

SUMMARY JUSTICE:  
THE PRICE OF TREASON FOR EIGHT WORLD WAR II GERMAN  
PRISONERS OF WAR

A Thesis by

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Bachelor of Arts, Kansas Newman College, 1978

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PRISONERS OF WAR

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommended that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in History.

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Robert Owens, Committee Chair

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Robin Henry, Committee Member

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William Woods, Committee Member

## DEDICATION

To the memory of my father, Richard Schock, and my uncle Pat Bessette, both of whom  
encouraged in me a deep love of history and country

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my adviser, Dr. Robert Owens, for his incredible patience with an old dog who had such trouble with new tricks. Special thanks go to Dr. Anthony and Dana Gythiel whose generous grant allowed me to travel to the National Archives and thus gain access to many of the original documents pertinent to this story. I'd also like to thank Colonel Jack Bender, U.S.A.F (ret.), for his insight into the workings of military justice. Special thanks are likewise due to Lowell May, author of two books about German POWs incarcerated in Kansas during World War II. Lowell knows more about the German POW experience than any other person I know, and was always ready to share his special knowledge with me. Dr. Martin Moll, of Graz University in Graz, Austria, offered invaluable help by reviewing my work as it was being written and pointed me to German sources. Dr. Eric Rust of Baylor University offered his insight into the mindset of the men who served in the *U-bootwaffe*. Mike Dill, editor in chief of Calkins Media, in Miami, Florida followed along as I wrote and offered corrections and much-appreciated encouragement.

My mother, Anne, was always ready to proof read as I wrote and offered innumerable suggestions to produce a better work. My wife, Cheryl, likewise proof read my often rambling script and offered many a better alternative.

Thanks go out to my life-long friend and partner in adventure, Greg. Your confidence in me allowed me to capture for myself some small measure of the courage and spirit that you possess in such abundance. I needed heavy doses of both to finish this work. The hills are calling partner, and I for one, can't wait to hit the trail.

## ABSTRACT

This work is the story of the murder of Werner Drechsler, a German Navy prisoner of war, at the POW camp in Papago Park, Arizona in March 1944. Drechsler had aided his American captors in trying to glean military information from other German Navy POWs at the Fort Hunt, Virginia interrogation center. He was recognized almost immediately upon his arrival at Papago Park, and was murdered the very night he arrived.

His killers were also German Navy POWs, whose identity was unknown until a special U. S. Army investigatory board uncovered their identities. Questions remain as to the methods employed by investigators, working on the periphery of that board, to eventually acquire confessions from the seven men responsible for Drechsler's death. Opinions vary as to the fairness of the court martial which condemned these men to death for their part in the murder. Opinions likewise vary as to the level of culpability of the U. S. Army for Drechsler's death.

The National Archives possesses thousands of pages of documents relating to Drechsler's activities at Fort Hunt, the reaction of both the German POWs at Papago Park and the U.S. Army to the murder, and to the investigation into the killing. The U. S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals holds the trial transcript and related papers. These documents are often confusing and contradictory.

An examination into these sources reveals allegations of coercion employed to gain the confessions, which constitute the only evidence presented against the accused seven men. The sources also reveal that U.S. Army personnel could, and probably should, have prevented the killing from ever taking place. Ultimately, they reveal yet another tragedy of war.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

We have no right to question his loyalty and devotion to his country any more than we have a right to question our own loyalty and devotion to ours. These men are strangers in a strange land. They have been separated from their armies, and for many purposes have been separated from the system of justice to which they are accustomed.

*Col. Thomas J. White, J.A.G.D.  
Ninth Services Command Judge Advocate<sup>1</sup>*

Three of the accused in their testimony complained of improper treatment. I have caused an investigation to be made and I find these complaints are either unfounded or are greatly exaggerated. Whatever improper treatment there may have been had no effect on their later confessions which were voluntarily made and are referred to above. I have taken steps to see that no further instances of this kind will occur.

*Henry L. Stimson  
Secretary of War<sup>2</sup>*

World War II produced many truthful stories of both heroism and villainy. The following story, however, is devoid of any obviously identifiable heroes or villains. This story centers around an event which occurred on 13 March 1944, when, in the wording of General Court-Martial Order Number No. 406, dated 21 August 1945, seven German *Kriegsmarine* (Navy) prisoners of war detained at Prisoner of War Camp, Papago Park, Phoenix, Arizona, did, “with malice aforethought, willfully, deliberately, feloniously, unlawfully, and with premeditation kill one Prisoner of War Werner Drechsler, a human being, by strangulation.”<sup>3</sup>

The seven German sailors were eventually tried before an American court-martial at Florence, Arizona. The German Navy enlisted men were prosecuted, defended, and

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<sup>1</sup> Review of Staff Judge Advocate on Record of Trial by General Court-Martial, 15 September 1944. Department of the Army, US Army court of Appeals, Arlington, VA.

<sup>2</sup> Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, Washington, D.C., to President Harry S. Truman, Washington, D.C., 14 February 1945. Papers of Harry S. Truman, White House Central Files, Confidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO.

<sup>3</sup> General Court-Martial Order No. 406, War Department, Washington 25, D. C., 21 August 1945. Department of the Army, US Army Court of Criminal Appeals, Arlington, Virginia.



judged by American Army officers, and in a two-day trial found guilty of “Violation of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Article of War,” and sentenced to death by hanging for the murder of Werner Drechsler. The sentence pronounced on the seven men was in accordance with the provisions of an occurrence in violation of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Article of War which reads, in part; “Any person subject to military law who commits murder or rape shall suffer death or imprisonment for life, as a court-martial may direct.”<sup>4</sup>

Werner Drechsler was no ordinary German *Kriegsgefangene* (prisoner of war). To his American captors he was an informer who “had given much information to the Armed Forces of the United States of apparent military value.” To his fellow POWs he was “accordingly appraised as a traitor.”<sup>5</sup> No matter the politics or ideology espoused by the individual reader of this story, it is difficult to bestow the label of hero upon any individual who betrays his country and comrades. Villain is likewise a difficult label to attach to a man who betrayed a regime so abhorrent as that of Nazi Germany.

The seven men at whose hands Werner Drechsler met his death professed that they were motivated to act by their sense of duty as loyal German *Soldaten* (soldiers).<sup>6</sup> At their trial their American defense counsel argued “that it might well be the duty of every soldier to treat a traitor as such.” The honorable performance of duty may be a precursor to heroism, but a further look in to the manner of Werner Drechsler’s death sheds a

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Whittingham, *Martial Justice: The Last Mass Execution in the United States* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1971; Annapolis: Bluejacket Books, 1997), 153; General Court-Martial Order No. 406; Colonel A. N. Tellofson, Washington, D. C., to Legation of Switzerland, Washington D. C., 15 July 1944. Department of the Army, US Army Court of Criminal Appeals, Arlington, Virginia.

<sup>5</sup> Review of Staff Judge Advocate on Record of Trial by General Court-Martial, German Prisoners of War Helmut Fischer, ISN 10G-1088-NA; Fritz Franke, ISN 10G-1083-NA; Guenther Kuelsen, ISN 10G-1073-NA; Heinrich Ludwig, ISN 7G-132-NA; Bernhard Reyak, ISN 10G-1069-NA; Otto Stengel, ISN 6-112-NA; Rolf Wizuy, ISN 10G-1072-NA. Army Service Forces, Headquarters Ninth Service Command, Office of the Service Command Judge Advocate, Fort Douglas, Utah, 15 September 1944..

<sup>6</sup> American readers may be somewhat confused by the use of the term *Soldaten* (soldiers) by German naval personnel. As explained to the author, “In the German language everyone wearing a uniform is a soldier, in that respect “soldier” is more ore less a synonym to combatant.” E-mail from Dr. Martin Moll, University of Graz, Austria, to author, 21 June 2008.

different light onto that “duty” as performed by his former *Kameraden* (comrades). Prior to hanging Drechsler the seven men had subjected him to a brutal beating. His nose was broken and multiple bruises covered his body, but most particularly his lower legs and scrotum.<sup>7</sup>

The American players in this drama may also be seen to have performed in a less than heroic manner. The Army held jurisdiction over all enemy POWs held on American soil, but due to the severity of the threat posed by German U-boats many U-boat POWs were temporarily left in custody of the Navy or a joint Army-Navy team for purposes of interrogation. It was while in the custody of such a joint team that Drechsler betrayed his country.

The Navy realized that Drechsler’s betrayal had probably been deduced by his fellow prisoners. The Navy therefore cautioned the Army, both in writing and through at least one telephone conversation, that he must be segregated from other *Kriegsmarine* POWs upon his transfer into Army custody. For unknown reasons the Army chose to ignore the Navy’s recommendation and Drechsler was sent by the Army to the POW camp at Papago Park, Arizona, which housed mostly *Kriegsmarine* prisoners.<sup>8</sup> Within hours of his arrival at Papago Park, Werner Drechsler was dead.

Immediately upon the discovery of Drechsler’s body the local Commanding Officer at Papago Park appointed a board to identify those responsible. This first board uncovered no information whatsoever. The German prisoners claimed to know nothing

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<sup>7</sup> Review of Staff Judge Advocate on Record of Trial by General Court-Martial, 15 September 1944.

<sup>8</sup> Prisoner of War Operations Div., Operations Branch, Classified Decimal File, box 1378, file 253.91 Fort Hunt. Memorandum for Colonel I. B. Summers P.M.G.O. 1, 20 December 1943. Records of The Provost Marshall General, Records of the Prisoner of War Division, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; John Hammond Moore, *The Faustball Tunnel: German POWs in America and Their Great Escape* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1978), 26.

about the incident. “There were even some suggestions that the American authorities were responsible.” Faced with the possibility that the murder would go unpunished the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate of the Ninth Services Command headquartered at Fort Douglas, Utah, “recommended that a board of the most competent, skilled, and trained officers within the command be appointed to conduct a further investigation for the purpose of determining those responsible for this crime.”

This board spent two and a half months investigating the incident and in the words of the report written by the Review Board of the Ninth Services Command “their efforts were crowned with success. Complete confessions were obtained from seven prisoners.” That same Review Board wrote that “upon being assured that all statements were free and voluntary, the Staff Judge Advocate recommended to the Commanding General that these seven confessed murderers be brought to trial.”

Unsworn testimony given at the actual trial by three of the accused, however, cast doubt as to just how “free and voluntary” these confessions actually were. These three men claimed that their initial confessions were the result of interrogation methods which must be considered, at the very least, far short of honorable. Unsworn testimony in and of itself raises questions of validity, but subsequent sworn testimony, given by Colonel G. F. Church, Chief of Military Intelligence, at the Presidio, San Francisco, California, who had served as president of the investigative board during the investigation, allowed that while no coercive methods had taken place in his presence, he had been informed that some such methods had indeed been employed outside his presence. Church’s admission lent considerable credence to their claims.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Review of Staff Judge Advocate on Record of Trial by General Court-Martial, 15 September 1944.

From the available records it would appear that Colonel Church was careful in all of his personal dealings with the accused to adhere to the standards of the Articles of War. What remains unknown is whether Church had given prior permission for the use of coercive methods by members of his team, or only learned of their use later. Whatever the case, Article 24 of the Articles of War clearly stated that any evidence gathered by coercion would be inadmissible in court.<sup>10</sup>

It was also discovered later in the review process of the trial that two of the Americans involved in the interrogations of the three men had testified during the trial under “fictitious” names. Furthermore, these same two named individuals refused to reveal their interrogation methods claiming that they were sworn to secrecy and that they could only reveal their methods if permitted to do so by the Chief of Staff of the Army.<sup>11</sup>

The transcript of the Arizona court-martial, along with its verdict and pronounced death sentences, were forwarded to the Ninth Services Command Headquarters in Utah for review. The first to review the proceedings was Major General William E. Shedd, commanding general of the Ninth Services Command. Shedd approved the death sentences, but offered his personal recommendation that the sentences be reduced to life imprisonment.<sup>12</sup>

The record of the trial was then forwarded to the above-mentioned review board. In the report issued by this board the allegations of brutality leveled by the three Germans in their unsworn testimony were judged to be largely irrelevant in light of later signed

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<sup>10</sup>Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and the Sick of Armies in the Field (Red Cross Convention), Prisoners of War, Convention Between the United States of America and Other Powers, signed at Geneva, July 27, 1929..

<sup>11</sup> General Archer L.Lerch, Washington, D. C., to General John Wilson, Fort Douglas, Utah, 27 January 1945. Department of the Army, US Army Court of Criminal Appeals, Arlington, Virginia.

<sup>12</sup> Wm. H. Shedd, Major General, U.S. Army, Commanding, Army Services Forces, Headquarters Ninth Service Command, Fort Douglas, Utah, 15 September 1944.

confessions of guilt elicited from all seven of the accused. This board, comprised of three officers serving as Assistant Service Command Judge Advocates, finished their review with, in part, “In view of the deliberate and cold-blooded manner in which the killing was effected and the brutal treatment of the deceased prior to the hanging, it is felt that the sentences were eminently proper.”<sup>13</sup>

The next step toward an American gallows for the seven German sailors led to the office of the serving Ninth Services Command Judge Advocate, Colonel Thomas J. White, J.A.G.D. Colonel White, however, was not as comfortable with the idea of death sentences for the seven as his subordinates had been. Pointing out in his concurring opinion appended to the review board’s report that each of the accused was a prisoner of war as a result of military service, he wrote:

We have no right to question his loyalty and devotion to his country any more than we have a right to question our own loyalty and devotion to ours. These men are strangers in a strange land. They have been separated from their armies, and for many purposes have been separated from the system of justice to which they are accustomed.

White recommended that in view of these circumstances the sentences be reduced to life imprisonment.<sup>14</sup>

The report of the Review Board of the Ninth Services Command, complete with Colonel White’s concurring opinion was next forwarded to the U.S. Army’s Judge Advocate General, Major General Myron C. Cramer, and from him to the Secretary of War of the United States, Henry L. Stimson. Both of these men raised questions about the methods used to obtain the confessions, but still believed the later confessions

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<sup>13</sup> Whittingham, 252; Review of Staff Judge Advocate on Record of Trial by General Court-Martial, 15 September 1944.

<sup>14</sup> Review of Staff Judge Advocate on Record of Trial by General Court-Martial, 15 September 1944.

outweighed the earlier coerced confessions, and forwarded their recommendations that the death sentences be carried out to the final arbiter of the young sailors' fate, President Harry S. Truman.

In his letter to Truman, Secretary Stimson wrote:

Three of the accused in their testimony complained of improper treatment. I have caused an investigation to be made and I find these complaints are either unfounded or are grossly exaggerated. Whatever improper treatment there may have been had no effect on their later confessions which were voluntarily made and are referred to above. I have taken steps to see that no further instances of this kind will occur.<sup>15</sup>

This statement, made by a veteran statesman, stretches all credulity. If the statements made by the accused were indeed “unfounded” or “grossly exaggerated,” why would the Secretary have found it necessary to take “steps so that no further instances of this kind will occur”? Why indeed? It was during the Stimson investigation that it was revealed that two American interrogators had testified in the trial under “fictitious” names.<sup>16</sup>

President Truman confirmed the death sentences on July 28, 1945 in a one paragraph statement which ended with “the sentence of each accused is confirmed and will be carried into execution under the direction of, and at a time and place to be designated by the Commandant, United States Disciplinary Barracks, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.” The first of the seven men plunged through the gallows trap door to his death at 12:10 a.m. the morning of August 25, 1945. The war with Germany had been over for months and the Japanese surrender was only days away. The last of the seven was

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<sup>15</sup> Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, Washington, D.C., to President Harry S. Truman, Washington, D.C., 14 February 1945. Papers of Harry S. Truman, White House Central Files, Confidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO.

<sup>16</sup> General Archer L. Lerch, Washington, D. C., to General John Wilson, Fort Douglas, Utah, 27 January 1945.

pronounced dead at 2:48 a.m. that same morning. All seven men were buried in a small cemetery just west of the disciplinary barracks that same afternoon.<sup>17</sup> Their bodies rest there to this day.

Were any of the eight men in this story accorded true justice? Werner Drechsler was executed without benefit of trial. He was not given any opportunity to defend himself against the accusation of treason. However, the record will show that he was indeed guilty. The other seven men were given the benefit of trial. But, how fair and impartial was that trial? Yet, here too the record will leave no doubt as to their guilt. Does the fact of guilt alone then lend itself to true, legal, and moral justice? Or does the level of justice attained for these eight men rise no higher than that of summary justice?

Humanity accepts a certain level of ambiguity in the warrior's motives upon the field of battle. His actions are most often veiled under the time-honored mantra of duty, honor, country. While these honored motives are certainly present in most instances, other motives more basic to human nature are almost certainly present.

The battlefield, whether it be on the ground, in the air, or at sea, is an arena upon which the most basic of all human motives, self preservation, is pursued at its most brutal level. On the battlefield the question of guilt or innocence is ignored in the pursuit of survival. Politics and ideology are, for the moment, forgotten. The warrior levels "summary justice" as a means to self-preservation.

A sense of loyalty to one's comrades, to those who share the hardship and the terror, often assumes a level equal to or even greater than that of self preservation . A bond is created on the battlefield which in many instances surpasses that of loyalty to

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<sup>17</sup> Presidential Order, 28 July 1945, Papers of Harry S. Truman, White House Central Files, Confidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO.; Whittingham, 280-281.

family, friends, leaders, ideology or country. Examples of bravery and sacrifice on the battlefield in the defense of comrades are most often viewed as among the noblest of all human actions.

Loyalty born in battle is not confined to the battlefield. The insulation endemic to daily life as lived within the confines of a rifle squad, a bomber or submarine crew reinforces the bond to a degree unknown in any other human experience. This sense of loyalty is often extended to others outside the confines of a particular squad or crew who also practice the same craft of arms. A higher level of sacrifice or loss experienced within a particular martial craft only serves to increase the level of loyalty among that craft's members.

As intense as such loyalty is, any breach of its bond is sure to invite an equally intense response. Most cultures revere the notions of honor and loyalty, and just as surely, revile the notions of dishonor and disloyalty. Disloyalty bears the stain of treason and for most of the human community from time immemorial the penalty for treason in time of war is death.

The following is a true tale of loyalty, treason, and death. We can unequivocally relate here the nature and causes of death of eight German *Kriegsmarine* prisoners of war in American custody and on American soil, during and shortly after the conclusion of World War II.

We can truthfully state their ages and the dates of their death. We can describe the details of their service aboard their respective U-boats, and the dates of their capture. We can supply the dates when their paths crossed.

We can explore the coming of age process in National Socialist Germany and the



role of the *Hitler-Jugend* in that process. We can portray the emphasis which that society placed on the martial concept of loyalty. We can show how that society dealt with even the slightest hint of disloyalty or treason. We can attempt to gauge the degree of Nazi influence present within the *Kriegsmarine*, and more specifically within the *Ubootwaffe*, in which all eight men served.

We can look at the boats in which they served and the impact these boats made on the prosecution of the war as a whole. We can explore the nature of undersea warfare as experienced by these eight men. We will relate the final war cruises of the four U-boats on which these men served and the circumstances by which they found themselves prisoners of war to the Americans. We will review the treatment the American Navy and Army reserved specifically for prisoners from the *U-bootwaffe*. And we can tell specifically how seven of these men, in an act of summary justice, willfully took the life of the eighth.

We can review the American response to the death of one prisoner under their control at the hands of seven other prisoners, also under their supervision. We can follow the American investigation which led to the identification of the seven men responsible. We can relate the legal arguments offered by both prosecution and defense in the corresponding military court martial, and the legal basis given for the seven death sentences delivered by that court.

All of the above may be observed with a degree of certainty. What we can only speculate on are the motives, simple or complex, which prompted each of these men to act in the manner in which they did. At the same time we can only speculate as to the reasoning which led an American president to adhere to the strictest letter of the law and

carry through with the execution of German prisoners of war months after that country had surrendered unconditionally to the United States and their comrades were being repatriated home.

Does the justification for summary justice extend to areas other than the battlefield? Do the motives of duty, honor, and loyalty provide justification for summary justice in a prisoner of war camp setting? Is the POW camp in fact an extension of the battlefield? Is a two-day trial conducted in an American military courtroom involving defendants ignorant of the English language sufficient to render any justice other than summary in nature? May a decision pertaining to the fate of seven young men, made by a world leader under the pressures inherent in assuming office as the greatest war in world history neared its end, constitute an exercise in summary justice?

The answers to these questions may in fact, in themselves, require us to each level our own measure of summary justice.

Or perhaps we can surrender our own personal judgments to an agreement with the words of Fort Leavenworth's Roman Catholic chaplain, Captain George Towle, who ministered to the condemned men in the months leading to their execution. "You know the boy that they killed out in Arizona, that was sad. The seven we killed, that was sad, too."<sup>18</sup>

The story of Werner Derechsler's murder and the execution of the men responsible has been previously related in the 1971 book *Martial Justice*, by Richard Whittingham. Whittingham learned of the story while working at Fort Leavenworth's public information office in the 1960s and 70s. The story intrigued him and he spent six years researching the case. He was able to interview Major Francis P. Walsh, the man

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<sup>18</sup> *The Leavenworth Times*, 1 September 1999.

who prosecuted the seven men, as well as Captain George A. Towle, the Catholic chaplain at Leavenworth at the time the men were executed there. He also spoke with Otto Stengel's daughter and Günther Külsen's sister.

In his Acknowledgements, Whittingham thanked different organizations within both the U.S. Army and Navy, including the Army's office of the Judge Advocate General and the Navy's Office of Naval Intelligence. He also thanked the National Archives and the WAST Records Center in Berlin.<sup>19</sup>

Whittingham's access to the *Deutsche Dienststelle(WASt)* gave him an advantage that researchers today no longer enjoy. WAST is the German center for the notification of next-of-kin of members of the former German Wehrmacht who were killed in action. A German federal law passed in January 1993 limited access to the records held by WAST to only the persons in question in such records, and/or their next of kin.<sup>20</sup> This law has become the subject of both discussion and frustration for those historians who wish access to the center's records, but the center has been steadfast in compliance to the law.

