

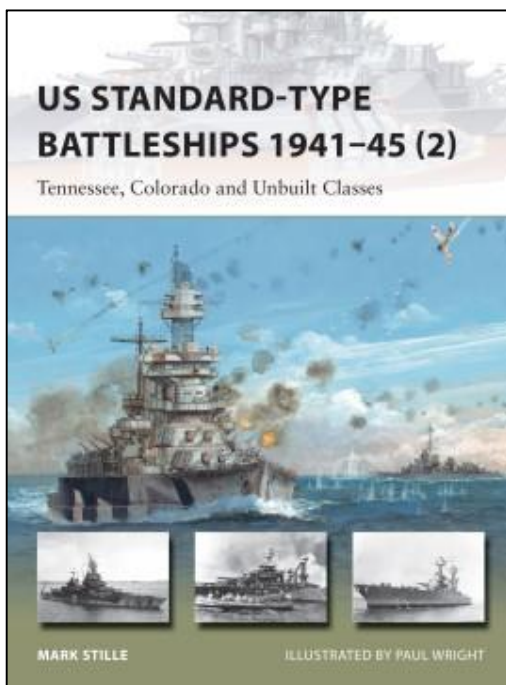
US Standard-Type Battleships 1941-45 (2)
Osprey New Vanguard series No. 229 (2016)
By Mark Stille; illustrations by Paul Wright
£9.99 / \$17.95

Review by Jonathan Aird

Contents:

Introduction
US World War II Strategy and the role of the Battleship
The Battleship classes
Analysis and Conclusions

This is a companion volume to New Vanguard 220 which covers the Nevada, Pennsylvania and New Mexico classes of battleship. This leaves the Tennessee, Colorado, and the Unbuilt classes for this volume. Mark Stille starts the book by setting the scene for the development of the US Navy battleships, covering their strategic role in World War II, and also starts the underlying narrative for the book whilst these particular battleships can be regarded as among the highest achievements of the naval architect they were also the last such examples. This was



predominantly due to the rise of aircraft and particularly the growing threat from naval aviation. Ships that had been designed to counter the Imperial Japanese Navy's battleships in glorious looking (if in reality terrifying) engagements at 27,000 yards found themselves, after the 12th of July 1941, relegated to the more humble activity of floating shore attack batteries. Through the war these vessels would receive better and better fire control systems as available Radar equipment improved but however the description of battleship tactics seems to underscore the coming obsolescence of the type. In late October 1944 an overwhelming USN battleship force was poised to intercept a Japanese fleet of seven vessels including two battleships, and indeed when they came to grips their gunnery was quite devastating. However, by the time that the Japanese vessels came under fire in this last clash of battleships the fleet had already been depleted by aircraft attack.

Four of the Japanese vessels, including one of the battleships, had been sunk or disabled. The USN surface fleet did little more than mop up what remained, a job which no doubt another flight of torpedo bombers could also have achieved.

The bulk of the book looks at four classes of battleship the built Tennessee and Colorado classes and the unbuilt South Dakota and Lexington classes. These latter were abandoned as part of the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty. Each of the five built vessels is covered in good detail, with the differences between vessels of the same class being picked out, as well as an assessment of each ship's service record and modifications being provided. There is a very telling table which lists armament modifications and over time secondary armaments were

stripped away to be replaced by anti-aircraft systems, the value of which were to be proved whenever one of the battleships came under kamikaze attacks. Naturally, there is a profusion of photographs and some very nice plates showing side views of the vessels, as well as a two-page cutaway of USS West Virginia in its late war fit and fairly bristling with AA guns. The side view of the South Dakota shows the peculiar stack arrangement that had been designed ó it looks like the imaginings of some Victorian Science Fiction gamer. Best of all though are Paul Wright's two full-page plates of USS California unleashing a salvo from her 14-inch guns and USS Colorado fending off an attack by kamikaze aircraft. Very evocative.

The sections on the unbuilt classes offer some intriguing ówhat-ifsö for the naval wargamer as the cancelled ships were potentially going to be very fast, changing both the strategic situation and the tactical deployment. Two hulls from the Lexington class were used for aircraft carriers ó and at least one more hull would seem to have been sufficiently advanced to have been completed in a similar way, although perhaps the USN fleet doesn't need even more advantages over the Japanese fleet!

Also of note is the splendidly easy style of reading that Mark Stille has achieved. Battleships were brutal weapons of war, but they have an intrinsic beauty which makes them pleasing on the eye. However, not all authors manage to capture a great deal of detail in their text whilst avoiding becoming bogged down in this very same detail ó Mark Stille has admirably avoided the pitfalls of turgid prose, helping to make this a highly recommended volume.