Book review by Fred Lane


Some prefer their war histories laid out in infinite precise detail, backed up by footnotes and attributions, like Antony Beevor’s *Berlin* and *Stalingrad*. Others prefer broader but still well-written presentations. Robert Cowley edits this selection of 45 brilliant essays, each describing an important event or series of events in WW II.

The essays are backed up by 20 maps, but no photographs, and range from eyewitness accounts to broad strategy discussions. Each essay is prefaced by a short introduction that sets the scene and lists the essay author’s credentials.

David Balme, for the first time publicly, tells how he recovered the Enigma cryptography machine from U-110, blown to the surface by depth charges on 9 May 1941. He was the SBLT in charge of HMS Bulldog's boarding party but had never rehearsed the boarding evolution. With considerable trepidation he clambers up the wallowing submarine’s side and, with his communications sailor, not only secures the Enigma machine, but also an envelope containing its June settings.

Antony Beevor offers a 16-page virtual precis of his *Stalingrad* book (first published in 1998). All the essential details are here, but this essay lacks the meat-grinder detail of the book.

No doubt many readers will prefer this potted version.
Operation Cerberus, the escape of *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* through the English Channel, 11-13 February 1942, and Ord Wingate’s Burma Campaign are described, but there is little or no mention of events closer to home, such as Kokoda, the Battle of the Coral Sea or the Battle of Milne Bay. Perhaps this is a side effect of a perceived anti-MacArthur bias. The chapters on MacArthur’s Philippines performance certainly do not praise him. 

**AUSTRALIAN CONTRIBUTIONS?**

Then again, it might well be that Australian authors or those who write about Australia’s part in WW II lack the support or skill of their contemporaries. As another example of poor Australia-related reporting, a personal account of the El Alamein assault makes no mention whatsoever of the brilliant Australian Ninth Division’s assault.

On the other hand, Cowley correctly reminds us of the amazingly brave, resourceful and successful Italians of the Decima Mas. This speedboat and frogman unit created havoc from Alexandria to Gibraltar between March 1941 and August 1943.

This book is strongly recommended to all those who seek brief descriptions of many of the most seminal WWII events.

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**USN WW II Fighters**

Posted on **Sunday 9 August, 2009** by **admin**


This volume preceded the excellent *US Navy WW II dive and torpedo bombers*. It is an equally gripping and well-written tale by the same pair of highly skilled aviation and naval historians. As the title suggests, the book describes the development and operational records of both successful and unsuccessful USN WW II fighter aircraft.

Starting logically with a brief description of pre-war USN and other fighters, the authors rebut some of the criticism of the much-maligned Brewster Buffalo fighter. It was never an ideal carrier-borne fighter for a number of reasons, including a delicate undercarriage unsuited to landing on a pitching and rolling deck.

Land-based Marines, who were used to receiving cast-offs, also found it wanting because of its lacklustre performance in the air. At Midway, one black day in June 1942, a dozen of 19 aircraft in one USMC Buffalo squadron were destroyed by Japanese carrier aircraft. Nevertheless, when flown by experienced aircrew using better tactics it could achieve considerable success. In Finland, the Brewster Buffalo recorded an impressive 25:1 kill:loss ratio against Russian aircraft (p 60).

**GRUMMAN IRONWORKS**

The old reliable Grumman ironworks, naturally, dominates the book, because Grumman fighter aircraft dominated USN inventories in WW II. Developed from an original biplane concept, the brilliant Grumman F4F Wildcat (RN Martlet) held the fort until the even better Grumman F6F Hellcat entered the fray in August 1943. No fewer than 5,156 aircraft were claimed shot down by F6Fs alone in the Pacific theatre, versus 3,705 by all the USAF’s fighters in the same theatre. Another 1,006 fell to the USN’s F4F Wildcats (p35).
The other significant WWII USN fighter was the bent wing Vought F4U Corsair. It suffered from slow development associated with a host of early modifications, many of which were required to solve early deck landing problems. Employed initially as a land-based fighter in Guadalcanal from February 1943, it ultimately more than proved its worth and was accepted aboard American carriers towards the end of 1944. The first of the RN’s eventual 13 Corsair squadrons to see action was from HMS Victorious in a strike against Tirpitz in April 1944. Hauling a substantial weapons load, the “Hose-nose” also proved to be an excellent Army Support aircraft in Korea, operating from both carriers and airfields ashore.

**F8F-1 BEARCAT**

The authors also describe a number of other very interesting naval fighters that were in production or in advanced stages of design by the war’s end. The Grumman F8F-1 Bearcat was one. It arrived too late to see combat in WWII, but it won enormous respect for a performance that challenged even the Hawker Sea Fury around the racing pylons in the USA.

Like the Sea Fury, the F8F-1B version mounted four 20 mm cannon, a highly significant upgrade on the .5 inch or smaller machine guns of most of its USN and USAAF predecessors. Both aircraft, however, were quickly overtaken in the 1950s by an entirely new generation of jet-propelled fighters.

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**USN WWII Bombers**

Posted on Sunday 9 August, 2009 by admin

**USN Dive and Torpedo Bombers of WW II**

Book review by Fred Lane


This highly interesting book, together with a companion piece, *US Navy Fighters of WW II*, vividly describe the vitally important parts played by USN aircraft and their aircraft carriers in WWII. It is not a “mom and apple pie” book. It critically analyses the shortcomings of some aircraft types and some misguided tactics. No matter how good a new aircraft type looks on paper, if it is not developed properly and flown with commonsense, it tends to kill the wrong people.

On the other hand, recovering from an appalling start with inferior aircraft on that “day of infamy” 7 December 1941, the USN, aircraft manufacturers and especially operational aircrew forged a strike weapons system that halted and turned back the then seemingly invincible Japanese. USN dive and torpedo bombers had an important anti-shipping role, but they were never employed simply to sink ships.

The same aircraft that sank the biggest battleship in the world, HIJMS Yamato in 1945, also enabled Nimitz’s highly successful direct thrust strategy. The WWII Pacific Ocean battles might have been bigger than anything in naval history yet, but to put the USN’s strike effort in perspective, “From 1942 through 1945, only 18.8 per cent of carrier aircraft sorties were launched against enemy ships” (p.113). The remainder were chiefly strikes against land targets, invaluable close air support to invading ground troops and fighter defence.