Unfortunately for those who wish to employ *Martial Justice* as a source, the book features neither footnotes nor bibliography, and thus does not qualify as an academic work. Even more unfortunately, Mr. Whittingham is now deceased. It is not, however, difficult to ascertain his sources once the researcher has acquired those records of the incidents available at the National Archives and the U.S. Army's Court of Criminal Appeals. The researcher should be forewarned, however, that the trial record has not been processed and the documents contained therein are not arranged in any particular order. These same documents are occasionally bereft of any identifying heading or date.

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<sup>19</sup> Whittingham, vii-xii.

<sup>20</sup> *Deutsche Dienststelle(WASt)* (accessed 3 April 2011); available at [http://www.dd-wast.de/frame\\_e.html](http://www.dd-wast.de/frame_e.html).

Thanks to the romance, if you will, that has come to be associated with the German U-boats two outstanding web sites now exist that allow access on-line to many of the same documents to be found at the National Archives. Those two sites are [www.uboaat.net](http://www.uboaat.net) and [www.uboaatarchive.net](http://www.uboaatarchive.net).

The amount of records available is so voluminous in fact, that any historian wishing to construct a retelling of the story faces a far more daunting task in identifying which documents to utilize than he or she does in avoiding simply presenting a revision of Whittingham's work. This work is not an attempt to present a revision of *Martial Justice*. The author has instead attempted to review the documents for himself and draw his own conclusions. Those conclusions are at times in agreement with Whittingham's, and at other times quite different.

Whittingham wrote in his *Preface* of some of the difficulties he encountered in his research. Many of the documents needed to understand the complexities of this story were still marked as "classified" at the time he was pursuing his research. He wrote that he was able to get much of the information declassified, but he does not reveal exactly which of the documents he was given access to.<sup>21</sup> This may be the reason why he identified Fort George G. Meade, Maryland, as the location of the interrogation center where Werner Drechsler worked on behalf of his American captors. The center was actually located at Fort Hunt, Virginia.

Whittingham also wrote that President Truman declined to be interviewed and refused to answer any questions relating to the case. He added that all the documents relating to the case disappeared from the Truman Library after he made application to view those documents. Randy Sowell, Archivist at the Truman Library, told this author

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<sup>21</sup> Whittingham, ix.

that the documents in question were not donated to the library until after Truman's death in 1972. This donation was made under the terms of President Truman's will.<sup>22</sup> *Martial Justice* was published in 1971, prior to Truman's death.

Mr. Whittingham's book concentrated almost entirely upon the Drechsler incident and the individuals involved. This work seeks to put that incident in relationship to the broader contexts of World War II, the Battle of the Atlantic, and the mindset of the men who served in Germany's U-boat arm during the war. This is grounded in the belief that we cannot attempt to understand their motivations without some understanding of the experiences which shaped those motivations.

Secondary source works on World War II and the Battle of the Atlantic abound. I chose the works of Samuel Eliot Morison as my main secondary source on these subjects due to the access to relevant sources he gained through his special relationship during the war with President Roosevelt and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox. Morison approached both men early in the war with his proposal to write a history of the war's naval operations from the inside. At the time Morison was Professor Emeritus of American History at Harvard, and after discussing his idea with Roosevelt and Knox, soon found himself commissioned as Lieutenant Commander Morison, USNR. During the course of the war Morison served on active duty on eleven different ships and ended the war as a Captain.<sup>23</sup>

I chose Hannsjoachim Koch's *The Hitler Youth* as my dominant secondary source on the indoctrination of German youth during the Nazi era. This choice was made due to

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.; E-mail from Randy Sowell, Archivist, Truman Library, to author, 16 October 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Battle of the Atlantic 1939-1943*, vol. 1, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1947; reprint, Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 2001), dust jacket (page citations are to the reprint edition).

Koch's personal experience as a member of that organization, as well as his post-war academic career in both England and Germany.<sup>24</sup>

Studies of the POWs held on American soil during the war are only now beginning to emerge. This should not come as a surprise. Paul J. Springer, currently an instructor at the Air Command and Staff College, points out in his book, *America's Captives*, that, "POWs have never been a major priority for the U. S. armed forces."<sup>25</sup> Still, the presence of nearly half a million enemy personnel on our soil is a subject worth exploring, and the tragic deaths of eight of these men is a story worthy of a second look.

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<sup>24</sup> Hannsjoachim W. Koch, *The Hitler Youth: Origins and Development 1922-1945* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1975, reprint, Briarcliff Manor, NY: Stein and Day), 91-92 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>25</sup> Paul J. Springer, *America's Captives: Treatment of POWs from the Revolutionary War to the War on Terror* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 203.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHILDREN OF THE REICH

These young people learn nothing else but to think as Germans and to act as Germans; these young boys join our organization at the age of ten ... then four years later they move ... to the Hitler Youth ... If they ... have still not become real National Socialists, then they go into the Labor Service and are polished there ... then the *Wehrmacht* will take over for a further treatment ... They will not be free again for the rest of their lives.

*Adolf Hitler*  
*Reichenberg, Germany December 1938*<sup>26</sup>

*Führer, my Führer, bequeathed to me by the Lord,  
Protect and preserve me as long as I live!  
Thou hast (sic) rescued Germany from deepest distress,  
I thank thee today for my daily bread.  
Abide thou long with me, forsake me not,  
Führer, my Führer, my faith and my light!  
Heil, my Führer!*

*Cologne school lunch invocation*<sup>27</sup>

It is next to impossible for the modern Western reader to fathom the world in which the eight German sailors whose fates this story chronicles came of age. In the time period in which these young men, or boys, as the American Ninth Services Command Review Board report often referred to them,<sup>28</sup> reached their maturity, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party wielded an unimaginable degree of influence over the nurturing of German youth.

Hitler and the Nazis did not initiate the German youth movement. The roots of Germany's youth movement may be traced to the *Wandervögel* (hiking birds) movement founded in the middle-class Berlin suburb of Steglitz in 1901. In his influential book, *Hitler Youth*, Michael H. Kater writes that, "Although the youths' activities were

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<sup>26</sup> Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds. *Nazism: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts, 1919-1945*, Vol. 1, (Exeter: Department of History and Archaeology, University of Exeter, 1983, reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1990), 416-417 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>27</sup> John Toland, *Adolf Hitler* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1976), 552.

<sup>28</sup> Review of Staff Judge Advocate on Record of Trial by General Court-Martial, 15 September 1944.

apolitical, they occurred within the wider framework of pre-liberal, romantic, and in some respect resurrected medieval social and political values. In conscious opposition to the ideals of the Enlightenment, they eschewed rationality in favor of emotion.”

Germany’s young people greeted their nation’s entrance into World War I with great enthusiasm. War was seen as the ultimate primal struggle. Perhaps the greatest expression of this ethos occurred on November 10, 1914, outside the Belgian village of Langemarck. Twelve thousand former *Wandervögel*, now volunteer soldiers of the *Kaiser*, charged the British line alongside their comrades and were slaughtered. Still today, the bodies of 25,000 German university students rest in the cemetery of Langemarck inside a gateway entrance adorned with the insignia of every German university.<sup>29</sup>

The German youth movement burgeoned after the Great War and the carnage at Langemarck was viewed as both a sacrifice for the good of the nation and as an example for future generations of German youth. Ceremonies honoring the heroes of Langemarck became a hallmark of the movement. Kater notes that this emerging movement “had always been elitist and anti-modernist, it now became increasingly martial, hierarchical, attached to discipline, uniforms, and drill, racist ...all of which was a departure from the days of the Empire.”

The *Wandervögel* were replaced with new *Bünde*, i.e. leagues. Weimar political parties sponsored their own youth leagues, such as the *Bismarckbund* of the German National People’s Party and the Communist *Antifa*. There were also Protestant and Catholic leagues. Still, the defining characteristic of the post war German youth

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<sup>29</sup> Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7-8; John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 133.



movement was a rejection of Weimar parliamentary democracy and a visceral loathing of the politicians who had signed the humiliating Treaty of Versailles in 1919.<sup>30</sup> The youth league of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi), the *Hitler-Jugend* (Hitler Youth), was only one of these anti-Weimar leagues and in 1932, the last year of the Weimar Republic, held a meager membership of only 107,956. By the time the Hitler assumed the office of German Chancellor in 1933 Germany boasted the largest youth movement in the world with over ten million youth enrolled in numerous organizations united under the umbrella of the Reich Committee of German Youth Associations.

In 1931 Hitler had appointed Baldur von Schirach as Youth Leader of the Nazi Party.<sup>31</sup> At von Schirach's urging the Nazis had held their first *Reichsjugendtag der NSDAP* at Potsdam in 1932. He had hoped for a gathering of 20,000 youth, but to everyone's surprise a crowd approaching 100,000 arrived. Historian H. W. Koch described the journey of Hitler's young followers to Potsdam. "By rail, bus, and on foot the youths converged on Potsdam, banners being unfurled whenever they entered a hamlet, village, or town, bugle signals ringing out aggressively, and the cobbled streets resounding with the somber tread of hobnailed boots and the strains of young voices singing marching songs. None but those devoid of any feeling for the enthusiasm of which youth is capable could fail to respect the idealism and the élan of the brown-shirted youths."

Hitler had at first balked at von Schirach's suggestion of such a rally fearing the possible embarrassment to the Nazi party had only a meager crowd of youth shown up for the event. But alerted to the throng and their youthful enthusiasm, "Hitler ...

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<sup>30</sup> Kater, 9.

<sup>31</sup> William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1959), 252.

unexpectedly turned up and stood on the review stand saluting *his* youth, according to some observers with tears in his eyes.”<sup>32</sup>

In June 1933 von Schirach, whom historian William L. Shirer described as “a handsome young man of banal mind but of great driving force” and of having “the curious look of an American college student, fresh and immature,” was promoted to the post of Youth Leader of the German Reich. Interestingly Baldur von Schirach was three-quarters American and only one-quarter German. His mother, Emma Tillou, was an American and a descendant of two signers of the Declaration of Independence. On the von Schirach side, his great-grandfather, Karl Benedikt, had immigrated to the United States in 1855. Karl Benedikt’s son, Karl Friedrich, had served as a Major in the Union Army during the Civil War, lost a leg at Bull Run, and had served in the honor guard at Lincoln’s funeral. Major von Schirach married the daughter of a patrician Philadelphia family, Elizabeth Baily Norris. Baldur’s father, Karl Norris von Schirach was born in Berlin as an American citizen and remained such until he joined the Prussian Army.<sup>33</sup>

Von Schirach’s first move at his new job was to send fifty armed Hitler Youth to forcibly take over the offices of the Reich Committee of German Youth Associations and evict the head of the committee, General Vogt. The president of the committee, the retired Admiral von Trotha, former Chief of Staff of the German High Seas Fleet in World War I, was likewise ousted; both his office and the Reich Committee itself were dissolved.<sup>34</sup>

On December 19, 1933, lacking the internal cohesion of the Catholic Church, the

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<sup>32</sup> Koch, 91-92.

<sup>33</sup> Shirer, 252; Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Marlowe & Co., 1976), 309; Kater, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Shirer, 252-253.

leaders of the Protestant Youth movements signed an agreement allowing uniform political instruction for their membership by the Nazi state and the Hitler Youth. All members under the age of eighteen were seamlessly merged into the Hitler Youth. By 1935 von Schirach estimated that as many as 3.5 million German youth were still involved in organizations outside the Nazi sphere. Using the emergency decree of February 28, 1933, as a pretext, the Gestapo issued another decree on February 8, 1936, forbidding all non-Nazi youth leagues from meeting or even existing. Still, some groups continued their activities, especially the Catholic youth groups.<sup>35</sup>

The concordat that Hitler had signed with Pope Pius XI on July 20, 1933, had specifically forbidden Nazi interference with the Catholic Youth Association. But Hitler was not to be bothered with such formalities in his designs on the hearts and minds of Germany's youth and on December 1, 1936; he pronounced a law outlawing all the non-Nazi youth organizations in Germany, including the Catholic Youth Association.<sup>36</sup>

This "Law concerning the Hitler Youth" stated that the entire "physical, spiritual and ethical" education of Germany's youth, allied with the influences of home and school, was henceforth placed within the sphere of the Hitler Youth. From the age of ten upwards, membership in the Hitler Youth became compulsory. Von Schirach as *Reichsjugendführer* was tasked with "educating the entire German youth in the Hitler Youth."<sup>37</sup>

Germany's major religious institutions had been practically neutralized by Hitler and the Nazis by the mid-1930s. As already noted, the Protestant Church was previously divided against itself into two main branches, Lutheran and Reformed. As the British

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<sup>35</sup> Koch, 109; Kater, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Shirer, 253.

<sup>37</sup> Koch, 113.

historians Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham noted in *Nazism: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts* “... German Protestantism had long been identified with German nationalism and—particularly in the case of Lutheranism—with ultra-Conservative political views—made it vulnerable to the appeal of the Nazis’ nationalism and their hostility to the liberal and Marxist Left.” Nazi influence within the Protestant Church had even given birth to a new movement whose adherents referred to themselves as ‘German Christians,’ and nominated themselves the ‘SA of the Church.’ This new theology “combined evangelical piety and *völkisch* nationalism, identifying the Church with the *Volk* and claiming that the German nation had a divinely-ordained destiny.

The Catholic Church was somewhat compromised by its focus on Bolshevism as its archenemy, a focus shared with the Nazis. The fact that the national loyalty of German Catholics had been called into question since Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s also served to steer the Church toward accommodation with the ultra-nationalist Nazi regime.<sup>38</sup> The concordat signed between the Pope and Hitler in 1933 may well be considered as another factor contributing to an illusory Catholic sense of security with Hitler’s regime.

Another government decree issued on March 25, 1939, made ‘youth service’ to the state compulsory for all German boys, and girls as well. In the words of historian H. W. Koch, the Nazi state would now “process every young German from his tenth birthday onwards.”<sup>39</sup> Even boys aged from six to ten were groomed for future membership in the Hitler Youth as *Pimpfs*. Each boy was issued a performance book in which to track his progress within the movement. That progress included ideological

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<sup>38</sup> Noakes and Pridham, 582; *Sturmabteilung* (Storm Detachment) The early private army of the Nazi Party, more commonly known as the Storm Troopers. Snyder, 304.

<sup>39</sup> Koch, 115.

growth within the Nazi belief system. Upon proving proficiency in athletics and camping, the ten-year-old boy was required to pass an exam in Nazi-inspired history before advancing into the ranks of the *Jungvolk* (Young Folk). Admittance into which required the following oath:

*In the presence of this blood banner, which represents our Führer, I swear to devote all my energies and my strength to the savior of our country, Adolf Hitler. I am willing and ready to give up my life for him, so help me God.*

From the ages of fourteen to eighteen German boys served in the Hitler Youth proper.<sup>40</sup> Here stronger boys supported their weaker comrades and trained leaders assisted with both physical and mental challenges. Here “physical activity ... would steel the boys’ muscles and sinews, readings and discussions in the evenings would train their minds in Germanic lore and Nazi ideology, part of which was the Führer cult.”<sup>41</sup> Here too, the boys recited an oath. An oath which was repeated every April 20, Adolf Hitler’s birthday:

*I promise  
In the Hitler Youth  
To do my duty  
At all times  
In love and faithfulness  
To help the Führer  
So help me God<sup>42</sup>*

In the earliest years of the Nazi regime von Schirach and his Hitler Youth unit leaders made concerted and honest attempts to gain German parents’ loyalty. Von Schirach made a number of public appearances and speeches aimed at winning parental

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<sup>40</sup> Shirer, 253.

<sup>41</sup> Kater, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Koch, 112.

support and Hitler Youth units held parents' meetings with the same goal in mind. But after the proclamation of the Hitler Youth law of 1936 the regime felt comfortable with the idea that German parents must necessarily accept Hitler Youth membership as on par with state-sponsored labor and military service.<sup>43</sup>

While the written text of the Hitler Youth law of 1936 had given specific mention of the influences of home in the formation of German youth, the police state nature of the Nazi regime also made it clear that those influences were secondary, at best. Parents who attempted to keep their children from the clutches of the Hitler Youth faced long prison terms for daring to put their familial influences above, or on an equal footing, with those of the Hitler Youth. With the new law of 1939, parents were warned that children not enrolled in the Hitler Youth would be removed to orphanages or other homes.

The 1936 law had also mentioned the role of education in youth formation. Control over this influence on the souls of young Germans was easier to grasp for the Nazi state than was control of the home. On April 30, 1934, Hitler appointed Bernhard Rust, an unemployed former provincial schoolmaster as well as an S.A. *Obergruppenführer*, as Reich Minister of Science, Education and Popular Culture.

“The German schools, from first grade through the universities, were quickly altered to reflect Nazi ideology. Textbooks were hastily rewritten, curricula were changed, *Mein Kampf* was made—in the words of *Der Deutsche Erzieher*, (The German Educator) official organ of the educators—‘our infallible pedagogical guiding star’ and teachers who failed to see the new light were cast out.” Every German educator, from kindergarten teacher to university professor, was required to be a member of the National Socialist Teachers’ League. This organization was tasked, by law, with responsibility “for

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 170.

the execution of the ideological and political co-ordination of all teachers in accordance with the National Socialist doctrine.” With the implementation of the Civil Service Act of 1937 German educators were required to be “the executors of the will of the party-supported State,” and were further required “at any time to defend without reservation the National Socialist State.” All teachers were required to take a personal oath of loyalty to Hitler, and eventually no man was allowed to teach without having already served in the S. A., the Hitler Youth or the Labor Service.<sup>44</sup>

Education in Germany during the Third Reich was heavily weighted towards physical training, “racial biology,” German history and literature. Literature, as studied in German schools during the Third Reich, was rich with sagas. Common to all these sagas was the idea “of a group of heroes inseparably tied to one another by an oath of faithfulness who, surrounded by physically and numerically superior foes, stand their ground.” In describing German education as it was pursued during the 1930s one Nazi pedagogue wrote, “The goal of our education is formation of character.”<sup>45</sup>

This concentrated effort at the Nazi concept of character building was accompanied with an equally concentrated effort at the deification of the German *Führer*, Adolf Hitler. In the German city of Cologne children would recite the following invocation before each lunch:

*Führer, my Führer, bequeathed to me by the Lord,  
Protect and preserve me as long as I live!  
Thou hast (sic) rescued Germany from deepest distress,  
I thank thee today for my daily bread.  
Abide thou long with me, forsake me not,  
Führer, my Führer, my Faith and my light!  
Heil, my Führer!*

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<sup>44</sup> Shirer, 248-255.

<sup>45</sup> Toland, 552; Koch, 143.

The British ambassador to Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps, noted to his London superiors, “... the German schoolboy is being methodically educated, mentally and physically to defend his country ... but I fear that, if this or a later German government ever requires it of him, he will be found to be equally well-fitted and ready to march or die on foreign soil.”<sup>46</sup>

In a December 1938 speech at Reichenberg, Hitler laid bare his vision for the future of Germany’s youth under his Third Reich. “These young people learn nothing else but to think as Germans and to act as Germans; these young boys join our organization at the age of ten ... then four years later they move ... to the Hitler Youth ... If they ... have still not become real National Socialists, then they go into the Labor Service and are polished there ... then the *Wehrmacht* will take over for a further treatment ... They will not be free again for the rest of their lives.”<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps H. W. Koch wrote the best summary of Nazi education. “In other words, the gradual and rational education with the aim of producing a responsible citizen of the state was not the purpose of National Socialist political education, but rather the development of the racially conscious *Volksgenosse* (national or racial comrade). Politically motivated literature was to appeal to the emotions, elicit reactions of blind obedience and total surrender and cement a ‘fanatical faith in the *Volk* and *Reich* and in the *Führer*, whose legacy they will one day have to preserve.”<sup>48</sup>

At eighteen years of age young boys passed into the ranks of the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, or RAD (National Labor Service). Here, all the lessons learned in

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<sup>46</sup> Toland, 552.

<sup>47</sup> Noakes and Pridham, 416-417.

<sup>48</sup> Koch, 152.



their Hitler Youth years were expanded upon and reinforced. As historian Stephen G. Fritz wrote, "... the daily routine of the Labor Service had a clear paramilitary content whose aims were not only to instill the rudiments of military training and physical stamina but also to foster character, comradeship, and cohesion."<sup>49</sup>

Friedrich Grupe, serving in the RAD in 1937, confided to his diary:

Despite everything, probably just because of our burdens borne in common, the feeling of comradely identity grows rapidly. ... We're experiencing here what we understand to be "*Volksgemeinschaft* [national community]." And we're putting our conception of National Socialism into action: ... This is the way from "I" to "We."<sup>50</sup>

While records of membership in the *Hitler-Jugend* are difficult to locate, it is reasonably safe to assume that the eight German sailors of our story were most probably members of that organization and/or the *Jungvolk* and *Reichsarbeitsdienst* at some point in their young lives. Of the eight, only Werner Drechsler claimed to have never been a member. In his 1994 book, *Nach Kompass: Lebenserinnerungen eines Seeoffiziers*, U-boat ace, Karl Friedrich Merten, wrote of U-boat crewmen that, "They had nearly all served in the Hitler Youth, had experienced the tough environment of the National Labour Service, were very idealistic and carried out their tasks with joy."<sup>51</sup>

It is also possible that all or some of them may have been members of just one of a number of the specialized branches of the *Hitler-Jugend*, the *Marine-Hitler-Jugend*. An

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<sup>49</sup> Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 15.

<sup>50</sup> Friedrich Grupe, *Jahrgang 1916: Die Fahne war mehr als der Tod* (Universitas-Verlag: Munich, 1989), 69, Quoted in Fritz, 15.

