

THIRD REICH VICTORIOUS

Alternate Histories of World War II

Edited by Peter G. Tsouras



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INTRODUCTION

The Germans win World War II. It is an unsettling, even horrifying proposition for a book. It is also provoking. All too often history, and especially military history, is seen as running down an already approved and well-worn groove. We won World War II because we were meant to win it. It is a gratifying but dangerous road to travel. If we have learned anything about history it is that it we hold it in our hands like a lump of wet clay.

The actions of not only great men and women, the warlords, heroes, and geniuses, constantly shape our history, but also the actions of countless nameless people. The guard who is so bone weary but also so resolved to do his duty that he must rest his chin on his bayonet to stay awake, in his own way, is a mighty shaper of history. An army of men such as that will do great things. A soldier who carelessly falls asleep on guard, and the leadership that lets him, will also make a mark in history. Decision, reason, and character are mighty ingredients in the makeup of history. These are the rational elements of human history-making, but there are others.

These are the ephemeral qualities not subject to human construction—chance and opportunity. That they occur is powerful enough. History then is also essentially about the interplay of chance and opportunity. I have explored this concept in the companion volume to this book, *Rising Sun Victorious: The Alternate History of How the Japanese Won the Pacific War* (Greenhill, 2001). It is worth restating.

‘The interplay between chance and opportunity is the heartbeat of war. Clausewitz touched on it when he said, “War is the realm of chance. No other human activity gives it greater scope: no other has such incessant and varied dealings with this intruder. Chance makes everything more uncertain and interferes with the whole course of events.”¹ And Napoleon put his finger on the relationship, “War is composed of nothing but accidents, and . . . a general should never lose sight of everything to enable him to profit from these accidents; that is the mark of genius.”² This book examines the ways not taken, the stillborn possibilities that might have grown to mighty events.’

The war against the Germans could have been lost a number of times. Each of the ten chapters in this book explores a different door leading to that dark end. Each is a self-contained examination of one particular battle, campaign, or event in the context of its own alternate reality. These are the authors’ separate approaches. Since each chapter sets in motion new events, each generates new ground from the historian’s perspective. Each is to be read as if it were actual history. This approach best conveys the sense of events. If the Germans win the Battle of Britain, for example, different historical works would appear in time. These different works appear in the endnotes along with those reflecting actual events. They are woven together to present a seamless alternate history.

The use of ‘alternate reality’ notes, of course, poses a risk to the unwary reader who may make

strenuous efforts to acquire a new and fascinating source. To avoid an epidemic of frustrating and futile searches, the 'alternate' notes are indicated with an asterisk (*) before the number. All works appearing in the bibliographies included separately in each chapter are, however, 'real'.

Also to assist the reader, the names of Allied military units are given in roman type and axis units in *italics* (with the exception of ships whose names are invariably *italicised*).

The chapters are presented in chronological order. So it is appropriate that the peril of Britain dominates the first chapters. For truly the sceptred isle was the only bar to a quick and easy victory for Hitler. In [Chapter 1](#), 'The Little Admiral', Wade Dudley takes a unique approach reaching back deep into the century and explores the astounding consequences of a young Hitler whose military service with the German Navy in World War I. Britain had triumphed at sea for over 300 years, defeating would-be conquerors of Europe who mercifully did not understand sea power. How would it have fared against an evil genius who fixed upon the Royal Navy as Britain's centre of gravity.

The next two chapters concentrate on other perils facing Britain in the early part of the war. In [Chapter 2](#), 'Disaster at Dunkirk', Stephen Badsey draws a picture of the destruction of the British Expeditionary Force on the continent, a fate it missed by a hairsbreadth and the subsequent advancement of the invasion of Britain itself. Charles Messenger writes in [Chapter 3](#) of a Battle of Britain in which a few changes in reasoning and luck would have spelled the end of Fighter Command's ability to defend the English skies.

As Hitler turned his back on a still defiant Britain and plotted against the Soviet Union, history briefly waved a great opportunity before him and then withdrew it before he knew it. Stalin contemplated attacking first in 1941. Gil Villahermosa draws a thought-provoking description in [Chapter 4](#), 'The Storm and the Whirlwind', of massed Soviet armies commanded by Zhukov attacking into the teeth of the German forces themselves assembling for Operation Barbarossa, Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union.

In the middle period of the war, fate then hands Britain back the key to defeat as Paddy Griffith describes how close Rommel came to snapping the hinge of three continents in 1942 at El Alamein. In [Chapter 5](#), appropriately titled 'The Hinge'. Also in 1942, in [Chapter 6](#), 'Into the Caucasus', Jack Gould examines the fascinating possibilities inherent in Turkey's entry into the war on the side of Germany. Turkey was the largest neutral state outside of the Americas. Its entry into the war on the side of Germany in 1942 would have stretched Soviet resources at their weakest moment. John Burt rounds out the middle period of the war in [Chapter 7](#), 'Known Enemies and Forced Allies', with the two battles in time—Kursk and Sicily, each a close run thing and surprisingly interrelated.

The discussion of the final period of the war, 1944—45, addresses the possibilities of air power and technology in two chapters. In [Chapter 8](#), 'Luftwaffe Triumphant', David Isby describes the possibility for defeat of the Combined Bomber Offensive which in reality was so vital to the steady destruction of the German ability to manage and supply war. Forrest Lindsey then addresses the horrendous consequences of Germany developing the atomic bomb first. No other weapon embodied Hitler's compulsion to destruction. It is inconceivable that, if such a weapon had been

available to him, he would not have immediately and gleefully used it.

