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The Fall of Fortress Europe, 1943-1945

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Seaton, Albert. *The Fall of Fortress Europe, 1943-1945*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981. 218pp. \$24.50

The common view that German defeat in World War II was the inevitable result of the great "turning point" battles of 1942 and 1943 is simplistic at best. While Stalingrad, El Alamein, North Africa, and the failure of the U-boat war did indeed destroy any possibility of total German victory, a total German defeat was by no means pre-ordained in early 1943. Hitler still controlled an enormous empire stretching from the Atlantic to the Ukraine and faced a coalition that was anything but united. That he did not turn this empire into an impregnable fortress, divide his opponents, and secure a negotiated settlement was due at least as much to German blunders as it was to Allied power and astuteness.

In *The Fall of Fortress Europe*, Col. Albert Seaton analyzes some of those blunders within the context of a narrative history of the military campaigns of 1943-45. While he deals with the Allied side and the diplomacy of the war to a limited extent, his focus is clearly German military failures—failures which he attributes to both Hitler and his generals.

Both before and during World War II, Seaton notes, these men had exhibited an uncanny ability to violate Clausewitz' famous dicta regarding the relationship between war and policy. Consistently, they underrated their opponents, ignored political and economic realities, and substituted daring and brilliant but meaningless campaign plans for appropriate and comprehensive war plans which could match ends and means. As a result, German tactical genius was wasted in situations made unwinnable by strategic and political blindness.

The German General Staff had exhibited these characteristics long before Hitler's rise to power, but he epitomized such thinking, encouraged its continuation in German military planning, and added a few new deficiencies of his own. By the spring of 1943, he had created a situation which demanded a flexible military defense, possible withdrawal from peripheral areas, total mobilization for a long war, and negotiations with at least one of his enemies to split the Allies and achieve a compromise peace. But Hitler had long before abandoned diplomacy as a viable instrument of policy and refused to face economic reality. Moreover, his "military genius," as applied to defense during the next two years, would consist of foolish and disastrous offensives like Kursk and the Ardennes, a refusal to withdraw from any area, rigid "stand fast" orders which made effective defense impossible, and consistent tactical meddling on the battlefields. The result would be the total defeat of his Thousand-Year *Reich* two and a half years after it had reached its zenith.

None of this will come as news to readers familiar with the history of World War II. Seaton's brief and unfootnoted book adds little to what is already known and available in other, more detailed works, including his own *The Russo-German War* (1971) and *Stalin as Military Commander* (1975), and the serious reader would be better off going directly to these works. For the novice interested in a brief analysis of the military aspects of the war after 1942, however, this can serve as a useful introduction. It is clearly organized, well-written, and contains numerous, easy-to-follow maps. Moreover, Seaton's focus on German defensive efforts from 1943-45 properly draws one away from the 1942 "turning point" syndrome. Equally

important and refreshing, his use of German and Russian sources and emphasis on the Eastern front constitute a healthy corrective to the Western tendency to view the Anglo-American campaigns as the key to Allied victory.

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Lawrence, Hal. *A Bloody War: One Man's Memories of the Canadian Navy 1939-1945*. Annapolis: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1979. 193pp. \$17.95

A Bloody War is a fascinating personal account of World War II seen through the eyes of a man who joined the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve in the early days of 1939 and survived the war years at sea (and ashore). Beginning as an eighteen year old "snotty" assigned to the singularly unglamorous gate tender *Andree Dupre*, Hal Lawrence quickly adapted to life at sea and by war's end, had transferred to the regular navy with the rank of First Lieutenant, assigned as executive officer of HMCS *Sioux*. Although a decidedly casual and narrowly focused history of the wartime Canadian Navy, the author's carefully researched factual material adequately shores up the anecdotal sea stories of patrol duty, convoy operations, bizarre wardroom antics and memorable port calls to Halifax, New York, Scapa Flow, and even Polyarnoe. Moreover, the book captures some of the intensity of the battle for the Atlantic and the personal drama of a few of its incredibly primitive actions at sea.

The book's principal focus is convoy operations and the difficult challenge of ensuring "a safe and timely" arrival of millions of tons of fuel, grain, phosphate, ammunition, and iron ore to sustain the Allies' wartime production. In simple terms, this meant long transits in U-

boat-infested waters protected only by the escorts' limited capabilities, weather, and more than a little luck. Until late in the war, routes were being marked on an alarmingly regular basis with sunken merchant hulls.

During 1942, U-boats sank 1,160 ships, a total of nearly eight million tons. Despite the eight or so escorts that might be assigned to an 80-ship convoy, the U-boats operated with virtual impunity, positioning themselves along the convoy's intended track (determined by long-range surveillance aircraft and refined by intercepted radio signals) and taking advantage of the significant gaps in friendly air coverage from Canada, Iceland, and England. Poor weather often worked against the convoy, slowing the ships to bare steerageway from their normal cruising speeds of 8-10 knots.

Possessing limited surveillance equipment ("Huff Duff"—HF direction-finding gear—was just barely developed, shipboard radars were not introduced until 1942, and early Asdic sets were extremely limited in range and sensitivity) and a modest offensive punch (racked depth charges, 3"-5" guns, and (in some ships) thicker hull plating forward that was used for ramming), corvettes and small destroyers shepherded countless merchants across the Atlantic; there was little doubt the probability of a safe crossing in convoy was considerably higher than that of a single ship.

Lawrence's career spanned the entire spectrum of convoy operations including escorting tankers from the Southern Atlantic, the dangerous Halifax-UK run, and, following Russia's entry into the war, Scapa Flow to Murmansk. One of the most interesting actions recounted in the book occurred when the Canadian corvette *Oakville* sank the *U-94* just south of the Windward Passage. In what could