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Three Before Breakfast

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the defense of "superior orders" in war crimes trials.)

The importance that the nations of the world of today place on the need for a far-reaching and enforceable humanitarian law of armed conflict has been vividly demonstrated by the costs they underwrote and the talent they contributed to the four sessions of the Diplomatic Conference concerned with that subject. There is an urgent need to supplement the Protocols themselves with published discussions by experts in this field of international law, discussions that will help to clarify and to publicize these documents. This volume is a major contribution to this process.

HOWARD S. LEVIE
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Coles, Alan. *Three Before Breakfast*.

Homewell, Havant, Hampshire, Eng.: Kenneth Mason, 1979. 192pp.

Three Before Breakfast recounts a little known story of the sinking of three aged *Bacchante*-class British cruisers by a single (probably) German U-boat in World War I. What makes this story so unusual is not that the three were sunk, but that all three were sunk in less than an hour's time—just before breakfast. Alan Coles has balanced an incredible amount of scholarly research with a carefully conceived measure of poetic license that makes the personalities on both sides come alive, and it is through their eyes that the morning becomes real. The result is a suspenseful, colorful, romantic, and sometimes sentimental inquiry into one of Britain's darkest days at sea. The incident sparked a great deal of debate on the readiness of Britain's naval forces, the priorities and responsibilities of its senior commanders and the operational plans of the fleet. Additionally, it marked the first action that confirmed the U-boat's value as an effective although admittedly ungentlemanly

In September 1941 *Aboukir*, *Hogue*, and *Cressy* were patrolling the "Broad Fourteens" where the English Channel pushes into the North Sea. At that time and since, some have argued that the three coal-burning cruisers were positioned as unescorted live bait for the German Fleet. Ironically, Churchill had decided to withdraw them from this forward position, to be replaced with a balanced, more modern force. However, his decision was 24 hours too late for a bold U-boat commander named Weddigen had already maneuvered the U-9 for an attack.

Coles' account of the sinkings reads like a novel and he pieces each ship's story together in a skillful manner. None of the ships was ready for the attack—they had fallen into the routine monotony of the patrol. *Aboukir* was the first ship to be attacked (torpedoed or mined, thought the captain) and shortly afterward was abandoned. *Hogue* steamed to assist the foundering *Aboukir* and provided a stationary broadside target for Weddigen. Despite a thick armor belt of Krupps steel, two torpedoes opened up *Hogue's* hull and magazine explosions finished the work. While pandemonium reigned on the surface, U-9 stalked *Cressy*. With her batteries nearly discharged, Weddigen ordered an attack and succeeded in sinking *Cressy*.

Littered with thousands of men and boys (midshipmen from Dartmouth were assigned to the ships' companies) and an assortment of rafts, launches, and flotsam, the sea became the stage for dramatic heroism and survival. First reaching the survivors were British and Dutch fishing trawlers. The fleet, having been alerted by *Cressy's* dispatch "ABOUKIR SUNK, HOGUE SINKING", arrived on the scene several hours later—just before lunch.

Though not as interesting, the second half of the book deals with the aftermath of the triple sinking, the rescue of survivors, reaction of the

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press, the labored and painful official inquiries, some unusually inflated war stories, and the questions that still remain unanswered. Additionally, Coles traces the careers of many of the British officers and midshipmen that were involved in the catastrophe that took 1500 lives. Weddigen's later career is followed as well as that of his second in command, Johannes Spiess, who was one of a handful of German submariners who survived in U-boats until their surrender to the British later in the war.

Three Before Breakfast is a classic example of little known naval stories that can be dredged up years later to fascinate, enlighten, and perhaps instruct.

J.P. MORSE

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Dobson, Christopher, et al. *The Cruellest Night*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1979. 223pp.

Stamp out the fascist beast once and for all in its lair. Use force to break the racial pride of these Germanic women. Take them as your lawful booty. Kill. As you storm onwards, kill, you gallant soldiers of the Red Army.

This injunction by the Soviet war correspondent Ilya Ehrenburg, quoted by the authors of *The Cruellest Night*, states well the reality that the over 7,000 German civilians, Women Naval Auxiliaries, wounded soldiers, and submariners were fleeing in late January 1945 when they boarded the former Nazi Party "Strength Through Joy" passenger liner *Wilhelm Gustloff* in the East Prussian port of Gdynia. Unfortunately, most of these citizens and warriors of the nearly defeated Third Reich did not escape the fury of Soviet revenge, inspired by a half decade of cruel Nazi occupation of Russia. Most of the passengers and crew of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* perished when Soviet submarine captain Alexander Marinesko fired three torpedoes into its

hull—causing what the authors claim to be "the biggest sea disaster" in history. Nearly five times the number of people died that night as had died in the *Titanic* sinking.

The sinking of the 25,484-ton *Wilhelm Gustloff* was the most spectacular event in the history of "Germany's Dunkirk," the monumental evacuation of eastern Germany orchestrated personally by Admiral Doenitz and which ultimately saved over two million Germans from Soviet revenge and subjugation. Fortunately, the authors of *The Cruellest Night*, British journalists, refuse to let WW II or cold war politics obscure the essential fact of that drama: that wars are fought by frightened human beings who are capable of great cowardice and great bravery. Consequently, Dobson, Miller, and Payne cram full their narrative with eyewitness accounts from both sides. They tell of the panic to get aboard. "Babies were used as tickets, being carried on board and then thrown down again to be used as a passport to safety for another family member. Some fell between the ship and the quayside. It seemed not to matter. All that mattered was to get away from the Russians." The authors also tell of great courage after the liner had been torpedoed. "Then Max Bonnet appeared still apparently wearing his white jacket. With enormous difficulty he carried his tray. 'A final cognac, gentlemen,' he said. They drank and threw down his glasses."

We also see events through Russian eyes as well. We meet Captain Marinesko of Soviet submarine S-13 who, although by sinking the *Wilhelm Gustloff* had scored the largest kill in Soviet submarine history, would later be stripped of his commission, declared an "un-person," and sentenced to the Gulag—all for having returned late once from a shore leave weekend in Turku, Finland (The NKGB accused him of making contact with allied