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Execute Against Japan: The U.S. Decision to Conduct Unrestricted Submarine Warfare

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Holwitt, Joel Ira. *Execute Against Japan: The U.S. Decision to Conduct Unrestricted Submarine Warfare.* College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2009. 262pp. $37.50

Joel Ira Holwitt is a lieutenant who has just completed the Submarine Officer Advanced Course and will soon report to USS *New Mexico* (SSN 779), in Groton, Connecticut, as navigator. This book was his PhD dissertation at Ohio State University, where he studied under Dr. John Guilmartin. It is a serious work that is researched in the tradition of *The Blue Sword* (1982) by Dr. Mike Vlahos, *War Plan Orange* (1991) by Edward Miller, and the more recent *Agents of Innovation* (2008) by John Kuehn, all of which deal with the interwar period and the roles played by the War Plans Division, the Naval War College, and the General Board.

This book is an in-depth historical look at how the United States and the U.S. Navy's decision-making process worked in the run-up to Pearl Harbor. It is a well documented and fascinating story that brings to life some naval personalities perhaps not well known to today's officers. Most interesting for students at the U.S. Naval War College and naval officers who work in today's interagency system, it is another look into how the Navy's leadership has functioned and the constructive role that the Naval War College has played in influencing the thinking of the leadership. Students of history and policy too will find this an interesting story, not only because the German decision to implement unrestricted submarine warfare actually was one of the major causes for the American entry into the First World War but also because there appears to be no documentation indicating that those leaders whom we would today call the "national command authority" ever actually participated in the decision to implement this policy.

There exists a memorandum dated March 1941 from Admiral Edward Kalbfus (researched by Naval War College faculty and students), recommending a strategy of unrestricted submarine and aerial warfare against Japan, that was clearly rejected by the General Board. The report, however, was retained by the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Harold "Betty" Stark, and it ultimately influenced his decision to deliver the memo to the commander of the Asiatic Fleet, Admiral Thomas C. Hart.

As a serving flag officer, I found it fascinating to see how real life worked in the run-up to the war. For example, for me the most interesting story was how the CNO transmitted his "commander's intent" to Admiral Hart, a most experienced submariner. Stark knew that the State Department would never consent to unrestricted submarine warfare and so decided against raising the issue directly before the United States entered the war. Instead, he sent a letter to Admiral Hart; Stark's war planner, Rear Admiral Kelly Turner, also discussed it with Captain James Fife, another highly respected submariner, who delivered the information to Admiral Hart and his staff personally in the Philippines. There was no way that Admiral Hart could mistake Stark's intent. This put Hart in a position to anticipate his orders, in a way the best commanders will. Hart sent U.S. submarines to sea, ready for war patrol, immediately after the initial Japanese attack.

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The other interesting aspect of this work deals with the difference between prewar training of our submariners and what they actually did in combat. In a section called "The Accidental Commerce Raiders," Holwitt points out that commanders had been conditioned by article 22 of the London Naval Treaty—which many thought meant that if they torpedoed merchants without warning, they would actually be held liable, "hunted down and captured or sunk as pirates." So, according to this account, commanders were taught to be cautious and were essentially trained for naval combat against high-speed, heavily armored combatants and not against commercial shipping. The result was that very few of the tactics eventually used were developed before the war.

Execute Against Japan should be required reading for naval officers (especially in submarine wardrooms), as well as for anyone interested in history, policy, or international law. Lieutenant Holwitt has already briefed some of our Naval War College students. His research shows how and why our experience in the First World War did not prepare us for the next one, and this is its essential lesson. It is a lesson worth some reflection.

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Mueller, Michael. *Canaris: The Life and Death of Hitler's Spymaster.* Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2007. 320pp. $34.95

Who was Wilhelm Canaris? The naval cadet from the Ruhr who rose to vice admiral and directed the Abwehr, German military intelligence, for nine years remains one of the most intriguing figures in twentieth-century military history. German journalist and documentarian Michael Mueller unravels several of the mysteries that surround Canaris's life, though many remain.

Mueller acknowledges the shortfall. Despite solid research and fresh archival material, his account "neither answers all the questions, nor resolves all the contradictions." The paucity of primary sources and the tendency of intelligence operators habitually to brush their tracks owe much to the circumstances of Canaris's arrest and execution. Only remnants survive of Canaris's service diaries, discovered by investigators in the aftermath of the 20 July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler.

Mueller's narrative informs, illuminates, and entertains. Canaris's early career at sea was marked by escapades of derring-do in South America and Spain. An officer of his time, Canaris absorbed the credo of the sea service, and it served him well. He had a clear talent for languages and social rapport, and his superiors noted the vitality of his wide-ranging networks. Before long, he became "too valuable to send to sea."

An astute and calculating observer, Canaris navigated multiple career-threatening crises that began as the defeated German fleet returned to Kiel in 1918. In the closing years of the Weimar Republic, Canaris again leveraged his luck, evading a series of potentially devastating political scandals. He did not emerge unscathed, however; his growing reputation made both naval officials and politicians nervous.