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Vincent P. O'Hara, W. David Dickson, and Richard Worth, eds., *On Seas Contested: The Seven Great Navies of the Second World War*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Inst. Press, 2011. Pp. xvi, 333. ISBN 978-1-59114-646-9.

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On Seas Contested is a unique collaborative work by fifteen highly qualified naval historians, several of whom have previously published monographs with the Naval Institute Press. It is a tightly structured comparative study of the seven major navies that dominated operations in the greatest naval war ever fought. It is designed to correct what the editors believe are two deeply rooted flaws in the existing literature on naval warfare in World War II: first, a tendency to focus on such superficial similarities among the navies as weapons, ship design, and command structure, rather than on deeper, critical differences in naval tradition and doctrine, logistics and overseas bases, prewar operational expectations, and national wartime objectives; the second identified problem is an Anglo-American bias in the literature, especially in English-language histories. To remedy these problems, the editors commissioned this anthology as a convenient and accessible comparative basis for advanced naval researchers and writers.

The book also offers something new on at least two scores. First, it devotes roughly equal coverage to all seven major WWII navies: France's *Marine Nationale*, the German *Kriegsmarine*, Great Britain's Royal Navy, the Italian *Regia Marina*, Japan's *Teikoku Kaigun*, the US Navy (USN), and the Soviet *Voенно-морской Флот СССР*. Unfortunately, the significant contributions of the larger Dominion navies, notably the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), are merely subsumed within the Royal Navy chapter; they deserved separate treatment. As importantly, non-English language primary and secondary sources were used extensively in the chapters on the five non-Anglophone navies. This alone is a major contribution to better dissemination of information about naval matters during the war.

The chapters are parallel in style and content, each with subdivisions on ship design and deployments, weapons systems, crew training and officer selection, maritime and cultural traditions, geographical and economic constraints, orders of battle, armament charts, and operational doctrine, among other topics. This ensures ease of comparison across the seven navies, but at a real cost: a rather stilted prose style, more suited to encyclopedia entries than flowing narrative histories; in addition, each navy's actual performance in combat operations gets short shrift.

Chapter 1, on the *Marine Nationale*, is by John Jordan, a noted expert on the French Navy¹ and editor of the scholarly journal *Warship*. His task is uniquely difficult: the French Navy was successively Allied, neutral and independent (under the Vichy regime, till November 1942), then divided and scattered, and finally Allied once again. We may, therefore, forgive him for occasional repetition. Some general readers will find the heavy technical emphasis off-putting, but naval researchers will appreciate the detail.

Chapter 2, on the *Kriegsmarine*, is written by a team of five co-authors, under the lead of Peter Schenk, author of two books on German naval history.² A notable insight here is that, although the Treaty of Versailles reduced the old *Kaiserliche Marine* to the size and role of a minor navy, in its ship design, procurement, and combat doctrine, the successor *Kriegsmarine* nevertheless entered World War II still adhering to the traditional idea of a decisive naval battle between lines of battleships. Further, its leaders never understood that Hitler's goals were continental. Specifically, he wanted Russia and Russian resources. In his mind, the *Kriegsmarine* would only provide protection against Britain. Slightly marring this fine overview is

1. See, e.g., his *French Battleships: 1922-1956* (Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 2009), co-authored with Robert Dumas.

2. *Invasion of England, 1940: The Planning of Operation Sealion*, tr. R. Magowan (London: Conway Maritime Pr, 1990), and *Kampf um die Ägäis: Die Kriegsmarine in griechischen Gewässern, 1941-1945* (Hamburg: Mittler, 2000).

some unexplained technical information on anti-submarine warfare. A more grave omission in this chapter is an anomalous lack of any footnotes, a flaw only partly corrected by an annotated bibliography.

Chapter 3, on the Royal Navy, is by David Wragg, prolific author of some twenty naval histories or handbooks.³ Its handling of technical and doctrinal issues is as fine and reliable as in the book's other chapters, but is more deeply analytical. An interesting revelation here is that the Royal Navy concealed from its Dominion allies its inability to fight in Asia while engaged in Europe. Wragg contends this was necessary in a period when Britain needed Australian and New Zealander manpower in North Africa. Also perceptive is Wragg's assessment of Britain's Pacific Fleet in 1945, the largest it had ever assembled. The book would have benefited from more of this type of analytical coverage and less minutely technical, encyclopedic information. And, too, compressing the history of the RAN and RCN in the war into an addendum in this chapter was ill-advised.

Chapter 4, on the *Regia Marina*, is co-written by an Italian naval specialist, Enrico Cernuschi, and one of the collection's editors, Vincent P. O'Hara.⁴ It is a tale of poor preparation and wishful strategic thinking, but also of the bravery and loyalty of Italian crews. This chapter, more than any other, by its astute revisionist appraisal of the *Regio Marina's* wartime performance, quashes longstanding myths present even in major English-language works on naval warfare in the Mediterranean in World War II.

The Imperial Japanese Navy is covered in chapter 5 by Mark Peattie, author of two previous studies of the *Teikoku Kaigun*.⁵ He provides an excellent summary of Japanese naval tradition and operational doctrine, as well as the usual concisely organized information on command structure, training, ship types, weapons, and so on.

The US Navy is treated in chapter 6 by Trent Hone, author of an earlier monograph on its interwar history.⁶ After a very cursory "backstory" section about USN traditions and missions, it dives into more technical coverage of organization, intelligence, and doctrine. There is also a long section on naval aviation.

Chapter 7, on the *Voenno-morskoi Flot SSSR*, is by Stephen McLaughlin, author of *Russian and Soviet Battleships*.⁷ For general readers, it will provide new and surprising information, especially on the Red Navy's anti-Mahanian strategic planning and the decisive impact of national geography on its dispositions and defined missions.

Each chapter is well illustrated with various Major Unit Tables or Budgetary Estimates, and Orders of Battle. A handful of maps and well-chosen photographs are included, more in some chapters than in others. Throughout, there are painstaking technical discussions of guns, mines, torpedoes, radars, sonars, naval aviation facilities and capabilities, and other offensive and defensive systems, as well as more limited treatments of traditions, missions, and doctrines. Three short appendices cover Guns and Torpedoes, Ranks, and Conversions and Abbreviations. Casual readers seeking a general narrative history of the great naval contests of 1939–45 should look elsewhere, although what there is along those lines in this collection is succinct and insightful. Advanced readers who need a reliable, compact overview of the major navies of World War II will want to keep this fine compendium near to hand.

3. E.g., *Carrier Combat* (Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 1994) and *Royal Navy Handbook: 1914–1918* (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2006).

4. They are co-authors of *Dark Navy: The Italian Regia Marina and the Armistice of 8 September 1943* (Ann Arbor, MI: Nimble Books, 2009). See also, by Cernuschi, *Il sottomarino italiano: storia di un'evoluzione non conclusa, 1909–1958* (Rome: Rivista Marittima, 1999), and, by O'Hara, *Struggle for the Middle Sea: The Great Navies at War in the Mediterranean Theater, 1940–1945* (Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 2009).

5. *Kaigun* (Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 1994), co-authored with David Evans, and *Sunburst: The Rise of Japanese Naval Airpower, 1909–1941* (Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 2002).

6. *Battle Line: The United States Navy, 1919–1939* (Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 2006), co-authored with Thomas C. Hone.

7. Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 2003.