<sup>51</sup> AC of S, G-2, Intelligence Division, Captured Personnel and Material Branch, Enemy POW Interrogation File (MIS-Y) 1943-1945, box 462, Werner Drechsler 201 File. Records of the War Department and Special Staffs, Office of the Director of Intelligence (G-2), Military Intelligence Service, Record Group 165, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; Karl Friedrich Merten, *Nach Kompass: Lebenserinnerungen eines Seeoffiziers* (Hamburg: E. S. Mittler, 1994), Quoted in Jean Delize, *U-Boote Crews* (Paris: Histoire & Collections, 2007), 17.

information bulletin released by the French navy in April 1940 asserted that members of the “Hitler Youth in their blind devotion to the Führer, seem to fit the bill perfectly for serving on submarines.” The bulletin also cited the March 14 issue of the German newspaper, *National Zeitung*, from Essen, for publishing an agreement between the High Command of the *Kriegsmarine* and the leadership of the Hitler Youth declaring that future naval personnel be recruited from the *Marine-Hitler-Jugend*.<sup>52</sup>

The *Marine-Hitler-Jugend* held its members up to a much stricter standard of time spent in training, as well as both mental and physical accomplishment. At its peak this all-male organization numbered 62,000 members. And unlike members of the *Hitler-Jugend* proper, which had its own uniform distinctive from the military, these boys wore the standard enlisted man’s *Kriegsmarine* uniform<sup>53</sup> which could only have reinforced the overall martial attitude of its members.

By early 1939, 98.1 percent of all German youth between the ages of fourteen and eighteen were enrolled in the Hitler Youth. It should also be remembered that German youth organizations that predated the Hitler Youth had likewise emphasized military organization and the concept of the “*Soldat*.” H. W. Koch noted that, “Faithfulness and loyalty irrespective of the consequences were an article of faith shared among wide sections of Germany’s youth.” He also wrote that, “The youngsters who had joined the Hitler Youth before or during the early 1930s were veteran soldiers by 1941, and many of those who followed them into the front-lines during the war were determined to meet Hitler’s demand of his youth to be ‘quick like greyhounds, tough like leather, and hard

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<sup>52</sup> N° 23, 1 April 1940, Quoted in Delize, 24.

<sup>53</sup> Koch, 230-231; Jak P. Mallmann Showell, *Hitler’s Navy: A Reference Guide to the Kriegsmarine 1935-1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 193.

like Krupp steel.’’<sup>54</sup>

On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the Western Allies would learn all too well just how effectively the Hitler Youth had prepared Germany’s youth to measure up to Hitler’s demand. In the Caen sector Canadian and British forces first encountered the 12<sup>th</sup> SS *Hitlerjugend* Division. Chester Wilmot wrote that “the troops of the 12<sup>th</sup> SS, who were holding this sector, fought with a tenacity and ferocity seldom equaled and never excelled during the whole campaign.” A British tank commander likewise commented that the *Hitler-Jugend* soldiers assaulted his tanks “like wolves, until we were forced to kill them against our will.”<sup>55</sup>

The 12<sup>th</sup> SS *Hitlerjugend* Division was most likely the brainchild of SS-*Gruppenführer* Gottlob Berger, chief of the SS-*Hauptamt* (Central Office), and thus in charge of the SS’s replacement office. In a letter dated February 13, 1943, *Reichsführer* SS Heinrich Himmler reported that Hitler was “highly pleased” with the idea and had given his personal approval for recruitment to begin immediately. The division was to consist entirely of volunteers from the *Hitler-Jugend* born in the year 1926. Hubert Meyer, who served as chief of staff of the 12<sup>th</sup> SS, wrote in his two volume history of the division that, “The division was to be a symbol of the willingness of the German youth to sacrifice itself and of its will to achieve victory.”<sup>56</sup>

While all generalization bears weakness and the members of Himmler’s elite SS were probably more influenced by the effects of Nazi ideology than most members of the

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<sup>54</sup> Kater, 23; Koch, 119, 238.

<sup>55</sup> Chester Wilmot, *Struggle for Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), 377, Quoted in Koch, 246; Desmond Young, *Rommel: The Desert Fox* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), 56, Quoted in Koch, 246.

<sup>56</sup> Hubert Meyer, *The 12<sup>th</sup> SS: The History of the Hitler Youth Panzer Division: Vol. I*, Stackpole Military History Series (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), 2-3.

*Wehrmacht* at large, almost all of Germany's young suffered from its effects. As the English historian Miriam Kochan wrote in her book *Prisoners of England* of German POWs imprisoned in British camps early in the war:

Many of them had spent a great part of their lives after childhood under the Nazi regime and were imbued to a greater or lesser degree with its ideology. ... They had mostly grown up in the totalitarian state Hitler had created in the 1930s, with its concept of *Gleichschaltung*, co-ordination of every phase of national life, including the church, press, education, industry and army. They had barely known a society where diversity of opinions and institutions was possible. Instead, they had been subjected from their schooldays to the full force of Nazi propaganda. They had learned from their teachers to glorify the leader, worship the Fatherland and offer blind obedience.<sup>57</sup>

On an Arizona desert night in March 1944 Helmut Fischer, Fritz Franke, Guenther Kuelsen, Heinrich Ludwig, Bernhard Reyak, Otto Stengel, and Rolf Wizuy would demonstrate to their American captors that they too had learned well the lessons of faithfulness, duty, and loyalty taught to them in their youth. They would prove that they were true children of the Reich, and as such their fates were sealed the moment Werner Drechsler arrived at Papago Park.

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<sup>57</sup> Miriam Kochan, *Prisoners of England* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1980), 4.

## CHAPTER 3

### HEROES OF THE REICH, RATTLESNAKES OF THE ATLANTIC

The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril. Invasion, I thought, even before the air battle, would fail. After the air victory it was a good battle for us. ... But now our life-line, even across the broad oceans and especially in the entrances to the island, was endangered. I was even more anxious about this battle than I had been about the glorious air fight called the Battle of Britain.

*Winston Churchill  
Writing in Their Finest Hour*<sup>58</sup>

When you see a rattlesnake poised, you don't wait until it has struck before you crush it. These Nazi submarines and raiders are the rattlesnakes of the Atlantic. They are a menace to the free pathways of the high seas. They are a challenge to our sovereignty ... In waters we deem necessary to our own safety American warships and planes will no longer wait until Axis submarines lurking under the water ... strike their deadly blow first.

*President Franklin Delano Roosevelt  
Radio address, September 11, 1941*<sup>59</sup>

Adolf Hitler had once said, "On land I am a hero, at sea I am a coward." The *Führer's* self-effacing naval posturing did not, however, signify any reticence on his part to involve himself any less directly in naval affairs than in any other facet of German life. In late March 1933 Admiral Erich Raeder, *Chef der Marineleitung*, the head of the German Navy or *Reichsmarine* met with Hitler, the new German chancellor, for the first time. "Raeder's immediate concern was to establish his support for Hitler's foreign policy and military priorities and demonstrate the navy's absolute loyalty and obedience to the new regime."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *Their Finest Hour* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1949), 598.

<sup>59</sup> Terry Hughes and John Costello, *The Battle of the Atlantic: The First Complete Account of the Origins and Outcome of the Longest and Most Crucial Campaign of World War II* (New York: The Dial Press/James Wade, 1977), 176.

<sup>60</sup> David Fairbanks White, *Bitter Ocean: The Battle of the Atlantic: 1939-1945* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 21; Keith Bird, *Erich Raeder: Admiral of the Third Reich*, Library of Naval Biography (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 98; The name of the German Navy would be changed to *Kriegsmarine* on May 21, 1935. On November 9, 1935, the naval flag would be altered as the old Imperial German Iron Cross in the center was replaced by a large swastika and the old black, white and red stripes were replaced by a solid red background with crossing black and white stripes. A smaller iron cross appeared in the upper left corner. Mallmann Showell, 11.

Germany's naval leadership was haunted by the specter of the 1918 naval mutinies which contributed greatly to the fall of the Hohenzollern monarchy and the German surrender in World War I. In the early days of November 1918 sailors of the High Seas Fleet had mutinied after hearing that their leadership was contemplating one last foray into the open sea for a final climactic "death ride." Raeder himself wrote that, "Every superior officer in the navy silently swore that there should never again be a November 1918 in the navy."<sup>61</sup> He, and his officer corps, was determined to prove that their navy was absolutely loyal to the German nation and people.

The overall relationship between the German armed forces (*Wehrmacht*) and the Nazi regime was predicated on the common goals of rearmament and the belief that the Weimar Republic had failed to reach that goal. For his part, Raeder did his best to integrate the navy into the Third Reich. In August 1933 he ordered that naval personnel could respond in kind to the "Heil Hitler" greeting and shortly thereafter ordered the use of the National Socialist salute in certain situations. He fired Vice Admiral Walter Gladisch, the fleet chief, for disparaging remarks about "brown party bosses" and promised to discipline any officer who failed to show proper respect to Nazi officials. He went so far as to promote S.A. involvement in naval functions and promoted naval involvement in party-sponsored functions.<sup>62</sup>

The dedication of the navy memorial at Laboe on May 30, 1936, was scripted to both honor the navy's heroes of 1914-1918, and to announce the reemergence of their

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<sup>61</sup> Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2004), 325; Erich Raeder, *My Life*, translated Henry W. Drexel (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1960), 142, Quoted in Timothy P. Mulligan, *Neither Sharks Nor Wolves: The Men of Nazi Germany's U-Boat Arm 1939-1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 220.

<sup>62</sup> Noakes and Pridham, 624; Bird, 100.

spirit and honor under the Nazi regime. In his keynote address Raeder praised Hitler for leading Germany out of the dark to a new future. “Raeder’s rhetoric was matched in the speeches of other officers, official and semiofficial publications, and service manuals, demonstrating the navy’s susceptibility to the ‘leader cult’ and the ‘Führer Principle’ and its readiness to rewrite the history of the navy within the National Socialist framework.”<sup>63</sup>

Hitler’s Reichenberg speech concerning the *Wehrmacht*’s role as the finishing school for completing the ideological modeling of the National Socialism’s first generation was not empty rhetoric. On January 30, 1936, Field Marshall Werner von Blomberg, Minister of War and supreme commander of the *Wehrmacht* in the early years of the Third Reich, issued a directive intended to provide uniformity in the political indoctrination of all three armed services; *Heer* (Army), *Luftwaffe* (Air Force), and *Kriegsmarine* (Navy). The directive’s opening sentence revealed its purpose. “The officer corps of the *Wehrmacht* can only fulfill its task of leadership in the nation and State if it adopts the National Socialist ideology which gives direction to the life of the German nation and State and appropriates it intellectually totally and with conviction.”<sup>64</sup>

Eventually Hitler cemented his control over the armed forces by assuming direct personal control on February 4, 1938, with a decree which began: “From now onwards I will exercise direct command over the whole *Wehrmacht* personally. The present *Wehrmacht* Office in the War Ministry will come directly under my command as the ‘Supreme Command of the *Wehrmacht*’ [*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* = *OKW*] retaining its responsibilities and acting as my personal staff.”

By May 1938 Britain had become identified as Germany’s primary naval

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<sup>63</sup> Bird, 101-102.

<sup>64</sup> Snyder, 29; Noakes and Pridham, Vol. 2, 641.

opponent by Germany's naval strategists. Most of Germany's naval chiefs believed the best way to counter the Royal Navy was through the construction of cruisers, destroyers, and U-boats. What they were unaware of was that Hitler, who would make the final strategic decisions, was basing his plans on a much broader strategy. Hitler was not concerned with any immediate threat from Britain, against whom he hoped to avoid conflict.

Hitler believed the United States to pose the greater threat at sea. To take on the Americans would require not cruisers, destroyers and U-boats, but rather a large battle fleet with at least ten battleships. He also did not believe this war at sea with the Americans would begin before 1944. In line with this vision he ordered the bulk of German naval construction to be concentrated on this battle fleet strategy. While he did not believe Britain possessed of the will to challenge him, he did allow for a limited increase in U-boat construction.<sup>65</sup>

History, of course, would prove the naval strategists correct and Hitler wrong. Hitler had committed the fateful error of underestimating his British enemy, and German sailors would pay a dear price for their *Führer's* monumental blunder and none more so than the men of the *U-bootwaffe*.

What would become known as the Battle of the Atlantic began on September 3, 1939, with the sinking of the British ocean liner *Athenia* by the German *U-30* off the west coast of Ireland and finally ended on May 7, 1945, with the sinking of two small steamers by *U-2336* in the North Sea off Newcastle, England.<sup>66</sup> It was only fitting that the opening and closing salvos of this cataclysmic battle should be fired by the boats and crews of the

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<sup>65</sup> Noakes and Pridham, 698, 728.

<sup>66</sup> Marc Milner, "The Battle That Had to be Won," *Naval History*, June 2008, 13.



German *U-bootwaffe*.

Although not remembered with as much glamour as the more-storied Battle of Britain, the Battle of the Atlantic was waged across all 32 million square miles of the Atlantic Ocean. In the north, ships and crew were lost off the coasts of the United States and Canada, off Greenland, Iceland, Ireland and Britain. To the south others were lost off Central and South America, the lonely mid-Atlantic Azores, and Africa.

The battle cost the lives of some 36,200 Allied sailors, airmen, servicemen and women, as well as the lives of 36,000 civilian merchant sailors. German losses were equally catastrophic, if difficult to pin down. In his 2006 book, *Bitter Ocean*, former *New York Times* and *The Journal of Commerce* reporter, David Fairbank White, cites these numbers; of the 1171 U-boats the *Kriegsmarine* sent to war, 660, or 57% were lost. Of the 40,000 U-boat crewmen deployed to sea, only 7,000 returned home at war's end. White maintains that these numbers constituted the highest casualty rate for any single military unit since the days of the Roman Empire.<sup>67</sup>

Former U-boat commander, Herbert A. Werner, who relied on his own experiences and a brochure published by *Heidenheimer Druckerei und Verlag GMBH*, "which lists the fate of every U-boat," in his 1969 book, *Iron Coffins*, provided a different set of statistics. Werner stated that out of 1,150 commissioned boats only 842 engaged in battle duty, and of these 781 were lost; a staggering loss of 93%. He added that the *U-bootwaffe* held a total enlistment of 39,000 of which 28,000 were killed and 5,000 taken prisoner. These numbers add up to an 85% casualty rate.<sup>68</sup>

Such staggering losses could not be hidden from the members of such a small and

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<sup>67</sup> White, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Herbert A. Werner, *Iron Coffins: A Personal Account of the German U-boat Battles of World War II* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), xvii.

elite service. These men were fully aware of the boats and crews that never returned to their bases. Yet personal account after personal account penned by the survivors paints a picture not of disintegrating morale, but rather one of grim resolve. Hans Goebeler of *U-505* spoke for most of these men when he wrote,

I have heard from veterans of other nation's military services that it was traditional for them to avoid making friends because of the emotional pain involved if they were killed. That idea was never found in the U-boat crews I knew. Fighting alone against a dangerous enemy and the ruthless sea bred a feeling of intimate brotherhood between us. We treasured our friendships with each other, and when the war turned against us and more and more of our comrades failed to return after a mission, the memory of those friends was all we had left.<sup>69</sup>

The primary focus of this work revolves around only eight of the German U-boat sailors who never returned. It is not necessary here to provide a detailed description of the Battle of the Atlantic, but some understanding of the war in the Atlantic, as well as their understanding of it, is necessary to gain an appreciation of the path they traveled to their ultimate fate.

Large German warships played a key part in the German strategy against Britain's Royal Navy and merchant shipping in the war's early months. "Modern, fast, and powerful German surface units could be—and were—enormously disruptive; ...But the overall impact of German attacks on Allied shipping in 1939-40 was minimal."

With the fall of Western Europe in the summer of 1940 the German strategy became one of attrition and blockade. Britain was especially vulnerable to such a strategy as she was dependent upon imports for half of her food and an even higher percentage of the resources necessary to wage war. With French, Dutch, Belgian, and Norwegian ports

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<sup>69</sup> Hans Jacob Goebeler and John Vanzo, *Steel Boat, Iron Hearts: A U-boat Crewman's Life Aboard U-505* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2005; Savas Beatie, 2008), 130.

and airfields now in German hands, Britain's main seaports on its eastern and channel coasts were essentially shut down.

Throughout the winter months of 1940-41 the primary target of the Royal Navy was the German surface threat. But the sinking of the battleship *Bismarck* on May 27, 1941, allowed the British to turn their attention more directly on the U-boat threat. Even before the *Bismarck's* demise the U-boats had actually been responsible for the majority of damage to Allied shipping. U-boat aces like Otto Kretschmer, Günter Prien, Joachim Schepke, and Fritz Lemp operating as lone wolves had each averaged almost 25 sinkings per month. The U-boats had in fact been so successful that the first nine months of the war had become known throughout the *U-bootwaffe* as *die glückliche Zeit*, "the happy time."<sup>70</sup>

The *Bismarck's* loss also convinced the German *Oberkommando der Marine*, or *OKM* (Supreme Naval Command) that a cruiser war against the enormously superior surface forces of the Royal Navy was untenable. It was therefore decided to keep its larger surface vessels in port where they posed at least a latent threat to British convoys. With this decision *OKM* placed the main burden of the Atlantic battle upon the *U-bootwaffe*.<sup>71</sup>

Germany's U-boat forces were commanded by Admiral Karl Dönitz. Dönitz had considerable experience in undersea warfare, having commanded U-68 in World War I. He knew the terrifying realities inherent in such warfare, having survived the sinking of U-68 off Malta in October 1918. He was also one of the few high ranking officers in the *Kriegsmarine* who was a committed National Socialist, and thus enjoyed his *Führer's*

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<sup>70</sup> Milner, 13 -14; Dan van der Vat, *The Atlantic Campaign: World War II's Great Struggle at Sea* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 147.

<sup>71</sup> Noakes and Pridham, Vol. 2, 848.

complete confidence, while his naval superior Admiral Raeder, did not. That confidence would result in Dönitz ascending to Raeder's post in January 1943 and ultimately to his succeeding Hitler himself in May 1945 after the *Führer's* suicide.<sup>72</sup>

Dönitz also enjoyed the total confidence and devotion of the men of his *U-bootwaffe*. They referred to him as *Der Löwe* (the Lion) and he affectionately referred to them as his "Grey Wolves" in deference to their grey-painted boats and grey leather clothing worn at sea. He made it his practice to learn what he could about the personal lives of his men. Whenever a U-boat crewman became a new father while on a war cruise Dönitz took pains to make sure that the man was informed of the new arrival as quickly as possible.

Perhaps because of the confidence with which Hitler held Dönitz, the *U-bootwaffe* and the *Kriegsmarine* as a whole were considered to be freer of Nazi influence than the other services. National Socialist Guidance Officers did serve on several naval vessels and with naval land units in order to spread Nazi ideology, but their influence was never on the same level as in the *Heer* or *Luftwaffe*. A number of individual U-boat commanders employed the right of 'instant refusal' to keep these men off their boats. Every man serving on a U-boat had the right to leave, without citing a reason, once a suitable replacement was found. Every crewman was assigned to specific duties and there was no room on the cramped boats for superfluous personnel such as political officers. British historian Gordon Williamson maintains that Dönitz himself eventually took steps to ensure that no such political officers served on his U-boats.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Snyder, 71.

<sup>73</sup> Gordon Williamson, *Wolf Pack: The Story of the U-Boat in World War II* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2005; Osprey, 2006), 169-171; Mallman Showell, 50.

Dönitz could go to great lengths to protect his ‘Grey Wolves’ when necessary. *Kapitänleutnant* Helmut Schmoeckel commanded *U-802* despite the fact that he was half Jewish. Werner Henke, commander of *U-124*, found himself in trouble with the Gestapo after he accused Gestapo men who had harassed some of his friends of being thugs and gangsters. The only punishment Henke received was a stern rebuke from *Der Löwe*. As Williamson observed, “It is hard to imagine any ordinary German citizen being quite so fortunate.”

Still, *Der Löwe* did not hold any sympathy with his officers when their indiscretions were committed in front of the crew while at sea. Such an offense was seen by Dönitz as an inexcusable breach of discipline injurious to morale and combat efficiency. *Oberleutnant zur Zee* Oskar-Heinz Kusch committed just such an infraction and was reported by one of his own officers.<sup>74</sup> During a war cruise Kusch had turned his boat’s ward-room radio to the BBC (British Broadcasting Company). On personal leave after the cruise he was recalled, believing he was to receive the Knight’s Cross. Instead he was charged with sedition and at Dönitz’s personal direction was executed for the BBC incident, as well as for making critical remarks about Nazi leaders and removing a portrait of Hitler.<sup>75</sup>

Dönitz ordered Kusch’s execution even after promising Kusch’s close friend, *Kapitänleutnant* Gustav-Adolf Janssen, commander of *U-103*, that he would first visit

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<sup>74</sup> Williamson, 171- 172.

<sup>75</sup> Mallmann Showell, 50. Cf. also Heinrich Walle, *Die Tragödie des Oberleutnants zur Zee Oskar Kusch*. Hrsg. Im Auftrag der Ranke-Gesellschaft, Vereinigung für Geschichte im Öffentlichen Leben e. V. Und dem Deutschen Marine-Institut von Michael Salewski. Historische Mittelungen Beiheft 13. Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag 1995. Walle proves that Dönitz did not only refuse to protect Kusch but was himself the driving force behind the officer’s execution.

Kusch personally to “have a good look into his heart.”<sup>76</sup> Dönitz never visited Kusch because he had already decided to “set down an example.”<sup>77</sup> *Der Löwe* had apparently decided that he could not order other men of the *U-bootwaffe* into battle while one of his officers had, in front of his crew while at sea, cast doubt on the ability of the Nazis to lead Germany to ultimate victory. Just after dawn on May 12, 1944, Kusch was executed by firing squad. In 1968 Dönitz told his former Nuremberg defense counsel that Kusch’s death sentence had been a “difficult but necessary duty.”<sup>78</sup>

Baylor University professor Eric C. Rust observed that the Kusch incident offered an important insight into the *U-bootwaffe* “cosmos.” In the *International Journal of Naval History*, Rust wrote that “the U-boat arm was not a blessed isle rising above the brown morass all around it, but, especially in the later phases of the war, its formerly fairly independent spirit was diluted and polluted by an ever closer affinity to the Nazi message ..., by Dönitz’s readiness to sacrifice one of his finest commanders to preserve ideological conformity, and by the way the naval legal bureaucracies treated a worthy man as if he were a dangerous criminal.”<sup>79</sup> We would do well to remember Rust’s observation if we dare to pass judgment on the seven men executed at Fort Leavenworth.

