ships"?

In *American Amphibious Gunboats in World War II*, Rielly not only explores what these ships were but how they came to be and the roles they played in the combat zone. The evolution of the LCI and LCS(L) gunboats is covered in impressive detail. Rielly begins the story with the need for gunboats to stop Japanese inter-island barges and continues it through the war to the extensive use of gunboats as supporting ships at Okinawa. Begun as a way to intercept and destroy Japanese barges, the gunboats were at first field-modified landing craft pressed into service. As their usefulness became apparent, more and more time was spent improving their functionality. What began as a project to intercept Japanese barges turned into one to produce gunboats that could not only destroy the barges but also provide close-fire support to troops landing on enemy-held

shores. These subsequent actions are covered in the book, which presents not only the historical narrative but an analysis of the boats' effectiveness at various stages.

Besides a well-written and comprehensive narrative, this book also offers a remarkable number of images. Hardly a page goes by without one. This adds to the reader's understanding and visualization of the ships being described. The presentation immensely impressed this reviewer.

Typically, the gunboats that are the focus here get only a passing mention in other sources, if at all. Yet these gunboats played an important, and at times, critical role in aiding troops on shore reach their objectives. They also devastated Japanese barge traffic in the South Pacific and Philippines. Later, they became important in guarding anchorages from Japanese suicide attackers.

Rielly has done an excellent service in providing a well-researched and -written book on these often overlooked ships. The large number of images and diagrams make it not only a good read but an important reference source as well. This book rightly deserves a place on any Pacific War historian's shelf.

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