

# The COCKLESHELL CANOES

## British Military Canoes of World War 2

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320 Pages with 134 Photographs. Size 248x172mm

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Anniversary of 1942 Frankton Raid 30th Nov - 12th Dec).

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### Synopsis

'Cockleshell Canoes' is the complete narrative of the British Military canoe designed and manufactured during WW2. Unquestionably this is the first ever account of such craft; it is both accurate and comprehensive. The work is some 90,000 words in length with many vintage and rare previously unpublished B&W photographs.

**Very rarely is there an opportunity to bring to the world something that has not been written about before; this is one such rarity.**

The 'Cockleshell Canoes' story represents the first and only definitive reference work of the entire History and Development of British Military Canoes during World War Two, 1939 to 1945. But it is indeed much more than this, it is a gripping tale. It contains intricate details woven with events as well as the technology, design and the manufacture of the military canoe; it shows how the world of the canoe coloured so many areas as well as the lives of many skilled individuals.

It is a tale about a most unusual mode of warfare, wrapped up within a very human story. It is also a celebration of those individuals who have become part of canoe history, both civilian and Military, some of great fame, many yet to become accredited through this work.

Whilst charting this fascinating evolution of the Military canoe, with the keenness to publicise the Navy's very small 'boats', it is impossible not to include the activities of these craft in a tactical setting and to highlight exactly what was required of the units and therefore the men, to perform the tasks set, using these canoes.

As far as amphibious assaults and reconnaissance with canoes are concerned, a few audacious adventures of the Second World War have been written, but hardly any detailed and accurate information about the 'accessories' used in the various raids exist.

Much (98%) of the information in the manuscript has never been revealed before.

Few existing publications even mention canoes. Of those that do much is inaccurate and usually found in an appendix. Even the simplest dimensions are wrongly quoted. 'Not a lot is known about this canoe' and 'no information exists' are perhaps the worst of the quoted references that can be mentioned.

Yet the story of the British military canoe as written is a very interesting one.

Within are 24 canoes are identified with a full description; with a further 17 canoes dealt with on a lesser scale, this being the entire stock of canoes developed, most unknown to Military historians and therefore the general public. The entire work is evidenced by original source material, all referenced. Every detail that exists on the British Military canoe during WW2 is reported on.

This work tries not to be too technical but has this element included as an integral of part of the overall requirement to understand the differences and the technology used in the individual canoes. It weaves the description of an intricate series of events within many different fields that have shaped the progress of

development from pre-war recreational use of canoes to the needs of the military during WW2, briefly showing how some of these developments have had a direct effect and bearing on a much larger vessel of the modern day.

It tells of the epic journey of progress that canoe development took from Scotland and Cornwall, London, Cambridge, Gosport, Brentford, Warwick, Poole, Southampton, the Island of Wight in the Solent to the tropical Island of Sri Lanka.

The work chronicles all the detailed specifications and gives a timeline during the trials and tribulations experienced within military canoe development. It explains the journey each particular 'mark' took and how the development stages brought about each new genus of canoe for the military. Many of these stages were pivotal moments, giving an important insight into a new organisation that required a fast moving set of operational methodologies in order to deliver what was required.

From the talents of a few the 'Cockleshell Canoe' became a greater craft than that of recreational transport. The military used civilian held skills and technology to push the boundaries; each step was choreographed by need.

Thousands of canoes of various marks and types were sent worldwide from the U.K. as far as Australia, and used operationally. Many details for other clandestine organizations are relatively unknown until now.

The work is a product of real life testimonies within the stories of the Commanders, Inventors, Designers and the University boat race connections, together with many previously unseen photographs. The endeavour is to inform so that even from photographs it is possible to identify each Mark.

The work also describes the purpose and some operations of the units, the Admiralty departments, Combined Operations and its various facets including the various Special Forces activities; each part adding to the raison d'être for the canoe, pouring out the very essence of the British spirit. The narrative goes behind the scenes to expose the internal workings, it also explains how many different companies including those in the aviation industry were used to produce the canoes and the links between certain individuals.