The men who comprised the *U-bootwaffe* were the elite of the *Kriegsmarine*. Men undergoing naval basic training were closely scrutinized by *U-bootwaffe* recruiters. Only ten percent of these men were selected as candidates for the U-boats. These candidates were then subjected to a vigorous regimen of physical, psychological, and technical

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<sup>76</sup> Eric C. Rust, “The Case of Oskar Kusch and the Limits of U-boat Camaraderie in World War II: Reflections on a German Tragedy,” *International Journal of Naval History* 1, no. 1 (April 2002): accessed online at [http://www.ijonline.org/volume1\\_number\\_1Apr02/article\\_rust\\_kusch\\_uboot.doc.htm](http://www.ijonline.org/volume1_number_1Apr02/article_rust_kusch_uboot.doc.htm)., 10 March 2010. Kurt Wiemer to Oskarheinz Kusch, 14 April 1946, Quoted in Walle, 136-137.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Erwin Rau to Robert Hering, 4 January 1984, Quoted in Karl Peter, “Der Fall des Oberleutnants zur Zee Kusch,” MS, U-Boot-Archiv Cuxhaven-Altenbruch, Appendix B.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Karl Dönitz to Kranzbühler, 30 November 1968, Quoted in Walle, 138.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

training. Only ten percent of these recruits managed to graduate from *U-bootschule* (Submarine School). Gordon Williamson wrote of the men of the *U-bootwaffe*, “U-boat men were effectively a breed apart, with higher pay, better rations and more relaxed discipline, but equally, they endured a much greater risk of being killed in action.”<sup>80</sup>

Dönitz openly encouraged the men of the *U-bootwaffe* to view themselves as members of an elite service. Greeting a class of officer candidates at Kiel in 1935, he boasted that, “The Navy is the best of our armed forces. The submarine arm is the best of the Navy.” Outward signs of that elite status were encouraged. U-boat officers wore the summer uniform white cap in all seasons and men of all ranks routinely wore captured British khaki and French navy blue uniforms. But perhaps the most commonly recognized distinguishing feature of the German submariner was the full beard which most sported on their return from a sea patrol.<sup>81</sup>

Attitude, foreign uniforms and beards aside, the war record of the *U-bootwaffe* bears out the elite status to which *Der Löwe’s* men aspired. Roughly 900,000 men served in the *Kriegsmarine* during World War II, and 318 members of the *Kriegsmarine* earned the coveted orders of the Knight’s Cross for exceptional merit. Although the *U-bootwaffe* comprised less than five per cent of the *Kriegsmarine*, 145 — or almost half -- of the Knight’s Crosses won by German naval personnel were won by the members of the submarine arm. The highest order of the Knight’s Cross, the Knight’s Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds, was awarded only twice, both times to U-boat commanders: Wolfgang Lüth of *U-181* and Albrecht Brandi of *U-967*.

At sea, officers and enlisted alike dispensed with distinctive rank insignia. Every

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<sup>80</sup> Goebeler and Vanzo, 6-8; Williamson, 173.

<sup>81</sup> Delize, 17.

job on a U-boat was essential and justifiably viewed as such, and every member of the crew regardless of rank, knew every other man's job. Every crewman held the fate of every other crewman and Dönitz stressed to his men that they all shared in the same *Schicksalgemeinschaft* (community of fate).<sup>82</sup>

When Dönitz had assumed command on September 28, 1935, the tiny *U-bootwaffe* consisted of only nine boats. The boats were so small, 250 tons, that their crews referred to them as 'dugout canoes.' But their crews' enthusiasm was every bit as large as the boats were small and their training bore out their reputation as military elite. Dönitz created, and often personally supervised, a training program for the crews which lasted a full six months. Each crew completed 66 surface, and 66 submerged, simulated attacks before earning permission to fire their first practice torpedo.<sup>83</sup>

Once the Royal Navy had effectively eliminated the German surface threat to British convoys it was these elite who now faced-off with the British tars and almost brought Britain to her knees. In a memorandum dated the opening day of the war, September 1, 1939, Dönitz had expressed the need for a minimum of 300 U-boats to achieve victory in the Atlantic. As it was, when the war opened Germany had only twenty-five boats capable of operating in the Atlantic. By June 1, 1940, there were fifty such boats and by March 1, 1941, the fleet numbered 109.

The figure of 109 boats is deceptive. Of this number, the vast majority were still undergoing sea trials or was being used only for training. This resulted in only twenty-two fully operational U-boats by February 1941. Dönitz's pleas for additional boats were thwarted by Hitler's insistence on granting armaments production priority to land

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<sup>82</sup> Douglas Botting and the editors of Time-Life Books, *The U-boats, The Seafarers* (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1979), 117.

<sup>83</sup> Hughes and Costello, 29.



operations. The *Führer* promised to increase U-boat construction upon the successful conclusion of the Russian campaign.<sup>84</sup>

The German U-boats of World War II were a marked improvement over the ‘dugout canoes’ of 1935. It is not necessary here to describe each class of U-boat, but it should be mentioned that the backbone of the *U-bootwaffe* of this era was the Type VII. Although the Type VII was smaller than some Allied submarines and restricted their crews to extremely tight and uncomfortable conditions they were ultimately more successful in combat than all the Allied types put together.<sup>85</sup>

Faced with making do with what he had, Dönitz believed that the early successes of his U-boats could be significantly increased if the boats could be concentrated into groups. This strategy was termed *Rudeltaktik* (Pack Attacks) by Dönitz, but has more commonly become known as “wolf packs.” The idea had come from Dönitz’s own experience in World War I and he was convinced that the *Rudeltaktik* was the answer to the defensive convoy system strategy which had thwarted the effectiveness of World War I German U-boats.<sup>86</sup>

With the fall of France, Dönitz was now able to partially offset his lack of numbers by basing the bulk of his U-boats at the French ports of Brest, Lorient, La Pallice, St. Nazaire and Bordeaux. These ports were vulnerable to British, and later American, air attack, and it was crucial that the small number of U-boats be protected while in port. The *Kriegsmarine* did not possess the manpower necessary to construct bunkers or ‘pens’ capable of withstanding Allied air bombardment. At Hitler’s suggestion

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<sup>84</sup> Noakes and Pridham, Vol. 2, 848-849.

<sup>85</sup> Williamson, 8.

<sup>86</sup> Hughes and Costello, 30.

the task of constructing the bombproof shelters was placed with the Todt Organization.<sup>87</sup>

With protected bunkers for his boats under construction in the French harbors, Dönitz loosed his “wolf packs” on the Allied convoys in the Atlantic. Between the months of June and December 1940 Dönitz’s crews sank 343 British ships totaling 1,754,501 tons. At the same time British and American shipping yards were producing 200,000 tons of shipping per month. While the British merchant fleet was not facing immediate collapse, it was facing gradual attrition. Britain had begun rationing in January 1940, but it was now necessary to make the practice even more severe. Dönitz believed that if he had only twice the small number of U-boats then at his disposal he could have knocked Britain out of the war.<sup>88</sup>

Even though the air battle, known to history as the Battle of Britain, had begun to turn in Britain’s favor and the threat of invasion had faded, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill believed he still faced the greatest crisis of the war. He confessed to this fear after the war when penning his four volume history of the war:

The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril. Invasion, I thought, even before the air battle, would fail. After the air victory it was a good battle for us. ... But now our life-line, even across the broad oceans and especially in the entrances to the island, was endangered. I was even more anxious about this battle than I had been about the glorious air fight called the Battle of Britain.<sup>89</sup>

The *U-bootwaffe* had already given Germany its share of early war heroes, most notably *Kapitänleutnant* Günther Prien, who had managed to penetrate the heavily-guarded British Home Fleet anchorage at Scapa Flow with *U-47* and sink the battleship

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<sup>87</sup> van der Vat, 149-150; Jak P. Mallman Showell, *Hitler’s U-boat Bases* (Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2002; Sutton Publishing, 2007), 3.

<sup>88</sup> Noakes and Pridham, Vol. 2, 848; van der Vat, 149.

<sup>89</sup> Churchill, 598.

*Royal Oak* in October 1939. But now as Allied losses in the Atlantic mounted Hitler's *Reichminister für Volkserklärung und Propaganda* (Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda) Joseph Goebbels mounted a massive publicity campaign employing newsreels, radio, magazines and newspapers to trumpet the German submariners' success. Boats returning from war patrols were greeted by cheering crowds, dignitaries and military bands. Their first night ashore was spent at lavish banquets complete with choice foods unavailable to most other members of Germany's fighting forces, as well as endless bottles of real beer, *Becks* and *Falstaff*, likewise rare treats for their brothers of the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>90</sup> The men of the *U-bootwaffe* were now the *Reich's* most popular heroes.

The British responded in typical Churchillian fashion, with both bombast and action. On March 6, 1941, Churchill publicly declared his nation's resolve to win the "Battle of the Atlantic." The Royal Navy's Western Approaches Command (WAC) moved from southern England to the island's western coast at Liverpool and was given sole responsibility for protecting the nation's trade in the North Atlantic. More importantly it was given control of all Royal Air Force Coastal Command aircraft in the WAC operational zone.

Standardized escort composition, leadership, training, and antisubmarine tactics were developed. Radar development and deployment for both aircraft and ships were crucial to the Royal Navy's strategy, "especially the new 10-cm sets that could detect U-boats on the surface, and shipborne high-frequency direction-finding (HF/DF, or Huff/Duff) receivers." The command published its first tactical pamphlet, "Western Approaches Convoys Instructions," in April 1941. The pamphlet made it clear that the

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<sup>90</sup> van der Vat, 40-41, 149; Snyder, 120; Goebeler and Vanzo, 36-37.

“safe and timely arrival” of the convoy was the escort’s primary task, sinking U-boats took second place.<sup>91</sup>

Secure in the belief that the Royal Navy would counter any threat from the Atlantic; the neutral United States had previously concentrated its naval forces in the Pacific to keep close watch on the Imperial Japanese Navy. The success of Dönitz’s U-boat offensive severely shook America’s, at least President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s, belief in the security offered by the Royal Navy.<sup>92</sup>

In a “fireside chat” delivered on December 29, 1940, Roosevelt revealed to the American people his view of the threat the United States now faced from Nazi Germany:

If Britain should go down, all of us in all America would be living at the point of a gun, a gun loaded with explosive bullets, economic as well as military. We must produce arms and ships with every energy and resource we can command. We must be the great Arsenal of Democracy.<sup>93</sup>

When Roosevelt signed the Lend-Lease bill on March 11, 1941, Congress immediately apportioned \$7 billion for the first shipments; a first payment of the nearly \$50 billion in aid, mostly to Britain, that would eventually flow to the Allies. American vessels were still prohibited from sailing into designated war zones, so it was mostly British ships which carried the badly needed supplies across the dangerous waters of the Atlantic.

Hitler responded to Lend-Lease by expanding the German naval combat zone further into the Atlantic, all the way to the eastern coast of Greenland. Churchill was well aware that the aid offered by the United States supplied little comfort to his beleaguered nation if most of that aid ended its voyage on the bottom of the Atlantic courtesy of the

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<sup>91</sup> Milner, 15.

<sup>92</sup> Morison, 27.

<sup>93</sup> Hughes and Costello, 120.

*U-bootwaffe*. He was likewise aware that only the U.S. Navy could prevent such an eventuality.<sup>94</sup>

In early March 1941 the U.S. Navy's Support Force began training for anti-submarine warfare at Norfolk, Virginia and New London, Connecticut, and on March 20 Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, informed Roosevelt that the Navy would soon be capable of escorting merchant convoys from North America to the United Kingdom. On April 11, 1941, Roosevelt informed Churchill that he was extending the American security zone in the Atlantic to west longitude twenty-five degrees. This extension would include nearly all of Greenland, and more importantly would overlap the western third of Hitler's newly expanded German combat zone.<sup>95</sup>

Roosevelt believed that the U-boat campaign, as being waged by Germany, was against international law and in violation of treaty obligations. In his opinion, Germany's transgressions justified the still-neutral U.S. Navy's expanded role. While committing the Navy to merchant convoy escort, he stopped short of utilizing U.S. resources for Canadian combat troop convoy escort. Aware of the very real potential for full-scale open war with Germany in the near future, U.S. Army and Navy observers in London arranged for ongoing cooperation and consultations with the British Chiefs of Staff in May 1941. On May 27 Roosevelt proclaimed a state of unlimited national emergency, practically placing America's Atlantic Fleet on full war status.<sup>96</sup>

Preoccupied with Operation Barbarossa, the upcoming invasion of the Soviet Union, and not ready to add to his list of enemies, Hitler admonished Raeder on June 21,

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<sup>94</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 474-475, 490.

<sup>95</sup> Morison, 54; Kennedy., 491.

<sup>96</sup> Morison, 55; Jeffrey G. Barlow, "The Navy's Atlantic War Learning Curve," *Naval History*, June 2008, 23.

the very day before Barbarossa commenced, to avoid provoking the United States until victory against the Soviets was assured. Roosevelt too, aware that America's armed forces were ill-prepared for war, and facing political opposition from American isolationists, wished also to avoid all out war with Germany, at least for the present time.<sup>97</sup> Despite these "official" stances by both nations, open confrontations between the vessels and crews of the *Kriegsmarine* and the U.S. Navy were now inevitable. And once these confrontations did take place, it was the commanders actually "on the scene" who had to decide how to respond.

On July 7, 1941, American Marines relieved the British garrison occupying Iceland. Task Force 19, which delivered the Marines to Reykjavik, was the first U.S. Navy task force to see foreign service in World War II. En route from Argentia, Newfoundland, the U.S. destroyer *Hughes*, of Task Force 19, rescued 14 survivors from a torpedoed Norwegian freighter, including four American Red Cross nurses.<sup>98</sup>

In a previously unannounced conference held at Argentia, Newfoundland, from August 9-11, Roosevelt and Churchill met personally for three days. The result was a declaration entitled the "Atlantic Charter," which became the foundation for mutual Allied war aims and the ideas behind what would eventually become the United Nations. While Churchill was not able to convince Roosevelt to immediately bring the U.S. into the war, "The Anglo-American alliance was in place, and the Prime Minister thought it would not be long before it turned into a fighting partnership."<sup>99</sup>

At 0840, September 4, 1941, as the American destroyer, U.S.S. *Greer*, was en

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<sup>97</sup> Shirer, 880-881; Polls showed that a tiny majority of Americans supported convoy escort, even if this risked war, but a larger majority opposed outright war, and 70% believed Roosevelt's present level of aid to Britain was either sufficient or already too much. Kennedy, 491.

<sup>98</sup> Morison, 74-75.

<sup>99</sup> van der Vat, 205.

route alone to Iceland, a British aircraft signaled the destroyer that a submerged U-boat sat ten miles dead ahead. The *Greer* increased speed, began zigzagging, went to general quarters and laid a course for the U-boat's reported position. Once she reached the *U-652*'s position she slowed and made sound contact with the sub and maintained that contact for over three hours, but did not attack.

At 1000, before returning to its base to refuel, the British aircraft did attack, dropping depth charges in the general area which the *Greer*'s course indicated that *U-652* laid. At 1240 *U-652* turned towards the *Greer* and launched a single torpedo, which the destroyer dodged. The *Greer* responded with depth charges and at 1300 *U-652* launched a second torpedo. Neither ship managed to score a hit, there were no casualties, and by 1416 the *Greer* lost *U-652*'s location and resumed her course to Iceland.

In a radio address on September 11 Roosevelt branded the incident an act of "piracy" and warned that, "From now on, if German or Italian vessels of war enter the waters the protection of which is necessary for American defense, they do so at their own risk."<sup>100</sup> To emphasize his indignation Roosevelt employed words sure to strike home to an American audience:

When you see a rattlesnake poised, you don't wait until it has struck before you crush it. These Nazi submarines and raiders are the rattlesnakes of the Atlantic. They are a menace to the free pathways of the high seas. They are a challenge to our sovereignty ... In waters we deem necessary to our own safety American warships and planes will no longer wait until the Axis submarines lurking under the water ... strike their deadly blow first.<sup>101</sup>

To the men of the *U-652* and their comrades of the *U-bootwaffe* the American president's words must have appeared disingenuous, if not outright ludicrous. In their eyes the *Greer* had acted as a bird dog for the British aircraft, pointing to *U-652*'s

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 79-80.

<sup>101</sup> Hughes and Costello, 176.

location, while believing herself immune from German attack because of the American charade of neutrality.

A rather unique attitude towards the U.S. Navy was growing among the men of the *Kriegsmarine*. They knew that denying their enemy the supplies necessary to prosecute war was essential to German success, and that the U.S. Navy was employing the shield of neutrality to thwart their efforts. In his 1943 book, “*Auf Gefechtsstationen!*” *U-Boote im Einsatz gegen England und Amerika*, Kapitänleutnant Reinhard Hardegen, commander of *U-123*, relating a wartime conversation with two other U-boat commanders, wrote:

I have a lot of anger toward the Americans. Don't forget, two patrols ago I was off the coast of Africa, and the Americans with their hypocritical claims of neutrality made a fool of me. Time and time again I would sight smoke clouds and mast tops on the horizon only to close with them and see that they belonged to ships with large painted American flags on their hulls. So many times that happened. I knew -- everyone one of us on board knew -- that those U.S. ships were delivering contraband to the enemy. Yet we couldn't touch them.<sup>102</sup>

Still, as of the end of September 1941, neither the U.S. Navy, nor the *Kriegsmarine* had drawn first blood from the other. October would put an end to that record and almost two months prior to Pearl Harbor American sailors would perish in combat at sea.

On October 15 Convoy SC-48, en route from Newfoundland, was attacked by a wolf pack some 400 miles south of Iceland and lost three ships. A force of five U.S. Navy destroyers, along with H.M.S. *Broadwater* and the Free French corvette *Lobelia*, were dispatched to the convoy's rescue from Reykjavik and a west-bound convoy. These

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<sup>102</sup> Reinhard Hardegen, “*Auf Gefechtsstationen!*” *U-Boote im Einsatz gegen England und Amerika*, with a forward by Großadmiral Karl Dönitz (Leipzig: Boreas – Verlag, 1943), 165, Quoted in Michael Gannon, *Operation Drumbeat: the Dramatic True Story of Germany's First U-boat Attacks along the American Coast in World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 64.



reinforcements were on station by the evening of October 16. At about 2200 that very night the wolf pack struck again torpedoing a merchant ship. The escorts fired off star shells and dropped depth charges randomly in an attempt to drive the U- boats away, but accomplished little more than adding to the growing chaos.

At 2315 two more merchant ships were hit and sunk. Four more merchant ships were struck at 0200 in the early morning of October 17. A burning merchantman 1200 yards off silhouetted the destroyer U.S.S. *Kearny*, presenting the *U-568* with a perfect target, and the U-boat launched a torpedo into the *Kearny*'s starboard side. The crippled destroyer was able to restart her engines ten minutes after being stricken and escorted by the *Greer* was able to reach Iceland under her own power. A Navy Catalina parachuted blood plasma for the wounded from the cruiser U.S.S. *Wichita*, berthed at Iceland, onto the *Kearny*.<sup>103</sup>

Eleven American sailors died aboard the *Kearny* as a result of *U-568*'s attack. *Kapitänleutnant* Joachim Preuss had inflicted the first fatal casualties suffered by American military personnel since 1918. On October 27 President Roosevelt informed the American people that, "We have tried to avoid shooting, but the shooting war has started. And history recorded who fired the first shot." Hitler responded to Roosevelt's charge by announcing, "I have ordered German ships not to shoot when they sight American vessels but to defend themselves when attacked. I will have any German officer court-martialed who fails to defend himself."<sup>104</sup> While the rhetoric continued to flow from Washington and Berlin, German and American commanders at sea were forced to make the decisions which resulted in life or death for their crews.

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<sup>103</sup> Morison, 92-93.

<sup>104</sup> van der Vat, 210; Hughes and Costello, 185.

Only three days after Hitler's declaration more American sailors lost their lives in the undeclared Atlantic war. While providing escort to convoy HX 156 the destroyer U.S.S. *Reuben James* was torpedoed and sunk by *U-552* under the command of *Kapitänleutnant* Erich Topp. One hundred and fifteen American sailors died and only 46 survived.

Hitler was sure that Roosevelt would now ask for a declaration of war, but the American president still stayed his hand. As Churchill explained to South African Prime Minister, Jan Smuts, "He [Roosevelt] went so far as to say to me "I shall never declare war. I shall make war. If I were to ask Congress to declare war they might argue about it for three months." The U.S. Navy hierarchy was aware of the political situation Roosevelt faced but was nonetheless under no illusions as to the nature of the conflict in the Atlantic. Admiral Harold R. Stark noted, "The Navy is already in the war of the Atlantic but the country doesn't seem to realize it ... Apathy to the point of open opposition is evident in a considerable section of the Press ... Whether the country knows it or not *we are at war*." <sup>105</sup>

By early November 1941, convinced by the early successes of *Barbarossa* that the Soviet Union would soon fall, Hitler felt confident enough to risk war with the United States if doing so would help win the war in the Atlantic. U-boats were deployed in the Strait of Belle Isle, off Newfoundland, and south of Greenland. Convoy SC-52 lost four ships on November 3. No more ships were lost in November, and only four more were lost in December. Against Dönitz's protests the German Naval War Staff diverted the majority of his boats to weather missions and the Mediterranean, creating for a time, a

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<sup>105</sup> Hughes and Costello, 185-186.

lull in the Battle of the Atlantic.<sup>106</sup> But for the U.S. Navy, World War II was just beginning.

