

without analysis? A “facts-only” history runs the risk of neglecting such key questions as why and how the war happened in the first place. It may focus on a select few ‘heroic’ sailors and officers and overlook the contributions of ordinary mariners forced into a war with no other objective but to survive.

Reviewing such a book for a journal like *The Northern Mariner* obliges the reviewer to acknowledge that Barents Sea 1942 is not a scholarly book. Rather, it is a general history designed for a non-academic market interested in, or fascinated by, tales of military action. While this is perfectly acceptable, it cannot be evaluated for its contribution to the body of existing historical knowledge nor can one engage with a historical argument or thesis proposed by the respective author. On a positive note, however, compiling the existing knowledge on JW51B and the Battle of the Barents Sea in a single book makes the information more readily available. Similarly, even if the facts cannot be argued, they are, at least, correct and complete. Like all books in the Osprey series, it is well supported by photographs and illustrations that help explain the course of events.

Given the above limitations, to whom should this book be recommended? Naval historians working on Arctic convoys and the battles in the Arctic theatre would find it a handy summary of the Battle of the Barents Sea. A general audience interested in Arctic operations during the Second World War might appreciate the description of warfare in Arctic waters during wintertime. Would I recommend the book to my students to help them understand the Second World War? Probably not, since the campaign is not put in the context of the wider war. Nevertheless, the book can be recommended to readers interested in learning the facts about this particular campaign.

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Angus Konstam. *The Convoy: HG-76: Taking the Fight to Hitler’s U-boats*. Oxford, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, www.bloomsbury.com, 2023. 320 pp., illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. UK £25.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-47285-768-2. (E-book available.)

The Second World War Battle of the Atlantic is a story of continuous struggle for command of the sea. An interesting term “command of the sea.” Naval theorists have loaded the term with a great deal of meaning. It has justified the build-up of massive battle fleets at huge expense, yet always seems elusive. In truth, command of the sea means being able to utilize the world’s oceans for your desired purposes, meanwhile denying your enemies the same opportunity to control the oceans for their own ends. Very rarely, however, is

the control complete. Despite A.T. Mahan's argument that a decisive battle gave one command of the sea, the truth is the opposite. Yes, a decisive battle might eliminate the enemy fleet and allow free range on the oceans, but such moments are rare and often overstated. Day-to-day command of the sea is fought for continuously and is constantly shifting. After all, command can only be exerted within the effective range of your warships. If the enemy contests it, the struggle for that specific piece of the world's oceans is decisive in the sense that the winner controls what happens there. Regarding the anti-submarine war of 1939-1945, Allied victory meant their shipping could sail either unhindered or with minimal losses. If Germany won, convoys would suffer catastrophic losses. The war for command of the sea was waged in a practical sense not by battleships in massive fleets, but by the "little guys"—destroyers, frigates, sloops, and the like. They were what some would call the 'real' navy because theirs was the dirtiest and hardest struggle, waged every hour and every day regardless of the weather in a constantly shifting location across the Atlantic.

The story of this small ship war is, ironically enough, huge. Hundreds of convoys plied the Atlantic carrying everything from ambulances and food to munitions, medical supplies, and of course, armies. These were the sinews of war and essential to British survival; not to mention the target of German efforts. It is the story of successes and failures, technological developments and achievements, and hard work. In many ways, the escorting forces are the unsung heroes of the Second World War. One of the key convoys in this struggle was HG-76. Sailing from Gibraltar to England from 19-23 December 1941, it was no different from the hundreds of other convoys plowing through the Atlantic. Certainly, the cargo was not more significant than the others. But, as Konstam rightly points out, this convoy was critical in the evolution of the Battle of the Atlantic for two reasons. One was the introduction of HMS Audacity, the first, small, escort carrier and the forerunner of the jeep carriers which played a critical role in the defeat of the German U-boats. The second was Commander Johnny Walker, the escort commander. An expert in anti-submarine warfare, Commander Walker helped revolutionize convoy defense. His aggressive tactics and creative thinking had a major impact on the success of the convoys and led, in the long run, to a dramatic increase in U-boat losses and the eventual defeat of Hitler's submarine threat. Combined, the Audacity and Walker pointed the way to a more sophisticated attack on the U-boat threat. The Convoy: HG-76 sheds a bright light on a critical moment in the Second World War, and one that is rarely mentioned.