Naval historians Tillman (see *In harm’s way: The saga of Gambier Bay*) and Lawson (see *US Navy Fighters of WW II*) show how the
USN, like the RN’s Fleet Air Arm, were woefully under-equipped at the outbreak of WW II, with an inventory of only 239 scouts, dive bombers and torpedo planes, “including 89 biplanes” (p. 8) embarked in five aircraft carriers. On 7 December 1941, six Japanese carriers launched 386 aircraft, including the then incomparable Zero fighter, to attack Pearl Harbor. By an amazing stroke of good fortune, the American carriers were at sea. They were the kernel from which all initial retaliation sprang and from which grew the versatile and overwhelming force it is today.

HARD TIMES

The early WW II days were hard. The first all-carrier naval battle in history was fought in the Coral Sea that laps Australia’s shores, in May 1942, when aircraft from the USS Lexington and Yorktown sank the light Japanese carrier Shoho, but at the cost of the much more valuable fleet carrier Lexington. The Americans more than evened the score, with the help of some clever signals intelligence, on 4-5 June at Midway. Tillman and Lawson show how the tempo of USN strike operations increased, particularly with the introduction of the Grumman TBM/TBF Avenger and the magnificent Essex class carriers.

The Grumman TBM/TBF Avenger quickly replaced both the TBD-1 Devastator and SB2U Vindicator torpedo bombers/scouts. Meanwhile, the well-loved SBD-2/SBD-3 Douglas Dauntless became the dive bomber of choice. Devastator crews experienced 83 per cent losses at Midway while on the other hand the Dauntless dive bomber was credited with sinking all four Japanese carriers. A planned Dauntless replacement, the new Curtiss SB2C Helldiver, arrived in April 1942, but with expectations not matched by performance. “Problems as diverse as hook skip, collapsed landing gear and structural failures cast a cloud over the entire program,” Tillman and Lawson note (p. 44).

There are dozens of excellent quality photographs of naval aviators, their carriers and their aircraft in the book. It is recommended reading.

Padfield: Sea Power 1788-1851

Book review by Fred Lane

Padfield, Peter. *Maritime power and the struggle for freedom: Naval campaigns that shaped the modern world 1788-1851*. The Overlook Press: Woodstock, 2005. 467 pages including a comprehensive index, glossary, 16 pages of illustrations and another nine pages of maps. RRP is US$35, but unmarked used books are available on the internet for about AU$20 plus $7 or so postage.

This great Christmas present book follows *Maritime supremacy and the opening of the Western Mind: Naval campaigns that shaped the modern world 1588-1782*, by the same author. It covers a vital period when Royal Navy ships, led by officers such as Jervis and Nelson, established a maritime supremacy that permitted trade expansion and colonisation on scales that had never before been contemplated.

Padfield also discusses the bucket of cold water administered by the USA in 1812-13. Importantly, he describes the last days of naval warfare before steam and iron trashed the rules. He explains how Jack Tars, in wooden sailing ships at the pinnacle of their development cycle, fought battles that led to the destruction of entrenched geopolitical ideologies.

Correlated with a Europe-wide struggle to define and govern an emerging “freedom of the masses”, Padfield shows how the Royal Navy and a British civilian population of about 20 million radically reshaped society in a little over 50 years.
Youngsters interested in only the blood and guts of battle might find Padfield’s sociopolitical arguments a little long-winded as he reprises the theoretical concepts of Sociology 101’s “usual suspects”. Nevertheless, this is an essential prerequisite and there is enough blood and guts to satisfy even the most bloodthirsty. All the important sea battles are there, including a thrilling virtual shot-by-shot report of Howe’s 1794 Glorious First of June. “Howe had shown the way,” Padfield asserts. “Within a few years Nelson would follow and lift naval warfare to greater heights of daring and destructiveness” (p. 103).

In the contexts of their respective officer corps, Padfield cleverly analyses the socioeconomic development and promotion of major personalities, like Napoleon and Nelson. Both were “… of small height and slight build … who had raised (themselves) through similar extraordinary ambition, flare (sic) and audacity to heroic status” (p 129). With equal dexterity and attention to detail he shows how British superiority in gunnery, seamanship, signalling and fleet tactics determined battles.

**GEOPOLITICAL MOVEMENTS**

Padfield illustrates how maritime supremacy shaped crucial geopolitical movements. He acknowledges the devastating land warfare clashes, but correctly points out that these armies were financed by nations. His bottom line: It was the maritime nations that controlled trade, therefore they had the deeper pockets and won the final battles.

How was this fiscal success achieved? As Padfield asserts, all the warring nations were deeply in debt but after Jervis’s singular 1797 St Vincent success, “News of the victory restored British government credit practically at a stroke. It was more than ever clear that, however many ships her enemies might bring against her, they would be no match for British fleets” (p 128). Of course, had Nelson not broken from the British line without orders and acted on his own initiative, capturing two much larger ships than his own, and had Collingwood not come to his old gunroom messmate’s assistance, St Vincent might well have had a vastly different outcome.

Napoleon commanded an army ostensibly to invade England in 1798, but he had broader aims. He saw the impossibility of achieving his primary task without first destroying the Royal Navy, but first his country’s crippled treasury needed money. He looted the Vatican’s coffers, then Switzerland’s. Then he stripped the money vaults of the wealthy Knights Templar of Malta on his way to invading Egypt. There, he planned to interdict Britain’s access to India and other Asian trading nations.

**UNDERESTIMATED RN**

Napoleon underestimated the Royal Navy and Nelson who, at Aboukir, inflicted “… the worst ever French defeat and unprecedented in naval history. Strategically it was decisive. France had lost control of the Mediterranean. Bonaparte’s army was imprisoned in Egypt … “(p 166).

Trafalgar in 1805 was the last, biggest and most decisive major battle under sail. It was an overwhelming victory for Nelson, but also a tragedy. The nation at once rejoiced in the victory and mourned their gallant hero’s death.

