

GERMAN ADMIRALS EXPECT DEFEAT

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THE European War in its initial three months has been, except for the rapid conquest of Poland, essentially a naval struggle, in terms of blockade, counterblockade, and demolition of enemy tonnage. The two sides were stalemated on land and tended to cancel each other out in the air. Only on sea did the conflict develop intensely, in the silent and relentless pressures of economic blockade and the headlined sinkings of ships. The truth about the relative naval strengths of the warring nations is therefore basic to an understanding of the struggle; and that truth, though distorted for the masses at home and abroad, is a matter of record for the experts. The German Admiralty has in effect revealed its awareness that, in the naval sense at least, the war against England was lost before it began. Authoritative opinion in that regard is most unlikely to be disturbed by the melodrama of a new or revised weapon such as the mining of waters from the air. Every surprise

weapon is effective only temporarily — until it produces its inevitable antidote in a defensive weapon or defensive technique.

Adolf Hitler's Admirals are committed to double-talk. Their public statements, intended to bolster the morale of the German people in the face of Britain's blockade, reiterate propaganda slogans about "the resurrected might of German sea power." Their communiqués speak of "German supremacy in the North Sea" and predict the imminent destruction of Britain's battle fleet. Among themselves, however, these Admirals speak a different language. Articles in their own periodicals, and official Admiralty statistics, reflect their grave doubts as to Germany's naval preparedness. German Admiralty officials — whose testimony supplied the evidence offered in this survey — admit the inferiority of the Nazi navy and warn against the disastrous outcome of a conflict with Britain's battle fleet. These warnings, significantly, were sounded

in authoritative articles published shortly before the outbreak of this war.

Most outspoken is Admiral Wilhelm Prentzel. A World War veteran and a great expert, Admiral Prentzel knows intimately the limitations of Germany's fleet in the light of the tasks of a modern navy. Just before Chancellor Hitler started the war, Admiral Prentzel contributed an important article to a book entitled *Germany's Armed Forces, 1914-1939*. This volume was officially sponsored by the German War Ministry and the High Commands of the German armed forces, so that its authority is beyond question. In his contribution Admiral Prentzel undertakes to review past experiences and map the future duties of the German Navy. Navies will have greater duties to perform in contemporary wars, he asserts, "The times of purely continental warfare are over. Once again Germany has become a world power and this obliges us to regain our sea power as well. *Only sea powers can be world powers!*" What are, according to Admiral Prentzel, the tasks of the revamped German naval forces? He writes:

The reconstruction of Germany's sea might must aim at the maintenance of German security. It is not sufficient

merely to provide for the defense of our coastline and our coastal waters. Aside from the strictly military task of keeping the enemy away from our shores, this security involves the protection of our overseas supplies of raw materials and the foodstuffs required by our population. A considerable part of our foreign trade travels along these overseas routes.

As a matter of fact, about 40 per cent of Germany's peacetime foreign trade was with overseas countries. Since the Anglo-French blockade may interfere even with supplies normally reaching Germany from Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries, about two-thirds of Germany's imports require the protection of her navy.

Hitler's Admirals do not conceal their knowledge that their navy is unable to offer this crucial protection. That is why they were emphatic in cautioning against war with Great Britain. Almost on the eve of the present war, Admiral Prentzel wrote:

An attack against the overwhelmingly superior sea position of Great Britain is out of the question. Germany has drawn her conclusions from the experiences of the last war and knowingly allots but a modest role to her navy.

The experience to which Admiral Prentzel refers taught the Germans that Britain is practically invincible. "The German Navy was powerless against Britain's

blockade . . ." he recalls. "The British blockade resulted in the complete cessation of Germany's overseas trade while that of Britain was hardly touched by the operations of the German High Sea Fleet." Summarizing this prophetic analysis, he concludes:

Britain's unbroken blockade in the North Sea secured for her all overseas supplies she required as well as assured the transportation of troops and war materials from England and overseas points to the European battlefields. Thus Great Britain was able to make a most decisive contribution toward the strengthening of the enemy front. This continual reinforcement of the Allied armies, added to the gradually increasing starvation of the Central Powers, brought about the final victory of the Allies.

It is not accidental, obviously, that the leaders of the German Navy thus pointedly reviewed the lessons of the first World War — on the eve of the second. In summarizing the dismal experiences of 1914-18, they aimed to clarify the perils of another war. Admiral Prentzel's candid warning against the adventure of a test against Great Britain's sea power becomes increasingly impressive when it is read in conjunction with official German figures disclosing the country's present naval strength and comparing it with her position a quarter of a century ago.