Finally, in [Chapter 10](#), ‘Rommel Versus Zhukov’, I draw a scenario in which Germany could have escaped destruction as late as August 1944. The Soviet steamroller seemed invincible by then and its victory inevitable. Yet, even after the destruction of Army Group Centre, Germany theoretically had the resources to achieve at least a stalemate on the Eastern Front. It is an optimistic scenario but one which shows that, absent Hitler, rational German leadership had a chance for victory—not the victory of conquest but the victory of survival.

Peter G. Tsouras

Alexandria, Virginia

2002

THE LITTLE ADMIRAL

Hitler and the German Navy

Wade G. Dudley

Introduction

We are the sum of our experiences. Change any of those experiences, and you change the person. Change the person, and you may just change the world. Make that person a young Adolf Hitler, and things do get interesting. . .

An undying enmity, 1914–19

By early 1914, the highly militarised states of Europe needed only a spark to precipitate war. Between universal conscription and a naval arms race of staggering proportions, few German-speaking young men could have doubted that their opportunity for glory would soon be upon them. Yet, it seemed that fate would deny at least one ardent, neophyte warrior the chance to validate his manhood. Twenty-five year old Adolf Hitler attempted to join the army of his native Austria in February—the army rejected his application.

Failure was not unknown to the brilliant but erratic Hitler. He had failed to gain his certificate from secondary school, failed in numerous odd jobs in and around Vienna, and failed as an aspiring artist. This time, a desperate Hitler determined to succeed. Using the last of his money (failure had also led to poverty and hunger), he purchased a train ticket for Bavaria, intending to enlist in the Bavarian army corps. Fatefully, Hitler shared a bench with Stabsoberbootsman (senior chief boatswain) Günther Luck, returning to active duty from family leave. The garrulous Luck, impressive in his dress uniform, regaled Hitler with stories of the Imperial German Navy's rapidly expanding *Hochseeflotte* (*High Sea Fleet*). As Luck explained, ship after ship sliding down the ways meant rapid promotion for any young man intelligent enough to grasp it. The Stabsoberbootsman must have been an impressive, convincing, and somewhat generous man, for Hitler accompanied him (at Luck's expense) to the German port of Kiel. There, with the support of his new mentor, the Austrian enlisted in the German Navy.

After a brief period of basic training, Hitler found himself assigned to the light cruiser *Wiesbaden*, on which Günther Luck served as senior petty officer. In a revealing letter to his wife, Luck wrote about the young seaman's brilliance and desire to learn, and about the one thing that Hitler had to un-learn, as well:

'He is an astounding young man, and reminds me of our poor Rudie [Luck's son had been killed in a tragic accident aboard the battleship *Posen* a year earlier] in both appearance and the desire to learn

He saw a picture of our boy on my desk; now he wears that silly moustache like Rudie wore, and he reads, he reads constantly. He devoured my technical manuals in the first month on board, and asked for more. I told him to see his division officer, and was surprised to hear him mutter, "But he is a damn Jew."

My darling, where do our children learn these things? We are a nation surrounded by enemies, we are sailors who constantly battle the sea for our survival. If we hate ourselves, what is left for our enemies but an easy victory? If we let race-hatred divide our crews, will we not founder and drown? I explained this to Adolf, I reasoned with him, and I threatened to box his ears—he never had a real father to do that for him, you know—if I ever heard such words again. Then I took him to see his lieutenant and arranged for Adolf to borrow naval histories. Privately, I explained the boy's prejudice and asked the officer occasionally to discuss the books with Adolf.

Still, I worry. He will become a man of strong convictions, strong hates, strong loves. I can only hope that the war which I feel will soon be upon us will focus that hate away from good German citizens and toward our true enemies.'¹

Hitler thrived in his new environment. Hard work, naval discipline, and the encouragement of his mentor each played their part in a true sea-change. Hitler discovered a capability to lead others. Between charisma, rapidly developing knowledge of seamanship, and the support of Günther Luck, he quickly rose to the rank of Unteroffiziere-maat (petty officer). Perhaps more importantly, he developed a fanatical devotion to the twin institutions of the Imperial Navy and the German Empire. A voracious reader of naval history and theory when off duty, Hitler often shared those theories with his men. They, in turn, affectionately called him '*unser kleine Admiral*' ('our little admiral'), and vowed to follow him anywhere—as long as it led to a tavern in Kiel, of course.²

After the beginning of the Great War in August 1914, the talk of every mess in the German Navy centred upon the British fleet. The news from abroad, though not unexpected, was bleak. Within months, Great Britain had swept the seas clean of German surface units, and the few German successes did not balance the list of lost ships and forever absent comrades. Worse, the Royal Navy maintained a distant blockade of the Baltic, denying Germany imports, particularly the nitrates needed to fuel its munitions industry and as fertiliser for its agriculture. If the war continued (and the deadlock in France showed little change as the months dragged onward) then Germany faced a harsh choice—munitions or calories, feed the guns or feed the people.

Of course, if the Imperial Navy could force Great Britain to relinquish its blockade, that choice need not be made. But, despite its aggressive building programme in the early 1900s, the Imperial Navy could not match the quantity of British ships arrayed against it.³ Thus the admirals of the *Hochseeflotte* settled on a policy of attriting British vessels by attempting to isolate portions of the Royal Navy, defeat them in detail, and prepare the way for a final confrontation on even terms somewhere in the North Sea. That policy failed, in part because British Intelligence monitored German wireless traffic and knew exactly when the *Hochseeflotte* sailed. German planning and British

Intelligence efforts set the stage for the battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916.

