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The Critical Convoy Battles of March, 1943

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that King demanded that Nimitz replace him without delay as Halsey's chief of staff.

On the contrary, then, new sources and new interpretations have appeared in the past decade which could have been incorporated into this second edition. It is regrettable that the text does not reflect them. Nevertheless, *The Fast Carriers* is valuable, not as a balanced history of naval aviation, but rather as a mirror of the views of naval aviators seeking recognition for their service. Its summary of technical developments is also valuable. No other book has done as well in describing the emergence of the carrier as a principal tactical weapon of the Navy in the Second World War. Thus by its uniqueness, despite its flaws, *The Fast Carriers* remains as an important book on the history of naval warfare.

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Rohwer, Jürgen. *The Critical Convoy Battles of March, 1943*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1977. 356pp.

The Atlantic Ocean frequently has been the scene of great battles. Perhaps the most intense of these conflicts was during what Winston Churchill called the 20th century's "forty years war." The outcome of both the First and Second World Wars depended to a significant degree on the results of submarine against convoy in the Atlantic.

Jürgen Rohwer, noted German naval historian and editor of *Marine Rundschau*, has exhaustively researched a brief but crucial period in this theater. The Battle of the Atlantic—Germany's attempt in World War II to intervene decisively in the seaborne flow of material from the United States to England—reached a point of crisis during the winter of 1942-1943. During the last quarter of 1942, for the first time since the beginning of the war, Allied production of merchant shipping

exceeded losses (both to weather and Axis activities). In May 1943 Churchill surveyed the Atlantic situation, as well as that in North Africa, Russia, and the Pacific, and declared the "end of the beginning" of winning the war. The intervening period—January through April 1943—was of decisive importance.

"Few outside the two Navies and merchant marine," wrote Samuel Eliot Morison,

realized how serious the situation had become in March 1943. The U-boats . . . sank 108 ships that month, totaling 627,000 tons, and lost only 15 of their number. So many Allied escort vessels were under repair that the group organization was disintegrating. So many U-boats were at sea . . . that evasive routing was futile . . . No enemy ever came so near to disrupting Atlantic communications as [Germany] did that month.

It is precisely that month, March 1943, that Rohwer addresses in his book. In particular, he describes the events surrounding the transits of the convoys designated SC. 122, HX. 229, and HX. 229A.

The author has intensively researched both Allied and German sources to produce a greatly detailed narrative. So great is the detail, in fact, that *Critical Convoy Battles* is a book for the specialist. It is itself a valuable historical source document. Included in the 200 pages of text and the 153 pages of appendixes and bibliography is a wealth of information about the participants—the men as well as the ships—from both sides in the Battle of the Atlantic. The book also contains many detailed diagrams and tables. The photographs are so numerous and excellent that they alone justify the book's purchase.

The convoys discussed were attacked almost continuously during their transit. Although the Germans regarded this battle, occurring primarily from 16-19 March, as a victory—no U-boats were

lost to surface escorts (two were sunk by patrol aircraft) and approximately 20 merchantmen were sunk—it was really an Allied win. Not only did the bulk of the convoys reach their destination but March was to mark the high point of the German U-boat successes. In fact, during the period 28 April-6 May 1943 convoy "ONS-5," composed of 42 ships, transited the North Atlantic with a loss of "only" 13 ships although it was opposed by up to 51 U-boats. In addition, seven of the submarines were sunk, five by the convoy's escorts and two by aircraft. On 24 May 1943 Germany withdrew its submarines from the area. In Rohwer's words, "the Battle of the Atlantic had been decided."

The author discusses more than just this brief period and provides valuable information about the operating methods of Allied and German commanders as they contested the convoys' passages. The heart of the German campaign was communication. The effectiveness of the "wolf pack"—the tactic of coordinated attacks on a convoy by several submarines—depended on frequent use of radio communications. This provided the Allies with a valuable source of intelligence about the U-boats' locations and intentions. Rohwer emphasizes that the Germans were surprisingly slow to appreciate how much information they were giving away to the Allied "HF-DF" or direction-finding effort. Indeed, the author concludes that this was the decisive factor in the Allied victory in the Atlantic, with radar a distant second.

Also of great importance to this victory was the increasing number and range of patrol aircraft. As the primary U-boat tactic was to attack on the surface, aircraft visual and radar surveillance capabilities were excellent detection means, well outranging the surface escorts' radar and sonar resources.

What is striking about the Battle of the Atlantic is the heroism and resourcefulness of the men who fought it. The

winter of 1942-1943 was one of the harshest on record and the warships involved, both submarines and escorts, were relatively small, with the latter averaging only 1,000 tons. The author states that he did not intend to produce a book about the "human" story of the battle but rather to investigate "the interplay of forces on both sides in the sphere of operational command with its many technical aspects." He has accomplished this purpose admirably, but also has produced a record of determined and courageous actions by seamen of many nations.

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Smyth, Henry DeWolf. *Atomic Energy for Military Purposes: The Official Report of the Development of the Atomic Bomb under the Auspices of the United States Government, 1940-1945*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1976. 264pp. Lens, Sidney. *The Day Before Doomsday: An Anatomy of the Nuclear Arms Race*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977. 274pp. Cave Brown, Anthony, and MacDonald, Charles B., eds. *The Secret History of the Atomic Bomb*. New York: Dial Press, 1977. 582pp.

The books under review here address three aspects of the same conviction: that the advent of atomic and nuclear weapons has constituted an essential break with the past, and a principal problem for the present and future. The Smyth report, a physicist's description of the bomb's genesis, rested on the premise that good national policy in the new technological era would depend on wide public and professional understanding of the problems and capabilities inherent in atomic power. Sidney Lens' book elaborates the author's conviction that exploitation of nuclear technology has threatened the human species, jeopardized democratic and liberal political institutions, and