There are storylines which included men such as Mountbatten, Tollemarche, Hasler, Montenaro and individuals within and connected to the C.O.H.Q. as well as the S.O.E. and describes how the S.O.E. and one of the canoe inventors had a direct influence on writings of the author Ian Fleming

Due the military association within the field of amphibious warfare it will be welcomed in the United States as the base from which their hardware evolved – proven links exist in this area are highlight within the book.

The work is not a difficult read; even with the craft descriptions it is easily absorbed. It will be enlightening and yet controversial due to it being in opposition to the small amount of incorrect information published.

The work needed to be written, this information has been lost to our nation for long enough – to have left it unpublished would have left a void within British Military History.

Each exclusive photograph used is accompanied with a detailed and authoritative caption.

The originality is one of the strongest selling points about the work; it is the 'missing link', the means by which clandestine warfare was conducted by the various Special Forces during WW2.

Quite possibly it represents the most comprehensive study ever undertaken in the field of the twentieth-century naval small 'boats'; deserving the description 'indispensable'.

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### **Additional**

The work begins with a short explanation of canoe hull construction and propulsion it then moves on to give a little flavour of the history of the different units that used these craft. This latter category is added to with another separate but brief explanation of the **S.O.E.** in the form of background information in order to fully understand how the 'Executive' played their part in the history and development of the military canoe; it is a who was where and why which connects well to the main body of the canoe narrative.

A chapter is dedicated to the Small Operations Group in Sri Lanka and paints a picture of the day to day living conditions and training regime that existed at that time. Most chapters have a weave of stories which intertwine around the various centres of activity in different parts of the world each giving an insight into how these craft were brought to fruition. Further information details the various units that predominated in the world of canoes; interesting information surrounding these units is revealed which allows the reader to have a snapshot view of how they were formed and much of the behind the scenes activity.

The main body of the narrative of the canoe history begins with the 'Mark Ones' which represents the earliest uses of the collapsible canoe type. Through a defined timeline, as with all the different 'marks' mentioned, this section chronicles those pre-war users and manufacturers who assisted in the development of the war canoe and the associations with submarines as well as accounting for the constructional qualities and how this type was progressed.

The narrative continues with a chapter that deals with what everyone understands to be the 'Cockleshell heroes' type of canoe and is supplied with a precursor as well as a brief narrative of the Bordeaux raid which fully introduces Hasler and the C.O.S.D. into the fray. The entire background history of the development of the Cockleshell canoe, never previously written about, is fully explained. This uncovers the truth of the origins and those who were responsible as well as showing the details and how problems were overcome. It is the very detailed story of how Hasler's canoes were brought about.

Another chapter is devoted to a pivotal time when the method of construction for the military canoe changed wholesale and shows how certain individuals played their part in this effort; this is added to with the introduction of the COPPS and the activities around and associated with Hayling Island H/Q.

The following chapters go on to explain how the war canoe further developed during a short period of time with the introduction of an engine and yet larger canoes using alloy were then being employed for the war in the Far East.

The various canoes are each shown and explained as individual entities, most of which have never been known of before this time and certainly never been written about. Further descriptions of sail and equipment development are given along with individual histories of the characters and manufacturers who played a greater part in the bringing about of the war canoe from both civilian and military areas. Additional canoes developed are briefly introduced which included oddities such as the Perspex and water boatman type of canoe.

The chapters are interspersed with the methodologies of operations and further descriptions of development are introduced along with details of the carriage of canoes by submarine and flying boat. There is also a list containing an at-a-glance summary showing the details of each canoe.

A final chapter is devoted to the only canoe which was equally at ease below the water as it was above it together with how this canoe was suggested to be used as a carrier for an **Atomic bomb**.

A good deal of information throughout the manuscript is revealed which actually corrects inaccurate historical data as well as rewriting the history books.

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