Hitler would have died with Luck aboard the *Wiesbaden* at Jutland, had not a curious event occurred in late March 1916. While enjoying a weekend pass, Hitler chanced to be reading a recent translation of Alfred Thayer Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* while sitting in a small cafe near the naval base at Kiel. He acquiesced to the request of a well dressed civilian to join him at his table, leading to a long discussion of the book in general and the importance of achieving a crushing, Trafalgar-esque victory in particular. Impressed by the young petty officer's knowledge and zeal, the 'civilian' eventually revealed himself to be none other than Erich Raeder, chief of staff to Vice-Admiral Franz von Hipper, commander of the Imperial Navy's battlecruiser squadron. When asked if Hitler would value a place on Raeder's own staff, the overwhelmed sailor could only nod affirmatively. Four days later (and suffering from a tremendous hangover, courtesy of a farewell party staged by Luck and the crew of the *Wiesbaden*) Hitler transferred to the battlecruiser *Lützow*, Hipper's flagship, as Raeder's personal yeoman. Over the following weeks, Hitler continued to impress Hipper's chief of staff with his theoretical knowledge of sea power and his fine memory for detail.⁴

Jutland not only brought the direct association of Raeder and his yeoman to an end, it also spelled the end of Hitler, himself. In the thick of the action, ten British heavy calibre shells and a torpedo eventually crippled the *Lützow*. Even as Hipper and Raeder prepared to transfer to another battlecruiser, an internal explosion laced the deck of the doomed flagship with shrapnel. Caught in the explosion, bleeding and concussed, it would be five days before Hitler, who had volunteered to lead a damage control party, regained consciousness.

Twice during Hitler's three-month convalescence, Raeder personally visited his favourite yeoman. Though newspapers declared Jutland a tactical victory for the *Hochseeflotte* based on tonnage lost, both men realised that the British blockade could never be broken by the weaker German fleet. This became clear during the first, and unofficial, visit. As Hitler later recorded in his autobiography *Mein Kampf* ('My Struggle'), discussion turned to the future of the German Navy. Both men agreed that Great Britain would remain the greatest threat to Germany in this and any future war. Indeed, Hitler, upon learning of the loss of the *Wiesbaden* and its entire crew—his dear comrades!—at Jutland, took the first steps toward developing a near pathological hatred of all things British. Raeder, steeped in conservative naval tradition, still favoured the search for a single climactic battle to destroy the Royal Navy. Hitler openly agreed with the officer, but privately saw this approach as hopeless, and wondered if another means of destroying the Royal Navy was not already at hand—the *Unterseebooten* (or U-boats, Germany's submarines).⁵

At the end of Raeder's second visit, an official visit to award the petty officer the Iron Cross First Class in recognition of his valour at Jutland, the chief of staff offered to assist Hitler in any way possible. Hitler immediately requested a transfer to U-boats. Though shocked, Raeder recognised the young man's desire to strike at the hated British, something no longer possible in the *Hochseeflotte*. He not only approved the transfer, but also pulled the necessary strings to promote Hitler to probationary Leutnant zur See. This made Hitler somewhat of an oddity: a *Volksoffizier*,

commissioned officer raised from the ranks in an overwhelmingly aristocratic officer corps. But, Raeder undoubtedly surmised, such would matter little in the tight confines of the submarine service.

Thus, in late September 1916, Hitler reported aboard *U-39*. He thrived; in fact the only criticisms recorded in his fitness reports concerned the intensity of his hatred for the British foes, a hatred that his captain feared could lead to excessive risk-taking in Hitler's zeal to sink British vessels. On the other hand, the lieutenant received the highest praise for the quickness with which he learned the complicated operation of the boat and grasped the tactics of both gun and torpedo, as well as for his leadership skills. Even the captain seemed somewhat mesmerised by the sheer intensity of the Austrian.

By January 1917, Hitler was serving as (still probationary) second watch officer of *U-39*. In that month, a new watch officer joined the boat. As with Hitler, Karl Dönitz had begun his naval career on cruisers, then transferred to submarines. The two men became fast friends; in fact, Dönitz would later credit Hitler as his role model for the boldness and inspirational leadership that characterised his career. During long watches and shared miseries, the officers often discussed the future of naval warfare. Decades later, Dönitz would recall one miserable watch in particular. With the ship running on the surface at night and both men soaked to the skin, he envisioned fleets of submarines, each boat of tremendous size, range, and destructive power, that could, perhaps, circle the globe without once rising to the surface to replenish air, charge batteries, and soak watch officers. Hitler shrugged, then pointed to the waves that often towered above the fragile vessel. What point in such fleets, he questioned, if they could not even find the enemy? What good would they serve if they could project their firepower only over short distances? First, asserted Hitler, some method of discovering the enemy at a distance was needed; then, some method of killing that enemy at a distance had to be found; then, perhaps, whining third officers could stay dry. Dönitz recalled that he laughed, and asked if adding seaplane hangars to his new submarines would satisfy his friend. Perhaps, the second officer replied, or perhaps something more would be needed.⁷

By 1917, German unlimited submarine warfare offered the only real chance of convincing Great Britain to leave the war and to end its blockade. Instead, a starving Germany watched as a new enemy, the United States, entered the alliance against it. Fortunately, the collapse of Russia allowed the transfer of forces to the West, and a renewed offensive in France held hope that the war could be ended favourably before American troops arrived in quantity. As for the navy, the *Hochseeflotte* remained useless except as a fleet-in-being, and the U-boat force shouldered an increasingly heavy load. In March 1918, Hitler received a promotion to Kapitänleutnant (Lieutenant-Commander) and transfer to *U-71* as the executive officer of Korvettenkapitän (Commander) Kurt Slevogt. His friend Dönitz, had been transferred to the Mediterranean, where he soon commanded a submarine of his own.