In the words of Admiral Matome Ugaki of the Imperial Japanese Navy, the attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor erupted “like a thunderclap from a clear sky.” In the spring of 1941 Hitler had casually assured Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka, during the latter’s visit to Berlin on April 4, 1941, that Germany would take part in any conflict between Japan and the United States. While conceding to Matsuoka that he was not eager to face-off with the United States he had considered the possibility in his future plans. “Germany would wage a vigorous war against America with U-boats and the Luftwaffe, and with her greater experience ... would be more than a match for America ...”<sup>107</sup>

The United States declared war on the Empire of Japan on December 8, 1941. Germany and Italy declared war on the U.S. on December 11, and later that same day the U.S. replied with her own declarations against Germany and Italy.<sup>108</sup>

For Dönitz and his *U-bootwaffe* the gloves were finally off. In the opinion of historian Michael Gannon, Dönitz saw opportunity in the war declarations:

War with the United States would get the U-boats back in the Atlantic where they belonged. The commander in chief knew that all his commanders would be of one mind with him. The Americans must be made to pay for their false neutrality; for their arrogance in declaring four-fifths of the Atlantic to be part of the Western Hemisphere; for their sighting reports on U-boats to British destroyers; and for their hitherto-untouchable convoys of war matériel and food to enemy England.<sup>109</sup>

The Allies were fully aware that victory in Europe was impossible without victory in the Atlantic. On February 28, 1942, the new chief of the army’s War Plans Division,

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<sup>106</sup> Morison, 95.

<sup>107</sup> White, 143; Shirer, 875-876.

<sup>108</sup> White, 145.

<sup>109</sup> Gannon, xvii.

Brigadier General Dwight D. Eisenhower, informed Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall of the significance of the North Atlantic sea lanes. “Maximum safety of these lines of communication is a ‘must’ in our military effort, no matter what else we attempt to do.”<sup>110</sup>

Equally, if not even more important to the American war effort were the sea lanes running from Newfoundland, down the North American east coast into the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. The industrial cities along the American Atlantic coast were largely dependent upon fuel hauled along these sea lanes from the Venezuelan oil fields, the Netherlands West Indies’ ports of Aruba and Curaçao, and from Corpus Christi, Houston, and Port Arthur, Texas, in the Gulf of Mexico. The American military was likewise dependent upon the oil transported along the eastern seaboard. “The oil reserves of the United States were simply not large enough to meet the sustained, high demands of world conflict. To cut her supply lines along the Atlantic coast and to the south would be, in effect, to defeat the United States, to freeze much of her population, and force her out of the war.”<sup>111</sup>

The *Kriegsmarine*’s initial assault against the new American enemy was launched by its spearhead, the *U-bootwaffe*. Christened *Paukenschlag* (Drumbeat) by Dönitz, the *U-bootwaffe*’s first operation against the United States appeared to prove Hitler’s boast to Matsuoka. Writing in his book *Operation Drumbeat*, retired University of Florida historian Michael Gannon argued that the damage wreaked by the *U-bootwaffe* in American waters in the first year after America’s entry into the war was, in fact, a greater catastrophe for the Allies than that suffered at Pearl Harbor:

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<sup>110</sup> Kennedy, 565.

<sup>111</sup> Homer H. Hickam, Jr., *Torpedo Junction: U-boat War Off America’s Coast, 1942* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989; Dell Publishing, 1991), 1.

... the U-boat assault on merchant shipping in United States home waters and the Caribbean during 1942 constituted a greater strategic setback for the Allied war effort than did the defeat at Pearl Harbor—particularly in that the loss of naval vessels destroyed or damaged at Hawaii had little or no bearing on the decisive carrier battles that developed soon after with the Japanese at Coral Sea and Midway; whereas the loss of nearly 400 hulls and cargoes strewn across the sands of the U.S. Navy’s Eastern, Gulf, and Caribbean Sea frontiers threatened both to sever Great Britain’s lifeline and to cripple American war industries.<sup>112</sup>

Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall lamented in a memorandum, dated June 19, 1942, to Admiral Ernest J. King, Atlantic Fleet commander, that, “The losses by submarines off our Atlantic seaboard and in the Caribbean now threaten our entire war effort.”<sup>113</sup>

Admiral King was sixty-three years old in 1942 and had already enjoyed an impressive naval career. He was also noted for his hard-drinking and his abrasive manner. Roosevelt himself had once remarked of King that ‘he shaved with a blow torch.’ Historian David M. Kennedy wrote of King that “King’s choleric manner masked an incisive strategic intelligence, possessed of qualities that perfectly fitted him for senior command: the ability to anticipate, the capacity for penetrating analysis of his adversary’s predicaments, an unerring grasp of the reach and limits of his own forces, and a pit bull’s determination to seize the initiative and attack, attack, attack.”<sup>114</sup>

The British opinion of the American Atlantic commander was less sanguine. Dönitz’s U-boats continued to wreak havoc off the American coast, and the British Admiralty found it “quite incomprehensible” that King refused to follow their suggestion that a coastal convoy system be instituted along the American Atlantic coast. Americans

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<sup>112</sup> Gannon , *xvii-xviii*.

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Gannon, *xviii*. The original of Marshall’s memorandum can be found in the George C. Marshall Research Library, Lexington, Virginia, Marshall Papers, Box 73, Folder 12, “King, Ernest J. 1942 May – 1942 August,” 19 June 1942.

<sup>114</sup> Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 544-545; Hughes and Costello, photo caption, 197.

may conjecture that King resented what he saw to be British meddling in his domain, and viewed the Admiralty's suggestions as high-handed and arrogant. But British historian Dan van der Vat, perhaps writing for a majority of Britons, blames King's refusal to listen to the British on the American admiral's "near-psychotic Anglophobia." At least one high-placed American sided with the British opinion. General Eisenhower stated, "He is an arbitrary stubborn type, with not too much brains and a tendency toward bullying his juniors. One thing that might help win this war is to shoot King."<sup>115</sup>

Instead of following British advice, King tried to move dispersed shipping along designated routes guarded by a series of patrols. By April 1, 1942 some 160 military aircraft and 80 small military ships were engaged in patrol duty along routes stretching from Maine to Florida. Putting aside British and American nationalistic opinions, even the journal of the U.S. Naval Institute, *Naval History*, notes: "The results were disastrous. Routine patrols and dispersed shipping allowed U-boats to operate at leisure, confident that they would not be interrupted and assured that another target would come along like clockwork." King defended his decision to eschew the use of coastal convoy escorts by insisting that he lacked enough suitable escort vessels. By the spring of 1942 half of all Allied shipping losses in the Atlantic were occurring off the American coast as ships were sunk either before joining or after leaving the convoys.<sup>116</sup>

There was some validity to King's claim to a lack of suitable resources. On May 4, 1942, King requested that the Coast Guard Auxiliary, itself a volunteer civilian entity, take over and organize the efforts of the Coastal Picket Patrol (C.P.P.). The C.P.P., known to the Coast Guard as the "Corsair Fleet," but to the majority of its own personnel

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<sup>115</sup> Hickam, 56; van der Vat, 233

<sup>116</sup> Milner, 17; Hughes and Costello, 196.

as the “Hooligan Navy,” was comprised of civilian “auxiliary sailing yachts, motorboats, converted fishermen and small freighters.” The C.P.P. vessels lacked the speed and armament, most being armed with no more than the pistols and rifles carried by their crews, necessary to perform any offensive action against the experienced *U-bootwaffe*. However, they were capable of relaying the position of any U-boat they sighted to military shore stations.<sup>117</sup>

One notable veteran of the Hooligan Navy was the great novelist Ernest Hemingway. From the summer of 1942 and throughout 1943 Hemingway and a crew of friends searched for U-boats in the Gulf Stream and the sea off Cuba’s north shore in the writer’s wooden fishing boat, the *Pilar*. Hemingway biographer Terry Mort credits these U-boat patrols as the inspiration behind Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* and *Islands in the Stream*.<sup>118</sup>

Another civilian organization, the Civil Air Patrol (C.A.P.), proved to be of great value in the early months of the war. The C.A.P. was organized and remained under civilian control until it became an auxiliary of the Army Air Force on April 29, 1943. The men and women of the C.A.P. flew their privately owned planes and served without pay. These civilian airmen, and women, performed a variety of missions ranging from reconnaissance and rescue, to freighting and fire patrol. A few of the C.A.P. aircraft went one better than their comrades of the C.P.P. in that they performed their missions armed with either one 325- pound depth charge or two 100- pound bombs. The C.A.P. earned the praise of the eminent naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison, who wrote of its efforts in his famous *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*. “In anti-

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<sup>117</sup> Morison, 268-272.

<sup>118</sup> Terry Mort, *The Hemingway Patrols: Ernest Hemingway and His Hunt for U-boats* (New York: Scribner, 2009), dust jacket.

submarine warfare its coastal patrol squadrons were outstanding in quality and impressive in numbers.” The brightly-painted red, blue and yellow low-flying planes of the C.A.P. also earned curses as the “yellow bees” from U-boat commanders. The official war diary of the U.S. Eastern Sea Frontier noted that the civilian aircraft dropped 82 bombs or depth charges and definitely damaged or destroyed two U-boats at the cost of 90 aircraft and 26 dead.<sup>119</sup>

Some in the American business and local political community were much less helpful in stemming the slaughter. Cities and businesses all up and down the coast kept their lights burning at night providing the U-boats with perfectly backlit targets. Requests that the lights be turned off were met with protests that doing so would ruin the tourist season. It was not until April that the navy finally managed to ban waterfront lights and sky signs. In May the army was able to institute a stringent light curfew.<sup>120</sup>

The *U-bootwaffe*’s early success prompted Dönitz to boast, and boast with good reason. “Our U-boats are operating close inshore along the coast of the United States of America, so that bathers and sometimes entire coastal cities are witnesses to the drama of war, whose visual climaxes are constituted by the red glorioles of blazing tankers.”<sup>121</sup>

The first convoys along the U.S. Eastern Sea Frontier were actually Canadian and by early May 1942 Canadian tanker convoys were running the length of the U.S. east coast all the way to the Caribbean without loss. As yet there were still no American convoys and the U-boats spread their attacks into the Gulf of Mexico. By this time there were nineteen U-boats operating in American waters.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Morison, 276-278; Gannon, 356-357.

<sup>120</sup> White, 148-149.

<sup>121</sup> Gannon, facing page.

<sup>122</sup> Milner, 17-18.



U-boats operating in American waters far from their bases in France necessitated a refinement in German resupply and refueling operations. The solution was found in the Type XIV U-boat, known to the Germans as the *Milchkuh* (Milk Cow). These boats were capable of carrying nearly 400 tons of extra fuel as well as large amounts of additional fresh food. The Type XIVs also boasted their own bakery to produce fresh bread for their comrades.<sup>123</sup>

In May 1942 U-boats sank 115 ships in the western Atlantic and an additional 122 were sunk in June. The losses in these two months alone amounted to a million tons, half the total lost in the entire year of 1941. Finally, in mid-May the first American coastal convoy sailed from Hampton Roads, Virginia to Key West, Florida. As the American convoy system grew, and air support also improved, the shipping losses dropped and the U-boats moved their hunting grounds further south into the Caribbean and South American waters. Still, the U.S. merchant fleet had suffered a pummeling and the U.S. Navy had suffered a severe blow to its prestige. The *U-bootwaffe* had sunk six million tons of shipping in 1942 alone, triple the previous yearly averages.<sup>124</sup>

The British, and their Canadian allies, must be given the credit for bearing the brunt of the ultimate Allied victory in the Battle of the Atlantic. The U.S. Navy and Army Air Force suffered approximately 2,600 casualties in the struggle, while British Commonwealth losses topped 33,600. Almost all the Allied combat victories in the Atlantic scored up to 1943 were British and/or Canadian, and after 1943 Commonwealth forces scored 75 percent of Atlantic victories. That is not to say that the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard did not significantly contribute to the victory. They most certainly did, and

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<sup>123</sup> Williamson, 52.

<sup>124</sup> Milner, 18.

U.S. industry also contributed mightily, producing 27 million tons of new shipping, in effect producing new ships faster than the Germans could sink them.<sup>125</sup>

The British should also be credited with devising the strategy and tactics which eventually turned the tide in the Allies favor. The British had surmised that by combining “modern 10-cm radar; large, well-trained and well-lead (*sic*) escort groups, and carrier-based and very long range (VLR) airpower” an unacceptable toll could be extracted from the *U-bootwaffe*. John Keegan wrote in *Intelligence in War* that, “By 1941 the Royal Navy was wholly committed to the correct view that, if U-boats were to be found and sunk, they had to be presented with targets to attack that could defend themselves, in short, convoys with strong close escorts.”<sup>126</sup>

The British likewise must be credited with the lion’s share of the credit for the intelligence effort. On May 8, 1941, the British succeeded in capturing the *U-110* intact, when her crew, believing they were about to be rammed, failed to scuttle their boat. The capture, kept secret from the Germans, proved one of the greatest intelligence coups of the war. Aboard the *U-110* were her code books, cipher documents, and the machine known as Enigma, used to encipher radio messages. By the end of June, the British decryption effort, labeled ULTRA, was able to decipher Dönitz’s radio messages to his boats at sea within a few days of their interception.<sup>127</sup>

ULTRA allowed the British to steer their convoys away from any U-boats lurking in their path. As a consequence the U-boat campaign in the North Atlantic fizzled for the remainder of 1941. It has been estimated that ULTRA saved the Allied cause as much as

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<sup>125</sup> White, 5-6.

<sup>126</sup> Milner, 17; John Keegan, *Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 235.

<sup>127</sup> Hughes and Costello, 153-155; Mulligan, 76.

1.6 million tons of shipping in 1941. As the Axis situation in North Africa worsened in late 1941, all the U-boats in the Atlantic were ordered to stations off the western approaches to Gibraltar or into the Mediterranean Sea. By Christmas Day 1941 not a single boat was on station in the Atlantic.

As previously discussed, Operation *Paukenschlag* renewed the *U-bootwaffe*'s fortunes in 1942. Improvements to the Enigma encryptions had restored security to Dönitz's communications with his boats at sea and the Germans' own intelligence efforts had resulted in their being able to decrypt up to 80 percent of Allied convoy signals.<sup>128</sup>

Keegan identifies the period from September 1942 to May 1943 as the climactic period of the Battle of the Atlantic.

It was the moment in the maritime conflict between the *Kriegsmarine* and its opponents—the Royal Navy, the Royal Canadian Navy, the United States Navy and their associated air forces—when Dönitz was forced, in the classical terms of sea warfare, to give battle. He had argued throughout his life as a professional naval officer that there was a victory waiting to be won between a surface fleet and its submarine enemy. At the end of 1942 he was challenged to win such a victory—and lost.<sup>129</sup>

United States National Archives and Records Administration archivist and editor, Timothy P. Mulligan, in his book *Neither Sharks Nor Wolves*, places the climactic phase of the Battle of the Atlantic as taking place between August 1942 and November 1943. Mulligan labeled this “a period of greatly fluctuating fortunes for both sides before Allied supremacy became evident. The U-boats had their moments.” He points out that in November 1942 the *U-bootwaffe* sank 117 merchant vessels, totaling almost 758,000 tons, their most successful single month of the entire war. In March 1943 the British Admiralty observed that “the Germans never came so near to disrupting communication

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<sup>128</sup> Mulligan, 77- 78.

<sup>129</sup> Keegan, 235.

between the old World and the New.”<sup>130</sup>

But as Mulligan wrote, “The cumulative effect of expanded air coverage, experienced escorts armed with the latest detection and weapons technology, and restored cryptographic insight into German communications led to a crushing defeat of the U-boats in the late spring and summer of 1943.” In the first twenty-two days of May 1943 the *U-bootwaffe* lost at least thirty-one boats, nearly as many as were lost in the entire year of 1941. As a result Dönitz withdrew his U-boats from the North Atlantic and redeployed them to the central Atlantic where U.S. Navy “hunter-killer” groups comprised of destroyer escorts and escort aircraft carriers attacked the U-boat refueling rendezvous areas and sank almost all of the German *Milchkuh* boats.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Mulligan, 80; Stephen W. Roskill, *The War at Sea, 1939-1945*. Vol. 2. (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954-1961), 367. Quoted in Mulligan, 80.

<sup>131</sup> Mulligan, 80-81.

## CHAPTER 4

### FOUR U-BOATS, EIGHT YOUNG MEN

ICARUS swung around as quickly as possible to bring her 3-inch gun to bear. Her first two shells straddled the U-boat, then the gunner found the target. Out of fourteen shots six direct and one ricochet hit were scored on the hull and conning tower. Thirty-three men tumbled from the conning tower in clock-like precision, swimming rapidly away from the boat. U-352 remained on the surface five minutes. She sank at 1714 and ICARUS, now three hundred yards away, ceased firing.

*Final Report of Interrogation of Survivors  
from U-352 Sunk by U.S.C.G. Icarus on  
May 9, 1942*<sup>132</sup>

The funeral pyre of this vessel made a fine spectacle and Kapitzky reported it by air to Berlin, which was his eventual undoing. The HF/DF trackers at San Juan picked up the transmission and sparked off an operation which provides perhaps the best example in the entire war of a fiercely aggressive, fearfully costly, but finally successful air anti-submarine hunt.

*Samuel Eliot Morison  
Writing in The Atlantic Battle Won*<sup>133</sup>

It was during these crucial months, and their periphery, that the eight young German sailors who are the subject of this story suffered the consequences of Dönitz's lost argument and found themselves and their shipmates victims of the changing fortunes of war.

On the morning of April 4, 1942, *Kapitänleutnant* (equivalent to U.S. Navy Lieutenant) Helmut Rathke guided U-352 out of the port of St. Nazaire, France. No band was present to offer the boat and crew a rousing farewell. The sense of security the U-boat crews had once enjoyed at their French ports had already disappeared. British Royal

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<sup>132</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945, Interrogations, U-352, box 14, U-352 folder, "Final Report of Interrogation of Survivors from U-352 Sunk by U.S.C.G. Icarus on May 9, 1942 in Approximate Position Latitude 34.12.05 N., Longitude 76.35 W. 31 August 1942," Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Record Group 38, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>133</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Atlantic Battle Won: May 1943-May 1945*, vol. 10, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, Inc, 1947; University of Illinois Press, 2002), 195-196.

Air Force (RAF) bombers had attacked St. Nazaire repeatedly since 1941 and the bombing increased in intensity in 1942 when the U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) joined the fray. The RAF struck at night and the USAAF bombed in daylight. The heavily reinforced concrete U-boat pens had actually received very little damage in the raids, but the town of St. Nazaire had been heavily damaged and the vast majority of casualties incurred from the bombing raids were suffered by the French civilian population.<sup>134</sup>

The *U-352* was a Type VIIC boat and was one of twenty-eight boats built by Flensburger Schiffsbau in Flensburg. Over 700 Type VII boats were built and they were by far the most successful of all the U-boat types. As one of the earlier examples of the Type VIIC variant built *U-352* was poorly armed topside against air attack with one 2cm flak gun, but she was more than a match on the surface against Allied merchantmen with her one 88mm deck gun. She had four bow torpedo tubes and one tube in her stern. She could travel 9,500 nautical miles on the surface, but only seventy-five submerged before having to surface to recharge her batteries.

Type VII boats embarked on over 2,600 war cruises during World War II and sank approximately 1,365 Allied vessels, including 190 warships. The Type VIIs also bore the brunt of *U-bootwaffe* losses during the war. Over 400 were sunk, most with the loss of all hands onboard. Of the approximately 30,000 men lost on U-boats, around 22,000, or 73% were lost on Type VIIs.<sup>135</sup>

Once into the open Atlantic, Rathke kept *U-352* on the surface and ordered her to proceed at *langsame Fahrt*, slow speed, in order to conserve her fuel for operations off the American coast. During the uneventful four week crossing to American waters

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<sup>134</sup> Hickam, 191; Randolph Bradham, *Hitler's U-Boat Fortresses* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003; The Lyons Press, 2005), 24, 25, 29.

<sup>135</sup> Williamson, 30, 38-40.

Rathke drilled his young crew constantly. Thirteen members of the crew were under twenty-one years of age. Rathke himself was thirty-two years old, a member of the naval class of 1930, and had been on active duty since 1935. He had been born in East Prussia and had left behind a wife and young daughter in Flensburg.<sup>136</sup>

The foray to American waters was *U-352*'s second war cruise. The operational area of her first cruise had been off the coast of Iceland from late January until early March 1942. The boat had not managed to sink a single enemy ship during this initial war cruise, but had been herself depth charged and frequently attacked from the air. She managed to escape each attack unscathed, if not unnerved.<sup>137</sup>

Rathke and his crew arrived in American waters several hundred miles off the coast of New Jersey on May 2, 1942. He decided to stay on the surface and look for targets as he turned his boat south to travel to his ordered area of operation off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. To Rathke's surprise however, patrolling aircraft forced the *U-352* to crash dive on numerous occasions. By May 5 Rathke had brought his boat to approximately 300 miles off Hatteras and following Dönitz's recommendation Rathke kept *U-352* submerged during the day and only surfaced at night.<sup>138</sup>

That night he surfaced under a bright moon and at 2100 hours was rewarded with the sight of a lone target plodding along at only 8 knots. What followed could only be described as a comedy of errors or a case of extremely bad luck for the *U-352* and her crew.

The lone target was the *Freden*, a medium-sized Swedish cargo freighter. At 2130

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<sup>136</sup> Hickam, 192-193; Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945, Interrogations, *U-352*.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Hickam, 193-194.

hours Rathke launched his first torpedo as the freighter crossed his bow, and missed by the length of the ship. The *Freden's* crew was in a state of near panic when at 2200 Rathke fired again, and missed again as the torpedo passed underneath the target.

The *Freden* came to a complete stop as her crew lowered her two lifeboats and pulled away. Unaware that the freighter had stopped, Rathke pulled ahead of her and lost sight of her in the night. Meanwhile, the *Freden's* master, realizing that his ship was unharmed, called his crew back to their ship and they promptly reboarded her. In a short time the *Freden* was again underway.

A short time later *U-352's* lookouts spotted the *Freden* trailing behind their U-boat. Rathke turned his boat around and fired a third time, and missed too deep yet again. At 2230 Rathke tried one last shot at his prey, and this last time he missed her bow by only a few feet. The *Freden's* master turned her stern toward the *U-352* to present less of a target as once more his crew abandoned ship. Rathke assumed the freighter had turned to run and gave up the chase.