These and other Royal Navy victories changed the world. Britain’s subsequent buoyant economy was based on unparalleled growth of colonial trade protected by a strong navy. This commerce supported the development of a truly accountable democratic government system that led to advances such as the abolition of slavery. All this shaped the “freedom” that we take for granted.
The legendary Andrew W. (Nicky) Barr is well enough known in aircrew circles, but few non-flying Australians know much about his amazing WW II service. This book by Peter Dornan puts this into perspective. Nicky detested war, intensely and vehemently (p. 227), but this did not prevent him from becoming one of the top ten RAAF WW II aces in numbers of enemy aircraft shot down. He accomplished all this despite being shot down three times, forced landing in enemy territory, repairing his engine and flying home. As a POW, he was captured or recaptured three times; and escaped four times. He died recently, on 12 June 2006.

Nicky earned a very rare combination of decorations the hard way: OBE, MC, DFC and Bar. He also became a member of the highly selective Red-eyed Caterpillar Club (parachuted from a burning aircraft) and the Flying Boot Club (returned to operations at his home base after landing behind enemy lines) and he gained a triple “Escaper” qualification.

In September 1940 Nicky Barr qualified as a brand new Flying Officer pilot at RAAF Point Cook. In action in the Western Desert 23 November 1941, he flew Curtiss P-40 Tomahawks against German and Italian aircraft supporting Rommel. Six months later, by 26 May 1942, he was a Squadron Leader in command of 3 Squadron, re-equipped with P-40D Kittyhawks. A month later he was shot down, severely wounded and taken prisoner.

It was amazing that more RAAF aircraft were not lost in the Western Desert. In the early days, Dornan says, they used tactics such as flying in vics or box fours and forming defensive Luftberry circles in the presence of enemy fighters. Giving barely more than lip service to the German-developed imperative of fighting in pairs, RAAF tactics frequently resulted in pairs splitting to attack targets of opportunity. This in turn led to bad habits such as haring off after a target any old time anyone sighted an enemy aircraft. It was rare, it seems, for Barr to return to base after a dogfight as a member of an intact pair. In contrast, some German fighter pilots, in marginally better-performing Me 109s, were shooting down aircraft at four or five times a RAAF squadron’s rate.

Shot down, wounded and captured in the Western Desert, Nicky was sent to Italy, where he escaped from hospital but was recaptured in sight of Lake Como, on the Italian-Swiss border. Tried for the murder of a border guard, who Nicky had knocked unconscious with a rock, he faced an automatic death sentence, until a Swiss official dramatically proved the guard was still alive. Other escapes followed, including one from an SS prison in Austria.

He evaded back into Italy and made his way south, where he fell in with a group of British and American commandos 50 kilometres or so behind enemy lines. This group passed on intelligence, conducted sabotage and herded escapees to safety.

Caught by the SS, he escaped yet again. He had a price on his head but he became the group’s leader. The poor Italian peasants he befriended never betrayed him. All this earned him a well-deserved MC. When he finally crossed into friendly territory he was emotionally exhausted, emaciated, suffering from malaria and had a debilitating blood disease linked to infections in his old wounds. The book describes his slow return to health, his triumphant return to full flying duties and his tender reunion with his wife, Dot, in Melbourne. Discharged as a Wing Commander after the war, he enjoyed a highly successful non-flying career in civilian life. The book concludes with an interesting series of vignettes describing both enemy and Allied characters with whom Nicky re-established postwar contact.
The stated fuel consumption of 650 tons of coal an hour must be in error. Southampton to New York is some 3000 miles. At 22.5 knots
the ship would have to consume some 86,000 tons of coal. She displaced only 46,000 tons. I would suggest that the ship would have
consumed less than 850 tons of coal a day and even this figure would have kept the 270 or so stokers very busy.

Of poignant interest is that not one of the engineer officers survived the collision. The electric lights, however, were still burning as the
ship plunged to her doom. This was possible because at least some of the 17 massive Merchant Navy Scotch boilers, each of which held
probably 20 to 30 tons of water, had enough stored energy to keep up steam as the ship slowly flooded.

(Ed. Note: Tom is correct and reviewer John Ellis agrees. The “per hour” figure was an egregious typo. It should have read “650 tons …
per day.”)

Ron Robb contributes to the Titanic discussion:

Browsing over Tom Fisher’s comments re John Ellis’ review of David Brown’s The Last Log of the Titanic stirred some half-forgotten
observations about the seemingly never-ending fascination with that ill-fated liner and brought to mind a few other stories, both mythical
and real, about other maritime disasters. It’s also worth noting that horrific disasters at sea still occur today. It may also come as a
surprise to know that the “golden age” of liner travel was less in the 1920s than it is today so the opportunities for disasters are as present
as ever. A few comments follow.

Photo showing smoke from Number three, but not number four funnel.
The first thing I noticed about the cutaway illustration of the legendary ship at the top of Tom’s letter was that it has a very common error
in non-photo pics of Titanic: smoke coming from the after smokestack. In fact, that structure was there mainly for show but was used as a
ventilating trunk, as John mentioned.
The public of the day equated power and speed with multiple funnels so the White Star line went along with the fad. The Last Log of the
Titanic has a painting on the front cover actually showing smoke coming from No 4 stack (p 10 Newsletter No. 54 and here). John picked
up a few errors and contradictions in David Brown’s book and this one appears even before one opens the cover.

The Riddle of the Titanic (Gardiner and Van der Vat, Orion: London, 1995) has good photos of both Titanic and Olympic (first of the
class) with a big head of steam and plenty of exhaust smoke, but with No. 4 stack showing none; that book also notes that No. 4 was for
ventilation only.

FITTING-OUT PHOTO
Titanic (Leo Marriot, PRC Books: London, 1997) specifically describes the three boiler rooms exhausting into funnels 1, 2 and 3. It also
shows a photo of her fitting-out with only the three active funnels in place at that stage and specifically draws attention to the fact that the
dummy fourth was to be fitted later. Moreover, it shows a number of famous paintings of Titanic, all correctly showing smoke from the
first three stacks only (and also a painting of Britannic, the third and last of the class, likewise showing no smoke).

