

figure from one of the many contemporary shipbuilding treatises mentioned.

In conclusion, while a promising title and subject, this is a very disappointing book and I can in no way recommend its purchase at the steep price indicated.

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Eric Rust. *U-Boat Commander Oskar Kusch: Anatomy of a Nazi-Era Betrayal and Judicial Murder*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, www.usni.org, 2020. 384 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. US \$45.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-68247-514-0. (E-book available.)

Military officers sometimes find themselves serving political masters whose political and ideological points of view differ radically from their own. In these cases, the struggle to find a personal “balance” between the duty to serve your country and your political and social ideology is often difficult, morally tumultuous, and potentially dangerous – especially in a state like Hitler’s Germany. This is the story of one man who faced this dilemma, and whose choice cost him his life. His story is all the more alluring because he was a U-boat commander in the German Navy, or *Kriegsmarine*, a service not known to harbour criticism of Hitler’s regime. Its author, Eric C. Rust, has previously published a critically acclaimed collective biography on one class of its Officer Cadets. This time, he has migrated from the macro to the micro, focusing on the career of one hapless German naval officer from that era. Like many academic works, Rust’s story had a long gestation from an initial idea to a published work. This explains why its thoughtful foreword was written by a famous U-boat

commander who passed away long before the book was finally published. This story is presented in 11 chapters of varying lengths, and the text is supported by a list of mostly *Kriegsmarine* abbreviations and a list of key individuals. Rust also provides a detailed index, notes, and an extensive bibliography. His primary focus is on the evolution of Oskar Kusch’s negative opinion of – and even aversion to – Hitler’s regime and the *Kriegsmarine*’s ultimate decision to execute him for voicing it.

Oskar Kusch had been an avid sailor and athlete from a middle class Protestant family with a good education with an artistic bent. With perhaps the exception of the latter, he was an ideal officer candidate for a *Kriegsmarine* that was in the midst of rapid expansion. Although he had some initial misgivings about Hitler’s regime, Kusch was not initially opposed to it because it seemed to have brought a semblance of order to a previously unsettled Germany. By all accounts, he was a professional officer who was genuinely concerned with the welfare and survival of his crew. He did not, however, shy away from sharing his increasingly negative opinion of the Hitler regime with his crew. In 1944, Kusch was brought up on charges because of a report filed by a former junior officer from his own crew. During his trial, Kusch adamantly refused to deny his anti-regime statements or offer any defence that could have alleviated their impact. Surprisingly, he was found innocent of all charges, except those regarding his “negative” opinions of the Hitler regime and its hopeless war, and was sentenced to death. The harshness of his sentence is the most striking aspect of his case because the *Kriegsmarine*’s Naval Court had only recommended a ten-year prison term.

The origins of the report that led to Kusch’s trial are well covered in the

text and most readers will find Rust's description of the German Naval Court Judicial procedures enlightening. Rust maintains that this report was motivated as much by a personal vendetta as a "patriotic and selfless act." Apparently, it was filed outside of "normal channels" and should have been squelched on the spot. Now, however, the German navy was under Admiral Karl Dönitz, who had begun to campaign ardently against all signs of political non-conformity and "defeatism" within its ranks. The men who could have intervened on Kusch's behalf either failed to act or were unavailable to head off the eventual trial. It is perhaps unfortunate that Kusch's case did not fall under the purview of the circle of officers around the German Naval Magistrate Berthold Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, the brother of Hitler's would-be assassin and a member of the July 20 plot. In general, at this stage of the war, German military and civil courts were under growing political and military pressure to root out "defeatists" and "dissenters" within the Third Reich. Post-war attitudes did not change much and it took two separate trials to clear Kusch's name to a limited degree. Even the former naval judge who insisted on Kusch's execution was only given a "severe" reprimand for choosing to impose the harshest possible sentence without any compelling legal justification.

This story is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, Dönitz, the self-proclaimed protector of his U-boat commanders, refused to help one of his own, despite a verbal promise to do so. Secondly, Kusch was one of the few officers of the *Kriegsmarine* to be executed for voicing his negative opinions about the Nazi regime and its leadership. It should not be forgotten that Hitler's regime had no qualms about spilling the blood of German officers or

civilians who in any way voiced opposition or even merely disparaged the regime. In fact, Germany executed almost 33,000 of its own sorely needed military personnel during the Second World War, many for 'crimes' like Kusch's. It is also notable that Kusch was not a member of the German resistance to Hitler's regime, and he was not known to even the small cadre of *Kriegsmarine* officers who were involved in the German resistance movement. Overall, this is a definitely recommended reading for those who are interested in *Kriegsmarine's* "muddied" relationship with Hitler and the Nazi regime. It reminds us that even some of those who served under Hitler could recognize the evil of his regime – and were often severely punished for voicing their dissent. Rust and the US Naval Institute Press should be acknowledged for bringing this riveting and well-written account to our attention.

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Jak P. Mallmann Showell. *Hitler's Attack U-Boats: The Kriegsmarine's WWII Submarine Strike Force*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Frontline Books, www.pen-and-sword.co.uk, 2020. vii+263 pp., illustrations, appendices, glossary, index. US \$34.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-52677-101-8.

One of the most prolific topics in military history must be the Battle of the Atlantic, arguably the most critical of campaigns for victory in Europe. The lengthy bibliography on the subject seems perpetually growing as more books and articles are added every year. It is also due, in part, to the fact that there is something about submarines that captures the imagination. These small boats, designed to sink and come