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Philip Kaplan, **Battleship**, Annapolis , MD : Naval Institute Press, 2004, 240 pp., illus.

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Sixty years after the last one was constructed, and more than a decade after the last one was decommissioned, battleships can still stir the imagination. Historians still produce historical publications on the technology, development, and deployment of big-gun battleships, and thousands of people still flock to walk the decks of the handful of battlewagons preserved as museum ships. Therefore, it is not surprising that Philip Kaplan's *Battleship* should appear in press. In many regards, *Battleship* is typical of the capital ship studies to come before it. The book emphasizes the role of the battleship in the two World Wars, focusing first on the battleship race between Great Britain and Germany , progressing through the Battle of Jutland, and culminating with the declining importance of battleships relative to aircraft carriers during World War II. Its approach is also typical in that the book devotes most of its pages to armament and naval combat than to the highly technical, but often less popular, aspects of design, technology, or propulsion.

Battleship is different from other books in other regards, however. The pages of narrative, while relatively few, are well-written, clear, and concise. The author obviously knows his subject, and there are few better accounts of battleship development and use in such a brief format. Another positive aspect of the narrative is the author's use of language. He mentions, describes, and defines technical terms so that an introductory reader can grasp the subject, but does so without creating a simplistic discourse that a knowledgeable reader would find boring. A very useful glossary appears at the end of the book. The only thing that diminishes the narrative is the omnipresent quotes that Kaplan includes in the margins of many pages. Often the quotes are appropriate to the discussion, but others are puzzling as to their relevance. Kaplan devotes a fair number of

pages to the life that common sailors lived aboard their battleship hosts. Battleship sailors, especially in the inter-war years, developed a unique fraternity, and Kaplan does an excellent job of capturing the pride that battleship sailors had for their ships and duty. The author accentuates the personal attachment that sailors had with their ships through the wide variety of excellent photographs used in the book. The photos are rendered in large format and are crisply reproduced, providing one of the best photographic records of battleships yet published.

While the photos are one of the positives of the book, they are also among its negatives. This is less a book about battleships than a photo album about battleships. In the author's defense, anyone who is familiar with Kaplan's publication records will find this book entirely consistent with his earlier works. Anyone looking for a more standard academic history of battleships will be disappointed by the absence of lengthy narrative, technical discussions, or political interplay. The book does not concern itself with broad international politics, contains no footnotes, and follows only a very loose chronological format.

It would be easy simply to write *Battleship* off as coffee table book and nothing more. But Kaplan's fine narrative and creative blending of photographs creates a book worth much more than mere decoration. While a knowledgeable historian or naval enthusiast might not find anything revealing in the book, a novice to the subject of battleships would find the book very useful. The snapshot of shipboard life, complimented by the interviews of surviving battleship sailors, provides a human presence to these massive machines. This human aspect often lost in other coldly technical battleship publications that stress displacement, firepower, and armor thickness, but seem to ignore the essential fact that humans control and sail in these devices of war.



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