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# Hold the Narrow Sea: Naval Warfare in the English Channel, 1939-1945

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less. Virtually all groups associated with the making of policy involving the Armed Forces are criticized. Such criticism is a natural consequence of the authors' desire to shift and reform the core perceptions within the military structure. Yet, it could cause the policymakers to place bruised egos before professionalism and ignore the valid points made by the book. While the book pulls no punches regarding the policymakers, junior officers and NCOs do not receive such honest treatment as the authors take great pains to gain their favor.

Two major shortcomings of the book are its exclusions of strategy and nuclear war. The authors explicitly state that the book deals with neither strategy nor nuclear war; however, in this age of both tactical and strategic weapons wherein the United States could foreseeably be involved in both superpower and Third World conflicts, the validity of these exclusions is questionable.

*America Can Win* identifies the issues facing America's military. The great merit of the book is not in its recommendations but its questions that call into account many basic beliefs and convictions regarding the military structure. It is for these hard questions that the book should be read by everyone concerned with the direction of the Armed Forces. The holders of those questioned beliefs must recall the wisdom of Nietzsche: "A very popular error: having the courage of one's convictions; rather it is a matter of having the courage for an attack on one's convictions." In its attacks on America's military

structure *America Can Win* provides a foundation for debate.

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Smith, Peter C. *Hold the Narrow Sea. Naval Warfare in the English Channell, 1939-1945.* Ashborne, Derbyshire, England: Mooreland Publishing Co. Ltd.; dist., Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1984. 255pp. \$14.95

Ever since England rose to prominence as a seapower, the English Channel and its approaches have been the scene of numerous naval actions. Those waters have always been crucial to England's retention of its position as a maritime nation. Often, for its very survival, England has had to ensure control of "narrow seas" surrounding its shores.

There was perhaps no greater threat to England's survival than the period between the fall of France in June 1940 and the German invasion of Russia in June 1941, when it stood alone facing what appeared to be the invincible might of Nazi Germany. In those critical days both the R.A.F. and the Royal Navy fought valiantly against overwhelming odds to save the country from a widely expected and planned invasion.

It was then, that the English Channel became a scene of numerous clashes between British and German light forces. The term "narrow seas" in fact came into wide use then to refer to the actions of light forces in

those waters washing the shores of west Europe and, in particular, the waters of the English Channel and its approaches. The struggle for mastery of the narrow seas did not end until the Allied liberation of France and the Benelux countries early in 1945. The naval actions in the English Channel were numerous, bloody, and fought with great determination on both sides. Both sides in the conflict suffered great losses in ships and men. But it was the British who in the end prevailed.

This book was written by a well known British naval author; however, the title is misleading because the author describes only the actions of British destroyers, and not light forces and minesweepers. The latter forces, and not the destroyers, bore the brunt of the burden in holding the narrow seas for the Allies. The author has provided a detailed account of everyday actions fought by the destroyers in escorting convoys, and transporting troops and materiel. These actions occurred frequently in atrocious weather and in waters endangered by many shoals, strong currents, and tides.

The British ships faced not only inclement weather and confined waters but had to ward off attacks by the German aircraft, E-Boats, and larger ships, and deal with the constant danger from mines. There was almost no respite and little glory in these actions by the destroyers in the English Channel; yet, they continued to fight despite the odds. The destroyers and their crews earned the respect of their enemies and provided

inestimable service for the Allied cause.

The book has a number of shortcomings which limit its use for any serious reader of naval warfare. There is an almost endless description of minute details concerning the particular courses, bearings, speeds, radio frequencies used, and number of rounds fired. There is little, if any, analysis of particular actions and no serious attempt to deal with and gain useful knowledge from operational mistakes. There are too many quotations from various diaries that add no analytical focus, but only serve to dull the reader with extraneous details. There is no attempt to describe the organization of the German or British naval forces used in the English Channel either at the beginning of their conflict or at any time during the ensuing years of the conflict. In discussing the evacuation from Dunkirk in June 1940, the author provides data on the number of troops transported but at no time are Allied ship and personnel losses given. He uses the German abbreviations for air units, with no English translations. The book is also badly organized, with too many subsections and no footnotes.

Despite these shortcomings and more, the book is useful because it describes an important and often forgotten aspect of naval war: the actions in "narrow seas" or restricted waters.

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