

2018

No Room for Mistakes: British and Allied Submarine Warfare 1939–1940

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Recommended Citation

Lewis, Charles T. and Haarr, Geirr H. (2018) "No Room for Mistakes: British and Allied Submarine Warfare 1939–1940," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 71 : No. 2 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol71/iss2/13>

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The resiliency, dedication, and mental toughness that the Chosen Few soldiers displayed, even though medevac assets and air support were lacking, are commendable. At Wanat, they were on their own in enemy territory and outnumbered by enemy insurgents just meters outside their fighting positions. Yet they continued to fight, looking out for one another in a way that only those in close combat can understand. In combat, soldiers fight for one another more than anything else—they do not want to let their buddies down.

The book raises the question: How can the world's most powerful military put soldiers in harm's way with only limited resources and support? Lieutenant Colonel Bill Ostlund, battalion commander of the 2/503 Infantry, noted that the entire “brigade had six Apache attack helicopters, and at times as many as four were down for maintenance. It was taking way too long to get the wounded off the battlefield.” Wanat was a travesty, not just another bureaucratic oversight; the U.S. military establishment clearly was surprised and could not react quickly enough.

The July 2008 battle of Wanat itself was horrific, and the fallout devastating for all. Those who survived were tormented by guilt, wondering what more they could have done. The Army, for its part, conducted several investigations, released the findings, and then amended the findings. Careers were ruined, and some leaders left the Army. Even more tragic, families lost faith in the chain of command and the Army leadership, because it seemed that no one was held accountable for the circumstances surrounding and the casualties resulting from the battle of Wanat.

There are important lessons to be learned from reading about these brave soldiers of the Chosen Few. Zoroya makes the following point: “Just as military teachers for decades strolled with students across the battlefields at Gettysburg, Shiloh, and other famous engagements to learn the art of war, they [should] also virtually tour Wanat in the years ahead.” These are lessons that should not have to be relearned each time U.S. forces engage in combat operations, and that is why the battle of Wanat will be studied by young men and women at the U.S. Military Academy and in college Reserve Officers' Training Corps (i.e., ROTC) detachments across the United States for years to come. Zoroya has done a masterful job of highlighting the brave soldiers of the Chosen Few. This book is a must-read for military leaders at any level.

THOMAS J. GIBBONS



No Room for Mistakes: British and Allied Submarine Warfare 1939–1940, by Geirr H. Haarr. Barnsley, U.K.: Seaforth, 2015. 450 pages. \$49.95.

No Room for Mistakes is a meticulously researched and well-written history of the British and Allied submarine services from 1939 to 1940. The relatively short time span the book covers allows the author, Geirr Haarr, to delve into granular detail, often giving week-by-week, even day-by-day, accounts of particular submarines and their travails fighting the German navy in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean.

The book's first chapter follows the tragic story of HMS *Thetis* during the first half of 1939. Shortly after it left the Cammell Laird shipyards near

Liverpool, England, a series of mistakes coupled with some very bad luck left the ship lying on the floor of the Irish Sea. Only a few survivors made it to the surface to be rescued. Eventually, *Thetis* was salvaged, repaired, and sent back into service. At first, this particular story might seem out of place; after all, the German military was nowhere near *Thetis* when it sank. Yet after a few chapters it is clear that *Thetis's* story artfully sets the tone for the entire book.

In 1939, there really was no room for mistakes. Everything about submarine warfare in the early years of World War II was experimental, and the margin for human error was paper-thin. Hull designs, weapon systems, and navigational equipment had undergone evolutionary leaps since the early U-boats of World War I—and crews had to learn how to operate them on the fly. Although crews learned quickly and often achieved remarkable results, the cost of not learning quickly enough, as with *Thetis*, was high. Questions such as the optimal depth and spread for firing torpedoes, equipment configurations, and maneuvering tactics remained unresolved throughout this period.

Even bigger unknowns surrounded operational employment. Some in the British Admiralty argued that submarines should be used primarily for surveillance; others argued for minelaying or direct engagement of surface vessels. After some early success seemed to settle the debate in favor of surface engagements, the German navy became increasingly adept at thwarting submarine attacks through the use of convoys and air cover. Increasing British losses from these improved German tactics restarted the debate on how submarines should be used.

Difficulties for the submarine service multiplied after the successful German invasions of Norway and France in 1940. British submarines now found themselves under threat of air attack from the moment they left home, and there were few neutral or allied ports outside the home islands where a captain could seek refuge if his boat suffered battle damage. As the summer of 1940 advanced and nights became shorter, it was also increasingly difficult for boats to charge their batteries on the surface without being detected and driven underwater. These circumstances frayed the nerves of even the most experienced sailors—a point Haarr drives home with his excellent narration and extensive use of ships' deck logs and crew diaries.

No Room for Mistakes is appropriate for both junior and senior personnel in the military as well as enthusiasts of military history. Although submariners will have the easiest time relating to the material, individuals from every branch and service will be inspired by the bravery of British submarine sailors. Additionally, the level of detail in *No Room for Mistakes* makes it an invaluable resource for anyone researching a particular aspect of military operations or naval tactical developments during the early World War II period.

My favorite aspect of *No Room for Mistakes* is Haarr's extensive use of primary sources, including diaries, logs, journals, and photographs. These materials help make the historical account of this period much more poignant and remind the reader of the high human cost of war at sea. *No Room for Mistakes* is an excellent addition to a personal library and is recommended particularly to anyone with an interest in naval history.

CHARLES T. LEWIS