

1999

Wolf: U-Boat Commanders in World War II

Saverio De Ruggiero

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Recommended Citation

Ruggiero, Saverio De (1999) "Wolf: U-Boat Commanders in World War II," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 52 : No. 1 , Article 26.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol52/iss1/26>

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rode the party bandwagon for the purpose of self-aggrandizement.

Nazi Science is recommended reading for the student of history who appreciates the complexities of human motivations and who can accept a world containing many shades of gray. In order best to appreciate Mark Walker's book, one is encouraged to read beforehand at least one of the many books about the era, such as *Lise Meitner: A Life in Physics*, by Ruth Lewin Sime (Univ. of California Press, 1996), or *Hitler's Uranium Club: The Secret Recordings at Farm Hall*, by Jeremy Bernstein and David Cassidy (American Institute of Physics, 1995), or one of the books mentioned above. With some prior knowledge of the Nazi nuclear effort, the reader should be able to comprehend and appreciate the nuances exposed here.

If there is a shortcoming in this book, it is perhaps in the title. *Nazi Science* pertains almost exclusively to Nazi nuclear science and neglects the other subfields of physics, let alone the disciplines of genetics, anthropology, biology, and so on. These fields were perhaps more adversely affected than was nuclear science.

XAVIER K. MARUYAMA
U.S. Naval Postgraduate School

Vause, Jordan. *Wolf: U-Boat Commanders in World War II*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1997. 249pp. \$29.95

Jordan Vause captures the history and tradition of Germany's submarine service through an exemplary analysis

of its commanders. Determined to find common threads of character and personality, he begins his narrative with imperial Germany's World War I strategy of unlimited submarine warfare, continues through the murderously effective World War II wolf pack, and concludes with a relevant postmortem on the ultimate tragedy of that war's destructive aftermath. Ironically, rather than proving the existence of a common *anima* of personal and professional behavior, in the end the author finds that "the man [U-boat commander] was stubborn in eluding any image at all." Nonetheless, the richness of Jordan's research and his comfortable manner of narration perfectly complement the considerable historical value of this book.

Wolf is not a sympathetic treatment of the often relentlessly effective German submarine service (U-Bootwaffe). Vause's success lies in his development of a personal, understanding, and yet incisive portrayal of Germany's World War II U-Bootwaffe commanders—uniform, and yet individually unique. Attempting to construct the persona of the Reichmarine's undersea service, Vause functions as a forensic pathologist, largely disproving a propagandist view of savagely efficient automatons bent on mindless slaughter at sea. He lays open to critical review the professional zeal and individual élan of the U-boat commanders, who sank millions of tons of Allied shipping at a cost of thousands of lives—actions that came perilously close to bringing Great Britain to its knees. Carefully fitting personalities over the stick-figure caricatures, he allows individual U-boat commanders to emerge as crafted

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images subside. Of particular interest is Vause's treatment of Karl Dönitz—paternalistic submarine force commander, commander in chief of the German navy, National Socialist sympathizer, Führer, and ultimately convicted war criminal.

Wolf is an excellent book, highly recommended for both the casual reader and the serious student of military history. An extract from the foreword by Jürgen Oesten, commander of U-61, U-106, and U-861 and recipient of the Knight's Cross, is fitting: "In the beginning, a war is exciting; toward the end, it is a bloody gamble in which you try to achieve the maximum result with an acceptable risk so as to have at least some chance of staying alive. If the U-boat commander had the ability to detach himself from the actual situation, if he had been able to look at himself as though on a movie screen and judge on that basis, his decisions might have been better. You, the reader, have that ability. Please judge fairly."

SAVERIO DE RUGGIERO
Newport, Rhode Island

Sondhaus, Lawrence. *Preparing for Welt-politik: German Sea Power before the Tirpitz Era*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1997. 344pp. \$39.95

As Lawrence Sondhaus tells us, for a long time the North German coastal kingdoms and independent city-states got along without a navy. It was not until 1848 that the idea of a navy arose seriously. This was when, despite the wishes of their German populations, the king of Denmark decided to

incorporate into his realm the adjacent duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. After the Danish army defeated the king's opponents, Prussia and other neighbors sprang to the rescue. In response, the Danish navy blockaded the German ports, strangled their trade, and thus forced a stalemate.

It was this embarrassing condition that led to the sentiment among Germans for a navy of their own. What they got was slow in coming, uncertain of purpose, and—while the German armies were winning wars against Denmark (1864), Austria (1866), and France (1870)—barren of accomplishment.

Commanded for years by a succession of Prussian generals, after the unification of Germany the navy (now called the Imperial Navy) acquired enough new ships for the work it attempted, though for long those ships and their engines, armor, and weapons came from foreign builders. Though the generals saw the navy's politico-military value, they ensured that its budget never grew so large as to affect that of the army. Each winter most of the ships went into hibernation and the sailors learned infantry tactics. Perhaps as a consequence, German seamanship was abominable, German accidents were numerous, and German naval tactics hardly existed.

It was not until 1888, many years after its beginning, that the German navy came under the command of an admiral. Even so, it was a service with little to boast about. In 1892, of Europe's six great navies it was fifth in size, just behind that of Italy and just ahead of Austria-Hungary's.