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# Hitler vs. Roosevelt: The Undeclared Naval War

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## 104 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

(Addit.MSS.15944). Indeed, foreign manuscripts have not been used in France nor the Netherlands. Information on the Dutch ships is apparently based on De Jonge's 1860 history of Dutch seafaring. This work does remain the standard one on the subject, but historians can no longer be content with ignoring manuscript sources available in Dutch and other foreign languages.

More important than sources, however, is the author's contention that it was these naval battles that were the determining factors of the war. This is an interesting and important problem. Writing in the 1890s, Mahan believed that the actions off Barfleure and La Hogue were of little interest and did not support his contention that climactic battle at sea was one of the important elements that led to establishing control over an enemy fleet and, thus, to obtain command of the sea. Aubrey has not presented enough evidence on the general strategic situation during the Nine Years War to prove the point; he has not examined the economic, diplomatic, political and military ramifications of this event at sea in order to reach a proper conclusion. On the other hand, Geoffrey Symcox, in his *The Crisis of French Sea Power 1688-1697* has effectively demonstrated from the French perspective that quite the opposite was true. Indeed, the battle was not a turning point in the war at sea. It was the gradual tipping of the numerical balance of forces at sea that led to the eclipse of the French Navy. As Symcox points out, it was the very presence of a numerical superior English Fleet in the Mediterranean in 1694 that drove the French into port for 18 months. At the same time, the action of the allied fleet in the Channel, following La Hogue and Barfleure, was not an effective sequel to a strategic turning point. Having made those points, however, it would not be surprising to discover that the English view of the event might have been different from

the actual effect that it had on France. Aubrey's work would have been much more effective if he had used Symcox' book directly and countered its persuasive evidence and broadly based account with a similar understanding of the English view and conduct of the war.

Aubrey's study of Barfleure and La Hogue remains a useful and easily accessible account of a fascinating event in naval history.

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Bailey, Thomas A. and Ryan, Paul B. *Hitler vs. Roosevelt: The Undeclared Naval War*. New York: The Free Press, 1979. 303pp.

The first part of World War II, which America officially sat out, holds a special fascination. In this period of quasi-peace (or quasi-war) for America, we rendered significant assistance to the British in their lonely stand against Hitler. Even before the Japanese attacked the Pacific Fleet and the United States went to war, the Atlantic Fleet was in effect at war, escorting convoys through submarine-infested waters. In this undeclared naval war German torpedoes sank one American destroyer, severely damaged another and missed a third.

The authors, a distinguished historian and a retired U.S. Navy captain, see this undeclared naval war as a personal conflict between Hitler and Roosevelt. They base their interesting thesis essentially on Hitler's prolonged oration of 11 December 1941 in which he reviewed what he saw as American provocations, castigated Roosevelt, and finally declared war on the United States. Roosevelt's actions from approximately the fall of France in June 1940 to December 1941 in support of Great Britain form the other major evidentiary pillar.

By casting the complex events of this period in terms of a personal conflict,

## PROFESSIONAL READING 105

the authors have incurred the serious risks of oversimplification. Roosevelt was not alone in detesting Hitler and the Nazi regime, but the purpose of American assistance to Great Britain was not so much to defeat or even to combat Hitler as it was to insure the survival of Great Britain in the war. British survival was absolutely necessary to the defense of the United States, given the deplorable state of readiness for major war of the U.S. Armed Forces, especially the Army and its Air Force, in 1940 and 1941.

Statecraft usually has far more profound motivations for action or non-action than mere personal animosity. Indeed, the authors go to great lengths to point out that Hitler consistently ignored what to him were undoubtedly American provocations because he felt it was not in Germany's interest to go to war with the United States before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. If Hitler refused the American challenge, regardless of his own feelings, then one could very easily conclude that the mechanism of a conflict between Hitler and Roosevelt is not particularly appropriate to examine this undeclared naval war.

The theme of Hitler-Roosevelt conflict gives the impression that the State, War and Navy Departments were sitting around waiting for Roosevelt, the master strategist, to issue orders. Almost the exact opposite was true. After France fell in June 1940, the Army and the Navy realized that the assumptions upon which they had based their war plans were invalid. They desperately needed Presidential guidance in the form of specific policy statements or direction in order to write new war plans and on which to base their increasingly feverish preparations for the war they saw as all but inevitable.