Perhaps the most famous artist’s painting of the ill-fated vessel is Simon Fisher’s The Last Sunset, viewed from the port quarter and
depicting Titanic sailing west after leaving Queenstown, having worked-up to to full speed to meet Lord Ismay’s determination to break all
records, with voluminous smoke belching from the first three stacks, but nothing from the fourth.

 Titanic contemporary RMS Lusitania did have a number four funnel chimney.
Tom Fisher was right about the coal usage, as was John Ellis’ subsequent correction: The Last Log of the Titanic does indeed state that
she was fed 650 tons of coal per day, and that was by human muscle and shovels. Each stoker shifted five tons of coal per watch, of
which there were two of four hours per twenty-four.

Also confirmed is Tom’s note that not one of the engineer officers survived. According to Brown there were 35 of them under Chief
Engineer Joseph Bell. Gardiner and Van der Vat list 32, though if deck engineers, electricians, carpenters and boilermakers are included
then the number is greater than either. Whatever, the main two investigative enquiries did not manage to elicit much about the last hours
of the Marine Engineering/Electrical Department but what evidence there was indicated that those who survived the first engulfment stuck to their posts right to the end.

No doubt most of them would have eventually been overwhelmed in the flood as it began to overtake the lower regions, with menacing inexorability once No. 5 bulkhead at boiler room No. 6 gave way, having been weakened to the point of red heat by the just recently extinguished ten-day old bulk coal fire.

Bunker fires were common in those days, due to the unstable coal dust atmosphere and, rather than the bulk explosives cargo claimed by the German Government, a likely reason for the mysterious second explosion after the single torpedo that went into the Lusitania. (However, that point is still to this day being hotly argued).

PRESS ON REGARDLESS?
The whole confluence of events was all the while being rapidly exacerbated by Ismay’s insane determination to press on regardless and CAPT Smith’s reckless disregard for caution after the impact.

Of Bell’s enlisted engineering department, comprising 271 firemen, trimmers and greasers, only 47 survived. Probably only NOC members of a bygone age, such as those who worked in boiler/engine rooms of the big warships like the County class cruisers, the carriers and other such big steamers, can imagine what the last hour or so down there in Titanic must have been like.

As an ex-birdie I sometimes used to go down into those spaces and to me they seemed like a precursor of Hell. At least ships soon after Titanic were oil-fired but even then life in the bowels was no picnic. When one considers conditions where 650 tons of coal per day had to be shovelled by hand I must confess I have a mental picture something akin to those terrifying orcs working in that ghastly middle earth in the Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings movies – an eerie half light, punctuated by blazes of angry firelight from roaring furnaces, suffocating heat, black dust everywhere, sweaty bodies covered in grime.

WHY NO ENGINEER SURVIVORS?
I sometimes wonder why at least some of the Titanic engineers didn’t survive, as there would have been plenty of time for them to climb the ladders out of the partitioned compartments (which were open at the top but with the watertight doors now closed). Marriott in Titanic actually draws a comparison between Titanic’s uncapped compartments and the contemporary Cunarders Lusitania and Mauretania with their independently compartmentalised watertight integrity (warship style). Tom Fisher and John Ellis were both steam plumbers so they may care to elucidate.

Tom also noted that the ship’s electrics continued right to the end. People often remark on that and sometimes assume that it was artist’s or film director’s licence. We know that in fact there was a good head of steam available right to the end because launching of the lifeboats quite some time after the accident was made all the more difficult by the deafening roar of venting steam.

The sudden extinguishing of all that light and hideous grinding-and-shearing noise as the vessel finally broke up and plunged must have left a dramatic contrasting silence and a terrifying switch into starlit darkness. At that point the horror of their position would have become starkly obvious to the survivors, many more of whom were yet to perish.

Notwithstanding the errors by Brown in The Last Log of the Titanic as pointed out by John Ellis, in my opinion the book does make a good case for what happened during those few critical moments and suggests that the vessel grounded rather than collided with the iceberg. The initial damage was not all that great. Many passengers and crew were unaware of the impact and Brown goes to some length to explain what a grounding feels like, as opposed to a collision, and how different a vessel behaves in each case. He convincingly reconstructs the technical aspects of the accident to show that the first damage probably amounted to just a few metres of opening-up and that not more than a few centimetres wide.

The damage, he claims, was more a gentle crushing and rupturing of the rivet integrity rather than the than ice acting as a can-opener.

NEAR SUCCESS
First Officer Murdock attempted to “port” the ship around the iceberg and came within a whisker of pulling it off. He had successfully executed a similar manoeuvre in another ship and he understood the dynamics of multiple screw/single rudder ship handling. Brown seems confident that no “full astern” order had been given and that is consistent with Murdock’s skill.

If Brown’s reconstruction of events is right, a “full astern” order would have been counterproductive. I would be very interested to read a fish-head’s review of Brown’s book and would be happy to lend both that book and my Gardiner and Van der Vat’s The Riddle of the Titanic, which gives a scathing review of Lord Ismay and CAPT Smith for that purpose. Brown examined two aspects of the Titanic disaster in great detail: the technical aspects of ship design (including the current state of metallurgy) and the seamanship attitudes and actions of CAPT Smith and his duty bridge officers.

If Ismay had not been so obsessed with getting under way again, and CAPT Smith had exercised his better, and legally obligatory, judgement, the ship might well have survived what was almost certainly a manageable situation for which, after all, she had been designed. Murdock achieved a fair salvaging of the situation but his superiors squandered the chance to recover.

The Riddle of the Titanic is a damning review of the cavalier attitude within the whole of the White Star top management. A disaster by
Titanic or some other White Star liner, seems inevitable. There had been plenty before, including CAPT Smith’s collision in Olympic with an RN cruiser, HMS Hawke, for which he was found culpable. He had grounded another liner at least once before and one wonders how he rose to be Commodore of the White Star line.

Even as Titanic departed Southampton, Smith’s gung-ho attitude nearly caused a collision with the New York. The British Board of Trade was uneasy about White Star’s record, even though safety-at-sea regulations were appalling by today’s standards. White Star must have been a right slap-dash outfit.