When *U-71* unmoored at Kiel in October for a new patrol, few of its crew harboured doubts that the end of the war was close. Some sailors, in fact, might well have refused to sail if not for the silver tongue of their charismatic executive officer. Hitler, having just learned that Dönitz's boat had been lost in action, called for one last strike against the English, one last blow for German honour, one last

pound of British flesh to avenge dead comrades. To the last man, the crew cheered and vowed to follow their officers to Valhalla—or to Hell.⁸ On 1 November their chance to see one or the other of those locations appeared near. Driven deep by British escorts after torpedoing two merchant ships in a daring daylight surface attack, depth-charges pounded *U-71*. Suddenly, a series of loud noises shook the boat, almost as if a hammer were repeatedly striking inside the vessel. Rushing from the control room to the engine room, Hitler saw that one of the quarter-ton pistons had been ripped from the engine by concussion and was banging at the thin inner wall of the boat. Knowing that if the noise did not pinpoint the submarine's location for its attackers, then the piston would soon punch through the hull and sink the vessel, he leapt to cushion the blows with his own body.

U-71 survived, and the engine was even repaired later that night. As the boat crept home, Adolf Hitler lay near death, his skull fractured in his act of heroism. Admitted to Kiel Naval Hospital on 1 November, Hitler finally regained consciousness on 15 November. The following day the doctors gave him two pieces of news that would change his life forever. First, the young officer could never again go to sea. Irreparable damage to his inner ear would impact his sense of balance for the remainder of his life, guaranteeing symptoms similar to seasickness if he even tried to stand on a rolling deck again. Second, an armistice had been signed, and though negotiations continued, Germany had lost the war.

Broken in body and stripped of his career, it would be months before Hitler could function with any normalcy again. Many people would have abandoned hope as they lay in a hospital and watched their once great nation collapse around them. Even Hitler later admitted that he felt that despair, felt the temptation to suicide. But rather than surrender, he chose to focus on the enemy who had brought him to this crisis in his life. And in those dark days of 1919, a bitter enmity for all things British began to consume Adolf Hitler. It would be the strength of this hatred that allowed a new Germany to arise.

From the ashes, 1919–39

From late 1918 through mid-1919, the Royal Navy continued its devastating blockade of Germany and the victorious allies ruminated in Paris on how best to punish their enemies and share the spoils of war. The Treaty of Versailles dismantled the German Empire, giving parts of its territory to France and the new nation of Poland. It hobbled the German military machine with limitations on manpower, weaponry, armaments industry, and even technological development. It crippled the spirit of the German people with its forced assumption of 'war guilt', demanding that they alone accept responsibility for causing the Great War.

Worse, perhaps, than all the damning clauses of that fatal treaty, during 1918 and 1919 the German people lost faith in the leadership of their statesmen, admirals and generals. The sense of betrayal from the top coupled with economic chaos led to near anarchy, controlled only by the heavy-handed police force that had once been the mighty Imperial Army. From the ashes of empire, the Weimar Republic rose to fill the political void, and in the late 1920s it actually restored a façade of economic prosperity to the nation. The economic depression which swept the globe after 1929 revealed that façade to the German people, and, discontented with the elitist Weimar Republic, the

quickly called for a man of the people as their leader. His name, of course, was Adolf Hitler.

Hitler's meteoric rise owed much to his ties to the old Imperial Navy and to two officers particular, Erich Raeder and Karl Dönitz. Raeder had rescued his protégé from the hospital at Kiel and taken him into his own home to recover from his near-fatal injuries. Two months later, Dönitz knocked on the door, having been captured rather than killed with his U-boat. His stories of ill treatment as a British prisoner of war further strengthened Hitler's hatred of that nation. Clearly, the early months of 1919 marked the formation of the triumvirate that would build the new *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy) and found *Das Dritte Reich* (The Third Reich); and just as clearly the least senior of the three men quickly assumed dominance of that triumvirate.

The post-Great War German Navy, limited to 15,000 officers and men and a handful of vessels (and no submarines) by the Treaty of Versailles, had little use for an officer who could no longer go to sea. Nonetheless, Raeder found a role for Hitler in the Ship Design Bureau, where he secretly developed plans for a new class of German warship, the aircraft carrier, and for the integration of new technologies into the *Kriegsmarine*.

Hitler also became the political operative of the three men, insinuating himself into a tiny political party, changing its name to National Socialist German Worker's Party ('Nazi', for short), and rapidly developing its power base through personal charisma, funds initially funnelled from the German naval budget, and the physical prowess of his 'Blueshirts'.⁹ His speeches enthralled the citizenry, especially when he ripped open his tunic to display the scars earned 'for the glory of the Fatherland; for the survival of you, my German people!' The war, he harangued, had been lost by 'those who never risked their lives for the Reich, who grew fat while German children starved during the Turnip Winter and those worse winters that followed.' The future of the nation properly belonged '... with your heroes, not those cowards afraid to face the enemy's fire.'¹⁰ With the Swastika waving above him (he designed the banner of the Nazi party himself in 1920), Hitler captivated the German people and alarmed the German government. In 1922, Hitler officially resigned from the German Navy to pursue politics full time, though the Ship Design Bureau retained his services as a civilian consultant.