During the summer of 1940 Roosevelt provided at best only minimal guidance, if that. He was more interested in his campaign for a third

term. Finally, at the end of October, the Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Harold R. Stark, realizing that Roosevelt would be reelected, wrote the Plan Dog Memorandum which cast Germany as a more dangerous threat to American security than Japan. He urged an eventual strong offensive in the Atlantic as an ally of Great Britain, and a defensive posture in the Pacific. As a preliminary, he recommended military and naval staff talks with the British. Roosevelt read this memorandum but took no action on it. Indeed, Roosevelt was particularly careful to avoid leaving documentary evidence linking him personally to strategic planning with the British.

A few weeks later, Stark, on his own initiative and without either informing Roosevelt or asking his permission, invited the British to send army, naval and air force representatives to Washington for staff talks. Then Stark told Roosevelt what he had done. These conversations were held in early 1941. The substance of the resulting ABC-1 talks formed the basis for Rainbow 5, the war plan that was issued in the late spring of 1941 and executed on 7 December 1941. In essence, this war plan provided an Atlantic strategy in which Germany would be defeated first. Roosevelt read this plan, but failed either to approve or disapprove it at the time. The authors fail to give this necessary background, thus distorting their account.

The surprisingly brief discussion of the exchange of 50 aged U.S. destroyers for lease rights to build American naval bases on British territory in the Western Hemisphere contains a glaring error that cannot be overlooked. The authors say, "Under pressure from President Roosevelt, the man who could hire and fire him, Admiral Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, formally certified that the fifty destroyers were not 'essential' for the defense of the United States." They imply Stark made the certification to save his job. This was not so.

## 106 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

What really happened was this: Under U.S. law at the time, no Navy ships could be transferred unless the Chief of Naval Operations certified they were not "essential" for the defense of the United States. Stark had only recently requested funds from Congress to place these ships in operating condition because they were essential to national defense. He felt that he would lose all credibility with Congress if suddenly he were to say they were not essential.

Stark knew that Roosevelt and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox wanted him to make the certification, but he held firm to his position. He was ready to resign rather than to impugn his credibility before Congress. Finally, a formula was devised by which Stark in good conscience could certify the 50 destroyers as nonessential because the net gain of the addition to the prospective bases would far outweigh the value of the ships to national defense. He made the certification and the ships were transferred.

What Bailey and Ryan overlook is that Stark made the certification only when his conscience was satisfied that he could do so, and not as a result of pressure from the White House.

There is another error requiring comment. A passage concerning the delivery of the 14-part message (surprisingly this term is not used) to Secretary of State Hull on 7 December 1941 by the Japanese Ambassadors contains the amazing statement that if that note had been delivered on time, instead of an hour late, there would have been "no opportunity to send an adequate warning to the defenders of Pearl Harbor." But warnings had already been sent.

Ten days previously all major commands of the U.S. Navy had received a message that started "This is a war warning . . ." The Army sent a similar warning. In the next few days the Navy Department sent additional information advising that negotiations with Japan had been concluded and that war was

imminent. Adm. Thomas C. Hart, commanding the Asiatic Fleet, literally got the message and was ready for war, although Adm. Husband E. Kimmel at Pearl Harbor was not. Even Gen. Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines was not prepared for a Japanese air raid some 8 hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor. His aircraft were still parked wingtip to wingtip when the Japanese struck.

The style of *Hitler vs. Roosevelt* is breezy and makes for quick reading. What could have been a major asset is unfortunately marred by excessive purple prose: Mussolini is a "jut-jawed Italian"; the "thundering British Fleet" keeps Hitler on the continent; Japanese troops are "the Mikado's minions"; and the legislature is "that windy body known as Congress." In referring to Hitler's standing with the other Axis powers, the authors say "He might fail, but it was better to go down in history as a Nero than as a zero."

The chief merit of this book is not in the illustration of the "bitter personal feud" between Roosevelt and Hitler. Rather it is in the extensive and at times encyclopedic coverage of the incidents involving various merchant ships and warships in the Atlantic. By providing this information in an easy to read and easy to find format, the authors have performed a useful service.

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Burdick, Charles. *The Frustrated Raider*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979. 119pp.

Professor Charles Burdick characterizes his history of the World War I German cruiser *Cormoran* as "an adventure story of a ship and her crew in the maelstrom of war." Burdick's monograph is indeed a fast-paced adventure story, cast more as a novel than a history, that tells the short and fascinating life and death of a proud ship. I'd