II

Figures published by the official *German Yearbook of the High Command of the Navy, 1939*, edited by Rear-Admiral R. Gadow, with a foreword by Grand-Admiral Dr. Erich Raeder, reveal the actual naval strength of the belligerents so far as "available, non-obsolete warships" are concerned:

	Percentage of the world's total	
	1914	1939
Great Britain..	39.8	29.3
France.....	12.8	13.1
Germany.....	18.6	4.2

Germany thus discloses officially that while in 1914 the Imperial Navy represented almost one-fifth of the world's total and more than one-third of the combined Anglo-French naval forces, it represented but 1/25th of the world's total, and less than 1/10th of the Anglo-French naval strength, at the outset of the present war.

It is often said that the great superiority of the Anglo-French navies is partly reduced by the fact that this superiority consists of capital ships, which have more or less outlived their usefulness. Recent naval developments seem to support this assumption. The ratio of capital ships has decreased from 60 per cent in 1914 to about 40 per cent in 1939. At the same time

the ratio of smaller naval units, like torpedoboats and destroyers, increased from 6.5 per cent in 1914 to 12.6 per cent in 1939. The increase of the submarine ratio was from 1.2 per cent to 7.7 per cent.

But this consoling argument is flatly rejected by those whom it would favor most: the German Admirals. As a matter of fact, they regard it as a perilous fallacy. In a 1938 report, the official German Institute of Economic Research emphasized: "Now, as before, the capital ship is the backbone of the great battle fleets. A fleet without capital ships is like an army without infantry. It may inflict destructive damage, but it will never be able to bring about a final decision." This clear-cut view is expressed by the German Admiralty as well. In an article published in the 1938 volume of *Wissen und Wehr*, a highly respected German military periodical, Vice-Admiral Dr. H. Groos wrote that "the modern sea battle" will require "moveable and swift units of ships and planes of all categories to supplement each other in reconnaissance and combat, in attack and defense."

The German Navy, however, is decidedly out of balance for what Admiral Groos called a "modern sea battle." She has a negligible number of capital ships, at present

practically paralyzed in home ports or hiding away on distant oceans. Her smaller units are still far from adequate in number. And, contrary to common belief, she has a rather limited number of undersea craft which, nevertheless, must carry the burden of the present war at sea. In contrast to the 21 capital ships¹ of the combined Anglo-French navies representing an aggregate tonnage of about 610,000, Germany possesses only 5 capital ships with an aggregate tonnage of only 82,000.

It is important to note that the German Admirals are aware of the rather limited possibilities left for the employment of these German capital ships. True, one or two of the five succeeded in breaking through the British blockade. They have the technical advantage of being faster and of wider cruising range than the German capital ships of 1914 which accomplished a similar feat. "Their machinery consists of Diesel engines," writes Admiral Prentzel, "utilized to such an extent for the first time, enabling the ships to cover a distance of 10,000 sea miles, an unparalleled performance." But even with this technical improvement, the German Navy does not expect much success from its capital ships

¹ That is, after the sinking of the *Royal Oak*.

at large on the oceans, chiefly because it remembers the experiences of the last war. Of those experiences with warships that ran the British blockade and operated on the high seas, Admiral Prentzel writes: "Germany's efforts to establish naval bases and refueling stations by means of peacetime agreements were all frustrated by the British." On this account, "while the campaign against enemy merchant ships was quite successful during the first months of the war, it was restricted to a limited period of time." Today conditions are similar. With even fewer capital ships at her disposal, present-day Germany may score a few initial successes but eventually the entire scope of her naval warfare will be limited to submarine attacks and the use of mines.

For the conduct of this submarine warfare Germany has a very efficient U-Boat fleet and a good many daredevil commanders, but its actual strength is considerably overrated. It seems to the writer that even Winston Churchill assumes the existence of more German submarines than do, in fact, exist. British Admiralty communiqués issued in October estimated Germany's U-Boat fleet at 90 to 100 units, but German sources reveal considerably fewer. Corresponding

figures published by the official German *Weyer's Pocket-Book of the World's War-Fleets* as well as by the *Yearbook of the German Admiralty* (both of 1939) showed that the Third Reich embarked upon her war against the British fleet with only 61 undersea craft. We have no reason to doubt the accuracy of the German figure, since we know that the Germans were wont to exaggerate rather than belittle their own armed strength, especially prior to the war.

Even this smaller German figure is impressive if one remembers that this entire submarine fleet was created in only five years. As late as 1936, at the time the ill-fated Anglo-German Naval Treaty was signed, Germany was still denying possession of any submarines. But immediately after the signature of that treaty there appeared as if from nowhere 24 brand-new 250-ton German U-Boats, despite the prohibitions of the Versailles treaty.

