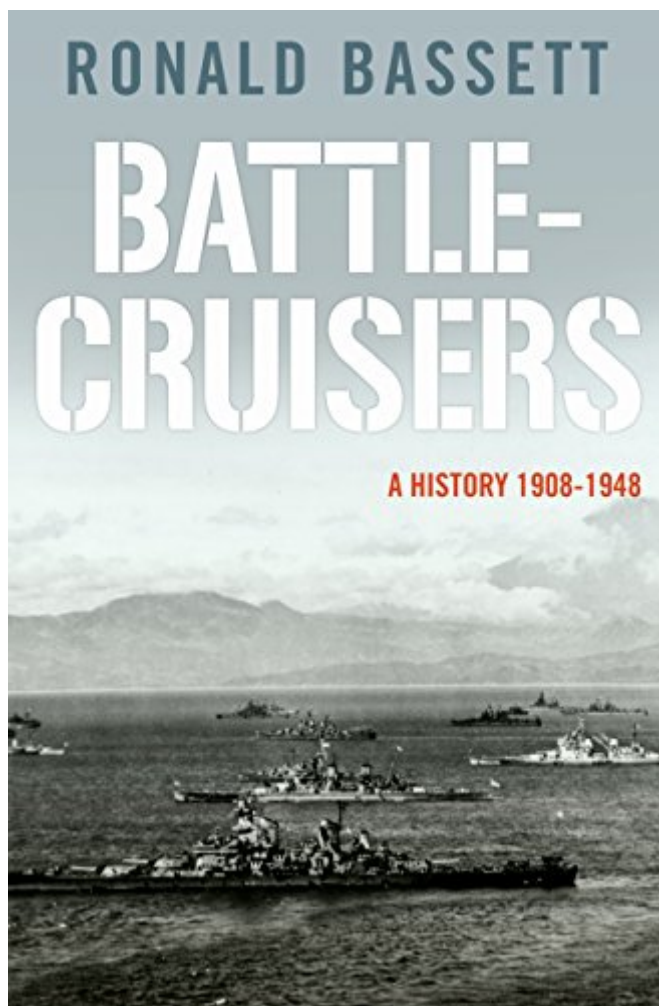


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Battle-Cruisers: A History 1908-48



Synopsis

A lean and hungry breed of warship, the battle cruisers burned their names deeply into the annals of sea-warfare. Fast and heavy-gunned, the battle-cruiser could overhaul and destroy anything at sea except the battleship. The brain child of Admiral Jacky Fisher, the battle-cruiser was intended to be light, fast, and able to avoid action with ships-of-the-line. However, the battle-cruisers came to be treated as fast battleships and expected to fight as a battleship. But their design rendered them vulnerable and left them outmatched. This weakness was cruelly exposed at the battle of Jutland in 1916, where three of the battle-cruisers exploded. Known as the 'Splendid Cats' for their speed and viciousness, battle cruisers fought at Heligoland Bight, the Falkland Islands, Dogger Bank and Jutland. Following the First World War the battle-cruisers biggest enemy was the scrapyard. Once more the world was plunged into war, and four battle-cruisers would be lost during the Second World War. The most famous is perhaps the Hood, following the action against the Bismark. Only the Renown survived both world wars, yet she was condemned to the breaker's yard in the summer of 1948. From the far side of the world to home waters, the battle-cruisers played a vital part in the British war effort. Combining meticulous research with a novelist's flair for storytelling, Battle-Cruisers vividly describes the life and times of the sixteen battle-cruisers built for the Royal Navy and Royal Australian Navy. Yet ships do not fight on their own. This is also the story of the men who served, lived, fought and faced adversity in these floating worlds. Ronald Bassett (1924-1996) was born in Chelsea. During the Munich crisis, at age fourteen, he falsified enlistment papers to become a Rifleman of the King's Royal Rifle Corps (60th Rifles). Following active service, he was exposed and discharged. In his records, his colonel noted, 'A good soldier. I am sorry to lose him.' Undismayed, he immediately entered the Royal Navy, in which he remained for fourteen years, serving in the Arctic, North Atlantic, Mediterranean, the Far East and, later, Korea. He died in Surrey.

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Customer Reviews

Bassett's book is a very thorough history of the battle-cruiser type. His writing is excellent enough for me to try some of his naval fiction. I especially liked his technical detail, battle descriptions, and opinions on how the ship type was used, or misused, in battle. If you are a reader of naval history, this book should be in your library.

