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BOOK REVIEW

Eagle Fleet – the story of a tanker fleet in peace and war

by W. E. Lucas

Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London, 1955, 116 pp.

San Demetrio and *Ohio* are illustrious names in the merchant navy of World War II and bring to mind two extraordinary feats of survival. Both stories are told in *Eagle Fleet* which recounts the history of the Eagle Tanker Company in peace and war. While their stories are the most spectacular, they were not the only remarkable incidents in the wartime history of the fleet which are recorded in the book.

The Eagle Tanker Company was founded by Weetman Pearson (later Baron Cowdray) in 1910 and its vessels traded mainly on routes between Europe and the Americas, so were not well known in Australia. In his earlier business life, Pearson had successfully challenged the powerful American monopoly in the field of Mexican oil. It was to transport this oil that the Eagle Fleet was created and it heralded a boom for British shipyards. It was always ahead in design; changes in world conditions were foreseen; and new markets invaded.

Indicative of this innovation, the company's engineering superintendent, Mr W. L. Nelson, developed the use of compressed air pumps to help maintain buoyancy in torpedoed ships, for which he was awarded the OBE; and company technicians designed a face mask to protect crews against the effect of immersion in oil.

The story is packed into a slim volume of 116 pages and has no index. It is well-illustrated with a mix of photographs (in colour and black and white) and unusual etchings of scenes and route maps. One photo records the 15,700 ton *San Fraterno* which, when launched in 1913, was the largest tanker in the world.

The book contains an immense amount of maritime history of the period and makes very worthwhile reading. It is in the Institution's library.

Stella Green