Today both Admiral Prentzel and the Admiralty's *Yearbook* admit that these craft were launched prior to 1935. It has also been confirmed that the first post-war submarine college in Germany was opened at Kiel on October 1, 1933, only eight months after the Nazis' seizure of power and long before Hitler's open violations of the Ver-

sailles Treaty. Sixty officers, 60 engineers, 45 deck-officers, and 950 petty officers and men were assigned to this school — all of them under 30. The first graduates participated in the Spanish Civil War, manning Franco's pirate submarines. Since submarine crews require a four-year training period, there is only a limited personnel available to man the German U-Boats. This may explain in part why there are so few German submarines operating off the British and French coasts.

The first post-war German submarines were unusually small, not only because they were easier to build secretly and could be completed faster but because in 1934 the Admiralty still reckoned with a war against the Soviet Union. It believed that submarines of such small tonnage would be better suited to conditions in the Baltic. In 1936 two U-Boats of 712 tons each were added and the building of ten 500-ton submarines began. The Admiralty's *Yearbook* revealed that the former were the first to be equipped with modern mine-laying apparatus and that today all under-sea craft above the 250-ton class carries such equipment with facilities for 30 to 50 mines. As European tension increased and the center of gravity shifted from the

east to the west, Germany intensified her submarine construction program and began building her U-Boats larger. In 1938, 24 more were launched, and Admiral Prentzel indicated that all of them were ready for action by 1939.

According to Weyer's, the official German *Pocket-Book of the World's War-Fleets*, Germany entered the war with the following fleet of underwater craft:

		<i>Tons each</i>
U-1 — U-24	(1935-6)	250
U-25 — U-26	(1936)	712
U-27 — U-36	(1936-7)	500
U-37 — U-44	(1938-9)	740
U-45 — U-51	(1938-9)	517
U-52 — U-55	(1938-9)	517
U-56 — U-61	(1939)	250

Allied and Nazi estimates of German submarine losses since the war started differ widely. The British assert that about 30 or more German U-Boats were either sunk, captured, disabled; the Germans admit fewer casualties.¹ But even if Germany has lost only ten submarines (a very moderate estimate), it means that one-sixth of her submarine fleet has been destroyed in the first three months of hostilities — an exorbitant price for the damage inflicted on the British fleet and merchant marine. According to this estimate, Britain lost about 1.5 per cent of her

¹ As of December 1, 1939.

merchant marine, for which Germany paid with about 16 per cent of her entire submarine fleet.

It is well to remember that the production of submarines still requires considerable time, so that replacement is slow. In its 1938 report the official German Institute of Economic Research establishes that the execution of naval building programs requires less time today than in 1914-1918. Then 30 to 36 months were required to build a 9000-ton battle-cruiser while today such cruisers are built in 27 months. The building of a torpedo boat or destroyer required 18 to 24 months in 1914, while today it is completed in about 14 to 18 months. The construction of a submarine averaged 24 months in 1914. Today submarines are built in 18 months or even less. The same German report acclaims Italy as the country which builds submarines fastest, having built a "620-ton submarine in about 12 months." It is possible that 250-ton submarines do not require a full year to complete but these pocket-submarines can hardly be used in the sea war against Britain. The fact remains that, according to official Nazi sources, U-Boats which can be thrown against the British fleet and merchant marine with the

prospect of success need between one year and 18 months for construction. The building cost of submarines has increased with the speeding up of construction. German statistics indicate that the building of a capital ship had cost from £80 to £100 per ton at the beginning of the last war. Today it costs more than £200 per ton. The building costs of submarines being double those of capital ships, the construction cost of a 500-ton U-Boat is about \$1,000,000.

Germany's submarine warfare against Britain is thus extremely costly both in time and money. Moreover, the increasingly complicated machinery of U-Boats require crews who have had longer training periods—a fact which makes the maintenance of supplementary reserves rather difficult. Admiral Prentzel writes: "While military service was fixed at one year and later extended to two years, the special service of the navy requires men to be retained and trained for not less than four years." Thus the question of personnel causes additional anxieties with Hitler's harried Admirals.

Germany's naval outlook is neither secure nor bright. It has been said that if Germany were able to obtain the necessary raw materials and continue her naval construc-

tion program at the rate of her present output, she would soon overtake the French navy and closely approach Britain's. This view is represented by certain neutral observers who are impressed by the absolute figures of the German construction program. They fail to realize, however, that even at the completion of this program the Nazi navy would still remain among the "lower-bracket navies" of the world.

