

# Reviews

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Marolda, Edward J., and R. Blake Dunnavent. 2015. *Combat at Close Quarters: Warfare on the Rivers and Canals of Vietnam*. Washington, DC: Department of the Navy. 82 pp. <http://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo58688>

The “Brown-Water Navy” in Vietnam gained fame by numerous books, such movies as *Apocalypse Now*, and the Presidential candidacy of Senator John Kerry, a “swift-boat” veteran. Commendably, this compact and lavishly illustrated history begins with an executive summary of riverine operations from the French Indochina War to the withdrawal of the United States Navy in the 1970’s. Subsequent chapters describe the major campaigns, milestone by milestone.

The Navy had conducted coastal and riverine warfare, yet arrived in Vietnam oddly unprepared in what we now call best practices. At first, the Navy adapted French naval tactics from the earlier conflict, establishing the River Patrol Force (RPF) to protect the sea route to Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). Later, the RPF interdicted war supplies and supported infantry assaults in the Mekong Delta and elsewhere, acting, as it were, as floating helicopters. River Patrol Force’s Operation Game Warden evolved into the Army-Navy Mobile Riverine Force and its wider-ranging Operation SEALORDS.

The iconic swift-boats arrived late in the conflict, and supplemented many older or retrofitted craft. The Navy updated its equipment, even anchoring ships and barges into floating bases for rest and refit. Throughout, sailors faced intense combat, exhausting tropical conditions, and underwater mines as ingenious and deadly as booby-traps on land. Each chapter alternates between

command-level decisions and hair-raising accounts of surface-level combat.

The concluding chapters recount the Vietnamization program as the Navy withdrew, and the budgetary circumstances that unraveled its hard-won successes. The authors conclude that the “Brown-Water Navy” sailors and commanders, notably Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, Jr., fought and functioned, for the most part, effectively. Much of the experience informed and supported successful operations on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers during the Iraq War.

This booklet is aimed at naval officers facing possible future riverine warfare. For general audiences, it is a bit heavy on military acronyms and other technical details, but still useful as an introduction to general histories or memoirs of naval combat in Vietnam.—*Carl Olson, Librarian at Towson University*

Whitby, Andrew. 2020. *The Sum of the People: How the Census has Shaped Nations, from the Ancient World to the Modern Age*. New York: Basic Books. 368 pp.

When I first received a gracious invitation to examine *The Sum of the People: How the Census has Shaped Nations, from the Ancient World to the Modern Age*, I have to admit I was a bit skeptical as to author Andrew Whitby’s intent to talk about the census as both a concept and an historical narrative spanning a timeline, as the subtitle indicates, “from the Ancient World to the Modern age.” Would the work be just another brief commentary on our current US 2020 Census, or would it digress into a study of enumeration as a tool used by statisticians to merely count human bodies

and their geographic location—lacking a human narrative or historic context?

I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Whitby’s efforts to discuss everything from King Ariantas—leader of the nomadic Scythians (who lived in Central Asia)—and his efforts to count the Scythian population by requesting members bring arrowheads to him to a spirited discussion of Palestinian census activities in the Israeli occupied areas of the West Bank and Gaza produce interesting narrative. Whitby’s identification of the Census as a “vast and intrepid undertaking. . . . To count is to have value, to matter” becomes a platform for a well-written, condensed version of the history of mankind.

In *The Sum of the People* prologue, Whitby acknowledges that he has selected mere snapshots of census activities through the ages, “tracing it backward from its present incarnation: an attempt to count everyone, everywhere.” Yet, it is Whitby’s up-front honesty with the reader that the story is a mere handful of thousands of census moments (some significant, many routine) that keeps the reader engaged, asking the question, “What interesting little bit of census knowledge will Whitby transform into an interesting history lesson that both teaches and entertains?”

While *The Sum of the People* chooses to emphasize many early US census strategies and events, it is the discussion of such significant historical census exercises as the Biblical census in Bethlehem where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were counted; Hitler’s Third Reich and Arian Master Race census efforts prior to World War II; and the global census activities that took place in post-World War II Russia, China, and India that offer surprising