Konstam's book, subdivided into 19 chapters supported by appendices, notes and illustrations, provides a history of HG-76. He traces the development of anti-submarine warfare between the wars, Walker's training and background, the evolution of the U-boat threat from the First World War through the first

two years of the Second World War, and details the experience of the convoy. In the process, he introduces the reader to not just individuals but technological developments and the struggle to adapt to the ever-changing conflict at sea. While fascinating, thanks to his blending of both German and British narratives, Konstam also offers a significant insight into HG-76 and more importantly, its long-term significance. Chapter seven, for example, examines the Audacity, its design and importance. It helps the reader understand why escort carriers were so critical to the Battle of the Atlantic. Arguably, Audacity fixed the greatest problem of the Atlantic War.

Earlier in the war, German U-boats had many advantages over the escorts. Quiet and with a low silhouette, the U-boat excelled in night surface attacks where its speed and maneuverability rewarded aggressive captains. The first escorts lacked effective nighttime surface-search capabilities. Radar was not widely available and was always in short supply. Night optics were never good enough to compensate for the lack of radar and the main method of detecting submarines rested in ASDIC, or what the Americans called sonar. Even in daylight, U-boats preferred to operate on the surface where fresh air and their speed worked in their favour. Shadowing and reporting on the convoy's course and speed, U-boats were able to keep naval authorities abreast of a convoy's location and speed while directing other submarines to the area where they created a wolfpack to swarm the convoy and overwhelm its defenses. The areas outside of air cover, the worst being called the Black Pit in the middle of the Atlantic, were where U-boats were most effective and held most of the advantages. The Audacity, or more specifically her aircraft, helped to limit this threat. Scouting further out from the convoy, they provided advance warning of a U-boat presence and they were able to attack them as needed. While certainly not guaranteeing a sinking, the attack forced the submarine underwater where it was much slower and more easily detected by the escorts. The Audacity's planes were also able to drive off or destroy Luftwaffe Condors, the long-range surveillance aircraft that helped locate and track convoys. By providing portable air cover, escort carriers significantly enhanced the offensive punch of the convoy escort and increased the chances of getting the convoy home safely by eliminating the holes in the aircover that were so essential to U-boat success.

An innovative commander, Walker developed a carefully thought out set of tactics to help protect the convoy. As detailed in chapter 14, his plans adapted to the inclusion of the Audacity, calling for aggressive sweeps to catch an attacking U-boat on or near the surface, effectively turning the convoy itself into an offensive weapon, designed to turn the tables on the German submarine threat. In the end, it worked rather well. Over the course of the HG-76's run to Britain, five German U-boats were sunk. That was an unheard-

of number at the time and a significant reversal of fortunes for the Germans. Sadly, the convoy also suffered losses including the Audacity. But the legacy of HMS Audacity endured as more escort carriers were produced. They helped to provide air cover for future convoys during their entire crossing. This put greater pressure on the U-boats and that, reinforced with Walker's aggressive thinking and technology like radar and larger escort forces, finally led to the breaking of the German U-boat arm.

Konstam is certainly correct about the lack of material available on HG-76. Just one convoy, although a very successful one, out of hundreds, it certainly warrants more discussion. While there is more written about Audacity than the convoy, the author misses the fact that this was Audacity's fourth convoy, not her first. It was the combination of Audacity and Walker that made HG-76 so successful. Konstam's review of prewar thinking and technological developments by both the British and the Germans provides a lot of context and is valuable to those readers who are not well versed in such matters. It does, however, make the story of HG-76 feel abbreviated, which is unfortunate. More depth, better fleshing out of the subject and, of course, a fuller post-mortem would be very valuable to the reader. A key element of the story is Commander Walker himself, whose critical role, I felt, needed more clarification. Perhaps pairing this text with a good history of Commander Walker would help the reader more.

Overall, I recommend the text. Konstam has done an incredible job providing a lively and interesting work, not just for the historical hobbyist, but for those more interested in the Battle of the Atlantic. Certainly, this book should be on the reading list of anyone interested in the subject.

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Witold Koszela. *Cruisers of the III Reich: Volume 2*. Petersfield, Hants: Military Miniature Press, www.mmp.com, 2022. 200 pp., illustrations, tables, notes. US \$52.00, hardback; ISBN 978-8-36595-885-3.

This second volume of author Witold Koszela's study of German cruisers of the Second World War is a continuation of his examination of the Kriegsmarine's capital ships beginning with his 2018 work on German battleships. While the first volume concentrated on the light cruises *Emden*, *Königsberg*, *Karlsruhe*, *Köln*, and *Leipzig*, this one covers both the light cruiser *Nürnberg* and the five Admiral Hipper class heavy cruisers, along with a final section touching on two Deutschland class heavy cruisers, Kriegsmarine auxiliary cruisers, and the abandoned M class cruiser project. Period photographs are used throughout