To give them some due, White Star never claimed Titanic was “unsinkable”. The company quite reasonably trumpeted her superior construction but the “unsinkable” adjective was a media beat-up that took wing. In fact, the “unsinkable” description had virtually no currency until after the fact.

Why the fascination? The Titanic seems to cast a never-ending fascination over the lore of the sea and various theories have been put forward why, since it was by no means unique in terms of circumstances or numbers of fatalities.

It had, in fact, nearly faded from the scene until the 1953 movie A Night To Remember came out and then, more recently, Dr Robert Ballard finally found her so it leapt back into the public’s imagination. After the 1953 movie there was a rush of Titanic movies, the most fanciful being Raise the Titanic, of which one critic remarked that the movie was so expensive and such a flop that it would have been cheaper to drain the Atlantic.

One theory on the saga’s fascination is that it signified the end of the era of innocence and brought everybody up with a round turn to the realisation that mankind was not as smart and invincible as had been imagined towards the end of the golden Victorian age. My own guess is that, because many of the professionally qualified-to-comment officers perished and the log was lost, little evidence of what really happened was available to the two Boards. Additionally, uncorroborated stories by terrified and confused survivors who were unskilled in maritime affairs were accepted at face value.

The enquiries thus generated more heat than light and mystery still surrounds much of the case. The loss of the log raises some interesting questions since its impounding and preservation should not have been difficult, given the time available and the number of bridge officers who survived.

Suffice to say that Lord Bruce Ismay emerged from the enquiries with a less-than-glowing reputation and went into seclusion (he died in 1937 bearing the shameful epithet ‘Brute’ Ismay).

The pathos of survivors’ stories add an overtone of fascinated horror. All of these things are ingredients for a gripping yarn, as indeed A Night to Remember and the more recent Titanic were.

TITANIC TRIVIA

One positive effect of the heightened interest in the sinking of the Titanic is some very interesting research. For instance, Captain Stanley Lord of the Californian, who was the only convenient scapegoat that the British Board of Enquiry could dredge up, is now being steadily exonerated and reinstated as a sensible officer who acted in a professional manner after all.

Closer to home, a local researcher in the Morling College Archives discovered a postcard reference from a Rev. John Harper, who declined a Sydney ecclesiastical post. Instead of sailing to a new job in Australia, he became a Titanic passenger headed for America. He perished after heroically giving his lifeboat place to a young mother and child.

The last purported Australian survivor from the Titanic, William Hall, lived in Sydney, perhaps Castle Hill, but he died in 1997 and some doubt has been cast on the authenticity of his claims.

Australia is the only place known to have monuments to the band that played as the Titanic went down. The three bands of Broken Hill erected a pillar in December 1913 and people of the silver city claim it is the world’s only such monument.

However, it is not so well known that a bandstand memorial to the Titanic band was built at the lower end of Sturt St, Ballarat, in October 1915. The funds were raised by the Victorian Bands Association and the people of Ballarat but the plaque engraver got it wrong and listed the sinking date as 1913.

MUSIC PLAYED?

Speaking of bands, popular legend has it that the ship’s band played the hymn Nearer My God to Thee as she went down. It’s doubtful that they did and while some survivors claim to have heard the hymn being played, reliable eyewitnesses such as Second Officer Lightoller, passenger A.H. Barkworth and retired U.S. Army Colonel Archibald Gracie all aver that the band was playing cheerful ragtime music. Moreover, the band had long since abandoned their instruments before the ship began her final plunge.

However, the band did achieve a later record that takes its place amongst the “biggest” in the Titanic corpus. The body of band leader Thomas Hartley, of Colne, Lancashire, was recovered and returned to his home town. His funeral, a symbol for all the ordinary working class people lost in the sinking, was held on the 18th May. Colne’s population was only 26,000 but some 40,000 people lined the procession route and packed around the Methodist Chapel. It was therefore the biggest single event, by far, then or since, that commemorated the tragedy.
One Titanic coincidence was a Morgan Robertson 1898 story, *The Wreck of the Titan*, published originally as *Futility*. Although a good fiction yarn, some precognition and similar psychic believers find it startlingly prescient in its detail for the Titanic. Robertson was a former Merchant Navy officer responding to a perceived disregard of the danger posed by icebergs to the new steamships, with their rapidly growing size and speed. A similar story is claimed to have been published by an even earlier author, W.T. Stead in 1892.

There are poignant stories aplenty arising from the Titanic. One concerns stewardess Violet Jessop, who survived both the Titanic and Britannic disasters. However, the most determined survivor would have to be Fireman John Priest, who served in all three Olympic class ships and who also outlived the loss of both the Titanic and Britannic.

There are also amusing anecdotes. An American naval historian, Kit Bonner, recounted in a recent USNI Proceedings how he had been engaged as a technical adviser by the producers of the recent Titanic movie (starring Kate Winslett and Leonardo di Caprio, directed by James Cameron).

**TITANIC MOVIE**
The producers painted some rocks black to simulate coal. It was heavy stuff and was really tiring out the burly extras who had been hired. Bonner suggested that they use real coal because it was much lighter, but the company declined on the grounds that painted rocks looked more realistic.

John Ellis (Newsletter September 2003, p 10) drew attention to the gap between reality and life aboard Titanic as depicted in that movie. One example given by Bonner was his advice that having a “scantily clad” Kate Winslett at the prow of the ship enjoying a gentle breeze was silly. “My remark that the wind chill factor in the North Atlantic at that time of the year was probably 15 degrees (F) went ignored,” he said.

On the other hand, his young granddaughter solved one vexatious problem. “My contribution to this film pales in comparison to my seven-year-old granddaughter Sarah’s,” Bonner proudly reports. “She accompanied me one day to Skywalker Sound Studios, where she suggested that we use the dinosaur foot stomps from Jurassic Park to emulate the rhythmic thump of the Titanic’s engines.” So next time you watch machinery space scenes in a Titanic re-run, think Jurassic Park.

