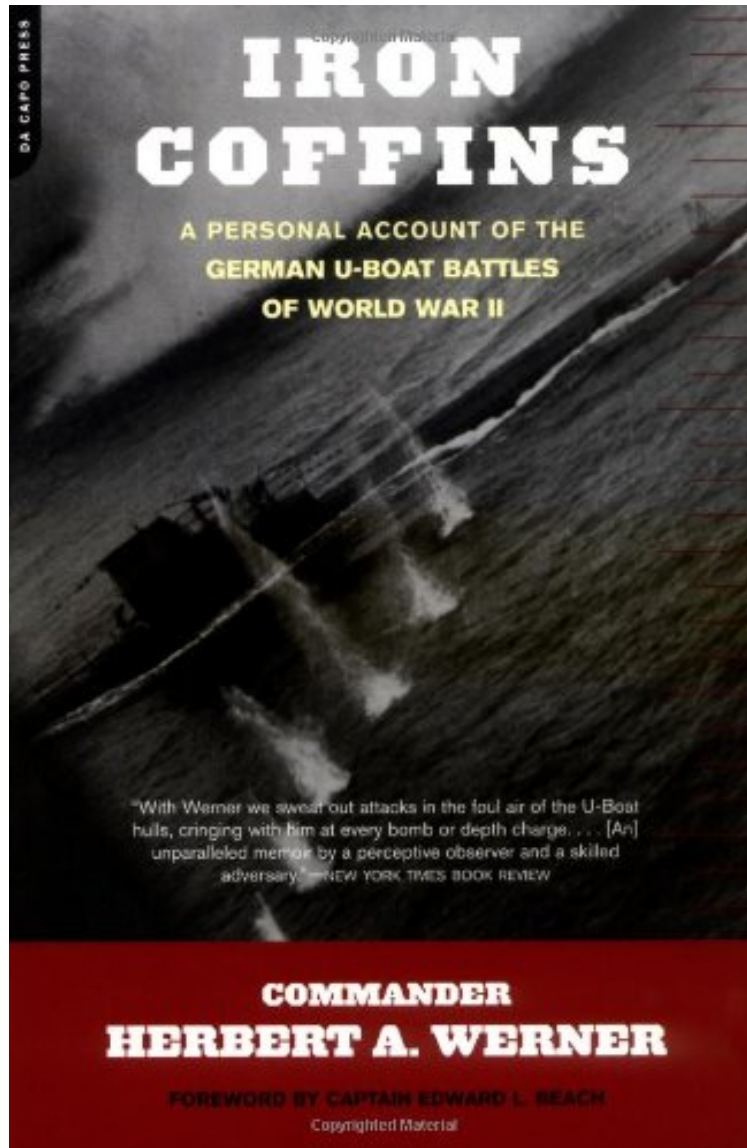


[Mobile book] Iron Coffins: A Personal Account Of The German U-boat Battles Of World War II

Iron Coffins: A Personal Account Of The German U-boat Battles Of World War II

Herbert A. Werner

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Herbert A. Werner : Iron Coffins: A Personal Account Of The German U-boat Battles Of World War II before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Iron Coffins: A Personal Account Of The German U-boat Battles Of World War II:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. True picture of the horror of the Battle of the Atlantic from the