In 1923, the Weimar government arrested Hitler for involvement in the Beer Hall Putsch, an attempt fronted by General Ludendorff (a senior general of the Great War) to seize control of Germany. While awaiting trial for treason, Hitler dictated his personal history and philosophical thoughts, later published as *Mein Kampf*, to fellow prisoner Rudolf Hess.¹¹ The judge at the trial, a secret Nazi sympathiser himself, failed to convict Hitler; offering as his reasoning that the supporters of Ludendorff had worn brown shirts instead of the blue associated with the Nazi leader. It was a popular, though wrong, decision—Hitler had, indeed, been involved in the treasonous act.

Hitler continued to build support for his Nazi Party. The economic downturn of 1930–31 provided an opportunity for the party to seize control of the government. On 13 March 1932, Hitler defeated Hindenburg (another general of the Great War) for the German presidency by claiming 54 percent of the vote to his opponent's 36.8 percent. The Enabling Act of March 1933, passed on the

strength of jingoism ('Many hands have failed Germany, let two hands lead us!') and Blücher's coercion, established the Nazis as the only German political party and Hitler as *Der Führer* (the Leader), absolute dictator of his nation.

While Hitler achieved political prominence, Karl Dönitz wore several hats within the German Navy. Officially, he served within the Ship Design Bureau, as had Hitler. Unofficially, he was the junior member of a coterie of officers that closely circled Admiral Raeder—officers committed to building a new and powerful *Kriegsmarine*. In that group, he had two roles. Dönitz is best known for the top secret development of the new submarine force. By 1932, he had secretly constructed ten small U-boats, had developed the plans for the next generation of long-range vessels, had begun training the crews for those boats, and had developed the theoretical tactics to use a U-boat fleet against Great Britain. The fruition of his efforts waited only on Hitler's seizure of the German government and the public nullification of the hated Treaty of Versailles.

Dönitz's second role has only recently been uncovered by historians. Between 1925 and 1934, he master-minded German naval intelligence. To his credit belong several major espionage efforts, including the acquisition of the plans for the Japanese 'Long Lance' torpedo. Dönitz also managed to place moles in several American and British institutions of higher education, allowing him access to (often secret) research in those countries and certainly providing Germany with schematics of the radar systems which would shortly be under development. Finally, to replace the overseas bases lost by Germany at the end of the Great War, Dönitz developed a supply system supported by sympathetic shipping magnates and industrialists in countries which could be expected to maintain their neutrality in the next round of war. In 1934 he received his richly deserved promotion to the rank of admiral from the hands of Hitler, who officially named him as Chief of Submarine Forces—an appointment accompanied by the public renunciation of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

While Hitler received the adoring accolades of the public and Dönitz submerged himself in the depths of international intrigue, Erich Raeder set the stage for the three men's vision of a new world naval order. In truth, he served as the rudder of the triumvirate, restraining the enthusiasm of Dönitz and smothering (at least visibly) the ardent Anglophobia of Hitler, while risking his own neck to siphon funds from the very public naval budget into 'black operations' and political adventurism.¹² In 1928 Raeder had become Admiral and Chief of Naval Command. At last, he had the power, if not the budget, to modernise the German Navy. In 1932 Hitler also granted him the lion's share of German military appropriations; and in 1934, the renunciation of Versailles removed the final yoke from Raeder's neck.

By 1928, Germany's Great War vintage battleships required replacements (allowed by the Treaty of Versailles as long as the replacements displaced 10,000 tons or less). Raeder proposed building three 'pocket battleships.' Mounting only six 11-inch primary guns in two turrets, they traded a third turret for speed (28 knots) and operational range (9–10,000 nautical miles at 18 knots). At the same time, he requested the building of 30 destroyers and 6 light cruisers, all trading heavier armament for extended range capability. With the Nazi Party already dominating the German parliament, his plan

received rapid approval. Over the following five years, three battleships (*Deutschland, Admiral Scheer, Admiral Graf Spee*), three cruisers (*Seydlitz, Nürnberg, Wiesbaden*), and 30 modern destroyers slid down the ways. All of the vessels violated treaty stipulations in one manner or another, but the victorious allies of the Great War, distracted by global economic disaster, lacked the energy for vigorous (i.e. military) protest.

That lack of protest, more than any other factor, allowed Hitler to disavow the Treaty of Versailles in its entirety. From 1934 to 1939, all segments of the German military rearmed with great vigour. For Raeder, Hitler and Dönitz, the time had arrived to put theory into practice. In a top secret message to the key officers of the *Kriegsmarine*, Raeder (speaking not only for Hitler but outlining a plan that certainly bore his mark) discussed the future objectives of the navy.

‘Our primary enemy, is the Royal Navy of Great Britain. We must destroy it, then land forces to subdue the English people. No nation has achieved that goal since 1066. Every nation that has tried to achieve equality with England has failed—not because of a lack of will, not because of industrial inferiority, but only because they failed to destroy the Royal Navy and its power of blockade. We shall succeed. We shall avenge our comrades who died and our children who starved at the hands of the Royal Navy from 1914 to 1919 . . .

