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Preparing for Weltpolitik: German Sea Power before the Tirpitz Era

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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."

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Sondhaus, Lawrence. *Preparing for Weltpolitik: 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.

But change was coming. In 1890 Rear Admiral Alfred Tirpitz took command of the Baltic station. Tirpitz saw that there was no connection between a shore-bound admiral's sparse operational plans (focused on fighting Russia, France, or both together) and the fleet's tactical abilities to carry out such plans. Tirpitz "argued that the best tactics were worthless if the captains and crews of the fleet could not execute simple maneuvers." Officers and crews had to be able to "operate individual ships competently, as a prerequisite to maneuvering with other ships in a squadron." (This new emphasis on shiphandling and tactics was to last; at Jutland in 1916 the High Seas Fleet demonstrated both fine individual ship skills and excellent large-formation tactics.)

Not because he was well liked, nor because he was a man of principle (he was neither), but because he was brighter and more forceful than any of the kaiser's other admirals, in 1897 Tirpitz became state secretary of the Imperial Navy Office and the most influential officer of his time. Sondhaus tells us that his political victories in the Reichstag in 1898 and 1900 "set Tirpitz on a course to become the most successful political figure in the history of the Second Reich, after Bismarck."

Adept as he was at both political and naval tactics, Tirpitz was not a strategist of any sort, diplomatic, military, or naval. But his vigorous activities in those lines pleased his emperor, the unsuitable Wilhelm II, and made the admiral world famous. As Sondhaus illustrates, Tirpitz's naval strategic thought was that of a child, his diplomatic strategic thought that of a lunatic. Though it is just beyond the scope of this book, between them Tirpitz and the kaiser built in German shipyards, with German engines, armor, and weapons, a great fleet. They also created out of a once-friendly Great Britain an even greater enemy, an achievement that made their great fleet unemployable.

Sondhaus brings these people and events (most of them unknown in the United States) to our attention in this handy-sized book, a book written clearly, concisely, and interestingly. Moreover, he has made sure that his publisher provided both sufficient illustrations of the people, ships, and events of which he writes and enough maps of the areas that his readers will need to know. Together Sondhaus and the Naval Institute Press have given us an excellent book.

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Martin, James Kirby. *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero: An American Warrior Reconsidered.* New York: New York Univ. Press, 1997. 540pp. $34.95

No military officer has received such universal condemnation as Benedict Arnold, the Continental general who sought to deliver George Washington and Fortress West Point to the British in 1780. Arnold has attracted his share of biographers in recent years, including Clare Brandt (*The Man in the Mirror*) and Willard Sterne Randall (*Benedict Arnold: Patriot and Traitor*). Adding his name to this list is James Kirby Martin,