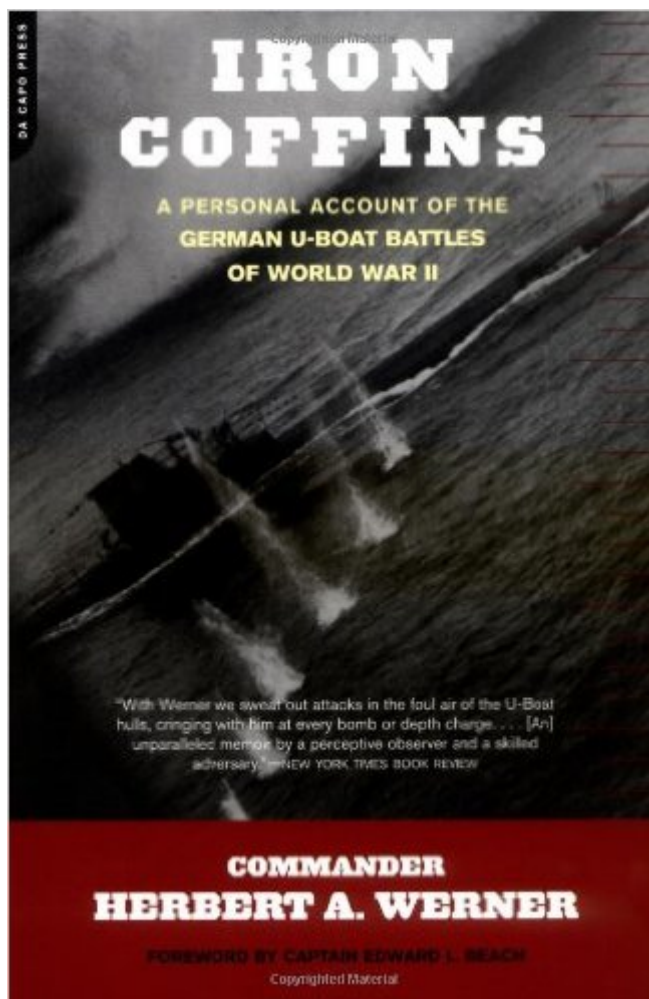


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Iron Coffins: A Personal Account Of The German U-boat Battles Of World War II



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

First off, it should be noted that Capt. Werner beat the odds. He survived to tell his tale. 80% of his fellow submariners would perish under the waves as in the later years of the war each mission was essentially a suicide mission. One of these "ramming" suicide missions was even ordered of his boat in the weeks after D-Day, and incredibly, some of his fellow sailors on other submarines would die following these orders. Werner's odyssey began when, on his first mission, the U-230 got stuck on the ocean floor and the crew spent 16 hours jettisoning water and weight out the torpedo tubes, and then ran from one end to the other to rock the boat free. So started his career. The number of close calls he and his ship would encounter over the course of the war, and survive, is equivalent to winning a lottery. Werner and crew had lady luck on their side at times, but many other escapes were a direct result of his competence and the crews bravery. It is a fascinating tale. The new radar that submarines employed in 1942 was later discovered to be acting like a homing beacon for allied aircraft, leading to the deaths of many crews from giving away their position before this error was discovered and fixed. By 1943 the Allies had perfected their hunt and destroy tactics so that many of these subs were unable to escape when their positions were verified. Many, many last reports from Werners classmates and fellow submariners were received onboard the U-230 before they

went down with the loss of all hands. These haunting messages were continually relayed to Werner and his sub and somehow this man was able to keep from being part of the majority of brave sailors who died an anonymous death in the deep waters of the Atlantic ocean. Simply an unforgettable book to read. One of the finest first person accounts of WWII that I have read to date. Ranks right up there with the works of Guy Sajer and Eugene Sledge.

This is the very best book I have read actually describing the conditions inside a German u-boat during World War II Atlantic Ocean war patrols. It is well written with both action and information in mind. The action standpoint is superb and makes the reader wonder how Capt Werner and his crew ever survived the punishment they took in their little fragile "egg" as aircraft and ships constantly dropped bombs and depth charges on them. From the information standpoint, Werner gives us a very comprehensive and interesting description of what it is like inside the early u-boats. It is hard to imagine how the crew lived like they did in their constantly rocking boat: without bathing for months, eating moldy food, suffering from constant humidity, freezing or roasting as the season might be (no airconditioning or heaters), and not having proper sanitary conditions (using a bucket in rough seas, etc.) Very good detail on u-boat life both aboard ship and in port. From another information standpoint, Werner gives us a good description of what average Germans were thinking as the war progressed, what sort of damage ordinary citizens were taking as the war proceeded in depth over Germany both from the heavy air bombardment plus the advancement of Allied armies from the south, east, and north. Werner is also a "ladies man" so we do hear a lot about the girlfriends in every port, so to speak, plus German submariners' night life in different occupied locations. (They seemed to like France a lot.) It is good that Werner provides you this gamut of information: living inside the boat, dealing with the difficult navy bureaucracy, joys of in-port liberty, his nice but unfortunate family, the Nazi party bother, and so on since it furnishes the reader with a rounded out picture of life during these unusual times. Werner is lucky to have come back alive, and we are fortunate he wrote this book. His family and many of his friends were not so fortunate as the reader will see.

The first time I read 'Iron Coffins', it was for a term paper in high school. At that point, all Germans in WWII were evil Nazi stooges with the mental capacity of a slug in salt. Once I started reading Mr. Werner's excellent book, I actually found myself sharing in the excitement as a U-Boat sank Allied ships. I also found myself feeling the dread as Allied escort ships dropped their deadly depth charges. Iron Coffins is a fast paced book that is hard to put down. One is able to truly experience

what the war was like through Mr. Werner's eyes. Once you've finished, you understand something...that just because you are at war with an evil nation doesn't make it's people all evil. Mr. Werner may not have been a celebrated U-Boat commander, but if it weren't for him, we would never truly understand the meaning of the term 'Iron Coffin.'

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