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Battleships Bismarck: A Survivor's Story

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Melville's propagandistic attack on flogging, a practice that Valle says was generally supported by enlisted men and officers alike.

Valle's main contribution is his careful analysis of the formal judicial proceedings and his extraction from them of a great deal of information. It remains for him, or someone else, to broaden the research and to place the naval judicial system in the context of its times. Until then his conclusions must be considered tentative as applied to the Navy as a whole.

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Von Müllenheim-Rechberg, Baron Burkhard. *Battleship Bismarck: A Survivor's Story*. Trans. by Jack Sweetman. Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1980. 290pp.

In the words of Admiral Sir John Tovey, Commander in Chief, Home Fleet, as the British closed in on *Bismarck*, "the sinking of the *Bismarck* may have an effect on the war as a whole out of all proportion to the loss of the enemy of one battleship." In retrospect, it is not surprising that the sinking of *Bismarck* took on more significance than the loss of one battleship—small as the German Fleet in 1941 was—or that the story continues to attract popular and scholarly interest. Before *Exercise Rhine* was over, the British had lost its largest warship and deployed four battleships, two battle cruisers, two aircraft carriers, three heavy cruisers, ten light cruisers and twenty-one destroyers in a chase that covered an area of more than a million square nautical miles. *Bismarck* demonstrated the technical achievements of German naval architecture and the culmination of German naval gunnery in its duel with *Hood* and *Prince of Wales*. In the final 90-minute action, *Bismarck*, unable to defend herself, demonstrated almost unbelievable staying power absorbing

2,876 hits before the crew set the scuttling charges and opened the sea-cocks. Another facet of this phase of the Anglo-German Atlantic battle, which has intrigued students of modern naval warfare, is the role of naval intelligence. Fueled by the publications beginning in 1974 about ULTRA and the British success in breaking the German naval code, there was speculation that Admiral Tovey's forces had substantial, if not decisive, aid from this source in tracking *Bismarck*.

As the senior survivor and fourth gunnery officer of *Bismarck* during her training period and first and final sortie, Baron Burkhard von Müllenheim-Rechberg provides an entirely new perspective to the ship's 8-day operation. The author's account, written 40 years after the sinking of *Bismarck*, represents the first and only detailed account of the battle from the German side.

Supplemented by new archival sources and the author's vivid recreation of events and the morale of the officers and crew, he has made a major contribution to this chapter of World War II and naval history in general. Not only does Müllenheim demonstrate his objectivity and scholarship but his writing holds the reader in suspense throughout the chase. His description of the ship's fitting-out and training period and the photographs provide a rare opportunity to experience what life was like on board *Bismarck*.

The book also presents Müllenheim with an opportunity to provide some counterinterpretations and necessary corrections to the various battle reports in the *Bismarck* literature. Müllenheim's *Battleship Bismarck* thereby joins Russell Granfell's *The Bismarck Episode* and Brian Schofield's *Loss of the Bismarck* as the classic accounts of the pursuit and destruction of *Bismarck*.

Müllenheim poses the difficult questions that Lütjens, the Fleet Commander, had to face at each critical

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phase. He contends that, viewed strategically, *Exercise Rhine* was a failure from the moment the ship left Norway inasmuch as the British had detected the breakout of *Bismarck* and her companion, *Prinz Eugen*. Commerce raiding was the primary objective of German surface forces in the Atlantic, not the destruction of enemy warships.

The contact with *Suffolk* on 23 May, the *Hood* action off Iceland and the persistent shadowing of British cruisers created the most likely reason for Lütjen's pessimism that became so noticeable in his tactical decisions and dispatches. As Müllenheim suggests, Lütjens may have been influenced by what the admiral regarded as superior British radar which, as Lütjens radioed to Group West on 25 May, "has a strong adverse effect on operations in Atlantic."

Lütjen's decisions not to close with the British cruisers, not to pursue the damaged *Prince of Wales*, his precipitate order to break off the mission and reach port and then to steer for St. Nazaire by the shortest route and, perhaps most significant, his failure to realize that *Bismarck* had managed to break away from its pursuers on 25 May are all symptoms of a larger issue that is somewhat outside the scope of this book. The weight of German naval tradition, the failure of the High Seas Fleet in World War I, placed a heavy burden on the *Seekriegsleitung* and Admiral Raeder whose conception of German naval strategy and planning went beyond the resources available to them. Although they maintained the goal of achieving command of the sea in the North Atlantic, even the admonition of the *Seekriegsleitung* to strive for "local and temporary" command of the sea was unrealistic. In spite of its limited surface forces which, according to Raeder, could only show they knew how to die gallantly, it was imperative that those limited forces be used to demonstrate their value to Hitler and to atone