The *Freden's* crew drifted in their lifeboats the remainder of the night until daylight revealed their ship drifting along, totally unscathed, only a few hundred yards away. With their tormentor from the previous night nowhere in sight, the *Freden's* crew once again reboarded their ship at 0830 and continued their voyage to New York.

At almost exactly the same time as the *Freden's* crew was reboarding their ship the *U-352* was surfacing only a few miles away. Within seconds of the lookouts climbing out into the boat's conning tower a twin-engine aircraft dived directly at her from about four miles out and at 600 feet altitude. The U-boat crash dived and the crew waited anxiously for the crash of bombs which was sure to come. None came, and an hour later



*U-352* surfaced once again, this time to an empty sea and sky. Rathke's boat and crew had survived to fight another day, but as a U.S. Navy report on the luckless boat's activities would read, "The next attack *U-352* made, that on the U.S.C.G. *ICARUS*, was to be her last."<sup>139</sup>

By May 9 the *U-352* was hunting the sea for targets some thirty miles south of Cape Lookout, North Carolina. For whatever reason, quite possibly nothing more complicated than frustration at his boat's lack of success, Rathke shelved Dönitz's prudent guidance and late in the afternoon brought *U-352* to the surface. Almost immediately upon ascending to the conning tower he sighted a mast just over the horizon, and ordered his boat to crash dive. Believing his rashness had finally blessed himself and his crew with their long overdue reward he fired two torpedoes from his bow tubes before bothering to even attempt to identify his prey.

At 1615 hours, just about ten minutes prior to Rathke's torpedo launch, the soundman aboard the United States Coast Guard Cutter *Icarus*, William I. Rabich, detected what he believed to be a submarine no more than 100 yards off the *Icarus*'s port bow. The ship's commander, Lieutenant Maurice D. Jester, had earlier retired to his quarters leaving his executive officer, Lieutenant Edward D. Howard, at the bridge. Informed of Rabich's possible contact, Howard held off sounding General Quarters until Jester had resumed the bridge.<sup>140</sup>

While Howard waited for Jester to appear on the bridge, Rabich, now joined by fellow crewmen Santiago Quinones and Arthur Laskowski, continued to monitor the

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<sup>139</sup> Hickam, 194-197; Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945.

<sup>140</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945; Hickam, 197-199.

suspected submarine contact. By 1625 the soundmen placed the contact at 2,000 yards distance off the port bow. All three soundmen were convinced the contact was indeed an enemy U-boat, but as of yet Howard had ordered no change in *Icarus*'s course, choosing instead to continue to wait for Jester's arrival.

At 1629 the *Icarus* was rocked by a tremendous explosion which put to rest any question as to the nature of the contact the soundmen had been dutifully monitoring. Jester had still not made his way to the bridge. The crew of *U-352* heard the explosion and at least some of her crew believed their long drought was finally over. They were mistaken. Not only was their unlucky streak intact, their luck was soon to turn even worse. Instead of striking the *Icarus*, the torpedoes had struck the sea floor and churned up swirls of mud.<sup>141</sup>

Rathke, operating under the mistaken impression that his boat had hit and severely damaged an enemy freighter, surfaced to survey his success. He was shocked to see instead, an enemy subchaser directly ahead. He immediately ordered the *U-352* to crash dive yet again. Finally arriving at his station on the bridge, Jester took immediate action and ordered the *Icarus* hard aport and headed her straight for the spot where the torpedoes had detonated. True to the losing streak shadowing him and his crew, Rathke steered his boat towards the very same spot, believing it the perfect place to hide.<sup>142</sup>

Once the *Icarus* reached the eastern edge of the mud swirl Jester dropped a diamond pattern of five depth charges. The diamond pattern was accomplished by first firing one depth charge from the rack, then two more from the Y-gun, another from the rack, and finally a fifth from the rack. After pummeling the *U-352* with this initial

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<sup>141</sup> Hickam, 199; Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945.

<sup>142</sup> Hickam, 200.

barrage, Jester circled the mud swirl and released three more depth charges, this time in a “V” pattern. The “V” pattern resulted from the firing of one depth charge from the rack, followed by two more from the Y-gun.

The initial depth charge assault had shaken the *Icarus* severely due to the shallow depth into which it was launched. But if the subchaser shook, her prey convulsed under the attack. Every gauge in the control room and conning tower were shattered and the boat’s second-in-command, Leutnant (equivalent to U.S. Navy Ensign) Josef Ernst, was killed instantly when his body was flung against the control panel, crushing his skull. The boat’s electric motors were knocked off their mounts and all her lights flickered and then died.<sup>143</sup>

These first depth charges had blown the *U-352*’s deck gun off, as well as much of the sheet metal enveloping her conning tower. The boat’s buoyancy was compromised and she drifted bow up, with her stern intermittently dragging on the sea bottom. The second attack ruptured one of her buoyancy tanks and she rolled over onto her port side and settled on the bottom. Her ordeal was not yet complete.

Jester circled the *Icarus* again and dropped yet another depth charge on the spot where air bubbles rose to the surface from *U-352*’s ruptured buoyancy tank. Once more Jester circled the *Icarus* and at 1708 dropped one last depth charge on the surface bubbles. The terrified German sailors could do nothing more than wait for an anonymous death. Their families, friends, and *U-bootwaffe* comrades would know only that the *U-352* and her crew had failed to return from this, their second and last, war cruise.

But, unlucky as she had been as an offensive weapon, *U-352* proved to be a

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<sup>143</sup> Hickam, 201-202: Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945.

sturdy protector for her crew. Despite the pounding delivered by the *Icarus* she held together long enough to bring her crew to the surface one last time. At 1709 she broke the surface at a forty-five degree angle, down by her stern. She settled with her deck awash, except for about eight feet of her bow. When Rathke opened the conning tower hatch and surveyed the damage he threw out his secret codes and ordered his crew to abandon ship.<sup>144</sup>

As the German crew scrambled from their stricken and helpless vessel, the crew of the *Icarus* opened up on them with her starboard quarter .50-caliber and .30-caliber machine guns mounted on the flying bridge. The *Icarus* was only 1,000 yards away from the helpless U-boat and the Americans could clearly see the Germans clambering out of the damaged conning tower in their desperation to escape.

The Navy's official report on the battle added that the:

ICARUS swung around as quickly as possible to bring her 3-inch gun to bear. Her first two shells straddled the U-boat, then the gunner found the target. Out of fourteen shots six direct and one ricochet hit were scored on the hull and conning tower. Thirty-three men tumbled from the conning tower in clock-like precision, swimming rapidly away from the boat. U-352 remained on the surface five minutes. She sank at 1714 and ICARUS, now three hundred yards away, ceased firing.<sup>145</sup>

Rathke believed his men had been murdered in cold blood as they tried to surrender. Jester's men had opened fire without being ordered to do so, but once the firing had commenced he had ordered it to continue. Jester was fully aware that the U-boat's deck gun was capable of sinking his small ship, but had been unaware that the gun

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<sup>144</sup> Hickam, 202-204; Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945.

<sup>145</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945.

had been blown off by the *Icarus*'s depth charges.<sup>146</sup> But, once the American sailors had opened fire on a live enemy for the first time, the adrenaline rush produced by the sights and sounds of their powerful weapons had taken possession of their senses and they had surrendered some piece of their humanity to the baser pursuit of summary justice.

Rathke had screamed to the Americans to stop the slaughter, and his men had echoed his cries as they floated helplessly in the sea. "*Kamerade, Bitte, Mein Gott, Bitte!*" At least one of the *Icarus*'s crew, John Bruce, also implored his shipmates to stop the carnage. "For God's sake!" he screamed. "Don't shoot them in the water!"

Thirteen of the *U-352*'s crew died in the minutes between 1629 and 1714 that day of May 9, 1942. One more of her crew, *Maschinistmaat* (equivalent to U.S. Navy Fireman 1<sup>st</sup> Class) Gerhard Reussel, whose leg was blown off by a 3-inch shell as he climbed out of the conning tower, died some four hours later.<sup>147</sup>

Once the *Icarus* ceased firing on the German sailors she did not come alongside to retrieve survivors. Yet another indignity awaited the men of *U-352*. To the amazement of the terrified and exhausted Germans, the *Icarus* turned and steamed away. Jester simply was unaware as to how to proceed now that he had sunk the enemy submarine. He had signaled Norfolk, "Have sunk submarine, 30-40 men in the water. Shall *Icarus* pick up any of the men?" Ten minutes later he had yet to receive a reply, so he sent another query. "Have you any message for us?" A minute later, Norfolk replied simply, "No."

At 1740, as the *Icarus* pulled further away from the helpless Germans, Jester attempted to receive instructions from another source, this time the commandant of the Sixth Naval District. "Shall *Icarus* pick up prisoners?" After minutes passed with no

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<sup>146</sup> Hickam, 203.

<sup>147</sup> Hickam, 204-207; Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945.

answer, he tried again. “Thirty-two German submarine men in the water. Shall we pick them up?” Finally, at 1749, he received his answer. “Pick up survivors. Bring to Charleston.” Jester immediately ordered the *Icarus* turned about.<sup>148</sup>

As the *Icarus* appeared over the horizon on her return to the location where the *U-352* had gone down, the German sailors could not have been sure of the American intentions. Were they coming to the rescue of the men in the water; or were they returning to finish the job of murdering the defenseless men in the water? Of one thing they could be sure, Hellmut Rathke was still their commander. Cradling the dying Reussel in his arms the *Kapitänleutnant* “shouted to his men warnings about the necessity of refusing to divulge information.” Rathke’s admonitions were not idle chatter to the frightened men in the water. The Americans would later note of the *U-352*’s commander that “he was held in great respect by his men, on whom he apparently inflicted a martinet’s discipline.” The Americans would also note of Rathke that, “He professes unqualified admiration for Hitler and National Socialism.”<sup>149</sup>

Among the survivors about to be picked from the sea by the crew of the *Icarus* was a twenty-three year old *Machinen Obergefreiter* (equivalent to U.S. Navy Fireman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class) by the name of Otto Stengel. Stengel had been in the *Kriegsmarine* since April 1939 and had left behind a wife and two small children in Börnsdorf, Germany.<sup>150</sup> Stengel shared with the other men of the *U-352* the ignominy of being a crewman on the first U-boat sunk in American waters from which survivors were taken prisoner in World

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<sup>148</sup> Hickam, 206.

<sup>149</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945.

<sup>150</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945. Interrogations, U-352, box 14, U-352 folder, Interview of German prisoner Otto STENGEL, conducted by Lt. A. Barron Holmes III, USNR; Major G. B. Fitch, the Citadel Interpreter, Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Record Group 38, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

War II. With his shipmates Stengel was turned over to the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army in Charleston. From there he would move to Camp Moultrie, South Carolina, then on to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. At both of these places he would be interrogated, but he held steadfast to the orders of Rathke and refused to provide the Americans with any information of military value. As the Battle of the Atlantic continued to exact its toll on the sailors of many nations, Stengel sat on the sidelines in POW camps from Massachusetts to Oklahoma to New Mexico before finally being transferred on January 3, 1944, to the POW camp at Papago Park, Arizona.<sup>151</sup> Unlike his *U-352* shipmates, Otto Stengel would never see his family, or Germany, again.

A little more than a year after the sinking of the *U-352* the *U-118* left Bordeaux, France, on May 20, 1943, for her fourth war cruise. She was under the command of *Korvettenkapitän* (equivalent to U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander) Werner Czygan. The *U-118* was one of only eight Type XB U-boats produced by Germaniawerft at Kiel. She was a large boat, designed primarily as a minelayer, but could also be used to resupply other boats much like a *Milchkuh*.<sup>152</sup>

While cruising on the surface off the Azores at midday on June 12, 1943, the *U-118* was attacked by aircraft from the escort carrier U.S.S. *Bogue*. Three of her four anti-aircraft gunners were wounded before she could submerge. Before she could reach a safe depth her electric motors were damaged beyond repair. Czygan ordered her back to the

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<sup>151</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945. Interrogations, U-352, box 14, U-352 folder, "Final Report of Interrogation of Survivors from U-352 Sunk by U.S.C.G. Icarus on May 9, 1942 in Approximate Position Latitude 34.12.05 N., Longitude 76.35 W. 31 August 1942,"; Whittingham, 18.

<sup>152</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945, Interrogations, U-94 to U-118, box 3, U-118 folder, Other Details, Records of the Office of the chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Record Group 38, National Archives, College Park, Maryland: Williamson, 54-55.

surface, planning to fight it out there.<sup>153</sup>

Czygan was struck by machine gun fire in the leg and side as soon as he climbed into the conning tower. Crewmen running to man the boat's guns were likewise shot down before reaching their weapons. Covered in his own blood and convinced further resistance was futile, Czygan gave the order to abandon ship.<sup>154</sup>

Below decks the electric motors exploded, killing much of the crew. The *U-118* began breaking apart as her surviving crew scrambled to escape her. Czygan stayed with her, kneeling on the bridge as his boat submerged for the final time. None of the *U-118*'s officers survived.<sup>155</sup>

The destroyer, U.S.S. *Osmond Ingram*, steamed to the site of the battle and picked from the sea only seventeen survivors. One of these seventeen died shortly after being lifted aboard the destroyer.<sup>156</sup>

Among the *U-118*'s survivors rescued by the *Osmond Ingram* was a twenty-year-old *Machinen Obergefreiter* from Chemnitz named Werner Drechsler. As Drechsler had climbed over the *U-118*'s conning tower in an effort to abandon his stricken vessel he had been struck in the neck by shrapnel from a depth charge. Within seconds of falling to the deck, he had been struck again, this time in the right knee by a bullet from the strafing aircraft. Once aboard the *Ingram* Drechsler was taken to the ship's sick bay and his knee was operated on by the ship's doctor. He would remain in sick bay for the eight-day

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<sup>153</sup> Morison, 113; Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op16-Z) 1941-1945, U-118 folder, Sinking.

<sup>154</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op16-Z) 1941-1945, U-118 folder, Sinking.

<sup>155</sup> Whittingham, 44-45; Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op16-Z) 1941-1945, U-118 folder, Sinking.

<sup>156</sup> Morison, 114; Whittingham, 45.



voyage that took the *U-118*'s survivors to Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>157</sup>

Werner Drechsler had entered the *Kriegsmarine* in 1941 and had volunteered for service in the *U-bootwaffe*.<sup>158</sup> The young *Machinen Obergefreiter* was now a prisoner of the United States. His journey through the American POW system would be quite different from that of Otto Stengel and the other men central to this story, but he too would eventually find himself at the Papago Park camp. And, he too, would never see his family or Germany again.

A week before the *U-118* departed from Bordeaux for her fourth war cruise the *U-199* sailed from Kiel for her first and only war cruise. She was one of twenty-nine Type IXD2 boats built by Deschimag at Bremen and carried twenty-four torpedoes to be fired from six tubes, four in the bow and two in the stern.<sup>159</sup>

The *U-199* was commanded by *Kapitänleutnant* Hans Werner Kraus. Kraus, though only twenty-eight years old was already a successful U-boat officer. He had served under the famous Gunther Prien aboard the *U-47*, and then had been given command of his own boat, the *U-83*. He had taken the *U-83* into the Mediterranean on numerous war cruises and on June 20, 1942, had been awarded the Knight's Cross to the Iron Cross.<sup>160</sup>

By June 15, 1943, the *U-199* had reached her assigned hunting area off Brazil.

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<sup>157</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945, U-118 folder, Basic Personnel Record; Whittingham, 44-45.

<sup>158</sup> Whittingham, 38.

<sup>159</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945, U-199 folder, Information from P/W Woenitzka (Matrosenobergefreiter) or Matrosengefreiter Buchholz. Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Record Group 38, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; Williamson, 50-51.

<sup>160</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945, U-199 folder, Information obtained thru Matrosenobergefreiter Woenitzka from Matrosengefreiter Buchholz. Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Record Group 38, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

For the next month and a half she operated in the area between Rio de Janeiro and Santos, circling back and forth in search of targets.<sup>161</sup>

Early on the morning of July 31 she was spotted on the surface some sixty miles off the Sugar Loaf at 0718 by a U.S. Navy *Mariner* aircraft. The *U-199* opened fire on her adversary at a distance of five miles as the plane dove to attack. The *Mariner* dropped six Mark-47 depth bombs on or near enough the target to so damage her that she could not submerge. At 0950 a Brazilian Air Force *Hudson* aircraft arrived and dropped two bombs 150 feet short of the crippled U-boat. After the *Hudson* missed on her bombing run, she turned around and came back on a strafing run that silenced *U-199*'s flak gunners once and for all. At 1152 a Brazilian *Catalina* arrived to join the battle. The *Catalina* straddled the U-boat with bombs and completed her destruction.<sup>162</sup>

The *U-199*'s surviving crew scrambled to escape as their boat slipped vertically beneath the sea for the last time. None of her engine room, torpedo, or radio crew members survived. Only twelve of the U-boats crew managed to escape with their lives. At 1250 the *U.S.S. Barnegat* plucked the twelve men, including *Kapitänleutnant* Hans Werner Kraus, from the sea and later delivered them to Recife, Brazil for interrogation. Nine of these men, including Kraus, were later transported to the United States for further interrogation.<sup>163</sup>

One of these nine was a former Krupp miner from Essen named Heinrich Ludwig.

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<sup>161</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945, U-199 folder, U-199, 23 August 1943, Chapter IV, First and Last Patrol. Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Record Group 38, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>162</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945, U-199 folder, U-199, Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Untitled page. Record Group 38, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; Morison, 219.

<sup>163</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945, U-199 folder, U-199, Untitled page.

Ludwig had been deferred from military service early in the war due to his employment in an industry deemed essential to Germany's war effort. He had not entered service in the *Kriegsmarine* until 1942.<sup>164</sup>

Heinrich Ludwig was twenty-four years old at the time of his capture. Prior to their rescue by the *Barneget*, Kraus had called his men to gather around him in the water and had exhorted all of them to remember their oaths of secrecy and allegiance to Germany. The Navy would note of the *U-199*'s survivors that "the prisoners demonstrated unparalleled security consciousness and their morale was unusually high." As he was moved from one location to another as a prisoner in American custody the former miner would steadfastly adhere to the admonitions of *Kapitänleutnant* Kraus.<sup>165</sup>

Just three days before the *U-199* had reached her hunting grounds off Brazil the Type VIIC *U-615* had left from La Pallice, France, for the Caribbean. Her commander was *Kapitänleutnant* Ralph Kapitzky. Kapitzky had already compiled an impressive military record. Early in his career he had been transferred from the *Kriegsmarine* to the *Luftwaffe*. He had flown combat air missions in the Polish and Norwegian campaigns, as well as over 100 missions in the Battle of Britain. Kapitzky was then transferred back to the *Kriegsmarine* in December 1940.<sup>166</sup>

The *U-615* entered the Caribbean through the Anegada Passage on July 13, 1943. Kapitzky's orders were to disrupt the tanker traffic between Lake Maracaibo and Aruba-

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<sup>164</sup> Whittingham, 19.

<sup>165</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945, U-199 folder, U-199, Matrosengefreiter Ludwig, U-199, 20 August 1943; Ibid., Untitled page; Whittingham, 22-23.

<sup>166</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) 1941-1945, U-615 folder, Chapter VII, 4<sup>th</sup> Patrol, 1 September 1943. Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Record Group 38, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; Theodore P. Savas, *Silent Hunters: German U-Boat Commanders of World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997; Annapolis: Bluejacket Books, 2003), 44-46.

Curaçao. For two weeks Kapitzky failed to locate any targets, but finally on July 27 he managed to sink a small lake tanker off Willemstad, Curaçao. Dutifully reporting his success to Berlin he unmindfully sealed his own destruction. As Samuel Eliot Morison wrote in *The Atlantic Battle Won*, “The funeral pyre of this vessel made a fine spectacle and Kapitzky reported it by air to Berlin, which was to be his eventual undoing. The HF/DF trackers at San Juan picked up the transmission and sparked off an operation which provides perhaps the best example in the entire war of a fiercely aggressive, fearfully costly, but finally successful air anti-submarine hunt.”

The running battle which ended in the sinking of the *U-615* began on the night of July 29 when a U.S. Army B-18 out of Aruba launched a successful bombing attack on the U-boat. The battle would not end until the morning of August 8. During this time period, the *U-615* and her crew endured attacks from multiple U.S. Army and Navy aircraft, and a U.S. Navy patrol craft. She fought back valiantly, downing one aircraft and killing the pilot of a second.<sup>167</sup>

Kapitzky had suffered a terrible wound early in the battle. A heavy caliber bullet had struck one of Kapitzky’s upper thighs, near the hip. He lay on his boat’s deck “with one of his legs completely dislocated and thrown up and back across his chest, a grimace of pain masking his face.” The location of the wound made it impossible to apply a tourniquet and the only treatment available was morphine to ease his pain.

Kapitzky breathed his last at 0100 the morning of August 8. Below deck German sailors reverently sewed his body into a hammock. In the face of driving rain and to the accompaniment of thunder the crew sang the traditional naval internment hymn as they committed his body to the deep.

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<sup>167</sup> Morison, 195-197.

By daybreak on August 8 the *U-615* was sinking and there was nothing her crew could do to save her. Her battle ensign was raised before she was scuttled. The U.S. Navy destroyer *U.S.S. Walker*, which had steamed to the area in hopes of joining in on the kill, instead found forty-three German sailors floating in an empty sea.<sup>168</sup>

Among the forty-three survivors of *U-615* was a twenty year old tool and die maker from Ravensburg in southern Germany named Helmut Fischer. Although protected from conscription because of his trade, he had joined the *Kriegsmarine* before his twentieth birthday. He had volunteered for the *U-bootwaffe* immediately upon completion of basic training.

Also among the men rescued by the *Walker* was nineteen year old Fritz Franke. Franke had grown up in Frankfurt an der Oder on Germany's border with Poland. He had trained to be a mechanic, but after three and a half years in trade school had joined the *Kriegsmarine* and was inordinately proud of his acceptance into the *U-bootwaffe*.

Another *U-615* survivor was a machinist from Dusseldorf named Günther Külsen. Külsen had not only been an active member of the Hitler Youth, he had risen within that organization to a position of leadership. Five months older than Franke he had worked as a machinist in Dusseldorf for over three years before joining the *Kriegsmarine* on February 7, 1942. He was Helmut Fischer's closest friend aboard *U-615*.