**THE REST OF THE CLASS**
Titanic’s two sister ships went on for some years. Britannic was the last of the three Olympics and on completion was requisitioned as a hospital ship for WW I. A German mine sank her on her sixth voyage in the Mediterranean on 21 November 1916. Interestingly, she received almost identical damage to Titanic and her Captain Bartlett made the same mistake as Titanic’s Smith. He attempted to move on again although, in fairness, he aimed to beach her on a nearby island. However, as with Titanic, the forward surge was too much for the damaged plates and rivets. They gave way so she, too, went down by the head. Only 21 lives were lost in the Britannic sinking, and those mostly by lifeboats tangling with the still-turning propellers. The warm Mediterranean water was also much more forgiving than the Atlantic’s icy grip around Titanic.

Robert Ballard has dived on Britannic and regards her as one of the best preserved wrecks he has ever seen. Underwater pictures show her lying on her starboard side with the bow and stern sections generally in good shape.

RMS Olympic served at Gallipoli and as a passenger ship until broken up in 1936. The Olympic actually completed a full service life until eventually broken up in 1936. Of interest to Australians is that she took part in the 1915 Gallipoli landings.

The class were actually well-designed ships and the two that were lost could almost certainly have withstood their damage if they hadn’t been driven so hard immediately after the disasters.

Brown makes a good case in *Last log of the Titanic* for her being not terribly wounded and he concludes that she should have survived if Ismay and Smith had not been so impatient. The ships were the epitome of their day for sound design and excellent workmanship. In fact, some marine engineers have remarked on the White Star line’s ships being sleek and “right-looking” compared with Cunard’s propensity to build bulky “top-heavy-looking” liners.

**A REALLY BIG MYTH**
Titanic by no means holds the record for number of fatalities, at an estimated 1523 or so. There have been a number of ships, both merchant and naval, that lost as many and in some cases far more souls, some in recent years, even with safety standards and navigational equipment far superior to that in 1912. The Lusitania disaster (some 1,198 fatalities) just a couple of years after Titanic was just as spectacular and to this day is surrounded by many unanswered questions.
On the 29th May, 1914, the *Empress of Ireland* was struck by a collier in the mouth of the St Lawrence. She was especially designed for superior watertight integrity and boasted 24 watertight bulkheads. Nevertheless, she sank in 14 minutes within close sight of land and 1,014 people went down with her. In December 1987 the super-ferry *Donna Paz* (mentioned by John Ellis) collided with a small tanker in the Philippines and somewhere between 4,341 and 4,500 lives were lost, well eclipsing *Titanic*.

However, the greatest sea disaster of all time, in terms of loss of life, could be the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, 25,484 tons, sunk in the Baltic by a Russian submarine on 30 January 1945, evacuating German civilians from Gdansk (Danzig) towards the end of WW II. The actual number of people who perished remains in doubt because of an unsubstantiated number of refugees aboard, but Robert McAuley conservatively records a loss of 5,200, Irwin Kappes says 5,348 and Mark Weber reports 5,400. A more recent work by Gunter Grass claims 9,000 lives lost, mostly women and children, but all agree that only about 1,239 survived.

The ship was one of Hitler’s “Strength through Joy” workers’ cruise ships built in the late 1930s but requisitioned by the Kriegsmarine in September 1939 as a hospital ship. She was designed to carry fewer than 2,000 passengers and crew but was grossly overloaded, maybe by a factor of more than five, in a desperate attempt to evacuate civilians from the advancing Russian Army. Heaven only knows how close her metacentric height was to the C of G.

**NEAR-FREEZING BALTIC**

At that time of the year the Baltic temperatures were even worse than *Titanic*’s Atlantic. Many people were lost after skidding across the ice-covered sloping deck, while a number of lifeboats could not be lowered because they were frozen to their davits.

Other German ships to sink with great loss of life about that time include the 14,666-ton *General von Steuben* on 10 February 1945, with the loss of 3,500 refugees and the 5,230-ton *Goya* on 16 April with perhaps 7,000 refugees and soldiers killed. The 27,000-ton *Cap Arcona* sank on 3 May with perhaps 5,000 concentration camp prisoners perishing in Lubeck Harbour after a British aircraft attack. The 2,800-ton *Thielbeck* was also sunk in the same 3 May raid, killing another 2,800 prisoners. Only 200 survived.

Grass is a well respected German-Polish writer. His work appears to be well researched, particularly on the *Wilhelm Gustloff* topic. He was born in Danzig, now Gdansk, in 1927 and was a member of the Hitler Youth. The *Wilhelm Gustloff* tragedy was kept quiet by the Germans for a long time and only recently are the circumstances being slowly rediscovered.

The Pacific War also saw its share of tragedy. The *Toyama Maru*, 5,400 tons, was torpedoed by USS *Sturgeon* on 29 June 1944, with the loss of 5,400 troops and POWs. On 18 September 1944, HMS *Tradewind* torpedoed the *Junyo Maru*, 5,065 tons, killing 5,620 POWs and slave labourers.

**THE NEW GOLDEN AGE**

Finally, we tend to think of the 1900s to the late 1930s as the golden era of great liner travel. In fact, more people are travelling by ocean liner and recording more ocean liner passenger miles right now, in 2004, than ever before in history. In 1999 some five and a half million people travelled by sea but by 2002 this figure had increased to more than seven million. About 250 large liners are in operation, filled to 90 per cent or beyond capacity. More than 40 others are building or on order from mainly European yards and orders stretch out for some years ahead. (The Finns, French, Italians and Germans have the game sewn up. The British have evidently lost their manufacturing, marketing or government support skills.) It is sobering to realise that Great Britain, once the world’s leader in mega-liner construction, now has its flagship built by others.

The P & O Star *Princess* was a big ship but the new *Queen Mary 2*, launched at St Nazaire in March 2003 and commissioned in January 2004 is now in service. She weighs in at 150,000 tons and carries over 3,000 cruise passengers.

However, even larger vessels are on the drawing boards with tonnages of a quarter of a million under consideration. That equates to a large town with all its infrastructure.
The ocean cruise is the main reason for this shipbuilding surge and evidence of this may be found in any recent photo of any of the bigger Caribbean ports. There will be several giant liners alongside. The Mediterranean and Alaskan cruises are also big business and many Australian ports are used to cruise ships coming and going.

