

Naval War College Review

Volume 34
Number 3 *May-June*

Article 23

1981

Hit First, Hit Hard: The Story of HMS 'Renown' 1916-48

Robert Shenk

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Shenk, Robert (1981) "Hit First, Hit Hard: The Story of HMS 'Renown' 1916-48," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 34 : No. 3 , Article 23.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol34/iss3/23>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

risky if revolutions occur. Here, the research has not been adequately updated for the Iranian Revolution (and perhaps could not be); thus, throughout, whenever Iran is described, we wonder how much is still relevant and how much is history (though of course still interesting). There must also be some doubt concerning the subject-matter orientation of the book. Is it about the policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia or about policies in the Persian Gulf? If the former, then it might have been better to examine just one country intensively. If the latter, then it might have been better to study more Persian Gulf states, e.g., Iraq, whose battle with Iran over the Shatt al Arab has taken on such importance. In any case, as structured, the book swings in focus from Iran to Saudi Arabia to the Persian Gulf generally, adding to the feeling, alluded to above, of sometimes having too much coming at one from different directions.

None of this diminishes Professor MacDonald's real contribution. His is a considerable effort, drawing upon material from many sources, political, historical, and economic, as well as legal. The book is a useful storehouse for anyone concerned with the roles of Iran and Saudi Arabia, specifically, or of developing countries, generally, in the development of the law of the sea.

MARK W. JANIS

University of Connecticut School of Law

Smith, Peter C. *Hit First, Hit Hard: The Story of HMS 'Renown' 1916-48*. London: William Kimber, 1979. 335pp.

This book traces the distinguished career of the British battle cruiser HMS *Renown*. "She hunted the *Graf Spee*," the jacket informs us, "and chased the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* off Norway. As Admiral Somerville's famous flagship she was at the bombardment of Genoa, in the hunt for the *Bismarck* and in the Malta convoy operations, and

served with the Home Fleet in guarding Arctic convoys and the North African landings." That survey suggests a much more stirring account than the facts and Smith's narrative actually provide. Not only did *Renown* actually engage only once with German capital ships, and then indecisively, but, overall, instead of one decisive moment following another, the dominant impression on reading the book is of *Renown* responding to false alarm after false alarm, serving on endless patrol, exercising her crew, taking part in fruitless searches, serving as an escort ship, and transporting British world figures at high speed from place to place. This is not to say that *Renown* wasn't the great ship she was reputed to be, but rather that Smith's narrative tends to emphasize the mundane. Only in the Mediterranean period is there nearly continuous action, and there are many more gripping accounts of the events involving Somerville and Force H than the one to be found in this book. Such a criticism is not really damning, however, for one could argue that by writing such a narrative, Smith has offered a valuable corrective to sea-novel portraits of war in which the tedious and routine is summarized in two short chapters and the rest of the book is filled with drama. Of course naval service isn't often like that—fortunately so, for too much of such drama for capital ships is usually fatal, as it was for the two other British battle cruisers of World War II—*Hood* and *Repulse*.

The battle cruiser type was of necessity far more vulnerable than the standard battleship. Designed to be "armed with the same main armaments as the latest battleships, but with the speed, or better, of the latest cruisers," *Renown* had three twin 15-inch guns and a top speed of 31 knots—but she had to be lightly armored to compensate for these advantages. The author gives us a good account of the original concept of this kind of vessel, as well as an

124 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

exhaustive account of the various modifications that *Renown*, in particular, went through. Unfortunately he does not stretch his narrative to give us an in-depth evaluation of the overall success of the type. Neither does he account for the fact that throughout her 30-year career *Renown* was a notoriously happy and high-spirited ship; one might have wished to know what part tradition and leadership played in *Renown's* high morale, or whether it was merely a product of chance. But while the author works into his book much personal recollection of captains and crew, on evaluation of the human affairs of the ship he is weak. In fact, overall, the book is a thoroughgoing chronology rather than a perceptive history. But chronology has its uses, and for those with a special interest in the ship or in the period *Hit First, Hit Hard* is recommended.

ROBERT SHENK
Commander, U.S. Naval Reserve

Solomon, Richard H., ed. *Asian Security in the 1980s: Problems and Policies for a Time of Transition*. Cambridge, Mass.: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1980. 324pp.

This book contains several revised papers that were originally presented at a RAND Corporation conference on East Asian security held in 1979. Among them are several highly impressive ones that analyze in great detail the security relationships that exist in this region and how they are affected both by external, great power influences and by internal influences. For almost all countries in East Asia, the foreign policy of the Soviet Union is presenting an increased threat. Crucial to how these countries face this threat will be the policies of the United States. The Soviet Union, though, is not the only challenge to security in this region: both Vietnam and North Korea pose a threat to stability as does internal turmoil within noncommunist countries.

The essays in this volume are extremely good in discussing how the U.S.S.R., Vietnam, and North Korea may threaten stability and what the foreign policy options of the United States, People's Republic of China, and other East Asian nations might be. These essays are less insightful, however, in discussing the threat of domestic turmoil within certain noncommunist countries. The authors criticize the Carter administration for its human rights policies, which they see as potentially causing a danger of destabilization within certain U.S. allies that would increase their vulnerability to external attack as well as decrease their ability to counter it. While such a question is a valid one, the authors, unfortunately, did not examine the question of to what extent does continued dictatorship in South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, and elsewhere affect the ability of these nations to defend themselves. Can dictatorships that refuse to leave office despite their unpopularity expect to command the same loyalty from their citizens as democratically elected governments? Indeed, is not the very existence of these dictatorships a cause of domestic unrest that the authors wish to see avoided? These questions are vital to the security of East Asian nations and thus deserve serious consideration.

In addition to security issues, several essays in this book examined economic ones affecting East Asia. Particularly interesting was that by Dr. Soedjatmoko that noted that there is a link between security and economics. Unfortunately, many Americans tend to regard these nations that it wishes to be allies for security purposes as enemies when it comes to trade. Paul Langer, for instance, seemed to feel that the solution of trade disputes between the United States and Japan that might block a more harmonious security relationship was for "further Japanese concessions and compromises in the economic