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In All Respects Ready: Australia's Navy in World War One, by David Stevens

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Perhaps all of this is what makes the book unique, though. While the plot follows the typical path of a techno-thriller, where an aggressive move by a “bad guy” forces a “good guy” to join in a fight of epic proportions, the discomfort the reader feels at the end is real, despite all the fully anticipated and stereotyped characters, plots, and technologies.

But that is not so much thrilling as it is troubling. The disturbing question that lurks in the background and permeates the plot like an insidious, deadly gas is, how effective is the United States when it comes to using the diplomatic and informational elements of national power in the international arena? This might have been the true heart of the story. Surrounded by layers of protective muscle in military might and economic strength, have the diplomatic and informational elements of U.S. national power aged and atrophied beyond the size of the body they inhabit? Without the diplomatic and informational elements, can the government still operate on just the military and economic elements? The idea is unexplored, but *Ghost Fleet*, with a plot that takes Lady Liberty's sword and purse away right from the start, leaves readers suspended in a disbelief completely different from the one they thought they were entering.

CONNIE FRIZZELL



In All Respects Ready: Australia's Navy in World War One, by David Stevens. Melbourne, Austral.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014. 320 pages. \$59.95.

Writing a definitive history of any major conflict from a single nation's perspective can be an exacting task—and, in

the case of the First World War at sea, a thankless one too, when compared with the far better known and better reported situation on land. This notwithstanding, it is hard to imagine a more timely and well-balanced book. David Stevens, as the Royal Australian Navy's historian, was perhaps in a perfect position to take on this project, but this should in no way diminish what he has achieved. His extensive and far-reaching research has produced a work that, while entertaining and readable, has sufficient gravitas to ensure it will become the definitive work on the subject. This title will appeal to all audiences; historians will revel in the wealth of archival material and private diaries, but this book is far more appealing than a mere record of historical fact. Anyone who has been to sea and experienced life on board ship, in particular a warship, will appreciate the insights from someone so obviously well versed in this area. Drawing heavily on his own seagoing background, Stevens presents an engaging narrative that gets to the very heart of the unique human experience that is life at sea.

In many ways, then, this book represents the best of both possible approaches to a history of this type: the broad and analytical, which sweeps over the major maritime events of the time, giving the work its much-needed context; and the intensely personal, employing many passages from diaries, letters, and reports that together illustrate the rich variety of naval life from the deck plates to the wardroom. To this end, each chapter ends with a short biography of an important or interesting figure from the preceding pages, which both enriches and helps to consolidate this comprehensive coverage. The book also triumphs in another aspect: by not

overlooking the very real administrative challenges the young navy faced in trying to establish itself simultaneously with the moment of its supreme test: a world war at sea. Thus, interspersed with coverage of all the important actions at sea is a discussion of the myriad supporting activities necessary to develop a navy with global reach: the establishment of bases and supply lines; the use of native labor; the issues of pay and benefits; the challenges of recruiting and training; right down to health concerns and the treatment of offenders and deserters—it is all there. Even the boredom of the long and often fruitless patrols in search of contraband and intelligence, so much a feature of the war at sea and yet rarely reported on, is reproduced faithfully in an engaging manner.

In the end, one is left to marvel at the foresight of those who, all those years

ago, came up with the “fleet unit” idea, as a way for the British dominions to contribute to the naval defense of the global economic system—something that should still resonate today, in this new era of naval cooperation. Australia alone among them persevered with it, and as a result was propelled within a few short years into the companionship of those nations with true global reach at sea. This is an important book because, above all else, it is a lasting testament to the character of the Australian sailor. The hurdles were enormous, but the Australians, it seems, always rose to the challenges, overcoming them with ease under the most trying of circumstances—and with an alacrity and charm that has endeared them to all.

ANGUS ROSS

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