HARLAND AND WOLFF

The Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast that employed 30,000 in its heyday is still building big tankers and freighters, but it is hardly a household name today. Wistful reminders are the twin slipways where the Olympics were built. They’re still there, unused and derelict alongside an equally unused and derelict car park.

With these new behemoths regularly plying the oceans in large numbers it may be confidently forecast that it will be only a matter of time before one of them faces a disaster. That won’t happen in this age of sophisticated technology? Think again of Andrea Doria and recall Queen Elizabeth 2 ripping her bottom open in December 1975 on a Nassau reef. Technology is no guarantee. Consider the latest super-technology in aircraft where sometimes the technology itself was actually the cause of disaster. Never mind the destruction of the mighty New York World Trade Centre by terrorists wielding nothing more lethal than Stanley knife box cutters.

A Cunard spokesman at the 2003 launching of Queen Mary 2 was asked if he saw any similarities between Titanic and the first voyage of the new luxury monster setting out on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic. The Cunard man grandly asserted that no such thing could happen these days. Queen Mary 2 is double hulled, with the latest in construction methods and metallurgy, 21st century navigation gear, Iceberg Watch, and so on. He actually declared the new Cunarder “unsinkable”. There are also plenty of lifeboats, that are well fitted-out, self righting, seaworthy and enclosed.
But pay close attention to the life jacket and abandon ship drills as you leave harbour.

REFERENCES:


Titanic’s last log

Posted on Tuesday 4 August, 2009 by admin

Book review by John Ellis

The many closet Titanic aficionados out there will be fascinated with David Brown’s re-creation of the ship’s deck log for the first watch of 14 April 1912. Brown holds a US Coast Guard master’s licence and teaches professional level USCG licensing courses. He also writes
Brown leapt to his keyboard following the Hollywood spectacle that he saw more concerned with period costume and a fictional romance than fact. He seeks to debunk many of the myths from that and other feature films, documentaries and stories and to establish just what did occur on the bridge and record these events in his “deck log”. He has used the reports of the British and American investigations into the tragedy, 30 books and several websites as references as well as discussions with the Titanic Historical Society.

One of his website references argues, though not convincingly, a quite different sequence of conning orders associated with the collision. Indeed, the websites visited by this reviewer seemed to be a jumble of “facts” submitted by self-proclaimed experts, often in such appalling prose that it led to questioning the value of any of the information.

**OW WATCHBILL**

Bridge watchkeepers will be interested in the anchor clankers’ watchbill. After the master there was a chief officer and six officers. The chief, 1st and 2nd officer kept one in three while the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th officers were watch about, ensuring three officers on watch at any one time. The junior officers kept conventional watch hours, but the senior officers changed half way through a watch so that 2nd Officer Lightoller, the senior survivor, went on watch at 1800 and was relieved by 1st Officer Murdoch at 2200. Lookouts stood two hours on and four off and quartermasters were watch about with two hours at the helm and two hours as OOW’s runner when on watch.

**THREE PROPELLERS, 17 KETTLES**

The description of the propulsion system is minimal, not quite correct and will disappoint engineers. Titanic had three screws and one rudder. The outer screws, 7.2 m diameter with three blades, were driven by triple expansion reversible steam engines that had one high pressure, one intermediate pressure and two low pressure cylinders. The centre screw, 5 m diameter with four blades, was driven by a steam turbine fed from the exhaust of the two reciprocating engines. It had no astern capability. All were coupled directly to the propeller shafts so that 75 rpm achieved 22.25 knots, the speed reported at the time of the grounding.

Full power delivered 80 rpm. There were four 400 kW generators and two refrigeration compressors. Saturated steam at 200 psi came from 12 double-ended and five single-ended fire tube cylindrical boilers that together consumed 650 tons of coal per hour. There were six boiler rooms, an engine room for the reciprocating engines, another for the turbine and another for the auxiliary machinery. All this required 30 officers and 271 men.

Brown is critical of the findings of both the American and British investigations. The American report, chaired by Senator W.A. Smith, demonstrated his panel’s lack of seafaring experience and Lord Mersey, the British Wreck Commissioner, was mindful of current rivalry between Great Britain and Germany on the Atlantic passenger run and tension leading up to World War I.

**SCAPEGOAT**

Neither report found Mr J.B. Ismay or Captain E.J. Smith to blame but found a live scapegoat in Captain Lord of *Californian* for failing to react to distress signals. Brown lays the blame with Ismay and Smith.

Ismay was the general manager of both International Mercantile Marine and its subsidiary, the White Star Line. He was aboard *Titanic*. He sought to attract passengers to his ships and indeed had secured finance for the three super liners, Olympic, Titanic and Britannic, to be built at Harland & Wolff. He also saw to Smith’s appointment as master, seeing him as compliant to business-oriented outlooks that sometimes overrode good seamanship. This led to Titanic sailing with a smouldering bunker fire and maintaining near top speed into seas reported to contain field ice and icebergs. Brown maintains that because of First Officer Murdoch’s skilful conning of the ship on sighting the iceberg, the ship could have remained afloat until assistance arrived, even though the bottom was holed. Ismay’s desire to proceed to Halifax after the grounding aggravated the flooding beyond the capability of damage control facilities, and the rest is history.

For an account that seeks to correct others, a few errors seem to remain. He refers to ships in the current politically correct neuter although his contemporary quotations use feminine participles. For one who gives an excellent appendix of nautical terms and is at pains to explain the nuances of terms less familiar to landlubbers, Brown seems to be one who is on, not in, a ship. This reviewer’s divisional officer would squirm.

The cover depicts the ship going down with smoke coming from all four funnels. In fact, only the first three exhausted boiler flue gas while the fourth improved symmetry and ducted ventilation exhaust. The cover also portrays Captain Smith with an “unknown” officer. One of Brown’s references identifies the officer as Purser McElroy.

