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Operation Drumbeat

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usual counsel, help, and coercion that he might have received from army headquarters.”

The final misadventure in this litany of errors was the failure to close the Falaise Gap on 14 August. Simonds’s “Operation Tractable” is described by the commander of the 7th Brigade as “certainly one of the strangest attack formations anyone ever dreamed up and without a hope . . . of succeeding as planned.” Closing the gap could have been a Canadian feat of arms; instead it became the task of four Allied armies.

English disagrees with the belief that the principal reason for Canadian failure in Normandy was a breakdown in regimental command. He blames the inexperience and the inadequate professional preparation of Canadian generals—exacerbated by the shackles of British doctrine—and too little staff or tactical depth to overcome such weaknesses.

English makes excuses for Simonds, relying heavily on General Montgomery’s judgement of the man: he has devoted an entire chapter to “The Montgomery Measurement.” He also documents the careful and professional thought that Simonds put into his planning. However, Simonds’s record after Normandy is spotty. If the entire record of the Canadian army in the Second World War is taken into account, there were by English’s measure other Canadian divisional commanders as good or better (Hoffmeister in Italy comes to mind, and he was not a peacetime regular).

This work is a welcome, necessary, and distinguished addition to the literature. The negative verdict on Canadian higher command is, in general, well supported, but English’s affirmation of Simonds remains in doubt.

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Gannon, Michael. *Operation Drumbeat*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990. 419pp. \$24.95

About 2:00 p.m. (EST) on 10 April 1942 a German type IXB U-boat, *U-123*, rose from her daytime resting place on the seabed to begin her evening’s search off St. Augustine Beach, Florida. Commanded by Kapitänleutnant Reinhard Hardegen, *U-123* was near the end of her second patrol to the U.S. coast in support of “Operation Drumbeat.” In the early evening Hardegen sighted a tanker steaming alone on her maiden voyage northward to New York with 90,000 barrels of fuel oil; it was the SS *Gulf-america*. At 10:20, *U-123* torpedoed the tanker off Jacksonville Beach. The explosion and fire brought people out onto the beach, from which she was clearly visible. To finish the kill, Hardegen coned *U-123* between the tanker and the beach so that his shells would not hit land. The *U-123* left the scene without being engaged by the forces responding to the distress calls. As was usually the case, German submarine attacks on merchant ships

did not include an attack on the crew after sinking the ship.

A native of St. Augustine, Michael Gannon wondered about the circumstances that brought an enemy submarine so close to the U.S. shore. What began as a footnote for a research paper resulted in the search for, and eventually an interview with, the commander and the surviving crew of the *U-123*.

Operation Drumbeat is an engaging story about the German U-boat operations designed to interdict materiel flow along the United States coastline from January through July 1942. The author has focused primarily on the operations of the *U-123*; he has examined life in the boat, machinery, and crew performance. An analysis of the U.S. reaction to the U-boat threat is offered, as well as a discussion of Germany's view of World War II maritime operations.

Gannon has vividly described the circumstances under which a U-boat crew existed. The *U-123* seldom submerged while crossing the Atlantic. Facing those waters in January on the surface required stamina and courage. It is easy to visualize watch-standers harnessed to bridge brackets, withstanding the waves washing over them, and enduring the low temperatures and poor visibility. The author has provided a tour of the cramped living and working spaces and a description of how food was stored in nets attached to the overheads, as well as details of torpedo maintenance, head flushing procedures (complete

with an appendix), and the need for "hot-bunking."

U-123's first patrol to New York was made without detailed harbor information. His description of the seamanship and the drama of the *U-123*'s approach to New York Harbor is captivating. The boat sank a total of nineteen ships and expended twenty-nine torpedoes during her two patrols in support of Operation Drumbeat. These figures together with the number of deck-gun rounds fired and the total tonnage sunk provide insight into operational efficiency. He has given us a superb story.

However, Gannon does make some disturbing assertions. He states that Operation Drumbeat's six-month assault on the U.S. east coast shipping was America's worst defeat at sea, and he insists that one person "must be assigned final responsibility for the U.S. Navy's failure to prevent" that defeat. Whether Fleet Admiral King is that person, and whether these losses were of greater strategic importance and magnitude than Pearl Harbor, are difficult matters to assess.

To be sure, the loss of nearly four hundred ships and over five thousand lives during this period is tragic, regardless of impact or results. But the Allies won the Battle of the Atlantic. Shipping was seriously threatened, but never cut off. In the end, ships did sail to Europe without loss. It is true that the "failure" to allocate forces to the Sea Frontier commanders, the failure to black out coastal lights or to alter navigational aids, and others cited by the author are clear contributors to the

loss of ships and lives. However, his statements that "King would not fight" and that U.S. defenses were caught off guard and asleep are misleading. This reviewer is not convinced of the case against Admiral King.

Gannon's account of the friction between operations and intelligence has a current counterpart in Operation Desert Storm. Vice Admiral Andrew's World War II Eastern Sea Frontier Command resembles the recent coalition efforts to interrupt the merchant trade with Iraq. Setting priorities among missions and functions is a continuing requirement. However, Admiral King's priorities and choices have not been fully developed in this work. As Gannon suggests, additional effort is required to further explore some of the conflicting details of this period. Does an adequate paper trail still exist?

Operation Drumbeat is recommended reading. Whether we agree or not with the author's assertions, it is important to keep an open mind to the issues he has raised.

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Frank, Richard B. *Guadalcanal: The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle*. New York: Random House, 1990. 800pp. \$34.95

This work is a result of thirteen years of research. Richard Frank has produced the most definitive account to date of the Guadalcanal Campaign,

providing detailed coverage of the land, sea, and air battles. Frank has managed to juxtapose the Japanese and American command decisions, which offers the reader a marvelous study in combat leadership.

From August 1942 to February 1943 the United States Navy fought seven major battles (most of them at night), which resulted in 5,000 killed or drowned. The Japanese navy sank eighteen U.S. destroyers, eight cruisers, two aircraft carriers, and several other ships. Not until the successful Japanese evacuation of their army's survivors in February 1943 did the U.S. Navy gain control of the night waters.

Marine, navy, and army air force pilots lived under appalling conditions ashore, and they rose daily, and often nightly, to contend with the Japanese. The losses to aircraft evened out to about five hundred planes on each side (including both operational and combat losses), but the Japanese found it difficult to replace pilots and as a result suffered serious long-term consequences. The author gives praise to the marine command ashore: "The conduct of [Major General Archer] Vandergrift and his staff gathered ample praise at the time and in the initial postwar assessments and this account thoroughly validates that verdict." However, the author has no praise for the United States Navy leadership at Guadalcanal. He presents a litany of failure of which this is only one instance: "With striking regularity almost each month of the struggle produced a relief [of a flag officer] or a painful exhibit of ineptitude."