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Axis Submarine Successes 1939-1945

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of weapons and the investment budget should only grow at a rate of 5 percent a year in real terms. Many persons may find these rules-of-thumb too mechanical and believe that the pace of Soviet modernization is faster than Kaufman assumes. But defense planners do have to face the question of how to modernize without compromising readiness. If not Kaufman's approach, another is needed.

Both of the works reviewed here are worth reading. Even if one disagrees with the conclusions of the Brookings analysts, the reader will be stimulated by the arguments on some important issues facing US policymakers.

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Rohwer, Jürgen. *Axis Submarine Successes 1939-1945*. Introductory material translated by John A. Broadwin. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1983. 386pp. \$23.95
Axis Submarine Successes 1939-45 is a translation and complete revision of Rohwer's *Die U-Boote-Erfolge der Achsenmächte*. Entirely superseding the earlier work, Rohwer's English version has now corrected and expanded the data using recently released action reports from archives in London, Washington, and Ottawa as well as extensive correspondence with naval officers involved in both sides of the submarine war and available Ultra signal information. After more than thirty years of compilation and analysis, Rohwer has produced

unquestionably, the most accurate listing of Axis submarine attacks and their targets for World War II. Rohwer has replaced the inflated wartime claims from all sides of the war with solid data, based on critical examination of all available evidence.

The book is divided into two major portions. The largest of them (291 pages) is a chronological listing of submarine attacks in each major operating area: North Sea, Northern Theater, Baltic, Black Sea, Mediterranean, Indian Ocean, and Pacific. Each of these listings has 15 columns of data. Three of them give the nationality, name, and commanding officer of the submarine, while the remaining columns describe the time, the position, the ship attacked, and the weapons used. This information is supplemented by extensive footnotes explaining any discrepancies between the reports of attacking submarines and other evidence.

The second portion of the book (83 pages) is devoted to four different indexes which give page references to individual submarines, the names of submarine captains, the designations of allied convoys, and the names of the ships attacked. The indexes are followed by nine pages of charts which legibly reproduce the worldwide, standard grid system which the German Navy used during World War II.

Rohwer's book is a gold mine of information which can be used in a variety of ways. It will be useful and interesting for survivors, relatives, and students who search for data on a

particular ship or individual and it will delight those buffs who glory in all types of statistics. More importantly, Rohwer's compilation is a research tool for historians who seek broader understanding about the nature and role of submarine warfare. For these historians, this book provides the carefully refined data from which they can more confidently measure the results which Axis submarines achieved in relation to the objects which Germany sought. This type of generalization will require extensive use of this book in conjunction with analysis of other types of historical material. It is a difficult task which remains to be done satisfactorily. While Rohwer has provided the basis for important future work, he has already drawn some valuable conclusions about the nature of wartime statistics.

Even very recently in America, the statistics which support claims of success in warfare have been controversial, but Rohwer's analysis of those from a different problem, in a different time, sheds some light on a larger issue which often confronts students of military and naval affairs. In many instances, Rohwer notes that the figures for German U-boat success contained in the reports of the German Armed Forces High Command greatly exceeded the actual numbers. In the postwar period, these extreme overestimates were often made out to be deliberately falsified reports, inflated estimates by Headquarters or complete fabrications for propaganda purposes. Rohwer's detailed analysis

shows that, with minor exceptions, these are false conclusions. The real cause of the overestimates was the difficulty which submarine commanders faced in getting accurate data following an attack. Interestingly, when single U-boats attacked solitary merchant ships, false reports of hits or sinkings were rare. When visual conditions were normal, tonnage estimates were generally good. However, when Allied counterattacks made visual observation difficult, submarine commanders were prone to misinterpret acoustical information.

For example, U-boat captains generally classified all torpedo explosions as hits, and all types of acoustical noise as "sinking sounds," even though, for a variety of reasons, torpedoes often misfired. In addition, when U-boats operated together against convoys, the claims of one submarine often duplicated that of others. U-boat officers often assumed that multiple detonations indicated hits on more than one ship, although in fact, different torpedoes often struck the same ship. Similarly, an explosion heard by one submarine may well have been the result of another submarine's torpedo, while its own failed to fire. These are some of the usual causes which made the figures reported by submarines in a wolfpack to be exaggerated. In addition, one needs to take into account the conditions of light during night attacks and the extent of antisubmarine activity to understand the large errors in wartime statistics. Another source of error can be found in the

estimate of size in attacking merchant ships. The convoy runs between Gibraltar and the United Kingdom often consisted of small ships, sailing in ballast. U-boat commanders easily overestimated their tonnage under difficult conditions. In short, Rohwer has stressed that we understand the human element in warfare before we leap to broad conclusions, even about statistical data.

After having examined all reports in detail, Rohwer concludes that there was seldom a wrong report for which there was no reasonable explanation. Most errors were caused by reduced chances for visual observation; a few from the overoptimistic temperament of the observer or from lack of experience. Only very rarely were exaggerations solely the product of a captain's imagination.

In terms of decisionmaking in high command, Rohwer's most interesting conclusion is that Command Headquarters accepted and forwarded, with few exceptions, the unverified data from U-boat commanders. Staff officers failed to use other intelligence sources to examine critically the overestimates. Therefore, they allowed policy and strategy to be formulated on the basis of inflated data.

With Rohwer's remarkable compilation in hand, historians can now move forward. By juxtaposing the original reports with actual successes, one can now begin to evaluate the extent to which overinflated figures affected High Command decisions. Naval historians can look

forward to such new insights and generalizations which Rohwer's long research now makes possible.

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Homze, Edward L. *German Military Aviation*. New York: Garland, 1984. 244pp. \$39

With *German Military Aviation* Edward L. Homze, already one of the leaders in his field, establishes a claim to be the front runner. This volume is a part of a series titled as *Military History Bibliographies* edited by Robin Higham and Jacob W. Kipp. It covers the literature on the German air arm from the days of Kaiser Wilhelm II down to those of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Homze logically organizes his work along chronological lines. In addition to the mandatory chapters on the great wars, he includes one on the infancy of aviation and another that covers the story after German rearmament began in the fifties. Each of these chapters begins with an authoritative bibliographic essay that demonstrates the erudition of the author that is clear and readable. Official and private works are considered in both the English and German languages, and some French literature is included. Each of these essays closes with some astute recommendations for further research which should be useful for either students at the war colleges or in graduate schools. The treatment is