Bernhard Reyak was nineteen years old when the *U-615* went down. He had worked as a metal smith in the small Rhine River town of Neuss where he had been born and raised. He had joined the *Kriegsmarine* in 1941 and was known as a conscientious and extremely hard worker by his shipmates.

Berlin native Rolf Wizuy had witnessed the mass spectacles staged by the Nazi

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<sup>168</sup> Savas, 64-65, 69-70.

party in his hometown in the heady days of the 1930s. Trained as an electrician he had enlisted in the *Kriegsmarine* in the fall of 1940, but had served for almost two years before realizing his ambition to serve in the *U-bootwaffe*. Wizuy was twenty-one years old when plucked from the sea with the other survivors of *U-615*.<sup>169</sup>

These five men had first met when the crew of the new *U-615* was first brought together for training and familiarization at Breda, The Netherlands. They served together for the length of *U-615*'s fighting career, and had developed the bonds that only men who have seen such duty together can form.

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<sup>169</sup> Whittingham, 24-28.

## CHAPTER 5

### KRIEGSGEFANGENE (PRISONERS OF WAR)

He must be thoroughly reliable, a quality normally not to be expected of men who are willing to perform this degrading function. The war with Germany, however, not infrequently produced men who felt that cooperation with the Allied Powers in the crushing of the Nazis was, in actuality, a noble service. Knowledge of cruelties visited upon their families at home, punishment or humiliation suffered by themselves during the rise of Hitler, were often sufficient to induce normally loyal men to turn against their leaders.

*Fort Hunt History*<sup>170</sup>

The Navy has requested that P/W Machgr. Werner Drechsler, 50-61-NA, now at Fort Hunt, when transferred be shipped to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. They have special reasons for making this request.

*Colonel Gatesby C. Jones to Colonel I. B. Summers, 20 December 1943*<sup>171</sup>

Men of the *U-bootwaffe* were among the very first prisoners of war incarcerated by the Western Allies. The International Red Cross reported in October 1939 that crewmen of the *U-27* and *U-29* were prisoners of the British. On November 14 the British confirmed that they were holding a total of eighteen German officers (eleven *Kriegsmarine* and seven *Luftwaffe*) and ninety-four enlisted men (eighty-six *Kriegsmarine* and eight *Luftwaffe*) in POW camps on the British mainland. By November 21 the stately manor at Grizedale, now home to twenty-one *Kriegsmarine* inmates, mostly U-boat officers, had been nicknamed the “U-boat Hotel.”

With the end of the so-called “Phony War” on the European continent in April

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<sup>170</sup> AC of S, G-2, Intelligence Division, Captured Personnel and Material Branch, Enemy POW Interrogation File (MIS-Y) 1943-1945, Interrogation Center CPM, box 360, Fort Hunt History. Records of the War Department and Special Staffs, Office of the Director of Intelligence (G-2), Military Intelligence Service, Record Group 165, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>171</sup> Prisoner of War Operations Division, Operations Branch, Classified Decimal File, box 1378, file 253.91 Fort Hunt. Memorandum for Colonel I. B. Summers, P. M. G. O. 1, 20 December 1943, Records of the Office of the Provost Marshall General, Records of the Prisoner of War Division, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

1940 the prospect for larger numbers of German prisoners needing confinement grew, but Allied defeats produced few German POWs. Even had the Allies been victorious on these fronts, the U-boat offensive in the Atlantic had reduced food supplies in Britain to a point where she was barely able to feed her own population and was in no way capable of finding extra food for enemy prisoners. A decision was reached to remove as many prisoners as possible to the colonies and dominions. By March 1941, Canada had received 2950 German prisoners from Britain. By the end of the war Canada held some 33,800 German POWs.<sup>172</sup>

Victories in January 1941 over the Italians in Cyrenaica, on the North African front, brought 130,000 Italian POWs to Britain. With the American entry into the war combined British and American operations in North Africa led to grueling battle after battle, and ultimately to victory in Tunisia. By the time of the surrender of the last leading Axis commander in North Africa, Field Marshall Giovanni Messe of the First Italian Army, on May 13, 1943, the Allies had captured approximately 275,000 Axis prisoners in North Africa.<sup>173</sup>

The British had been pleading with the Americans ever since America's entry into the war to relieve them from the burden of handling the majority of German and Italian POWs. After months of haggling, the American State Department had finally agreed in August 1942 to accept an emergency allotment of 50,000 enemy prisoners from Britain. After the close of the North African Campaign 30,000 more prisoners arrived in America in May 1943, and another 50,000 arrived in August 1943. The tide of Axis POWs sent to the United States continued to rise slowly, but did not actually become a flood until after

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<sup>172</sup> Kochan, 2-3.

<sup>173</sup> Kochan, 3; Richard Collier, *The War in the Desert*, World War II, ed. William K. Goolrick (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, Inc, 1977), 195.



D-Day in June 1944. Never before, or since, have so many POWs been incarcerated as during World War II. A total of more than 10 million German soldiers, airmen, and sailors became POWs in twenty different countries during and after World War II. The U.S. Army detained upwards of 425,000 German, 50,000 Italian, and 5,000 Japanese POWs in as many as 500 camps inside the borders of the United States.<sup>174</sup>

It was determined early on in the war that *Kriegsmarine*, and most especially *U-bootwaffe* prisoners were a special case. In a memorandum addressed to the Provost Marshall General of the Army dated September 11, 1942, the assistant chief of staff of the Army's Office of the Director of Intelligence (G-2), Major General George V. Strong, wrote, in part, the following, "By direction of the Secretary of War:"

1. Naval Prisoners of War will be repatriated only with the approval of the Navy Department, Division of Naval Intelligence, and the War Department, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2.
2. Trained submarine prisoners of war are regarded as potential aid to the enemy and will not be repatriated.<sup>175</sup>

As previously noted, the *U-352* was the first U-boat sunk in American waters from which survivors were taken prisoner. By the time the *Icarus* off-loaded its prisoners at Charleston, *U-352*'s commander *Kapitänleutnant* Helmut Rathke had made up his mind "that he would be the kind of prisoner the National Socialist Party would want him to be. He would be proud, arrogant, and unyielding in principle until the day the war was won and he was released, not in shame from the loss of his U-boat, but in glory." Rathke was also sure that his men would follow his example, and he made sure to marshal his

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<sup>174</sup> Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York: Stein & Day, 1979; Lanham, Maryland: Scarborough House, 1996), 2; Springer, 146; Robert C. Doyle, *The Enemy in Our Hands: America's Treatment of Prisoners of War from the Revolution to the War on Terror* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 179.

<sup>175</sup> Prisoner of War Operations Div., Operations Branch, Classified Decimal File, box 1378, file 253.91 Fort Hunt. Repatriation of Prisoners of War, September 11, 1942.

men to demonstrate their united resolve. As U.S. Marine guards with fixed bayonets and a contingent of American and British intelligence officers awaited their arrival on the dock, “Rathke lined his crew up and marched them, heads up, down the plank.” The intensely loyal *U-bootwaffe* officer kept his men, most of them barefoot, at strict attention on the brutally hot concrete and railroad tracks for thirty minutes, until the Marines marched them away into captivity.<sup>176</sup>

From Charleston Otto Stengel and the other crewmen of *U-352* were sent first to Camp Moultrie, South Carolina for a brief interrogation and then on to Fort Bragg, North Carolina for a yet more intensive session of interrogation. A memorandum prepared for the chiefs of both the U.S. Army’s Intelligence and Counter Intelligence Groups after the Fort Bragg interrogations reveals that Rathke’s crew remained loyal to his instructions. Under the heading of “Prisoner Behavior” the memorandum noted that, “Entering the examination room, the German typical prisoner would render a smart salute and usually remained at attention. ... Techniques employed by the prisoners included evasion, lying, and complaints about their rights under International Law.”

Perhaps even more revealing as to the loyalty and discipline displayed by *U-352*’s crew are these statements found under the heading of “Prisoner Morale:”

The morale of the captured personnel was excellent. These men had undergone a harrowing experience, yet their esprit showed no evidence of flagging. The attitude displayed toward their captors was that of formal politeness and scornful antagonism. The idea implied in “A German soldier does (or does not) do this” dominated their actions. Since the men are Nazi-indoctrinated, their statements of political belief had to be discounted, but the sincerity of their fanatical faith in the tenets of Hitlerism was practically unquestionable. Their conduct and discipline when alone or in the presence of an examining officer was exemplary. The prisoners stated that the treatment accorded them actually gave no cause for complaint. The men were husky and healthy, young and tough.

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<sup>176</sup> Hickam, 208.

To what extent the personal biases of Captain Anthony Wenderley, the Military Intelligence Service officer upon whose report this memorandum was based, colored this assessment of *U-352*'s crewmen can only be surmised. A hint at those biases may, or may not, be found in his seemingly contradictory statements of the prisoners' "complaints about their rights under International Law," and then that the "prisoners stated that the treatment accorded them actually gave no cause for complaint."<sup>177</sup>

Also true is the fact that what level of peer intimidation may have been present among the crewmen is also an exercise in guess work. These men most probably were "young and tough," and the toughest among them were also probably the most ardent Nazi "true believers." It must also be remembered that the *U-352* had gone down at a time when Germany still appeared to hold the upper hand in the war.

The experience of American intelligence officers with the men of the *U-352* did not deter either the Army or the Navy from attempting to gather as much intelligence as possible from any future *Kriegsmarine* prisoners. To this end a special "Interrogation Center" was officially opened at Fort Hunt, Virginia, on Monday, August 2, 1942.<sup>178</sup> The Army was responsible for the custody of all enemy POWs on U.S. soil, whether the prisoners be Army, Navy, or Air Force personnel of their respective nations. This fact made Fort Hunt an exception to the rule and made necessary its designation as an "Interrogation Center" as opposed to a "Prisoner of War Camp."

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<sup>177</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) Subject File 1942-1945, Algiers to British NID/1/PW Reports, box 2. Memorandum for Chief, Intelligence Group; Chief, Counter Intelligence Group, May 14, 1942. Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Record Group 38, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>178</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) Subject File 1942-1945, "Chapters on Other U-boats to O-2, box 5. Op-16-F-9-P/W, Standing Order No. 1, July 30, 1942. Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Record Group 38, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

The first four sections of Standing Order No. 2, issued just days prior to Fort Hunt's opening spelled out the installation's special character:

- “1. The Interrogation Center at Fort Hunt is a joint, co-operative undertaking of the Army and Navy. Under existing regulations the Provost Marshall of the Army is responsible for the custody of all prisoners of war and is, therefore, responsible for the custody of prisoners in the Center as well as elsewhere.
2. The Center is, therefore, a joint responsibility of the Provost Marshall General, the Interrogation Section of G-2, and the Interrogation Section of O.N. I.
3. Smooth running and efficient performance can only be realized by complete co-operation between these three activities and every member of the Navy Interrogation Section will use every effort to promote this co-operation both officially and personally.
4. The Center itself is under command of the Commanding Officer, Fort Hunt, who is detailed by the Provost Marshall General. ...”

Section eleven of Special Order No. 2 clearly stipulated that once a prisoner's presence was no longer required at the center he was to be remanded to Army custody:

- “11. When the Naval Interrogation is completed, prisoners may be retained for use of the Army or the Commanding Officer may be informed that they are no longer needed, and are available for transportation to internment camps. In the latter case, the Office of the Provost Marshall General should also be advised through Op-16-F-9.”<sup>179</sup>

A report written after the war stated that the “criterion of selection” for prisoners sent to Fort Hunt had been the individual POW's possession of “long term technical or strategic information.” The report further stated, “Thus, when a particularly knowledgeable prisoner was brought in who possessed such detailed information as to require continued interrogation over a long period and under the guidance of technical advisers, he was sent, after the First Detailed Interrogation (*sic*), to Fort Hunt, together

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<sup>179</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) Subject File 1942-1945, “Chapters on Other U-boats to O-2, box 5. Op-16-F-9-P/W, Standing Order No. 2, July 30, 1942.

with such information as has previously been obtained from him.”<sup>180</sup>

During the Interrogation Center’s existence, almost 4,000 prisoners of war, the majority of them German scientists or members of the *U-bootwaffe*, were held at Fort Hunt for days or even weeks, prior to their presence being reported to the International Red Cross, a practice which did not comply with the Geneva Conventions. A number of the interrogators employed here were German refugees.<sup>181</sup>

The typical room at Fort Hunt was originally intended to house two prisoners and contained two beds, two benches, and a table. Latrines were located in each corridor and the prisoners were allowed access to them upon their request, but only under guard. The prisoners were held responsible for cleaning their rooms and the latrines. Food was the regular base ration and medical care was provided by Fort Hunt’s medical officer.

In addition to information gathered during the course of interrogation the report also detailed how information was gathered from prisoners held at Fort Hunt through the use of listening devices installed in the ceiling above the prisoners’ rooms, fourteen of which had been installed by July 30, 1942, just days before the Interrogation Center officially opened.

Another means of obtaining information, and one central to our story, was the use of so-called “Stool Pigeons.” The report clearly states that along with the listening devices, the use of stool pigeons had “become an essential aid in the obtaining of military intelligence ...” The enlistment of prisoners for this role was done with the greatest of caution:

He must be thoroughly reliable, a quality normally not to be expected of men who

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<sup>180</sup> AC of S, G-2, Intelligence Division, Captured Personnel and Material Branch, Enemy POW Interrogation File (MIS-Y) 1943-1945, Interrogation Center CPM, box 360, Fort Hunt History.

<sup>181</sup> *Washington Post*, 6 October 2007.

are willing to perform this degrading function. The war with Germany, however, not infrequently produced men who felt that cooperation with the Allied Powers in the crushing of the Nazis was, in actuality, a noble service. Knowledge of cruelties visited upon their families at home, punishment or humiliation suffered by themselves during the rise of Hitler, were often sufficient to induce normally loyal men to turn against their leaders.

The report further stated that the stool pigeons should be thoroughly “briefed” as to the nature of the information the Americans wished him to obtain. He must be “permitted to employ his own methods.” He must be “made to feel that he is performing a valuable service.” And he must be “protected at all times from possible detection.”<sup>182</sup>

Werner Drechsler of the *U-118* became one of the Americans’ stool pigeons at Fort Hunt shortly after his arrival there. A report of his interrogation by Lieutenants Whitten and Hartog at Fort Hunt on December 18, 1943, shortly before his stay there ended, noted that he was “inclined to be boastful about his personal history,” and that he was “undoubtedly intelligent” and “very cooperative when flattered enough.” The American officers also made note that he was “a young man of immense conceit and vanity.”

Drechsler told the American officers that he was one of the very few young men in Germany who had never belonged to the Hitler Youth. He stated that “he always worked to (*sic*) hard and that nobody ever wanted any proof from him when he stated that he did belong to the HJ.” He reported that he had not volunteered for, but rather had been inducted into the *Kriegsmarine*. It was the opinion of the two Americans that, “It was probably P/W’s feeling of personal superiority that kept him from mixing with the Nazi indoctrinated youth of his own age.” The young German POW also volunteered that his father had been in a concentration camp for three years due to his membership in the

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<sup>182</sup> AC of S, G-2, Intelligence Division, Captured Personnel and Material Branch, Enemy POW Interrogation File (MIS-Y) 1943-1945, Interrogation Center CPM, box 360, Fort Hunt History.

Social Democratic Party.<sup>183</sup>

It is impossible for us to determine what exactly motivated Werner Drechsler to betray his country and his comrades. It is entirely possible that he shared his father's political beliefs and that he was to some degree or another desirous of aiding in the demise of the Nazi regime, or of exacting some degree of revenge against those who had imprisoned his father, and no doubt, brought humiliation to his family. It is also possible that he was indeed "a young man of immense conceit and vanity," who was motivated by little more than the prospect of becoming a privileged asset of some importance to his captors.

The first mention of Werner Drechsler in the daily Fort Hunt logs was on June 30, 1943, when he was assigned to Room 16 along with another POW by the name of Muchan or Mochan.<sup>184</sup> On July 3 he was moved to Room 20 with two other POWs. On July 9 Drechsler's personal effects, taken from him when he was first captured, were turned over to the Army for the purpose of being returned to him. On July 11 the logs note that Drechsler was being moved again and that he was "drawing equipment placed at his disposal." On July 12 he was moved yet again.

Interspersed with these moves, Drechsler took frequent walks with his American hosts, most frequently with an Ensign Wilkinson. On August 9 Drechsler again changed rooms. An entry for 1015 on August 10 notes that "Ensign Wilkinson takes P/W Limmer (Drechsler) for a walk. This is the earliest mention in the logs of at least one of the aliases by which other German POWs would come to know Drechsler at Fort Hunt. The reason

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<sup>183</sup> AC of S, G-2, Intelligence Division, Captured Personnel and Material Branch, Enemy POW Interrogation File (MIS-Y) 1943-1945, box 462, Werner Drechsler 201 File.

<sup>184</sup> The entries in the Fort Hunt logs are all handwritten, not typed. Different personnel wrote the entries on different days, and as to be expected, the entries on some days are more legible than on other days. The author has made every effort to correctly interpret these handwritten entries.

for the use of these aliases is unclear, but it is entirely possible that either Drechsler or his American handlers suggested this ruse because they harbored suspicions that Drechsler's treachery had already been detected.

The logs show that at 1355 on August 25 Drechsler (U-118), in this instance identified as Drechsler in the log, left "for a drive" with Lieutenants Rugh and Hart. The three men did not return until late that night at 2055, although Drechsler is identified as Limmer in this instance. Another citation in the Fort Hunt logs on this date, at 1545, reads "P/W Ludwig (U-199) interrogated by Lts. Kuhn & Lamont."<sup>185</sup> P/W Ludwig is most certainly Heinrich Ludwig of the *U-199*.

An entry for August 26 records that "Limmer" has been moved yet again, in this instance from Room 3 to Room 21. Two more entries for August 26 are of interest to our story. At 1735 "9 Ps/W from U-615 arrive at enclosure and are berthed as follows:" In the list following this entry appears the following notations:

"P/W Reyak, Masch.obergefr., in Room 22  
P/W Fischer, Funkobergefrierer, in Room 13"

These men are no doubt Bernhard Reyak and Helmut Fischer of the *U-615*. An entry for August 28 at 1025 reads, "Agent Howland interrogates P/W Wizuy." This denotes the presence at Fort Hunt of yet another *U-615* crewman, Rolf Wizuy. Another entry towards the end of September reads, "P/W Limmer (Drechsler) leaves enclosure with Ens. Wilkinson."<sup>186</sup>

The extended length of Werner Drechsler's stay at Fort Hunt, his constant moves from room to room within the installation, his frequent contacts with Ensign Wilkinson,

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<sup>185</sup> Special Operations Branch (OP16-F-9/ OP16-Z), Fort Hunt Logs, box 25. Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Record Group 38, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.



and his use of the alias “Limmer” all shed light on his activities while at the Fort Hunt Interrogation Center.

Further evidence of those activities can be gleaned from the personal files of Heinrich Ludwig and Rolf Wizuy. Ludwig’s file contains three pages of information headed by the notation, “Ludwig from Drechsler, (Via Drechsler)”, and “via Drechsler.” Wizuy’s file contains only one page of information obtained “(via Drechsler).” However, another page in his file contains the following two sentences. “Here is an oyster of the Nazi school that has to be opened with the greatest difficulty. The skimpy information that the Navy gleaned was derived via an S.P...” Another document headed, “Contacts of Werner Drechsler at Fort Hunt,” lists both Ludwig and Wizuy among many others. This leads to the conclusion that the “S.P.” from whom Wizuy’s “skimpy information” was obtained was most probably Werner Drechsler. This same document also states while he was at Fort Hunt, Drechsler “was known by the following aliases: (1) Limmer, (2) Brabant.”<sup>187</sup>

Werner Drechsler was turned over to the Army on December 17, 1943, and departed Fort Hunt on January 8, 1944.<sup>188</sup> The Americans at Fort Hunt had to be aware that Drechsler’s work on their behalf had been discovered by at least some of the *U-bootwaffe* prisoners who had passed through their facility. Efforts were made to protect him from retaliation once he left their protective custody. At least four different letters

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<sup>187</sup> Entry 179, Interrogation Reports and Correspondence on Prisoners of War (MIS-4), 1943-1945, Heinrich Ludwig File. Records of the War Department, General and Special Staffs, Office of the Director of Intelligence (G-2), Military Intelligence Service, Record Group 165, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; AC of S, G2, Intelligence division, Captured Personnel and Material Branch, Enemy POW Interrogation File (MIS-Y) 1943-1945, box 565, Rolf Wizuy File; Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op 16-Z) Subject File 1942-1945, Algiers to British NID/1/PW Reports, box 2, Contacts of Werner Drechsler at Fort Hunt.

<sup>188</sup> Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Special Activities Branch (Op-16-Z) Subject File 1942-1945, Algiers to British NID/1/PW Reports, box 2, Contacts of Werner Drechsler at Fort Hunt.

which state the Navy's desire that the Army segregate Drechsler from other *Kriegsmarine* prisoners are still in existence at the National Archives.

Such separation was in violation of War Department policies, but writing "For The Provost Marshall General" the assistant director of the Army's Prisoner of War Division, Lieutenant Colonel Earl L. Edwards, advised the commanding general of the Third Service Command that an exception had been granted in Drechsler's case. "This transfer of a German Naval prisoner of war to Prisoner of War Camp, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, which has been designated for the internment of German Army prisoners of war, is an exception to the segregation policies outlined in War Department secret letter, dated 18 February 1943, file AG 383.6 (2-17-43) OH-3-3, subject: Segregation of Prisoners of War, authorized at the specific direction of the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2."<sup>189</sup>

Another of these letters contains a handwritten sidebar that denotes that at least one telephone conversation, in addition to the printed letters, had been made in connection with the subject of Drechsler's transfer. That these efforts were being made on behalf of the Navy, and that the Navy had good reason for making this request, is made clear on another letter dated 20 December 1943. "The Navy has requested that P/W Machgfr. Werner Drechsler, 50-61-NA, now at Fort Hunt, when transferred be shipped to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. They have special reasons for making this request."<sup>190</sup>

For reasons yet, and most likely never to be, discovered, the Army delivered Werner Drechsler like a lamb to slaughter, to the former comrades he had betrayed.

