

*Castaways of the Kriegsmarine* by Derek Nudd  
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This book examines the survivors of five vessels of the Kriegsmarine as the British shifted them through the interrogation process after capture. All were sunk in late 1943 and early 1944, a period of intense activity for the naval team at Combined Services Detailed Intelligence Centre (CSDIC).

Whereas the use of stool pigeons, secret recordings and the psychological tricks of the trade used by the interrogators have been described by others, such as Sonke Neitzel (*Tapping Hitler's Generals*) and Helen Fry (*The London Cage, The M Room*); this book takes a narrower approach. It looks specifically at a small number of prisoners captured at a significant turning point in the war at sea and uses them as exemplars to help describe the interrogation processes used by the naval team at the time.

The survivors came from two U-boats, *U-593*, *U-73*, the destroyer *T-25*, the blockade-runner *Alsterufer* and the battleship *Scharnhorst*. There is nothing particularly special about any of the individuals themselves. They were merely a cross-section of typical Kriegsmarine prisoners captured at this time in WW2.

The actual core of the naval intelligence team are subject to their own mini biographies. They included some interesting characters, such as the team leader, Lieutenant-Commander Burton Cope who had worked with Major Trench in the London Cage of WW1. The journalist Ralph Izzard who also worked with Ian Fleming's well-documented 30AU commandos and was thought to have been involved in intelligence matters during the Cold War is another case in point.

The book gives an interesting description of how the CSDIC system worked. This includes some useful analysis on the scale of its activities throughout the war. For example, the author shows how the production of special eavesdropping reports reached a peak at the time the prisoners featured in this book were captured. Secret recordings at Latimer House and elsewhere led to no less than 2,000 naval eavesdropping reports being compiled in 1944; by far the largest yearly total of the war.

Overt polling of prisoners, carried out to analyse levels of morale and defeatism shows how both reached the lowest ebb at the end of 1943 and began to steadily rise as it became clear that the war was lost. Somewhat bucking this trend were the prisoners from *Scharnhorst*. They had been well-led and were isolated in Norway from the worst aspects of the war. Some survivors, who were mainly seamen, resisted even the suggestion that the enemy had been responsible for destroying their unsinkable ship.

The morale on board all of the five vessels was in fact quite different. The crew of *T-25* were of the lowest quality, including the commanding officer who was not regarded well by his men. By direct contrast the sailors and officers of *Alsterufer*, a vessel with a history in the Naval Supply Ship Organisation were of higher morale and discipline. This, despite the loss of a valuable contraband cargo of coffee, which would have made all of the crew a lot of money had she reached France.

The morale of the U-boat men also differed. The strict disciplinarian Klt Deckert on *U73* was suspected by his crew of inflating his reported successes in a desperate attempt to emulate the successes of the U-boat's previous commander. Naval Intelligence unsurprisingly could not reconcile many of his claims to known shipping losses. Klt Kelbing of *U-593* was already a Knight's Cross winner and was held in higher regard by his men.

The author notes that the interrogations of the five sets crews revealed information consistent with that gathered from the broader population of prisoners. It covered areas of interest to the

Allies, not least the distribution of operational U-boats, defences around the *Tirpitz* anchorage in Norway, new U-boat types and the T-5 acoustic torpedo. Kelbing helpfully revealed how he would recharge at night in the shadow of hospital ships.

Political issues also come to the fore in the interrogations including a quite broad knowledge of Jewish persecution and executions. There is also a wide range of opinions expressed on the occupied countries and the presence of naval units in their ports. The crew of *Alsterufer* gave vent to a particular dislike of the Japanese.

The operational value of any intelligence derived specifically from the prisoners of the five vessels featured in the book is difficult to know. Yet the author suggests that there may be a possible relationship between *U-593*'s interrogation reports, which revealed the building of U-boat pens at Marseilles, and the subsequent US Fifteenth Air Force raid of 27 May 1945.

The book is capped off with some useful appendices and a bibliography. Each chapter is fully annotated, giving detailed citations from the intelligence records of the National Archives; of undoubted utility to any researcher interested in this aspect of naval intelligence. My main criticism is that the conclusions seemed a little rushed and a recap of the key items of valuable intelligence derived from the castaways of the five vessels would have more suitably rounded off this interesting book.

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