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Ed Offley, *The Burning Shore: How Hitler's U-Boats Brought World War II to America*. New York: Basic Books, 2014. Pp. viii, 312. ISBN 978-0-465-02961-7.

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The opening of Operation Drumbeat, the German U-Boat offensive along the American coastline in January 1942, came as a shock to US Navy leaders and for several months posed a serious threat to the entire Allied war effort against Germany. Despite warnings from American and British intelligence sources, and from US naval officers already involved in escorting Atlantic convoys and in preparing coastal defenses, the Navy made virtually no preparations for the attacks, even at the most basic level of ordering coastal blackouts or organizing convoys. The U-Boats took full advantage and their crews enjoyed what was later called *der Glückliche Zeit* (the Happy Time), sinking ships nearly at will. Having learned the hard way, the Americans eventually took better security measures and committed enough aircraft and warships to counter the threat, and by July, the window of opportunity was rapidly closing for the Germans.

Both scholars and war buffs know this story from earlier books<sup>1</sup> and veteran journalist Ed Offley does not add much to the standard interpretation of events. But he does approach the topic from a fresh angle, focusing specifically on the careers of Horst Degen, commander of the German submarine U-701, and Harry Kane, an American bomber pilot, whose paths converged on 7 July 1942, when Kane sank Degen's U-Boat off the coast of North Carolina. It was one of several incidents that forced the Germans to call off the offensive. Offley tells a good story that clarifies for general readers the complex history of the Battle of the Atlantic.

The author knows his submarines.<sup>2</sup> His strong personal interest dates to the 1970s, when he learned that a U-Boat had laid mines at the entrance to Chesapeake Bay and that this submarine, the U-701, had been sunk not long afterward. During his subsequent investigation, he discovered that Kane and Degen, one of the few survivors of the sinking, were still alive and had met each other and become friends. He interviewed both men before they died, and with the support of their families worked to put the larger story together.

Offley rightly notes the limitations of the U-Boat force early in the war, including the lack of vessels, especially long-range ones, and defective torpedoes, a problem still bedeviling the U-701 in mid-1942. He summarizes the struggle between the British and Germans to control the Atlantic sea lanes and the increasing difficulty of attacking convoys as escort forces grew larger and gained experience. The author's thorough research shows in his discussion of the effectiveness and limitations of code-breaking, not just of Allied efforts to crack the German Enigma system, but also of German efforts to read Allied signals, which greatly helped the U-Boat force. He is less convincing in his evaluation of the threat posed by the German surface fleet by late 1941; in particular, he exaggerates (without attribution) the numbers of German capital ships. Still, his basic point—that the remaining assets of the surface fleet greatly concerned the Allies—is valid.

Offley's handling of the larger context of the war includes a sympathetic treatment of Adm. Ernest King, who took command of the US Atlantic Fleet shortly after Pearl Harbor, and eventually of the entire Navy. Usually depicted as an irascible Anglophobe, King appears here as a highly capable officer used to getting things done. "In the spring of 1940, Acting Navy Secretary Charles Edison assigned King to increase

1. E.g., Clay Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War*, 2 vols. (NY: Random House, 1996-98), and Michael Gannon, *Operation Drumbeat: The Dramatic True Story of Germany's First U-Boat Attacks along the American Coast in World War II* (NY: Harper and Row, 1990).

2. His early work includes *Scorpion Down: Sunk by the Soviets, Buried by the Pentagon: The Untold Story of the USS Scorpion* (NY: Basic Books, 2008) and *Turning the Tide: How a Small Band of Allied Sailors Defeated the U-Boats and Won the Battle of the Atlantic* (NY: Basic Books, 2011), reviewed at *MiWSR* 2012-013 – [www.miwsr.com/2012-013.aspx](http://www.miwsr.com/2012-013.aspx).

the antiaircraft firepower on all navy warships. With Edison's support, King slashed through the bureaucratic tentacles that paralyzed most major reforms and got the complicated rearming program underway in just three months. The bureaucrats howled, but the program proceeded on the fast track" (39).