**PROP BLADES?**

When discussing engine vibration, Brown states that all three propellers had four blades. In fact, from photographs and descriptions of machinery in his references, the arrangement was as described above. Brown gives output from the three engines at about 45,000 hp. One of his references clearly states there was 15,000 hp available from each of the reciprocating engines and 16,000 hp from the turbine. He also suggests that Murdoch did not order full astern for fear of snapping propeller shafts, yet another of his references states that during builder’s trials, Titanic did apply full astern from 20 knots ahead, stopping in just over 780 m.
Interestingly, Brown calculates that the iceberg was 835 metres ahead when the lookouts rang down the warning to the bridge and then compliments Murdoch’s ship handling to avoid a head-on collision. In a summary of key survivors, Murdoch is ranked second officer instead of first and fifth Officer Lowe is recorded as dying in 1964 aged 61. This suggests that Lowe was aged nine when Titanic went down. In fact, Lowe died in 1944 aged 61.

HARLAND & WOLFF

Brown describes Thomas Andrews, travelling aboard, as a representative of Harland & Wolff. His other references all have Andrews listed more specifically as managing director of the shipbuilding company.

Nevertheless, anchor clankers who are Titanic buffs will find much of interest and value. Of course, the loss of Titanic would be named by most people as the worst peacetime maritime disaster of all time, with over 1500 of the 2200 souls on board lost. Yet in 1987 a ferry went down off the Philippines with a loss of over 4,000 pilgrims. Would Hollywood see box office potential in that story?

Korean War

Book review by Fred Lane


Written from the viewpoint of a British National Serviceman, this book gives very detailed blow-by-blow descriptions of most of the important land actions in Korea. The author is clearly Army-aware but he is also very much cognisant of the naval and air contributions to the war.

The soft cover version of this book includes a thoroughly detailed index, notes and references for each chapter, together with thoughtful appendices listing common Korean language place name suffixes, national casualties in UN forces and the principal USA civilian and military leaders.

It starts logically at the beginning, with the notification to President Truman of the crossing of the 39th parallel border on Saturday 25 June 1950. It deals with actions as late as 1988, with an admission by North Korea that one of its submarines, caught in fishing nets, had been engaged in clandestine operations against South Korea. It shows how China asserted itself to international military prominence with decisive and surprising Peoples Liberation Army participation in the conflict.

The army actions described are in strict chronological order and the author pulls no punches with well-documented criticism of sometimes poor leadership. He makes up for this, in one sense, by unstinting praise for units, including Australian units, who held on or took ground despite the odds or despite the ultimate strategic logic of the particular action.

WELL-ILLUSTRATED

The book is well-illustrated with photographs and reproductions of propaganda pamphlets. There are many maps and diagrams, but some of them fail to include all the place names used in the nearby text. This leaves the reader hunting from map to map seeking to obtain a better grasp of the action.

OPERATION STRANGLE

He attempts to analyse the effects of naval and air contributions to the war. However, while correctly detecting shortcomings in the Operation Strangle strategy, to interdict supplies moving to the front line using land-based and carrier-based aircraft, he seems to record
Not mentioned in the book are the losses in action of RAN pilots LEUT Keith Clarkson, SBLT Dick Sinclair and ASLT Ron Coleman, all 805 Squadron Sea Fury pilots from HMAS Sydney.

It is a tough job to keep track of all the ships involved, but the book contains a number of internal inconsistencies with ship deployment. There are even errors with major warships such as aircraft carriers. His RN/RAN sequence and aircraft identification is erratic. On page 315 Catchpole says on “29 October 1952 Fleet Air Arm Seafires machine-gunned the enemy”. On that date these must have been Sea Furies from the British carrier HMS Ocean, not the Seafires that were briefly employed only at the very start of the war.

Other than a brief description of Valley Forge, American aircraft carriers get very short shrift, despite them contributing by far the major share of naval ordnance and reporting greatest losses.

Indeed, many might argue that it was the USN’s decision to strike “strategic” targets, previously reserved for the USAF, that finally uninstalled the Panmanjong Peace Talks.

**HMAS Sydney**

Catchpole also makes no mention of the outstanding East Coast deployments by HMAS Sydney and her aircraft, one of which, on 10-11 October 1951, sucked in a probable whole division to defend against an amphibious landing feint in the Kojo area. The enemy received a severe mauling from the Sydney Air Group and big guns from ships including New Jersey, the 16-inch battleship.

While the battleships were both accurate and devastating, at ranges of 20 miles or more inland, the destroyers and frigates achieved little. The battleships were rarely more than 50 yards off target with their first ranging shot. The destroyers and frigates shot a lot of shell, but even after painstakingly getting their ranging shots to fall somewhere near the target, their fire for effect broadsides would typically fall in 150 by 50 yards patterns. Even then, it could be practically guaranteed that the centre of the pattern would drift randomly fifty yards or more during the fire for effect sequence. Fortunately, spotter RAN Sea Furies also carried three-inch rockets with 60-pound heads and 600 rounds of high explosive and incendiary 20 mm cannon. Between the aircraft and the ships most designated targets received at least a nominal pasting.

**Mig 15s Scout Ocean**

Strangely, in the short “Naval Operations” chapter, despite noting the claimed Mig 15 shot down by LEUT Carmichael and his flight of four Sea Furies on 9 August 1952, there is no mention of the subsequent “pay back” that included a flight of Migs scouting Ocean. This at least contributed to, if not triggered, the wise decision to withdraw Ocean from her unnecessarily provocative North Yellow Sea position, back to the usual RN/RAN West Coast carrier spot, below the 39th parallel, out of Mig range.

The attention to detail and dramatic descriptions of land battles lend authenticity to Catchpole’s tales of action in Korea. The naval and air errors are disappointing, but they do not detract much from the book’s primary thrust, a meticulous description and analysis of the land battles of the Korean War. Catchpole’s expertise is clearly land-oriented and he makes the most of his Army-source material.
4. Internet Archive. The website is a huge repository of text, audio and video files, including public domain titles. You can browse and read online over 5 million books and items from over 1,500 collections. The books are available in a vast number of different file formats, so if you are looking for less popular ones, like Plucker or FictionBook2, Manybooks is a good destination to explore. Currently, there are almost 30,000 titles in Manybooks. For archives that mainly carry other languages, see the non-English languages archive listings. We break these out into categories: Large-scale repositories -- Significant indexes and search aids -- Significant smaller-scale archives. Large-scale repositories. These are big collections of texts, big enough to act as small library-like collections in their own right. The threshold for inclusion here may rise over time. Listed alphabetically.