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# The Fighting Tenth: The Tenth Submarine Flotilla and the Siege of Malta

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division after division of foot-marching infantry, whose artillery and first-line transport remained horse-drawn to the end of the war. The logistical limitations alone of such a force made nonsense of any so-called "Blitzkrieg strategy," to say nothing of the inability of Hitler's vague philosophies of war and the art of command to alter the army's essentially traditional *mentalité*.

However, the crux of Cooper's argument is how the army's moral—as opposed to professional—weakness was crucial to its disastrous performance in World War II. The army struck an early bargain with Hitler in the hope of using National Socialism to preserve and enhance the military's special position in German society. The inability of the its leaders to mount any consequent resistance to Hitler prior to 1939 reflected less naiveté about the Nazi system than complicity with it. This manifested itself most clearly and brutally in the army's systematic collaboration with the Reich's genocidal policies in Eastern Europe, when Jews, communists, and Slavs became foes not merely to be defeated but destroyed.

Perhaps senior officers feared the consequences of the army's behavior. A *Generalität* divided, facing a population and an army it believed still loyal to Hitler, could not muster the collective will to act. What began as a betrayal of conscience ended as an abandonment of the professional responsibility that soldiers regard as their unique preserve.

As Hitler assumed more and more responsibility for planning and decision-making, Germany's military leaders retreated into a pose of *nur-Soldatentum* ("soldierliness"), denying any higher duty to the troops they led, the nation they served, or their own traditions.

Blind obedience had no place in the ethos of the German officer. Too few possessed the moral courage to challenge Hitler's misuse of his powers as commander in chief. They justified their behavior with their fear of a German collapse and the ultimate triumph of Bolshevism. They entertained vague hopes of a postwar settling of accounts with the "Bohemian corporal" and his minions.

In the final analysis, the German officer corps prostituted itself and its calling with the substitution of obedience for responsibility. The German army lost its last and greatest war when it sacrificed its honor and its soul.

No armed force can afford to neglect this lesson: professional competence and ethical behavior are symbiotes, not opposites. Limitations in one area reinforce and reflect shortcomings in the other.

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Wingate, John. *The Fighting Tenth: The Tenth Submarine Flotilla and the Siege of Malta*. Hamden, Conn.: Shoestring Press, 1991. 176pp. \$38

The fiftieth anniversary of the lifting of the siege of Malta was celebrated in the summer of 1992 to commemorate the island's geographical importance as a viable submarine base during World War II.

It was imperative that a large submarine force be present to thwart Rommel's interference with Britain's oil supply and to sink Axis ships supporting Rommel's campaign across North Africa. Hence, the Tenth Flotilla of British submarines (the Fighting Tenth) was deployed to Malta to harass shipping across the Mediterranean while the Axis forces attempted to force the surrender of Malta through starvation and heavy bombing.

This book, then, is about the siege of Malta and the Tenth Flotilla's campaign against the sea-lifted supplies to Rommel's army. Together the two narratives constitute perhaps the finest epic story of World War II: British tenacity and "the most concentrated use of submarines in the entire history of submarines."

John Wingate served as first lieutenant (executive officer) in the submarine *United* under Lieutenant John Roxburgh during the 1942-1943 operations out of Malta. He shows a great appreciation for the strategies used by the Commander of the Tenth Flotilla, Captain G.M.G. "Shrimp" Simpson of the Royal Navy, when shuffling his boats between the anti-Axis shipping mission and operations to ensure that Malta remained an operating submarine base. The author has produced an

authoritative work and a firsthand account of most aspects of this tale.

Most of the Tenth Flotilla submarines were *Unity*-class (U-class) boats, which were small, short-range, and highly maneuverable and had a very low silhouette. The class had a diving time of sixteen seconds to periscope depth and weighed about eight hundred tons. Its simple design made it easy to produce in large numbers. The U-class boats proved to be the best solution for British submarine needs in that part of the Mediterranean, which has many shallow areas and contained many minefields as well as numerous air and surface escorts for Axis ships on their short transits to North Africa.

The British situation in North Africa while confronting Rommel's army had been so desperate, and the losses to the Tenth Flotilla so great (forty-five during the siege), that Captain Simpson wrote, "To me it seemed that fully visible ships must be sunk under any conditions, and the troops on board them who were shortly to confront our own army, must be drowned because casualties largely decided the war militarily, so this was our duty." Within two years of the U-class submarine operations, 648,629 tons of shipping was sunk and 400,480 tons was damaged. It was the Tenth Flotilla's valiant efforts that proved to be a major factor in stopping Rommel at El Alamein in Egypt, just short of the Middle East oil fields.

A minor regret relative to this work is that Wingate tells of too many submarine actions in too sparse detail to

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be a truly good reference work like Clay Blair's *Silent Victory*, which deals with U.S. submarine operations in World War II. However, if one reads this work carefully, its impact will endure when one considers submarines of the past and how those of the future might be used.

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Brune, Peter. *Those Ragged Bloody Heroes: From the Kokoda Trail to Gona Beach, 1942*. Winchester, Mass.: Allen & Unwin, 1991. 309pp. A\$34.95

Peter Brune, a school teacher, has provided the first study of the Australian ground phase of the Battle of the Coral Sea since Victor Austin's *To Kokoda and Beyond*, published in 1988. However, unlike Austin, who focused specifically on the Militia's 39th Battalion, Brune discusses not only the Militia but the units of the Australian Imperial Force's (AIF) 7th Division, which thwarted the Japanese advance and eventually cleared the northeast coast of New Guinea. He has provided a more detailed description than Austin of the men who fought and the conditions they faced, in contrast to Austin's greater detail about the engagements.

The Japanese advance to take Port Moresby and the direct threat to Australia was stopped by the Coral Sea naval action in May 1942. But the naval engagement did not eliminate

the land threat to the Allies' key position at Port Moresby. Not to be denied, the Japanese planned an overland advance to take the key port.

While the Japanese advanced from the Bona-Gona area on the northeast coast, they intended to push through the mountain station of Kokoda and eventually strike Port Moresby from the land side of the Owen Stanley Mountains. Fearing this, the Australian and Southwest Pacific (SWPac) Commands had B Company, 39th Battalion, moved to Kokoda. The terrain offered the worst conditions for fighting a war: mountains, thick jungle, and ridge gradients beyond belief. There was no worse place to fight a war. The awesome Japanese force numbered 13,500 (10,000 were seasoned combat troops). On 21 June 1942 the Japanese landed on the coast and began their advance. On 23 June the first shots were fired. The Australians fell back to within thirty-two miles of Port Moresby but eventually went back to the northeast coast and drove the Japanese out of Gona.

Brune has included many more photographs of the men who fought than has any other work on the subject. One gets a true sense of their struggle and the hostile environment in which it took place. They show how the battle quickly turned the young into old. He offers an excellent analysis not only of the battle but of the repercussions that followed, such as the commanders who got sacked and the firing of General Harding at Buna.