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## The U-Boat Offensive 1914-1945

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comprehension, direction, confidence, and constancy. Unfortunately, the U.S. has not always displayed these qualities in its dealings with its Pacific neighbors.

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Tarrant, V.E. *The U-Boat Offensive 1914-1945*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1989. 190pp.

Ministry of Defence (Navy). *The U-Boat War in the Atlantic, 1939-1945*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1989. 396pp. \$49.95

John Keegan once observed that the vast amount of raw data in logs, signals, orders, charts, and the like burden naval history with such a density and volume of facts that the prospect of writing it might "crush the spirit and blind the imagination of all but the most inspired and dedicated scholar." Compared to the more visceral problems confronting those who wrestle with land battles, modern naval "battle" history does present unique challenges. One of them is that the historiographical concept of naval battle has been extended in this century to include episodes that were, in essence, protracted campaigns of attrition waged by submarines against shipping. Far more than the distinct and discrete "battle piece"—like Jutland or Midway—throughout that Keegan had in mind, these campaigns were shaped and driven by hard data: such as loss and tonnage rates, wastage

rates of new construction, volumes of cargoes delivered, and serviceability and strength returns. The submarine campaigns of this century were battles writ large, with all the detail of particular actions overburdened by the mountains of data compiled by shore staffs.

That essential truth is amply demonstrated in these two excellent books. However, they do more than simply recount the relentlessly accumulated data in plus and minus columns. They fill large gaps in the English language literature on the U-Boat campaigns. Tarrant's *The U-Boat Offensive 1914-1945* covers the whole sweep of two world wars and provides a remarkably concise yet thorough account of the German U-boat campaigns in both. His discussion of operations is set in a solid strategic context and within the broader context of the evolution of naval warfare itself. His account of the wedding of time-honoured blockade strategy with the new possibilities—and limitations—of submarines in the First World War is tightly focused and marvelously balanced. The same can be said of his handling of World War II in which the complex pressures of strategy, the intelligence war, and the contest between Allied tonnage losses and new construction are clearly set forth, he displays a fine sense for the limits of Dönitz's fleet and for the imperatives of the war of attrition. *The U-Boat Offensive* also provides enough technical detail on U-boat development to carry the story.

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Tarrant's text is itself a major contribution to the field, but it is also particularly useful for the enormous volume of essential data that it provides on aspects of the U-boat war. U-boat losses are recorded in detail at the end of each chapter; merchant shipping losses (in various arrangements), new U-boat construction, monthly U-boat strength returns, U-boat specifications, and other tables are provided in appendices. Much of this information is already available in British official and naval staff histories and in out-of-print monographs, and the text is based largely on Admiralty in-house publications available at the Public Records Office in Kew. But it would be impudent to suggest that Tarrant has simply repackaged a familiar tale. Rather, he has produced for the first time a truly comprehensive and scholarly account of the German U-boat arm in the world wars. The worst that can be said is that his standard of documentation is less than the scholarly norm.

*The U-Boat Offensive* will serve as an essential reference on the U-boat campaigns. However, its significance is surpassed by that of the publication of *The U-Boat War in the Atlantic 1939-1945*, one of the confidential Admiralty in-house sources upon which Tarrant and many others before him have drawn. Long revered by specialists in the field as the Grail for U-boat operations in the Second World War, *The U-Boat War* was compiled after the war under British and American direction by Fregattenkapitän Gunter Hessler, Staff Of-

ficer (Operations) to BdU from 1941 onwards and Admiral Dönitz's son-in-law. Among Hessler's able research assistants was a young German naval officer named Jürgen Rohwer, now the foremost authority on the Battle of the Atlantic. Hessler's credentials for writing this account were impeccable and so too were his sources, which included the surviving U-boat logs, the War Diary of BdU, and other captured German records.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office has published a facsimile edition of the original three-volume "BR 305." Its 400-plus pages of text cover deployments, operations, analysis of U-boat activities, equipment, tactical developments, and evaluations of the significance of Allied countermeasures. The comings and goings of individual submarines and "wolfpacks" are described in detail, as are contemporary German assessments of convoy battles. The text is buttressed periodically with maps, diagrams, and charts illustrating strategic and tactical deployments and concepts, and with no less than thirty-two diagrams, published in a separate wallet, from the original BR 305. The diagrams contain a goldmine of data: flow charts of pack composition, strength returns, tonnages sunk, deployments by theatre, and the like. To this facsimile edition the reviser has appended brief notes correcting errors and explaining incidents in the text along with reflections on the latest intelligence revelations, and a brief index.

It is difficult not to indulge superlatives when assessing the importance of Hessler's work and its publication for wide distribution. Nothing like it has ever been available; *The U-Boat War* is without a doubt the most important book ever published on the Battle of the Atlantic.

Amid the welter of books which clutter the field of twentieth century naval history, Hessler's and Tarrant's stand out as essential additions to modern naval libraries. They also demonstrate that naval historians have been neither crushed or blinded by the challenges of their field.

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Terraine, John. *The U-Boat Wars: 1916-1945*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1989. 841pp. \$42.95

The U-boat campaigns of the First and Second World Wars were as crucial to the Allied victories as any campaign or battle in either war. The battles were fought by young men new to the sea. They fought in small, harsh vessels—corvettes, frigates, and destroyers. Battles were frequent and ugly. Most happened far from the land. Neither panache nor dash prevailed. Tenacity and technology, subtlety, and elemental heroism carried the day. Victory was perceived sooner by the statistician than by the commander.

John Terraine, a noted British military historian, has given us a long

and complex history of the U-boat wars. He has conveyed, with a historian's eye for insightful detail and quotation, all the interlocking threads of the campaigns. His special ability is to help the reader appreciate the subtle integrations of tactics, operations, and technologies in those brutal but historic campaigns.

Terraine's coverage of the U-boat actions of the First World War and of developments in the interwar period is important: he shows that the roots of the tactics and weapons of the Second World War were established in those years. Nevertheless, Terraine's descriptive and analytical writing rivets the reader's attention most firmly to the grueling Battle of the North Atlantic from 1939 to 1945.

The convoy arguments—to sail in escorted convoy or to sail alone, hoping to avoid detection—have been discussed by other writers. But Terraine masters this question and its tactical complexities by making the mathematics and its implications obvious. (Readers who want more development of the mathematics are advised to consult P.M.S. Blackett's work in operational analysis.) Terraine observes that the size of a convoy upon the vastness of the sea was so slight that it was not any more likely to suffer detection than was a single ship. Churchill put it: "There was in fact very nearly as good a chance of a convoy of forty ships in close order slipping unperceived between the patrolling U-boats as there was for a single ship; and each time this happened, forty ships escaped instead of