Phase I of our effort nears completion. A nucleus of modern surface ships is complete or nearly complete. Today I have ordered the conversion of the three light cruisers now under construction to aircraft carriers. Unknown to many of you, plans for light and heavy carriers have been under development since 1920, as have the plans for modern aircraft for those carriers. I have the highest assurances that the carriers will be completed by early 1936.

Phase II begins immediately. Construction has been ordered on the following ships: 2 heavy carriers, 2 pocket battleships, 2 large battleships, 3 heavy cruisers, 60 destroyers, 10 fast oilers, 10 fast replenishment vessels. Due to limitations of the economy, completion of all ships is not expected until 1942. Additionally, orders for seagoing U-boats will be placed in the next month, with an estimated delivery of five boats per month by mid-1935. Finally, the Führer has approved the formation of 3 aircraft squadrons for naval service and of a corps of marines to train for amphibious assaults . . .

The marine corps will consist of three divisions of light infantry plus supporting units, including a special operations battalion, an amphibious armoured brigade, and a parachutist brigade. Shipping and air assets will be allocated to provide a 100 per cent first wave lift capability to the corps. For security purposes, the corps will be designated *Schutzstaffel* [‘guard detachment’, abbreviated *SS*], and will officially serve as security detachments aboard ships and at bases, and as a bodyguard for the Führer. Secretly, it will begin planning and training for the potential invasion of England . . . ¹³

We do not envision war before 1942, but we cannot ignore the fact that Great Britain or France could strike first, especially if either nation realises that the Führer intends to restore Germany to its proper place in the world. To discourage premature conflict, every effort must be made to deceive our enemy as to our future intentions. There will, on pain of death, be neither public discussion of the

Grandiose plans, indeed, but could Hitler accomplish them? Could he mould the entire German government to his will? The man that most Germans soon called their Little Admiral quickly discovered that a government did not perform with naval efficiency. Ruthless, he sacked bureaucrats who did not come up to scratch and simply nationalised businesses that operated inefficiently. He put the German people to work building an infrastructure of roads and railways, even airlines, second to none—and the trains did run on time. He had little time for sycophants and no time for inefficiency or internal squabbling.¹⁵ By early 1936, Hitler had accomplished miracles both within and without Germany—and had rallied the German-speaking people of Europe to the Nazi banner.

Backed by a daily strengthening military armed from the industry of the Rhineland (re-militarised in 1934), Hitler began the *Anschluss*, the annexation of all territory that had once belonged to Imperial Germany or that now held German-speaking populations. Province by province and nation by nation, he dismantled the artificial states created by the Treaty of Versailles. And his former enemies of the Great War, Britain and France, practised appeasement—refusing to commit troops and treasure to stop the expansion of Hitler's Reich. They convinced themselves that his territorial ambitions had limits, and they were correct—to a point.

Hitler also scored three diplomatic coups during the waning years of the 1930s. He cemented alliances with both Italy (the Rome—Berlin Axis) and Japan. Both countries possessed large navies and could challenge the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean and in the Pacific respectively. Finally, he achieved an understanding with Josef Stalin, the Russian dictator. Representatives of the two nations signed a trade treaty (with military undertones) in early August 1939. That alliance of convenience not only placed the threat of a two-front war in abeyance, it provided a much needed trading partner for Germany.

By 1939 only one portion of the old German Empire still defied Hitler's grasp: Poland. And Hitler, for the first time since 1919, wavered. His trepidation did not stem from the fact that an attack on Poland would bring Britain and France immediately to its aid, as he welcomed the conflict with the Royal Navy. Rather, as his confidant, Dönitz, later recorded, Hitler feared the failure of his army, 'Admiral Karl, at sea I am like a lion, brave and fierce, but on land I am such a coward.'¹⁶ Only in June did he finally order the implementation of Case White, the invasion of Poland, for 1 September 1939. In mid-August, at the last joint planning session of the German High Command before the invasion, the Führer spoke with great passion. Victory, he explained to his generals and admirals, is never certain. Nothing is without risk. Hitler anticipated victory, however he ominously warned that 'we may be destroyed, but if we are, we shall drag a world with us . . . a world in flames.'¹⁷

A world in flames, 1939–45

On the eve of the invasion that would drag Europe into the conflagration which already appeared to be consuming Asia, the *Kriegsmarine* had not achieved quantitative parity with its primary enemy, the Royal Navy. Great Britain enjoyed an advantage in capital ships (battleships, battlecruisers, pocket

battleships) of 15:4, in carriers of 5:4, in cruisers of 56:3, in destroyers of 159:53. Only in submarines did the advantage rest with Germany, 131:54. Both sides also featured coastal defence forces, mostly older vessels. Germany accepted it as a given that France would enter the war on the British side, but its substantial navy (6 capital ships, 1 carrier, 18 cruisers, 58 destroyers, 76 submarines) would be committed in the Mediterranean, watching Germany's reluctant ally, Italy (4 capital ships, 21 cruisers, 48 destroyers, 104 submarines).¹⁸

Still, Hitler, Raeder, and Dönitz realised that their navy possessed several advantages. Most of the German ships had been constructed in the past seven years, no ships were in refit, and the German admirals could dictate the tempo of initial operations. Perhaps more importantly, the Royal Navy faced obligations that stretched the length and breadth of the globe-spanning British Empire, while the numerically weaker forces of the *Kriegsmarine* could be concentrated in northern European waters. Finally, the element of tactical surprise could be exploited to the utmost.