III

A survey prepared by the German Institute of Economic Research and published on July 12, 1939 revealed that the total German naval construction program amounts to only 188,200 tons as compared with the 558,000 tons called for in the Anglo-French construction plans. Germany is building only two capital ships and Weyer's give their aggregate tonnage as 70,000. Britain and France, on the other hand, are building no less than eleven capital ships, totaling 395,000 tons. Similarly large is the gulf between the Allied and German submarine construction programs, although in this field the numerical difference is smaller than the difference in tonnage. The Germans admit plans

for 22 submarines, representing a total of 11,000 tons. The Anglo-French construction program provides for 38 submarines totaling 37,000 tons. In other words, the proportional difference between the allied navies and the German navy will remain practically unchanged even at the end of their respective construction programs. Present building activities in German navy yards certainly do not menace Britain's naval superiority.

The enormous difference between the belligerent fleets in favor of the Allies is evident in the following summary figures, as of January 1, 1939:

	<i>Allies</i>	<i>Germany</i>
Capital Ships (by tons):		
Available	610,000	82,000
Building	395,000	70,000
Submarines (by tons):		
Available	128,000	16,000
Building	37,000	11,000

The German U-Boat fleet alone will not be able to break the sea might of Great Britain. Nor can it be expected that Germany can so rapidly increase its sea power during actual hostilities that it could be brought to a par with that of her opponents. But if open naval engagements are not possible; if submarine warfare can produce only limited results, what can be done? Could mines help? Could cruisers which have broken through

the blockade have a decisive influence on the final result?

The German Admiralty considered all these questions long before the outbreak of the war and answered in the negative on all counts. Mines as an arm of sea warfare are not new. They even played an important part in the Russo-Japanese war. Their first large scale use was in the World War. What was the result? Admiral Prentzel writes:

There were approximately 187,000 mines laid in European territorial waters of which 57,000 were in the isolated North Sea region between the Shetland Islands and Norway. To meet this increased danger from mines, mine sweepers and mine seekers built before the war had to be increased in number and efficiency during the war. For immediate protection of ships against mines, war craft as well as merchant craft were equipped with the newly invented "apron"—a protective implement with which the bow of the boat was equipped. As a result of immediately employed protective measures the mine had soon lost its effectiveness as an offensive weapon.

In this war the Germans resorted to the employment of mines at an early stage of the conflict since the purely submarine warfare failed to bring about decisive results. As is usually the case with the application of new or illegally employed weapons, the German mines did a lot of damage when

they first appeared off the British coast. Yet British counter-measures were soon to strip these mines of their initial effectiveness. Defensive weapons are developed much faster now than in 1918.

Thus the German Admirals judge their own sea power. Major naval engagements are out of the question because of the unevenness of the opposing forces. In view of the small number of available U-Boats and the extended period of construction, the potentialities of submarine warfare are rather negligible. Mines and a few cruisers that have broken through the steel ring of the British blockade cannot win much of permanent value. There can be no question of even touching Britain's superiority on the seas, according to the German Admiralty, just before this war began. Individual exploits of daredevil U-Boat commanders cannot make any difference in the long run. Even if the Germans were to succeed in sinking as many Allied ships as there are German warships altogether, the combined English-French war fleet would still be *nine times as strong* as the German. The German Admiralty knows this and therefore is aware, as we said at the outset, that Hitler's naval war against Britain was lost before it had begun.

LUNACY: RIGHT AND LEFT

We are forced to laugh at the picture of the hypocritical American government shedding crocodile tears over the fate of bourgeois democracy. Roosevelt and his imperialist advisers have only one prayer on their lips. It is: "God, send us a protracted war."

— Moscow *Trud*, November 13.



In traveling under an assumed name I was merely doing what is customary among the aristocracy when they travel incognito.

— Earl Browder, proletarian leader, in explaining his use of false passports.

Once again America emerges in its true role as "Uncle Shylock." While Washington weeps over the fate of small nations, it nevertheless encourages the traffic in arms to the highest bidder. The entire nauseating business is typically American.

— Berlin *Voelkischer Beobachter*, November 13.



Now that the revolution is victorious in the Soviet Union, more than one political party is unnecessary. The new Soviet Constitution, therefore, is the highest form of democracy.

— *Daily Worker*, organ of the American Communist Party, December 8, 1938.

I hope that I am tried before an exclusively Jewish jury. The Jewish people are a persecuted race and they will understand how I am being hounded and persecuted by Mayor LaGuardia and District Attorney Dewey.

— Fritz Kuhn, head of the German-American Bund.



The American capitalists, whose only interest is in furthering the war, repeal the embargo on the export of arms in order to secure huge profits to the kings of the munitions industry. . . blood money.

— Manifesto of the Communist International, issued in Moscow, November 6.

The leadership principle of the Nazi government and of the German-American Bund in the United States is the most advanced form of democracy.

— George Froebe, Mid-Western District Organizer for the Bund, November 8.

— *Deutsche Diplomatischpolitische Korrespondenz*, organ of the Nazi Foreign Office, November 16.