

Greg H. Williams. *World War II U.S. Navy Vessels in Private Hands: The Boats and Ships Sold and Registered for Commercial and Recreational Purposes under the American Flag.* Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013. 372 pp. \$55.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-4766-0040-6.

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Commissioned by Donna Sinclair (Central Michigan University)

Greg H. Williams's *World War II U.S. Navy Vessels in Private Hands* catalogs hundreds of vessels that were commissioned during the Second World War and the many postwar circumstances in which they wound up. Relying on records in *Merchant Vessels of the United States* and tracking individual official numbers of each ship, Williams compiles an impressive amount of information. The book offers details about a wide array of ships and explores personal information about crew members, owners, and operators over the course of each boat's military and private service. Williams's collection is both a valuable resource for anyone interested in these ships as well as a fascinating glimpse into the process of mobilization and demobilization during the World War II era and beyond.

The book is arranged in an encyclopedic fashion and vessels are listed by name. Chapters are arranged by type of ship and Williams gives a short but informative introduction for each type of ship he discusses. Although a picture or illustration of these vessel types would have greatly benefited readers without a familiarity with such technology, the provided descriptions adequately portray the general appearance and function of each type of ship. Williams delves into privately owned ships commissioned during the war and

ships built expressly for the navy, resulting in a large variety of wartime service and pre- and postwar experiences for vessels and crews alike.

The sheer volume of vessels included is the most striking feature of the book. Williams includes vessels that were made in dozens of different shipyards around the United States and abroad. Because of the wide range of vessel sizes and uses, wartime service differed significantly even for boats of the same type, and the history of private yachts commissioned for military service during the war provides interesting insight into the ways in which American private interests mobilized as part of the war effort.

Even more fascinating is the process of demobilization following the end of the war. As each vessel was decommissioned, it often found new life in the private sector as a fishing boat, passenger ferry, or research vessel. As with so many other technologies that were revolutionized by wartime, American ships came out of the war with new designs, new paint, and often new battle scars. The transition into a new, postwar life enabled many ships to remain useful long after the conflict ended. Williams also occasionally includes information about the postwar fate of the people intimately tied to these vessels, in addition to the history of the vessels themselves. These per-

sonal stories, scattered throughout the entries, remind the reader of the humanity behind each ship's construction and lifespan.

Williams provides a short introduction that briefly explains the research process and historical context, but his analysis is not focused on explaining the demobilization process on a large scale. Rather, his catalogue of individual entries reveals the complicated transition underway in the United States at the end of the war, where the incredible war machine built over the previous five years was decommissioned, sold, and repurposed or destroyed a piece at a time. Each entry follows the vessel from its construction, through any prewar service, its commission and wartime service, its postwar life, and whether it was lost, destroyed, or simply disappeared from the official records.

The amount of information available for each ship varies by the accessible records, and Williams's entries range from several hundred words for ships with detailed histories to much shorter descriptions of vessels with incomplete documentation. For historians of the World War II and postwar eras, the book adds little to the historiography but is full of excellent examples of the complicated processes of mobilization and demobilization, and the variety of vessels and personalities makes *World War II U.S. Navy Vessels in Private Hands* an interesting reference guide to anyone in search of information on ships from this period. More importantly, the easily accessible information makes the book a valuable resource for anyone looking for specific details about a particular vessel, especially for the thousands of Americans who built and served on these ships.

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