image symbolized Hitler's defiance of the Treaty of Versailles and the might and glory of the newly rearmed Germany. The most appealing of these was the Bismarck and there is a lot of Bismarck to see; builder's plans, photographs taken on different occasions such as during construction, at festive activities like the launch, the fitting out, and its first sea trials in the Baltic. Then came the war at sea, where, during operations from Norway, Bismarck sank the battle cruiser HMS Hood on 24 May 1941 in the Denmark Strait. Only three men out of a crew of 1,418 survived. The Royal Navy's hunt for the Bismarck ended three days later, on 27 May 1941, when Bismarck was destroyed. Over 2,000 German sailors lost their lives, while just over 100 survived. There are photographs of Bismarck's last battle as well as of the action against Hood.

The history of the Tirpitz, of the Bismarck-class, is totally different from that of its sister ship. Tirpitz's contribution to the German war effort was to serve as a threat rather than actually to create havoc among Allied convoys. During one operation, the battleship fired its guns against Spitsbergen, and that was it. But Tirpitz was still a force to be reckoned with. The Allies, particularly the British, had their hands full getting rid of the battleship. They finally succeeded on 12 November 1944, when the RAF bombed it. The photographs of Tirpitz being hit and keeling over are fascinating.

In his preface, Siegfried Breyer states that the Second World War demonstrated the battleship had been superseded by the aircraft carrier. But that was not the case in Germany. By the time it became clear to Britain, the U.S. and Japan that aircraft carriers could decide naval battles, Germany's aircraft carrier Graf Zeppelin only sailed the seas on the drawing board. It is not quite clear why the authors consider the Graf Zeppelin a capital ship. Perhaps they are referring to the amount of money it took to build this vessel that was never delivered.

The book is basically a pictorial history of battleships, leaving the story somewhat thin, uncritical, and mostly descriptive. Moreover, given the book's lack of colour photographs, it does not fulfil the expectation one has from the subtitle Ultimate Photograph Album.

In 1989, American oceanographer Robert Ballard discovered the wreck of the Bismarck and reignited interest in the story of the former battleship. Unfortunately, the book contains no photographs or any other kind of image of the Bismarck resting on the bottom of the sea. The quality of the album might have improved had it been reviewed by an editor. It is as if every available picture has been used, some are out of focus, others have no distinctive features, similar pictures recur, etc. Ultimately, however, the Ultimate Photograph Album is a nice read.

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Pirates are popular historical figures providing movies, cartoons, festivals and amusement parks with salacious enjoyment. Entertainment aside, the study of piracy is a legitimate discipline of maritime history. In the course of war, governments issued letters of marque to privateers—sailors who exercised a justifiable form of piracy against their nation's enemies. When the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) put an end to European hostilities, privateers and their crews found
themselves without official government sanction to legitimize their activities. Many of these displaced privateers turned to piracy. Though pirates have existed for centuries, the Atlantic World’s golden age of piracy occurred during a small window of time in the early 1700s.

Piracy interfered with burgeoning trade between the colonial powers, therefore, governments sought to eradicate the menace. In 1717, King George I issued a Royal Proclamation pardoning any pirates who would promise to stop their pillaging. While some pirates accepted the royal pardon, many pirates continued their illegal activity. Blackbeard, also known as Edward Teach, was in both categories.

A dearth of first-hand accounts written by sailors themselves leaves maritime scholars with numerous research challenges. Most common sailors were illiterate and, for obvious reasons, pirates did not keep written records of their plunder. Recorded testimonies including shipwreck narratives and legal and insurance documents were recorded by survivors who did not wish to have piratical accusations cast upon them. Newspaper accounts of piracy were often embellished and sensationalized.

In Blackbeard: The Hunt for the World’s Most Notorious Pirate, authors Craig Cabell, Graham A. Thomas, and Allan Richards address some of those research challenges and attempt to sort through some of the folklore about the pirate known as Blackbeard. Beginning with a few questions such as: Was Blackbeard as vicious as his legend portrays him? Why did Virginia Governor Alexander Spotswood organize an expedition to find and kill Blackbeard? And why is it that Blackbeard’s name persists as one of the most infamous pirates of all? The answers found in Blackbeard are geared towards a contemporary, lay audience.

The authors launch their probe with a book written in 1724 entitled A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates. Authored by a Captain Charles Johnson, A General History has also been attributed to the pen of Daniel Defoe. Cabell et al compare the enduring stories about Blackbeard with eighteenth-century sources and modern research. Robert E. Lee’s Blackbeard the Pirate—A Reappraisal of His Life and Times (1974) and Angus Konstam’s Blackbeard—America’s Most Notorious Pirate (2006) are the two most frequently quoted secondary sources in Blackbeard. The authors use Colonial State Papers, particularly those of Virginia’s governor, Alexander Spotswood, the man who organized the expedition to defeat the pirate. Combining folklore and written records, the authors consider the veracity of the Blackbeard legends. They appraise how other authors have treated these episodes, what the historical records say, and bring in historical context to help the reader see how they analyzed the event.

A good example of the authors’ style in examining the lore of Blackbeard is in Chapter Six, Flagship which recounts Blackbeard’s capture of the French slave ship La Concorde in 1717. The authors explain how Blackbeard and his crew converted the large ship, which once carried a human cargo of over 450 souls, into a first-class pirate vessel. Refitted and renamed, Queen Anne’s Revenge became Blackbeard’s flagship. After knowledgeably describing how the pirates added sails, removed internal bulkheads and armed the ship by cutting gun-ports into the hull, the authors then present archaeological evidence regarding the multinational origin of the numerous cannons found on the recently excavated Queen Anne’s Revenge. They also examine why Blackbeard gave the displaced captain and crew of La Concorde another, albeit inferior, vessel in which to return home. The chapter ends with a final question—did Blackbeard
release these men to humiliate the captain and crew of the slaver?

The authors use a few distracting and overreaching phrases such as "most historians agree" or "we shall never know." Perhaps because they wish to appeal to a non-maritime, non-historic audience, there is a tendency to oversimplify some of the context, for example, they suggest that pirates would have been less battle hardened than sailors on the Royal Navy war ships (p.51). Since many of Blackbeard’s cohorts were veterans of the European wars who continued their own mercenary ventures, they would have been just as experienced as contemporaneous British naval crews.

By dissecting some of Blackbeard’s known exploits using old and new evidence; the authors present an interesting perspective of how the legend of Blackbeard persisted and grew so that he is one of the most famous and notorious of an infamous lot.

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Beginning with her doctoral dissertation at the University of Exeter in England, the author sampled the records of 1,953 Royal Navy junior officers (which she defined as midshipmen, masters’ mates and, after 1804, sub-lieutenants) and 1,994 quarterdeck boys (defined as officers’ servants who were officer entrants and entitled to walk the quarterdeck) from the years 1771-1831. These men were selected from 231 ships’ muster books preserved in ADM 36 and 37 at the U.K. National Archives.