Early on, Offley depicts King as an effective leader, well aware of the potential threat posed by U-Boats to the American coastline. However, as he examines his responses to the opening of Operation Drumbeat, he writes that "What remains inexplicable more than seventy years after the fact is the failure of either Admiral King or Vice Admiral Ingersoll to carry out King's earlier advice to Admiral Stark to redeploy a sufficient number of destroyers to fight off the anticipated U-Boat offensive in American coastal waters" (101). Having made this observation, Offley resumes his narrative without further comment. This is disappointing and may confuse his readers.

While the top-down side of Offley's narrative is rather uneven, he handles the bottom-up aspect consistently well. The reader follows Degen and Kane through their peacetime military training to their active duty in the war itself. Tracing Degen's career enables Offley to describe the evolution of the U-Boat program and the changes in strategy that eventually led to his fateful encounter with Kane. Most of this material will be familiar to students of the war, but Offley makes it accessible to novices as well. Kane's story has not often been told, since most studies of the Army Air Corps/Air Forces during the war concentrate on combat missions rather than training. Pilot training was a long, elaborate process: aspiring flyers were put through a battery of mental and physical tests and several stages of pre-flight and flight training before qualifying as pilots. They then trained on the specific aircraft they would be flying.<sup>3</sup> Kane's initial assignment was on the West Coast, where the highlight of his career was accidentally provoking an air raid warning over Los Angeles.

Initially, both men's experiences were frustrating. Degen served as a junior officer on a U-Boat to learn the ropes before assuming command of U-701. His first two cruises produced relatively few results. Kane flew his A-29 Hudson bomber on sorties off the West Coast without ever spotting anything. Degen's third voyage was a minelaying cruise, during which he also torpedoed several merchant ships. As U-701 operated off the US coastline in June and July 1942, however, Degen and his crew discovered that the Americans were finally developing effective convoy tactics; it became harder to find viable targets for his last torpedoes.

As he continued his search, his boat was targeted by Kane, who had transferred to North Carolina after the Battle of Midway eased fears of a possible Japanese attack on California. The climax of the story is the attack itself. In his vivid and balanced account, Offley makes effective use of interviews with Kane, Degen, and Gerhard Schwendel, the last survivor of U-701's crew, as well as other materials.

Kunert and Hansel disappeared down the hatch opening, and Degen was waiting for Junker—who was standing at the aft end of the bridge—to step forward and climb down, when the 1WO [first watch officer] suddenly stiffened and pointed, shouting, "Airplane, 200 degrees, coming in from port aft!" Junker leaped down the hatch opening. Horrified, Degen looked up and saw an enemy bomber plummeting out of the cloud layer. He jumped down the hatch and cranked it shut as the U-Boat submerged.... As the A-29 came up over the U-Boat, Kane could clearly see that it was still close to the surface. He judged the right moment and stabbed the bomb-release override button on the control yoke. He felt a slight thump-thump-thump as the aircraft's load of three 325-pound Mark XVII depth charges fell free. Kane threw the A-29 into a steep climbing turn and craned his neck looking down at the water. He watched as the three depth charges exploded. The first fell twenty-five feet short of the U-Boat's blurred outline, but the second and third straddled its hull at the stern. Three columns of seawater erupted more than fifty feet high, then slowly collapsed back down into the surf. (218-19)

Kane was in fact the first Army pilot to sink a U-Boat, but his claims were discounted by disbelieving Navy men. Degen and the members of his crew who escaped the sunken submarine floated for several days before they were discovered, by which time only seven were left. Offley continues his story beyond the end

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3. Aside from a mislabeled photograph of a training aircraft (25), the author handles this material well.

of the war, as Kane and Degen tried to sort out the events they had been part of. The two eventually met in Germany in 1982.

In this remarkable narrative, Ed Offley brings the reader directly into the experiences of his protagonists. Even though *The Burning Shore* will not change historians' interpretations of the Battle of the Atlantic, it provides a superb introduction to it, especially for American readers, and contains stories even specialists, too, will appreciate.