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## A Game of Birds and Wolves: The Secret Game That Won the War

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shipbuilding policies. Although major strategic effects of each country's naval industrial production are presented clearly—especially for the Americans—some interesting insights on technology, industrial procedures, and maritime strategy remain between the lines.

In conclusion, *Warship Builders* is a much-needed and groundbreaking volume about the most staggering industrial conversion in American, indeed world, history. With outstanding attention to detail and a pleasantly precise style, Heinrich tackles fundamental inconsistencies in the conventional narrative and provides an authoritative description of the intersections between private and public sectors in the American wartime economy during World War II. Lastly, Heinrich's study of American shipbuilding in the interwar years highlights how crucial forward-thinking strategy and industrial planning are when preparing for a possible great-power conflict against insidious naval competitors. In this respect, Heinrich's contribution also offers food for thought to maritime historians and analysts as they examine America's competitors' current maritime buildups.

ANNA MATILDE BASSOLI



*A Game of Birds and Wolves: The Secret Game That Won the War*, by Simon Parkin. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2019. 310 pages. \$29.

During the Battle of the Atlantic in World War II, almost three thousand Allied merchant ships and warships succumbed to U-boats under the command of Admiral Karl Dönitz. Journalist and games writer Simon Parkin presents the story of a top secret unit established in Liverpool at the Western Approaches

Command headquarters during the height of the Battle of the Atlantic.

Recounting the history and work of this unit—the Western Approaches Tactical Unit (WATU), created by Winston Churchill in 1942—Parkin explores the role of war games in British efforts to defeat U-boat operations against Allied shipping. WATU was led by Commander (later Captain) Gilbert H. Roberts, RN, who had been recalled to service following medical retirement for tuberculosis in 1938, and was staffed largely by members of the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS, known as “Wrens”). In a flowing narrative, Parkin recounts the background to and development of a war game pitting convoy escorts against U-boats. Designed as a training exercise for convoy-escort officers, its lessons were operationalized readily (p. 143).

The game was laid out on the top floor of Derby House in Liverpool. Staffed by Roberts and a total of sixty-six Wrens from 1942 to 1945, the game was used to show escort officers from many Allied nations what Roberts considered the best way to be sure of sighting U-boats trying to get into the midst of the convoy. Once it was fully developed, the course or war game took six days to complete, and about fifty officers per course participated. Courses were held every week from February 1942 to the end of July 1945—more than 130 games or courses and five thousand participants by war's end (p. 264). The “birds” in the book title references British slang for women, the Wrens in particular; the “wolves” were the U-boats, along with their captains and crews, that frequently operated in groups or packs (i.e., “wolf packs”). That tactic—known as *Die Rudeltaktik*—had been tried and abandoned early in the

war, but under Dönitz's leadership it was changed and revitalized, on the basis of his childhood knowledge of the hunting habits of wolves (pp. 35–38).

First gaming tactics for U-boats attempting to pierce the convoy formations, then tactics for defending against those U-boats, Roberts and his team created a countertactic they code-named “Raspberry” (p. 161). Later, another tactic, known as “Pineapple,” was employed when U-boats were detected far from the convoy by reconnaissance flights, intelligence reports, communications intercepts, or other means.

Parkin opens his narrative with a chance meeting between Dönitz and Roberts on 23 May 1945, as Dönitz was coming down a ship's gangway on his way to be interrogated and Roberts was boarding the ship. From this coincidental moment, during which each acknowledged the other, the author's story begins. A colorful and interesting retelling of one aspect of the naval war in the Atlantic ensues.

The book's excellent character sketches weave a tapestry of human interest and military history. Drawing on numerous archives, including unpublished diaries of Roberts and other Roberts family holdings, the author is able to provide details and offer insights that have eluded others. He also tells a story of unit leadership, camaraderie, and effectiveness. In so doing, Parkin creates a book that reminds us of the dedication displayed by the many individuals who worked toward a common cause of victory. Even with continued postwar secrecy regarding much of the work that was done, there remained lasting friendships. One interesting link Parkin presents is between the work

of the Wrens at Derby House and that of other Wrens at Bletchley Park.

The book offers a lot of background, including several pages on the history of the use of war games, especially naval war games (pp. 94–98). The story is not limited to the activities at Derby House. Coverage of the efforts and operations of U-boat commanders helps to portray the formidable challenge the Allies faced at sea, as well as those ashore who sought to develop tactics to overcome the German wolf packs.

Although it is probably publisher's hyperbole to subtitle the book's subject as the effort that “won the war,” Parkin's work does highlight the significance of war gaming before and during World War II. Sixteen pages of very interesting photographs enhance the book, as does a select bibliography and helpful endnotes. Although the story being told is not a new one, it is not well-known. One hopes that this volume will be read widely and do much to raise awareness of the value of naval war gaming and the substantial efforts of the Wrens and WATU during World War II. It is a book well worth reading.

TIMOTHY J. DEMY



*The Bomber Mafia: A Dream, a Temptation, and the Longest Night of the Second World War*, by Malcolm Gladwell. New York: Little, Brown, 2021. 256 pages. \$27.

Malcolm Gladwell is well known for his books on popular culture and finding the unexpected in social science research. Writings such as *The Tipping Point* (2000), *Blink* (2005), and *Outliers* (2008) have received wide acclaim.