

The U-Boat Hunters

Marc Milner, *The U-Boat Hunters: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Offensive against Germany's Submarines* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) \$35.00, 326 pages, (ISBN 0-8020-0588-8).

In this companion book to *North Atlantic Run*, Marc Milner takes an in depth look at the second half of the U-Boat war, and the involvement of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Allied victory. Milner briefly recaps the dismal state of the RCN in early 1943, and then takes the reader through the political, administrative, tactical, and technical advances made during 1944-1945. Although this latter half of the Atlantic war has been traditionally shunned by

historians, Milner's careful research uncovers the incredible advances made by both the Allies and the Germans in the 'art' of submarine warfare. From the German Navy Acoustic Torpedo (GNAT), to the Canadian Anti-Acoustic Torpedo gear (CAT), and the British FOXER, the reader is introduced to the nuances of Anti-submarine Warfare (ASW) in the Second World War.

This book remains, however, an account of the Canadian contribution to the victory at sea. As with his earlier work, *North Atlantic Run*, Milner is not uncritical of the manner in which it was conducted. With the success of the convoy system finally assured, "hunter-killer" groups were formed to specifically destroy submarines. Zones of responsibility were established, which saw the United States Navy with its carrier-based groups, taking a larger share of the responsibility. In some cases, this marginalized the Canadian effort.

There were many different reasons for this occurrence, not the least of which was the unavailability of modern equipment for Canadian use. Certainly the aspirations of Admiral Percy Nelles and the professional navy for its postwar fleet, were partly to blame. Other reasons have a basis in decisions not to pursue the construction of more advanced types of escorts, such as the superb Castle-class corvette. The abortive Canadian designed RX/C radar was yet another set back. A sensitive unit, it worked very well, when it worked, but its maintenance requirements were such that it was impractical for active duty.

With the arrival of long range patrol (LRP) aircraft such as the B-24 Liberator, and the availability of better 10 cm radar sets, the nature of the Atlantic war was drastically changing by late 1944. Ships equipped with type 144/45 sonar, and the "Q" attachment, as well as the more advanced type 147B sonar, made identifying a submarine in open water easier.

This resulted in the Escort Groups achieving a much higher success rate against U-Boats. However, the problem of identifying a submerged submarine in shallow inshore waters, persisted throughout the war; Situations such as the "layering" of water due to differing temperatures played havoc with accurate identification. Therefore spring and fall became the best times for sub-hunting. The technology of bathythermography was developed in an attempt to combat this situation, and was marginally successful. Other methods were developed to tackle the threat of the U-Boat such as hunts to exhaustion. These so called "salmon operations" were organized in an effort to kill elusive U-Boats, but usually resulted in the vast expenditure of explosives with little to show.

Canadian support groups had, by wars end, become quite adept at sinking U-Boats; and what makes this achievement remarkable was the fact that it was accomplished almost solely by the volunteer navy. As Milner suggests, the professional navy was concerned with postwar careers, and the accumulation of fleet destroyers, cruisers, and aircraft carriers. But he never lets the reader forget that the Canadian Navy's primary responsibility was the safe escort of convoys; something which was accomplished with great success, under the most dire of circumstances.

In the end, *The U-Boat Hunters* is presented as a well-researched account of the late war activities of the RCN. A "good read," it is supported by maps, photographs, comprehensive notes, and a listing of U-Boat kills by the RCN from May 1943 to May 1945. This volume is a welcome addition to Milner's first book *North Atlantic Run*, and should be enjoyed by the Naval fraternity and the general public alike.

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