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Hitler's Battleships

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While the photographs are fewer than one might have hoped, they emphasize the personalities associated with fast carrier warfare in World War II and complement the book well. Furthermore, the 1968 bibliographic essay has been updated for this edition and is an invaluable first source for those researching aircraft carriers. It alone is worth the price of the book.

The Fast Carriers needs a thorough editing before its next reprinting. Terms like "makee-learn" are overused and distracting; extraneous comments and ideas make reading difficult while contributing little or nothing to the book. Even more annoying, however, are gratuitous slaps at individuals, such as on page 359, where the author describes an aviator admiral assuming the post of Superintendent of the Naval Academy, where he "relieved a rather inconspicuous battleship admiral who had been Superintendent during most of the war." The "inconspicuous" admiral is unnamed, and one wonders what he did to merit the author's disfavor.

Despite its imperfections, *The Fast Carriers* is an essentially outstanding book that is worthwhile reading for anyone interested in naval aviation and can provide particularly valuable insights for current and prospective staff officers.

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Gray, Edwyn. *Hitler's Battleships*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1992. 195pp. (No price given)

Edwyn Gray's previous contributions to the history of submarine warfare in both world wars are well known. His most recent work examines the other end of the naval spectrum, the operational careers of the *Kriegsmarine's* four battleships, its three *Panzerschiffe* or pocket battleships, and, when the occasion warrants, its two remaining pre-dreadnoughts. It is a story well worth telling. Hopelessly outnumbered at the outbreak of the Second World War, the *Kriegsmarine's* capital ships nevertheless fought with determination, if not always with great skill, from the first day of the war (the *Schleswig-Holstein's* opening salvo at the Polish fortress at Westerplatte) until five days after Hitler's death (a final volley from the wreck of the *Lützow*). In between, Hitler's battleships had their share of successes. The *Graf Spee* and *Scheer* were able to divert Allied warships away from the crucial North Atlantic theater and achieve considerable results waging *guerre de course* in the South Atlantic and Indian oceans. In 1940 the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau* had the good luck to catch the British carrier *Glorious* at the conclusion of the Norwegian campaign and in short order send it and its paltry two-destroyer escort to the bottom. Later, in March 1941 the same two battleships would sink twenty-one merchant ships as part of Operation Berlin, the German surface fleet's most effective antishipping operation of the war. And of course the *Bismarck* was able to sink the *Hood* before meeting its own catastrophic end in May 1941.

These successes notwithstanding, the surface fleet so dramatically failed to achieve its mission that, as Gray notes, not

a single one of its seven capital ships was left floating at the end of the war. The author offers a number of explanations for this failure. Hitler never appreciated the navy's admittedly nebulous role as a fleet-in-being. Both he and Admiral Erich Raeder placed burdensome restrictions on its officers, hampering them with cumbersome command arrangements and demanding results while cautioning at the same time against any losses that might accompany aggressive use of the fleet. As the war wore on, moreover, the Kriegsmarine not only faced ever-worsening quantitative odds but qualitative disadvantages as well, having definitely lost the radar war, for example, by 1943.

Gray retells this oft-told story with skill. Moreover, his analysis of the achievements of the *Funkbeobachtungsdienst* (or *B-Dienst*, the German navy's radio intelligence service) and of the important impact on naval operations later in the war of the Allied Ultra intercepts refines earlier accounts of individual ships and such general histories of the Kriegsmarine as those of Cajus Bekker and Edward von der Porten. The author's touch is less certain with regard to Germany's building program in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, the names of the Reichsmarine's pre-dreadnoughts are either misspelled or mistakenly rendered as *Hanover*, *Lotheringen*, and *Elass*, and such noteworthy naval officers as Hermann Ehrhardt and Günther Guse are identified as Erhrhardt and Gruse. Gray subscribes to the hoary myth that a "pact" regulating Hitler's succession to Reich President von Hindenburg was concluded aboard the *Deutschland*. He

likewise accepts uncritically the description of Hitler's building program given in Raeder's notoriously unreliable memoirs, an interpretation that stands in need of revision after the work of German naval historians Jost Dülffer and Michael Salewski. Nor is one entirely convinced by the author's contention that Britain's continued preoccupation with the minuscule German surface fleet was what cost Albion its Asian empire. On the contrary, given the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* and also Admiral Chuichi Nagumo's subsequent rampage through the Indian Ocean, one suspects that the dispatch of still more battleships to the Far East without adequate air cover would simply have swollen the Royal Navy's list of losses.

Yet it is in the common misfortunes of the battleships of both the Kriegsmarine and the Royal Navy at the hands of airpower that perhaps the most telling of Gray's arguments rings true: he persuasively demonstrates the abysmal level of interservice cooperation between the Kriegsmarine and the Luftwaffe. Indeed, until April 1940 the Luftwaffe, with its accidental attack on the destroyers *Max Schultz* and *Leberecht Maass*, could boast of having contributed to the sinking of more Kriegsmarine surface ships than could the Royal Navy (the *Graf Spee* having conveniently scuttled herself). Germany's interservice relations remained troubled throughout the war. In this regard, Gray's description of the appalling lack of Kriegsmarine-Luftwaffe cooperation provides a cautionary lesson for those who overlook

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the importance of joint operations today.

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Friedman, Norman, intro. *German Warships of World War I: The Royal Navy's Official Guide to the Capital Ships, Cruisers, Destroyers, Submarines and Small Craft, 1914–1918*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1992. 416pp. \$57.95

From 1898 to 1918 Great Britain faced a bold, aggressive new challenger in the North Sea. Gradually the British government and the Royal Navy were forced to abandon their focus on empire to confront the upstart German Empire, with its new High Seas Fleet. Accordingly, intensive British intelligence efforts were directed at the rival fleet.

German Warships of World War I shows the result of those efforts. It is a hefty reference work compiled from the Royal Navy's Confidential Books, which were standard issue on ships of the Grand Fleet throughout the war. The books were later passed on to the U.S. Navy, so the data in these pages represent the sum total of Allied knowledge of the German fleet on the eve of the Armistice. The book is divided by ship class and includes in-depth analysis of German tactics and countless specifications and illustrations. *German Warships* is a fascinating look at technology in transition, and, more significantly, its assessment of the High

Seas Fleet explains several important strategic decisions by British leaders.

The Confidential Books portray a modern fleet that posed a serious challenge to British maritime supremacy. German ships were designed to withstand punishment and were superior to their British counterparts in compartmentation. Still, *German Warships* (unintentionally) exposes the limitations of even the best intelligence collecting efforts. Norman Friedman comments in his introduction that British experts after the war were surprised to find stereo rangefinders on German battleships. This discovery explained the puzzling failure of British optical countermeasures, which were designed to frustrate *coincidence* rangefinders. On balance, German warships were the equals of any flying the White Ensign.

This work also provides insight into the British strategic dilemma. After the 1898 German Navy Laws, it gradually became apparent that the new fleet was not intended for colonial defense, despite Kaiser Wilhelm's statements to the contrary. Instead of a fleet of cruisers—useful for colonial defense—Germany planned a fleet of forty-one powerful battleships ill suited for overseas assignments. While heavily gunned, the new ships were cramped and short on endurance. The battleship fleet was clearly designed to contest British dominance in the North Sea.

For its part, the Royal Navy could not both meet the German challenge and sustain large squadrons overseas. The result was an alliance with Japan and a naval agreement with France, which allowed First Sea Lord Sir John