German side
By R. Dodd
If anyone has illusions about the romance and adventure of U-boat warfare, this book will disabuse them of that notion. This is a book about the horror of war, dimensions of horror that I probably never really understood prior to reading this. At best, a mission on a U-boat was a journey into purgatory, at worst it was a one-way trip into terror and death and the bottom of the sea. The overwhelming majority of German submariners in WWII were the unlucky recipients of a ticket to that latter destination. Oberleutnant Werner was, through an astounding accumulation of good luck in addition to skill and experience, not one of those. You can almost smell the bilges, reeking with diesel fuel and rotten things and urine. On one occasion the crew goes ashore and bathes and dines and relaxes, and then Oberleutnant Werner comes back to the boat and opens the hatch and almost gags himself on the stench of body odor and piss and decay and oil emanating from his boat below. The boats were continually falling apart and threatening the lives of their crews in so doing. It is a nightmare from which Werner scarcely dreams of waking up from. Even when the war is over, his war continues in the form of his varied modes of incarceration as a POW. I always had the vision of POW camps as no-nonsense but reasonably humane prisons: maybe that was the American ones, but the French ones did not appear to be so. They slept in the open, in mud pits, and had a canned dishwater-like substance as their food. To add humiliation to their defeat, they were played the Marseilles every morning at wake-up. One thing that surprised me was the degree to which I found myself rooting for Werner towards the end of the book. Initially I felt he was a shallow nationalistic warrior with no comprehension of or compassion for those he was learning to deal death to. Germany was at war, that was all he needed to know. He was a man of bordellos and torpedoes. The fact that German's leaders were insane and that they started a war that cost millions of lives and created one of the greatest genocides in history did not seem relevant to him. He might not have been an ardent Nazi, but he certainly was ardent about serving the Kriegsmarine. It was only when the truth that they were losing the war practically slapped him in the face that he could begin to admit to himself that the deaths of all his friends and all those he sent to the bottom were in vain. It's not that he didn't know the facts of the German situation late in the war, it was that he had a fanatical belief that somehow Hitler and Doenitz would turn it all around. In other words, I did not find him a sympathetic character at all. And yet as his war drew to a close, I found myself rooting for his survival (even though I knew of course he did survive.) The idea that he might be shot for escaping from a POW camp after all he went through seemed terribly tragic. Even when the war was over, his struggle to survive was not over. I found myself rooting for the survival of a (to me) most unlikable man, but a man of skill and a man who had lost everything by war's end. Who had nothing left but a will to continue. It goes to show that even relatively bad men (and certainly even he understood he had blood on his hands) are still human. If you have even the slightest interest in the Battle of the Atlantic and U-boats, I'll bet you won't be able to put it down. True, it took a few chapters for the book to really sink the hook in me (that is how much I didn't care for Werner's shallow militarism and thoughtless womanizing,) but once it did I read the last third of the book almost in one sitting.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great book from the German perspective
By MarquisMark
Iron Coffins is a World War II memoir written by a retired German naval officer, Herbert A. Werner, who fought in (and managed to survive) the Battle of the Atlantic. In this book, he recounts his time in the war, from his commissioning and first patrols as a junior officer in the early, heady days, when the Atlantic ocean was a turkey shoot for the German U-boat force to the final days, when the Reich was crumbling more and more with each return to port and ever-improving Allied anti-submarine tactics turned each patrol order into a veritable death sentence. Werner is a fantastic storyteller and provides an amazing first-person account of the Atlantic theater. I enjoyed following the young officer's career through the war. I especially liked reading about how the world changed around the Germans as the war went on. In the beginning, life is relatively carefree for the German sailors. They are sinking incredible amounts of Allied shipping with each patrol and port calls are full of good meals, booze, girls, and partying. But slowly, things change. The Russians and the Americans put pressure on the fronts and the French begin to turn on their German occupiers. Friends, family, and acquaintances become casualties of bombing raids and resources become increasingly scarce. Werner grudgingly comes to terms with this new reality as he sees these things taking place and in the final days of the war, finds the submarines he is to take on patrol barely seaworthy and under-supplied. He also registers his disdain for the Nazi party elite, who continue to feel entitled to a lavish and luxurious lifestyle despite the devastation inflicted on their country. Werner's story is well written and an engrossing read. It's not very heavy on the nautical jargon and is therefore easy to understand for the layman. In addition, the recounting his escape from a French POW camp and the smuggling of himself back to his hometown in the Taunus forest provides a great epilogue to the already engaging story of his time in the German navy. A recommended book for history buffs.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent account of the U-boat war
By J. Stimpert
I originally read this book when it first came out in 1969, then I disposed of it a long time ago. While browsing the World War II selection here, I came across the title and remembered it, so I bought it again. It's a very good account of one German officer's experiences, as a junior officer, an exec, and a commander, told in a straightforward style. Obviously, he has a point-of-view and I wasn't expecting an apology for the U-boat war. He displays considerable objectivity, especially toward his own side late in the war. I just finished reading it again and I'm glad I re-acquired it. The one aspect I would like to have seen is something describing his life after the war; not a month-by-month account, but a few paragraphs to fill in the twelve-year gap between the

end of the war and his journey to the U.S., and what he did after arriving in this country.

The former German U-boat commander Herbert Werner navigates readers through the waters of World War II, recounting four years of the most significant and savage battles. By war's end, 28,000 out of 39,000 German sailors had disappeared beneath the waves.

"Page for page, one of the most exciting accounts of submarine warfare...First-rate." -- Publishers Weekly
About the Author
Commander Herbert Werner served on five submarines from 1941 to 1945 and came to the United States in 1947.