for Germany's inactivity on the high seas in World War I. Lütjens had initially expressed reservations against deploying *Bismarck* alone without heavier surface forces but acceded to the position of the *Seekriegsleitung* and Raeder. In this light, Lütjens' 25 May "victory or death" speech with its deleterious effect on morale or his premature 26 May radio dispatch "we will fight to the last round" are expressions of resignation that did not appear justified by events at the time and may have prevented Lütjens from taking action such as the erection of the dummy smokestack designed to confuse enemy air attacks. As Müllenheim states, after 24 May immediate needs dictated most of the actions of the fleet staff and ship's command. In the end, it was Lütjens' two radio messages on the morning of 25 May that enabled the British to get a fix on *Bismarck* and direct Force H and its *Swordfish* to the target. Conventional methods of intelligence and reconnaissance and not ULTRA provided the British with their success against *Bismarck*. ULTRA and the *Bismarck* operation did, however, have a decisive effect on the war at sea because the British were able to destroy the German resupply organization in the Atlantic thereby making it impossible for surface forces to operate effectively in the Atlantic and forcing Dönitz to rely upon refueling his U-boats and U-boat tankers ("Milchcow").

In the final analysis, the German errors and failures doomed *Bismarck*. Not all the errors, however, were made by the Fleet Commander. Poor German aerial reconnaissance, the inaccurate report on 22 May that the British ships were at anchor in Scapa Flow and the encouragement by Group North marked the fateful beginnings of the voyage. Müllenheim is unwilling to ascribe the loss of *Bismarck* either to "unforeseeable fate" or a "fatal flaw" in Lütjens' character. No one can deny, of course, the role of the "fortunes of war" in the

misattack on *Sheffield* that caused *Ark Royal's* airplanes to switch from the unreliable magnetic detonators to contact detonators for the critical torpedo attack on *Bismarck*. As Müllenheim points out, the rudder damage and the inability to repair or steer the ship were only part of the reason *Bismarck* was left helpless in the Atlantic. Without U-boat or air support, *Bismarck* was, in Müllenheim's words, "consigned to a fate that she did not have the resources to avert."

Müllenheim does offer new insights into the actions and motivations of his superiors, although he does not claim definitive answers. In fact, the loss of the War Diary and the few survivors (115) mean that we can never be certain of the command decisions made by Lütjens. The author's excellent portrayal of Lütjens does suggest more strongly than he is willing to do that the Fleet Commander was involved in an operation that he did not fully support and each setback simply confirmed this attitude. The description of *Bismarck's* captain, Ernst Lindemann, and the differences between the two German officers does raise the question of whether another Fleet Commander might have acted otherwise. The failure of the German Navy to produce an outstanding naval commander of Hipper's caliber in World War II and the failure to develop and implement a viable naval strategy is a larger story of which the *Bismarck* episode is a significant and now clearer chapter.

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Whynes, David K. *The Economics of Third World Military Expenditures*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979. 165pp.

There was something distinctly Woodrow Wilsonish about President Carter's quest to achieve longrun goals

that were certifiably visionary to the "hardheaded realist." This was never more true than in his attempts to control arms sales to Third World nations. Reasonable men cannot but question the mortality of abetting the diversion of scarce development resources into local arms rivalries. Yet as a practical matter the net effect of Carter's policy appears to have been to have slowed such arms races little while causing the tanks of the world's arms suppliers to increase, at the expense of both U.S. arms sales and influence. Thus, at the advent of the Reagan administration, arms sales policy is once again an open and nettlesome issue.

The Economics of Third World Military Expenditures is a timely and thought-provoking work. Whynes assumes that because defense expenditures inherently require diversion of resources that are more directly welfare-promoting, there is a clear benefit from minimizing their net cost. Net cost is the financial (accounting) cost minus the social value of whatever civil benefits arise from defense expenditures. Civil benefits arise both directly through effects on the civilian economy and indirectly as the military acts as a "modernizing" influence on both the economy and the polity. Whynes, by his admission, fails to prove entirely the case he is interested in arguing—that greater emphasis should be placed on policies of "military-social integration" to reduce the net cost of defense. But he does succeed in providing a broad-ranging and imaginative review of evidence and thinking on the role of the military in the nation-building process.

After stating the problem, Whynes deals with why military expenditures have grown, their costs and benefits to the civilian economy, arms imports and foreign aid, and whether defense spending rises under military regimes. The empirical evidence he reviews is notable equally for the insights it provides and the confirmations it fails to provide.