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## Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs 1939-1945

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"mild but nevertheless distinct anti-Semitic bias" made compromise with the party easier.

In its fighting role (a role defined by Hitler's decision for war in 1939 and not 1944 when the navy might well have been a formidable strategic force), the navy had little choice but to follow Raeder's own diary entry of September, 1939: "die gallantly and thereby to create the basis for an eventual rebirth in the future." The surface fleet which Raeder had carefully nurtured for fifteen years did indeed die gallantly. The heroism of their comrades in the submarine force was incredible; of all fighting arms in World War II probably only the Japanese *kanikaze* corps had a higher percentage of casualties. Raeder's successor (and also Hitler's), U-boat chief Karl Dönitz, would not emulate Raeder's aloofness from Hitler (Raeder called Dönitz "the Hitler Youth"). The two patched up their differences in their memoirs after they served their sentences from the Nuremberg Tribunals, but researchers are clearly warned that these memoirs are not reliable.

Mr. Thomas presents the problem well. Raeder, the more reflective man, suffered from the Kiel Revolt and the failure of the navy to carry out the "death ride" against the Grand Fleet in 1918. In 1939, with no effective strategic force, he could not have asked for a political voice even if he had wanted one. Dönitz had a supremely effective fleet that he believed he could strengthen by seeking support from his political masters. Thomas may downplay somewhat Raeder's

compromises. He may also downplay Dönitz's somewhat naive (to put the best face on it) fascination with Hitler and the Nazi machine.

After finishing Mr. Thomas's fine book (which was first published in Britain) the reader is left to wonder if the problem of the German navy in two wars was not insoluble in maritime terms. In the 1870 war with France, and in the Schlieffen Plan, the navy was not mentioned. Was Tirpitz's fleet a folly? Wasn't the creation of a traditionless officer corps on the model of Prussian regiments an organizational and social disaster? Hanseatic merchants before 1914 would tell a little daughter with a skinned knee, "Don't cry, *liebchen*, I'll buy you a lieutenant." To what extent did this rootless officer corps' febrile pursuit of "honor" lead it to ally itself with the unspeakable? Mr. Thomas seems to say it could have been worse.

May a reviewer offer appreciation for the Naval Institute's excellent production of this very worthwhile book? At a time when most books are so shoddy that Gutenberg might have wished himself a plumber, the appearance of this one is a genuine pleasure.

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Martiensen, Anthony, ed. and trans.  
*Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs  
1939-1945*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval  
Institute Press, 1990. 544pp.  
\$27.95

The fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II has stimulated the release and re-release of a large number of historically important monographs. Among them, this volume is fully deserving of special attention from both the casual reader and professional researcher on the history of the German navy. It provides a summary of the majority of formal situation reports given by the head of the *Kriegsmarine* to Germany's dictator Adolf Hitler. These summaries were written by the naval commander in chief immediately after each conference session. They served as a reminder of the topics covered and the decisions made. After the war, these records were captured by the British, who then assigned Anthony Martienssen to collate, translate, and edit them. Access to the German original was severely restricted, which made research difficult for historians from Germany. One German naval historian had to resort to translating the English version back into the German language in 1972! Even after this work was declassified, it was never fully available to the public at large, but the Naval Institute's decision to reprint this work has eliminated that problem.

The book's summaries provide valuable insight not only into Germany's naval policies and strategies, but also into Hitler's reflections on wartime developments. They also serve to remind us just how unaware Germany was of both the extent of Allied scientific advances and the codebreaking success of "Ultra."

There is no denying that it is a bit of a dry read, but its historical value as a primary source outweighs this disadvantage. On occasion, the reader may be frustrated by the vague description of the topics discussed in some of the sessions. Nonetheless, these at least confirm that the navy did bring several key concerns to Hitler's attention. Jack P. Mallman Showell's foreword is informative and lively, but unfortunately very brief. Judging by the existence of several minor printing errors, one must conclude that the Naval Institute Press reprinted the British original without proofing it. Another minor fault is that they utilized a lower-grade paper than normally used for their publications. Perhaps the greatest shortcoming is the lack of a select bibliography on the history of the *Kriegsmarine*.

However, none of these minor faults detract from the basic utility of this volume. Both researcher and casual reader will benefit from this work, and should be encouraged to do so. The Naval Institute Press deserves to be commended for making this very valuable primary historical source fully available.

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Terzibaschitsch, Stefan. *Geleitschiffe der U.S. Navy: Von der Evarts bis zur Claud Jones Klasse* [Escort Ships of the U.S. Navy: From the Evarts class through the Claud Jones class].