Goof but could use more technical details

It would have been better if it looked at battlecruisers beyond those of Great Britain but otherwise a great read & hard to put down

Good book

A great history on the development and ensuing use of these vessels and the people who sailed in them.

A very interesting story of the British battlecruisers constructed between 1906 and 1920. The book contains much information on life aboard the ships and how they were deployed, mostly during World War I. There is an adequate summary of the technical aspects and historical development of the designs, accompanied by a few line drawings, but there are now much more thorough books available on these aspects of the ships (this book was originally published in 1983). Unfortunately, the book is marred by several minor but irritating technical errors: Page 7: it is stated that the German armored cruiser Blucher carried eight 210 mm guns as main armament. This is incorrect:

the main armament was twelve 210 mm guns in six twin turrets. The turrets were arranged hexagonally on the hull such that a broadside was eight guns. Page 10: it is stated that the main armament of the German battlecruiser Von der Tann was ten 11-inch guns. This is also incorrect: the main armament was eight 11-inch guns. The succeeding three ships, the Moltke, Goeben, and Seydlitz, were armed with ten 11-inch guns. Page 147: it is stated that the Admiralty had become aware that Germany was planning a series of battlecruisers mounting eight 15-inch guns, later identified as Mackensen, Graf Spee, Eitel Friedrich, and Furst Bismarck. This is not quite correct. British intelligence may have thought that these four ships were to mount 15-inch guns, but in fact they were to be armed with 350 mm (13.78-inch) guns. A subsequent group of three more ships were to be armed with 15-inch guns, but construction was never even started. Page 149: while discussing the three 18-inch guns constructed for the light battlecruiser Furious, the author states (Note 2) that "These guns were later taken to Singapore. In 1946 the author stumbled on them, half buried, overgrown with grass, and with their muzzles fractured, on the island of Blakang Mati, just off Singapore where they probably still are." This is impossible. I cite the book "The Big Guns" by Peter Hodges (1981), page 83: "There is a popular misconception that the three 18-inch guns were sent to Singapore but, although this may indeed have been mooted at some time, they did not, in fact, leave Great Britain." Hodges then goes on to describe exactly what happened to each of the three guns. Ultimately, two of the guns were sold for scrap in 1933 and the third was sold for scrap in 1947. Bassett may have seen one or more of the 15-inch guns at Singapore, of which five were installed, but it would not have been at Blakang Mati as all five of them were installed on the Singapore main island. According to the book "The Fatal Fortress" by Clements (2016), Pages 116 and 167, the three guns installed on Blakang Mati were 9.2-inch. These errors should not have occurred with even a minimal effort at investigation of sources on the ships of the Imperial German Navy and Royal Navy armaments. Page 88: it is stated that the initial bombardments of the outer forts at the Dardanelles began on March 19, 1915 with additional bombardments on March 25. The author is off by a month: the initial bombardments began in February, not March. For those of you who really thrive on battlecruiser histories (as I do!), I heartily recommend the following more up-to-date books, especially regarding technical aspects of their designs: "Battlecruisers" by John Roberts (1997); "British and German Battlecruisers: Their Development and Operations" by Cosentino and Stanglini (2016); "German Battlecruisers of World War I" by Gary Staff (2014); "Clydebank Battlecruisers: Forgotten Photographs from John Brown's Shipyard" by Ian Johnston (2011).

The history of the battle-cruiser in the British Navy is one surrounded by controversy. Ronald Bassett does a yeoman's job (pardon the pun) in explaining why the battle cruiser was built, what it was intended to do, and what it actually did. The spectacular losses at Jutland raised serious concerns about the battle-cruiser. A quarter of century later those same concerns were rehashed with the loss of the "Hood" in its epic battle with the "Bismarck." As he points out, it was a natural progression from a ship that was initially designed to take down cruisers with the firepower of a battleship to incorporating the battle-cruiser into the line of battle. Why no one seemed to anticipate the dangers is not satisfactorily explained. Nor is Admiralty's neglect of the "Hood" explained when its primary weakness was known almost from the beginning. Be that as it may, the author certainly gives a sense of "being there" in his descriptions of the various battles. He is a natural since he served in the Royal Navy and had experienced the tensions of combat and the pride of being part of what was the premier fleet in the world. It is worth a read. (FJR)

A book whose topic is a class of now-forgotten ships. Written from a classic British perspective; if the reader was not already aware of the fact both wars had multiple countries under the Allied umbrella, he would be led to believe both victories were won solely on the efforts of the Union Jack.

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