Part of that surprise centred upon innovative carrier and U-boat tactics. By 1939 the concept of *Rudeltaktik* ('pack/group tactics'), pioneered by Dönitz and refined by Raeder, had been applied at all levels of the *Kriegsmarine*. The *Rudel* was a permanent organisation (as distinct from a task force) composed for surface forces of (ideally) a carrier, a battleship, a cruiser, and 20 destroyers supported by two fast oilers and three fast replenishment vessels. As a permanent organisation, the men and ships of each *Rudel* had served together for months (years, in many cases) and had developed a level of group expertise superior to that of any contemporary naval task force. With a top speed of 29–30 knots, a cruising range of 11–12,000 miles, a force projection radius of 250 miles, and the ability of the carrier to replace its planes while at sea (replenishment vessels carried 20 spare planes), the German carrier group would be a deadly opponent when commanded with skill and daring.

The U-boat *Rudel* consisted of ten boats, usually nine medium range Type VIIC (770 tons) and one Type IXC (1,120 tons) to operate as a command/control vessel, though two of the eleven groups functional in 1939 contained all Type IXC boats (allowing them to take station at any point in the Atlantic Basin). Dönitz (disappointed, by the way, at the failure of German industry to meet his production demands) realised that his wolf packs could not afford the heavy losses experienced by U-boats in the Great War once Britain adopted a convoy system. He also agreed with Hitler that the complete isolation of the British Isles was not feasible, and that, based upon Germany's own experience, such a blockade could not return the short-term results needed to defeat their foe. Thus he determined that the primary objective of his U-boat force was to attrite the Royal Navy—sinking merchant tonnage would be a secondary objective. Once a convoy had been spotted by a wolf pack, the radar-equipped command/control boat would race to shadow the convoy and concentrate its flock. As soon as concentration had been achieved, two U-boats would target the merchantmen, drawing the escorts to their location. The remaining members of the *Rudel* would sink those escorts. If the elimination of the escort could be accomplished, the defenceless convoy could be sunk at leisure (and without endangering precious U-boats). Dönitz's standing order stipulated that no attacks would take place without concentration being achieved. By the end of August 1939, six of the eleven wolf packs

crowded the Western Approaches, another cruised near Gibraltar, while two crept stealthily toward Scapa Flow, primary anchorage of the Royal Navy. The time to test mettle and tactics rapidly approached.

At dawn on 1 September the German war machine smashed across the Polish border in what would be a short campaign—a proving ground for the *Blitzkrieg* ('lightning war') tactics of Hitler's generals. But Hitler's attention focused westward that morning, to London, where at 06.00 the German ambassador delivered a declaration of war to the British prime minister's office, and to Scapa Flow where at 06.05 his German eagles would descend on the anchored British lions of the Home Fleet.

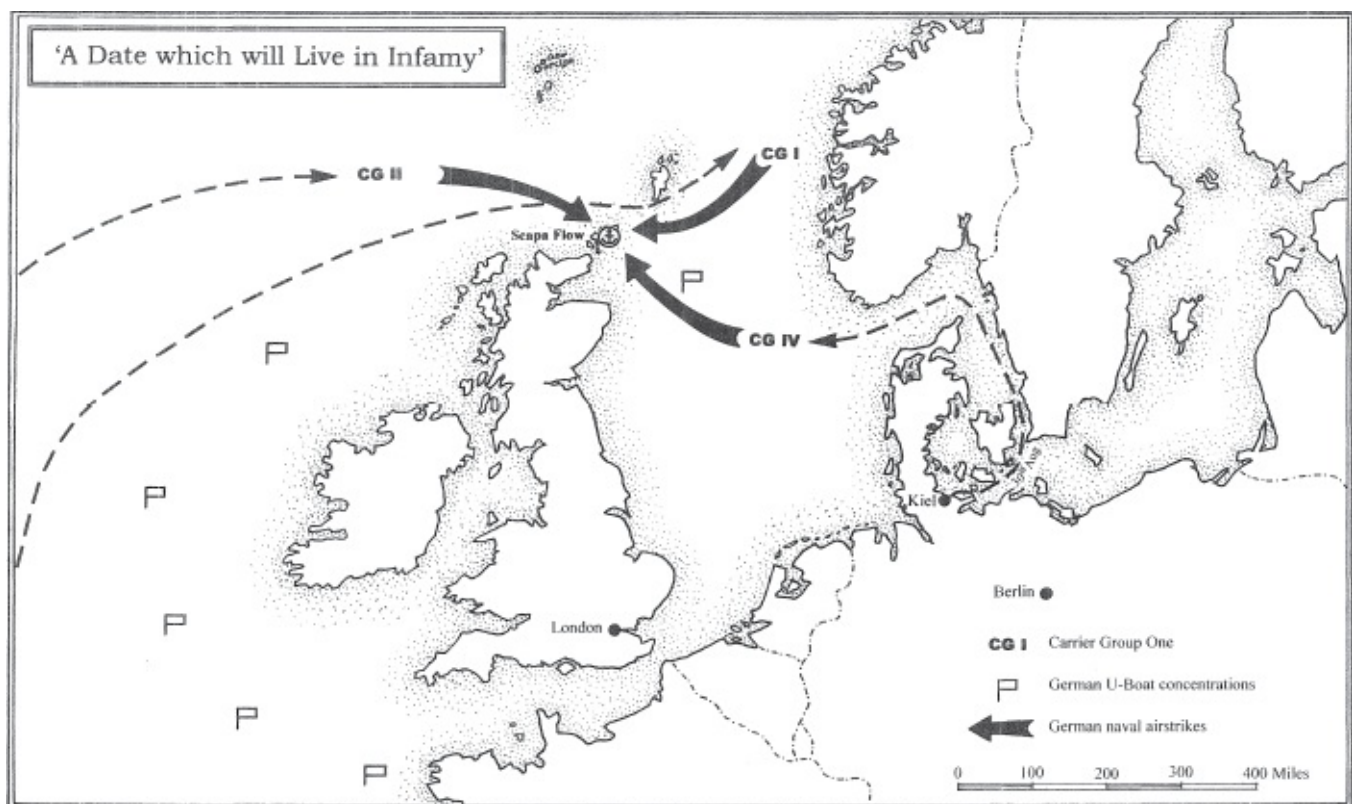
Over the past weeks, three of the four German carrier groups had scattered across the Atlantic, ostensibly to show the flag or to train. *Carrier Group (CG) I* (CV *Graf Zeppelin*, BB *Scharnhorst*, 10 destroyers, and support vessels) was on a return voyage from the South American coast, scheduled to reach Kiel on 3 September.²⁰ *CG II* (CVL *Günther Luck*, B *Admiral Graf Spee*, a light cruiser, 10 destroyers, and support vessels) had sailed in mid-August for the port of New York with the new German ambassador to the United States onboard. *CG III* (CVL *Gorch Fock*, B *Admiral Scheer*, a light cruiser, 14 destroyers, and support vessels) neared the Straits of Gibraltar, en route to Italy. Only *CG IV* (CVL *Fritz Heinzen*, B *Deutschland*, a light cruiser, 11 destroyers, and support vessels) remained in port through the waning days of August, only to slip its moorings quietly late on 30 August for a run to the North Sea.

