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U.S. Battleships: An Illustrated Design History

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trials board noted the "filthy and disorganised condition of this vessel" as delivered by the builders—she came to her end as a result of a tidal wave while anchored off Santo Domingo in 1916.

If the traditional military value of these ships was slight, their large hulls, particularly the *Pennsylvania's* and *Tennessee's*, gave the Nation exceptional value in the development of naval aviation. It was on the *Pennsylvania* that Eugene Ely first landed and from her that he took off in 1911. Marc Mitscher was in command of the aviation detachment aboard the *Huntington* (formerly *West Virginia*) when he went through experiences that perhaps presaged his "Turn on the lights" order in 1944.

That Mr. Musicant is an enthusiast is evident; that he is not a technician is also apparent. Reading the book, there are several occasions where you are jarred by the terminology. The problems in Dr. Friedman's cruiser book and now these minor, but noticeable problems in Mr. Musicant's book cause one to wonder about the naval knowledge of the editors of what is normally thought of as a prestigious naval publisher. "Depth" instead of "draft" marks, "contraptions" instead of "gear" and the probable misuse of "compression stroke" when referring to reciprocating steam machinery are examples.

The foregoing notwithstanding, if you are interested in the development of ships, and particularly their times and flavor, *U.S. Armored Cruisers* is a book well worth having. It is enjoy-

able and it has an added dimension, it can cause you to think.

STRAFFORD MORSS

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Friedman, Norman. *U.S. Battleships: An Illustrated Design History*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1986. 463pp. \$46.95

Now that Norman Friedman's battleship book is out, it must be considered on two levels. First, in the context of other dreadnought retrospectives. Second, in the context of his own series. It is the fourth volume, and the culmination of a series that includes destroyers, aircraft carriers, and cruisers. Now all the classic forms of the battle fleet have been covered.

What does this book tell us? What does his series tell us?

His book is not a BB log. It does not confine itself to the narrative of ships built in the age of steam and iron. In fact, major portions of the text talk about ships that never were, ships planned and cancelled, paper ships, even fanciful designs. Nearly 40 percent of the text addresses design planning; how actual ships came to be, and why others meant to be, never were.

This is a book not simply about battleships. It is a remembrance of what the capital ship concept meant to five or six generations of the U.S. Navy. The battleship was the source and centerpiece of strategy, indeed, the touchstone of seapower itself. In even bigger terms, it was the rough equation of national power, the

“benchmark” of American diplomacy and national security.

Friedman wants to show how actual battleship design technology was forged, and rolled to shape, and to suit national strategy. How did American ironclads make their own unique identity? Why did the *Texas* in 1914 or the *North Carolina* in 1941 look *exactly* as they did?

The answer is there. We see how early 20th century battlewagons were stunted by Congress, and later by international treaty. In a world of size and resource constraints, the trade-off between torpedo protection and plunging shellfire, or between 9 and 12 main guns, becomes the motive of the design process. In the process, the specific concerns of naval strategists emerge in a larger embrace: the politics of national security policy.

As they worry over allocating precious weight-limited ship tonnage, we get unexpected insight into the mental architecture of an anticipated conduct of war. The choices made by naval leaders in the making of their battleships is perhaps the clearest expression of their strategic world view. It is also a testament to their tenacity to sustain operational mission in the face of ambiguous political mandate.

Friedman does not describe the ship; he describes the thinking that described the ship. We watch battleships grow from the minds of individual men. These capital ships of the mind must pass myriad obstacles, and attain engineering and political consensus before even the first steel plate is laid. So this story is not an arcane excursion into naval architecture.

Friedman links combat engineering to its largest objective: the attainment of strategic goals. A battleship—in any era—drew its looks directly from its function.

In making explicit this connection he departs from other historical ship records. Although he devotes ample space to real ships after their commissioning, even here his focus is on how they were used; and physical changes made in actual ships as reflections of changes in operational-strategic thinking. So the battleship book is really the story of how the American Navy used available technology to achieve its mission.

His series of “battle force ship types” goes beyond this. The four volumes collectively draw together destroyers and cruisers and aircraft carriers and battleships. Looking at the series now, we can see how it shows their intertwined evolution: as they came to form a synergy of naval power.

Missing, until now, has been a picture of just what makes this Navy unique. Do American warships reflect actual continuities in a particular national “style” of strategy? How, in spite of continual technological change, has the Navy managed to preserve, even to expand, its ability to fulfill a demanding national strategy? And, ultimately, what do the ships tell us about our Navy, our very notions of national security, and ourselves?

Friedman has given the U.S. Navy a part of its past.

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