By the evening of 31 August, *CG II* had detached DD *Hans Lody* to convey the ambassador from New York, then reversed its course and steamed to within 150 miles west of Scapa Flow. *CG I* had slowed its journey home, and cruised some 200 miles northeast of the British naval base. Since nearing British territorial waters, it had been shadowed by HMS *Sheffield*; but, low on fuel, that ship had broken contact (with an exchange of friendly signals) earlier in the day. *CG IV*, after a rapid passage through the Skagerrak, held position 150 miles southeast of Scapa Flow. At 01.00 on 1 September commanders of the three naval forces announced the existence of a state of war between the Third Reich and its arch-nemesis, Great Britain. Personal messages from Hitler and Admiral Raeder called for vengeance upon the fleet that had starved German children in 1919, and exhorted men and officers to make the opening blow of the new conflict a victory 'für Führer, für Reich, für Volk!'

At 06.03, the first wave of planes—four Me Bf 109T fighters, eight Fi 167 torpedo bombers, and eight Ju 87C dive bombers from *CG II*—screamed over the unprepared British Home Fleet at Scapa Flow.²¹ Within minutes, 14 fighters, 21 torpedo bombers, and 24 dive bombers from *CG I* and *CG III* joined the assault. By 06.30, the last of the raiders had departed, unable fully to evaluate damage to the Royal Navy because of the heavy pall of smoke blanketing the harbour. And that damage was severe. Two fleet carriers, *Glorious* and *Ark Royal*, burned fiercely before sinking. Two Great War vintage battleships, *Queen Elizabeth* and *Warspite*, had slipped beneath the cold waters minutes after taking two torpedo hits each. BC *Renown*, its magazine penetrated by a bomb, exploded, then sank in seconds—over 1,000 men died with it alone. BB *Royal Sovereign*, serving as flag for the Home Fleet

lost its A-turret to a bomb and its propellers to a torpedo. The final tally of the German surprise attack was three capital ships, two carriers, a heavy cruiser, and three destroyers sunk for the cost of four planes. Additionally, of the remaining seven veterans of the British battleline at anchor that morning all except the battlecruiser *Hood* carried some mark of German bombs and torpedoes, while Bf 109s had savaged every plane at Scapa Flow's airfields. Even then, the trial by fire of 1 September for the Home Fleet was far from complete.

Expecting additional attacks from the German carriers, survivors of the Home Fleet sortied for southern bases and their own air cover. But the German carriers had no intention of risking a second attack. After recovering planes, *CG I* steamed for Kiel and the first of many 'heroes' welcomes' for the *Kriegsmarine*. *CG II* made maximum speed for the South Atlantic and *CG IV* moved at flank speed toward Halifax, Nova Scotia. Torment by air for the Home Fleet had ended for the day, but the disorganised flight stumbled into the waiting U-boats of *Submarine Groups I* and *V* (*SG I*, *SG V*). Vice-Admiral Kurt Slevogt, commanding *SG I*, was a model of Teutonic efficiency that day. He applied the convoy attack paradigm to the Home Fleet, using one submarine as a decoy while others lined up shots on its would-be attackers. By 23.00 Slevogt's tally included eight destroyers and three cruisers without the loss of a single U-boat. *SG V*'s commander failed to control the engagement. Committing his own boat to the attack early in the day, he paid the ultimate price. Two more of his boats fell to British depth charges, though it is probable that one of them managed to attack the *Royal Sovereign*, damaged and under tow, which capsized at 16.5 1 that afternoon when a single torpedo struck it amidships.



Throughout the remainder of September, as German armoured and infantry forces ground Poland beneath metal tracks and hobnailed boots, the *Kriegsmarine* ran amok in the Atlantic. U-boats savaged

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