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<sup>189</sup> Prisoner of War Operations Division, Operations Branch, Classified Decimal File, box 1378, file 253.91 Fort Hunt, Transfer of German Prisoner of War.

<sup>190</sup> Fort Hunt, Memorandum for Colonel I. B. Summers., Subject: Request for Transfer of Prisoners of War, 16 December 1943; Fort Hunt, Memorandum for Colonel I. B. Summers, P. M. G. O. 1, 20 December 1943.

## CHAPTER 6

### A SAILOR'S DEATH IN THE DESERT

We are bound by our common belief in our people who will be victorious no matter what trials and tribulations are quartered to them by fate. We must be victorious because we are tough – in contrast to the Jews and others – and we know for what we fight. We all know here what attitude to take in our fidelity to Führer and people, and, not to be mentioned last, our duty and honor for the dead, who gave their lives for the Reich.

*Papago Park POW spokesman,  
Fregattenkapitän Jürgen Wattenburg, in a  
letter to his parents*<sup>191</sup>

Drechsler has been murdered; however, he has committed countless murders. My sister-in-law has been bombed out, my cousin, a woman, was killed during an air raid, and how many more women and children, even more so, how many brave U-boat soldiers were sent to their deaths by Drechsler. Should we Prisoners of War wait until the war is finished in order to avenge the traitors of Germany? I love by (*sic*) Fatherland and cannot wait that long because until the end of this war Drechsler could have killed my wife and children also. I have committed a murder; however, I don't consider myself a murderer but a conscientious German soldier.

*Written confession of Otto Stengel, June 2,  
1944*<sup>192</sup>

After a very brief stay at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, Werner Drechsler arrived at the prisoner of war camp at Papago Park, Arizona on the afternoon of March 12, 1944, and was assigned to Compound 4.<sup>193</sup> As Leonard Wood's POW population had been limited to prisoners from the German Army, and Fort Hunt's POW population had been drawn primarily from *Kriegsmarine* personnel, Drechsler's activities at Fort Hunt would

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<sup>191</sup> Prisoner of War Operations Division, Operations Branch, Subject Correspondence File, box 1403, file 704, General # 2, Jürgen Wattenburg, Crossville, Tennessee, U.S.A., to Dr. G. Wattenburg, Lübeck, Germany, 13 November 1943.

<sup>192</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, ISN 10G-1088-NA, Fritz Franke, ISN 10G-1083-NA, Guenther Kuelsen, ISN 10G-1073-NA, Heinrich Ludwig, ISN 7G-132-NA, Bernhard Reyak, ISN 10G-1069-NA, Otto Stengel, ISN 6-112-NA, Rolf Wizuy, ISN 10G-1072-NA, By General Court Martial, Appointed By The Commanding General, Ninth Services Command, Fort Douglas, Utah, Tried at Florence, Arizona, 15 August 1944. Written confession of Otto Stengel, 2 June 1944. Department of the Army, US Army Court of Criminal Appeals, Arlington, Virginia.

<sup>193</sup> Army Services Forces, Headquarters Ninth Service Command, Office of the Service Command Judge Advocate, Fort Douglas, Utah, Review of the Staff Judge Advocate on Record of Trial by General Court-Martial, 15 September 1944.

have likely remained unknown in Missouri and he would have had little to fear.

Papago Park was another story altogether. In late 1943 at the prodding of American naval officers, a decision had been made to intern the 6,286 *Kriegsmarine* personnel then in American custody in four camps: Blanding, Florida; McCain, Mississippi; Beale, California, and Papago Park, Arizona. Of these camps, Blanding had a compound for POWs believed to be anti-Nazi, but the majority of the men at the other camps were believed to be, at least nominally, pro-Nazi.<sup>194</sup>

To label any single German POW of World War II pro-Nazi simply because he remained loyal to his country, his superior officers and his comrades is a gross inaccuracy. In his groundbreaking work on the subject, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, Dr. Arnold Krammer wrote that:

Estimates of the number of Nazis in American prisoner of war camps, ... range from a ridiculously low 6 percent to an equally ridiculous 90 percent. Unfortunately, it was not until late in the war—in an effort to belatedly segregate the prisoners for the reeducation program to follow—that several serious studies were undertaken to plumb the exact depth of Nazism within the camps. These studies confirmed that approximately 40 percent of the prisoners could be considered pro-Nazi (between 8-10 percent were judged to be fanatic, and about 30 percent were deeply sympathetic). More importantly, these surveys indicated that confidence in Adolf Hitler was not synonymous with an attraction to National Socialism; nor blind obedience to military orders and tradition indicate a sympathy for Nazism. A prisoner who was anti-American was not necessarily pro-fascist; nor was a German nationalist necessarily an advocate of racial atrocities.<sup>195</sup>

One man at Papago Park who definitely fit into the category of pro-Nazi was the spokesman for the German POWs at Papago Park, *Fregattenkapitän* Jürgen Wattenburg. In his book on the Werner Drechsler case, *Martial Justice*, author Richard Whittingham wrote that “from the German point of view at least, everything and everyone in the camp”

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<sup>194</sup> Moore, 67-68.

<sup>195</sup> Krammer, 149.

was under Wattenburg's command, and he "ruled with an iron discipline and a philosophy that was deeply embedded in the tenets of Nazism."<sup>196</sup>

A letter written by Wattenburg to his parents on November 13, 1943, supports Whittingham's assessment. Along with his best wishes for the Christmas holidays Wattenburg wrote:

We are bound by our common belief in our people who will be victorious no matter what trials and tribulations are quartered to them by fate. We must be victorious because we are tough – in contrast to the Jews and others – and we know for what we fight. We all know here what attitude to take in our fidelity to Führer and people, and, not to be mentioned last, our duty and honor for the dead, who gave their lives for the Reich.<sup>197</sup>

Given Wattenburg's influence over the Germans held there, Papago Park was not a place where Werner Drechsler would have little to fear. In fact, there very well may have been no other location in the entire United States of America where he would have had more to fear than at Papago Park.

That this was true was fully demonstrated the very night of Drechsler's arrival, but his actions early in the evening of his arrival give little indication that he was aware of the danger he faced. It would appear that either he was truly unaware of the grave danger he was in, or the vanity and conceit cited by his American interrogators earlier so influenced the young *Mechanikerobergefreiter*, that he actually believed that he could somehow weather his perilous predicament unscathed.

Drechsler had arrived at the train station in Tempe, Arizona at a little after 1300 in the company of approximately 350 other German prisoners. The process of verifying

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<sup>196</sup> Whittingham, 49.

<sup>197</sup> Prisoner of War Operations Division, Operations Branch, Subject Correspondence File, box 1403, file 704, General # 2, Jürgen Wattenburg, Crossville, Tennessee, U.S.A., to Dr. G. Wattenburg, Lübeck, Germany, 13 November 1943.

identifications, exchanging custody, and loading the new arrivals for transportation for the short ten-mile drive to Papago Park had taken until 1500. Still limping slightly from the wound he had received when the *U-118* had gone down, Drechsler made the short trip to Papago Park in a U.S. Army ambulance driven by Sergeant Fred R. Bornstein. The young German spoke to the American sergeant in very good English, explaining that he had attended school in England. He was under the impression that once at the camp he was to be billeted directly to the camp's hospital. Bornstein, however, informed the young prisoner that his orders were to deliver him to Compound 4. The American told him that perhaps he could go to the hospital the next morning.<sup>198</sup>

Of the new arrivals, fifty-eight were assigned to Compound 4, and arrived there at between 1550 and 1600. These fifty-eight men were an addition to the compound's existing compliment of 700 men. Drechsler was assigned to Barracks T-843. Only the small compound which housed the camp's German officers was less isolated than Compound 4. It was totally enclosed by a chain-link fence topped with three rows of barbed wire. Once inside their compound, the new men were called into formation by an American sergeant who took roll and issued bunk assignments. He further informed them that their bedding would be issued from the supply room located next door to their barracks. Once inside his new home, Drechsler went to his bunk and unpacked his clothes, toiletries, pipe and tobacco.<sup>199</sup>

Shortly after the last assembly of the day at 1700 a soccer game began at the camp's recreation area. Drechsler wandered over to the field and joined the other

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<sup>198</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, etal, Testimony of Captain Leland Hebblewaithe, U.S. A; Ibid., Testimony of Sergeant Fred L. Bornstein, U.S.A.; Whittingham, 55-59.

<sup>199</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, etal, Testimony of Captain Leland Hebblewaithe, U.S. A.; Whittingham, 59-61.

spectators. It was here that he made his first contact with Otto Stengel of the *U-352*. According to Stengel, he (Stengel) had already heard scuttlebutt that among the new arrivals in Compound 4 was a traitor by the name of Drechsler, and he was curious to see this man for himself. As the soccer field was located in front of the new arrival's barracks he headed in that direction.

Among the spectators Stengel noticed an acquaintance named Bruno Faust talking to a man he didn't recognize. Faust called Stengel over and identified the new man as a native of Chemnitz by the name of Drechsler. Stengel told Drechsler that one of his crewmates, Heinz Richter, was also from Chemnitz. Drechsler claimed to know Richter and Stengel offered to point him out to him. Richter was close by among another knot of spectators and Stengel walked over to him, pointed back to Drechsler, and speaking out loud told Richter that an old friend of his from Chemnitz by the name of Drechsler had just arrived.

Another spectator, who Stengel claimed not to know, called out, "You have a fine buddy there – he is a traitor. He will not survive the next morning." Richter replied to Stengel that he did not wish to speak with Drechsler. Stengel stayed with the men around Richter for the remainder of the game before heading back to his barracks.<sup>200</sup>

At 1830 that evening Rolf Wizuy of the *U-615* returned to his barracks from work in the Officers' Mess. Comrades from the *U-615* were waiting with the news that Werner Drechsler was one of the new arrivals to Compound 4. Wizuy accompanied his friends to the soccer field. At the field Guenther Külsen told Wizuy that he had himself spoken to

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<sup>200</sup> Report of Investigation of Court-Martial charges, dated 29 June 1944, against the following prisoners of war: Helmut Fischer, ISN 10G-1088-NA, Fritz Franke, ISN 10G-1083-NA, Guenther Kuelsen, ISN 10G-1073-NA, Heinrich Ludwig, ISN 7G-132-NA, Bernhard Reyak, ISN 10G-1069-NA, Otto Stengel, ISN 6-112-NA, Rolf Wizuy, ISN 10G-1072-NA, Dibble General Hospital, Menlo Park, California, Oral statement of Otto Stengel, 3 July 1944.

Drechsler. Drechsler had asked Külsen for a list of deserters and also inquired as to whether or not the prisoners had a secret short wave radio with which to receive communications from Germany.

Wizuy did not see Drechsler at the soccer field, so he went to Drechsler's barracks to speak with him. Wizuy greeted Drechsler with, "Well Mister *Obermaat*, what are you doing here?" Drechsler had posed as *Obermaat* Limmer at Fort Hunt when he had shared a room with Wizuy. Faced now with his deception, Drechsler denied that he was an *Obermaat*, and said that he was only a *Mechanikerobergefreiter*. *Obermaat* was a junior non-commissioned officer rank while *Mechanikerobergefreiter* was a seaman rank.<sup>201</sup> Wizuy confronted him with the fact that the two men had shared a room at Fort Hunt and Drechsler denied ever having seen Wizuy before.

Wizuy, accompanied by Külsen, next went to the barracks where the non-commissioned officers of Drechsler's *U-118* were billeted. He explained to them the conversation he had just had with their former comrade, but these men only replied that they wanted nothing to do with him and kept their personal thoughts to themselves. Wizuy and Kuelsen then returned to their own barracks.

Once there, Wizuy was told that *Obersteuermann* Franz Hox, POW spokesman for Compound 4, wanted to see him in the orderly room. Külsen again accompanied him and once there he found himself in the company of about fifteen other men who had also had contact with Drechsler at Fort Hunt. Hox asked the men about their experiences with Drechsler at Hunt, and wanted their assurances that the new man was indeed the same man who had betrayed them while there. Among the men gathered for this conference

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<sup>201</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, etal, Written confession of Rolf Wizuy, 3 June 1944; Mallmann Showell, *Hitler's Navy*, 174.



was Heinz Ludwig of the *U-199*. It was proposed that *Fregattenkapitän* Wattenburg be informed, but this was dismissed because it was decided that Wattenburg could do nothing about the situation. To the best of Wizuy's later recollection, Hox told his men, "It's hard to advise. You have to know yourselves what you're doing." Hox did not order his men to kill Drechsler. The meeting broke up and the men walked out into the dusk.<sup>202</sup>

At about the same time that the meeting in the orderly room was breaking up Otto Stengel walked over to the barracks where the new arrivals were billeted to see if any of the new men were from his hometown. None of the men were, but he lingered to talk anyway. Soon Drechsler entered the barracks and the other men departed leaving Stengel alone with Drechsler. Before long the two men were engaged in a heated conversation about Germany's Nazi regime. Drechsler argued that the war was lost and that if Hitler and his Nazis had not come to power there would not have been any war. Stengel would later claim that in his two years as a POW this was the first time he had heard such talk from another German POW. Stengel claimed that he left the barracks after cautioning Drechsler to be careful about such talk.<sup>203</sup>

We must be careful in ascertaining the veracity of Stengel's statement cited above. Stengel had not had contact with Drechsler before the latter's arrival at Papago Park. He had indeed been a POW since May 1942, longer than any of the other men central to our story. He alone of the men from the *U-352* would participate in the killing of Drechsler later that night even though he barely knew the other men involved. He may have embellished his account of his contact with Drechsler in an effort to justify his participation to the men who judged his actions, and perhaps even to himself. His later

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<sup>202</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, etal, Written confession of Rolf Wizuy, 3 June 1944.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., Oral statement of Otto Stengel, 3 July 1944.

denouncement of Drechsler would be among the most vehement of the seven men. Yet, if any credence may be given to his statement that this was the first time he had heard such talk from a fellow POW it could provide us with some sense of the depth of loyalty toward the Nazi regime still felt by at least some of the *U-bootwaffe* men held in American POW camps in early 1944.

After leaving Hox in the orderly room, a group of men gathered outside the compound's canteen. In Wizuy's confession he stated that this group included Freidrich Murza, Siegfried Elser, Helmut Fischer, Fritz Franke, Guenther Külsen, Bernhard Reyak, and possibly Heinrich Ludwig. Some of the men suggested that Drechsler be given the "*Heilige Gheist*"<sup>204</sup> treatment. Others, and Wizuy places himself in this group, believed a beating was not sufficient in Drechsler's case. They recalled Drechsler's questions to Külsen about deserters and the short wave radio as evidence that even here at Papago Park Drechsler was still working for the Americans. They pointed out that if he were only beaten the Americans would merely move him to another compound where he would continue his treachery. They also feared he would identify his tormentors to the Americans for punishment.

Wizuy wrote that to the best of his recollection he told the men, "To hang him would be best." He added:

Boat comrades Helmut Fischer, Fritz Franke, Günther Külsen and Bernhard Reyak knew that I had been together with Drechsler at the interrogation center. We five comrades carried on a particularly close friendship. And that's how it happened that my comrades, due to their loyalty to me, went so far as to help with the hanging of Drechsler. I never put an order or request before them. Due to my association, without saying one word, my comrades stayed by my side.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Heilige Gheist, or Holy Ghost, dated back to the Prussian military. This was a type of peer discipline practiced within the enlisted, and in some instances non-commissioned officer ranks, whereby a sheet or blanket was thrown over the victim's head as he was delivered a severe beating by his comrades.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., Written confession of Rolf Wizuy, 3 June 1944.

And so it was decided. The men returned to their barracks and waited for nightfall. The conference in Hox's orderly room would have to serve as Drechsler's only court-martial in determining his guilt or innocence, and the meeting outside the canteen had determined his sentence. This proposed exercise in summary justice must have been too much for Freidrich Murza and Siegfried Elser because their names are absent from this point forward in all of the statements and confessions given by the seven men who completed the deed.

After darkness had fallen, and the lights in the different buildings within the compound had gone out for the night, the five comrades from the *U-352* and Heinz Ludwig of the *U-199* gathered between Drechsler's barracks and the compound's shower building. Reyak and Ludwig entered the shower building where they readied the rope and a bench for Drechsler's execution; and then all six entered Drechsler's darkened barracks.<sup>206</sup>

Drechsler was asleep, but awakened quickly when the men grabbed him to pull him from his cot. A struggle ensued as Drechsler fought to break free and screamed for the men to listen to him, that he would explain everything tomorrow. Eventually they managed to carry him out of the barracks and began to beat him. Drechsler's screams had awakened most of the compound and men poured from their barracks to see what was happening. Fearful of discovery, the six men released their bloodied victim and he ran back inside his barracks.<sup>207</sup>

The six men huddled in the darkness to wait for the excitement to die down and to determine a new course of action. According to Wizuy, he (Wizuy) now believed that the

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., Written confession of Bernhard Reyak, 8 June 1944.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., Written confession of Günther Külsen, 8 June 1944.

beating and terror already administered was sufficient. But, again according to Wizuy, this was when Otto Stengel joined the group. It would certainly appear that Stengel simply could not stay away from Drechsler, and Wizuy wrote of Stengel that, “He seemed to have a great hatred of Drechsler.”<sup>208</sup>

Reinforced by Stengel, the group reentered the barracks to find Drechsler sitting on his bed. This time Drechsler admitted his treachery but still cried for his tormenters to give him until the morning to explain. This time the men had brought a rope to secure around their victim’s neck in order to keep him silent as they carried him to his place of execution. Drechsler fought fiercely for his life, but was eventually overpowered. The seven men ran from the barracks to the shower room where the hangman’s noose and makeshift scaffold were already in place. Two men climbed up on the bench to place the noose around Drechsler’s neck while others lifted his body. The noose secured, the bench was pushed away and the deed was done. We might presume that Drechsler struggled and kicked as he suffocated, but none of the seven killers spoke or wrote of this later. All seven only stated simply that the men dispersed and returned to their own barracks.<sup>209</sup>

Why could Otto Stengel not stay away? Of the seven men involved, he would have seemed to be the one with the least to gain and the most to lose from the action taken that night. He had never seen Werner Drechsler before that day. He was not a crewmate of any of the other six men involved; and he was the only one of the seven men who had a wife and children back home in Germany. We can only glimpse his motives from the final words of his confession:

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., Written confession of Rolf Wizuy, 3 June 1944.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., Written confession of Otto Stengel, 2 June 1944.

Drechsler has been murdered; however, he has committed countless murders. My sister-in-law has been bombed out, my cousin, a woman, was killed during an air raid, and how many more women and children, even more so, how many brave U-boat soldiers were sent to their deaths by Drechsler. Should we Prisoners of War wait until the war is finished in order to avenge the traitors of Germany? I love by (*sic*) Fatherland and cannot wait that long because until the end of this war Drechsler could have killed my wife and children also. I have committed a murder; however, I don't consider myself a murderer but a conscientious German soldier.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 7

### QUESTIONS TO REMAIN UNANSWERED

These men consider themselves soldiers. They do not appear in uniform. They are Prisoners of War. They were bitter, just as our soldiers would be bitter. They had seen ships sunk. They did their duty as they saw it. They executed this traitor, a man who might have further obtained information and divulged matters of military importance to the enemy.

*Major William H. Taylor, U.S.A. closing argument for the Defense*<sup>211</sup>

I say this, that when a German soldier or sailor is brought into this country as a Prisoner of War, he is subject to all the laws of the United States of America. One of the laws is this – you can not commit a murder. You can not take a person out and hang him. You can not beat him unmercifully and then take him over to the wash room, carried partly by the hair of his head, and hang him.

*Major Francis P. Walsh, U.S.A., rebuttal argument for the Prosecution*<sup>212</sup>

The POW camp at Papago Park came to life with whistles blaring reveille at 0530 on Monday morning, March 13, 1944. The German prisoners of Compound 4 lined up in formation, and then dispersed to the mess hall for breakfast. No one went to the compound's shower room. These men knew what was waiting there to be found by their American hosts.

An American guard discovered Drechsler's body at 0630. The camp's provost marshall, Captain Cecil Parshall, was immediately summoned and he rushed to the scene accompanied by a small entourage of officers and men from his office. Present in this group were Captain Leland Hebblewaithe, who had taken custody of the new arrivals in Tempe the day before, and Sergeant Fred Bornstein, the ambulance driver who had

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<sup>211</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, et al, Major William H. Taylor, closing argument for the Defense, 16 August 1944.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., Major Francis P. Walsh, rebuttal argument for the Prosecution, 16 August 1944.

delivered Drechsler to Compound 4.<sup>213</sup>

Captain Hebblewaithe took photographs of Drechsler's body, then went directly to Drechsler's barracks and took additional photographs of the dead prisoner's bunk and a pool of blood on the floor in front of the bunk. Then aided by Sgt. Bornstein cut the rope and lowered the body to the floor. He then took fingerprints from the dead man's right thumb, index and middle fingers.<sup>214</sup>

Bornstein placed the body on a litter, took photographs, loaded the body in an ambulance and drove the corpse to Mortensen and Kingsley Mortuary in Phoenix.<sup>215</sup> At Phoenix:

An autopsy and examination of the body disclosed that the deceased had received a severe beating. His nose had been fractured. There were multiple bruises over his entire body, particularly the scrotum and the lower portions of the legs. There were three definite skin burns about the neck. The tongue was swollen five times normal size. Dirt was rubbed into the bruises on the hands. All of these injuries were ante mortem. There was marked congestion of blood in blood vessels of the brain and in the veins and sinuses establishing that death was the result of strangulation. The neck was not broken. Identification of deceased was established by fingerprints, pictures, and by a former wound on the knee.<sup>216</sup>

Captain Parshall launched an investigation into the matter, but the American personnel at Papago Park were trained as guards, not as investigators. The POW population was totally uncooperative and Parshall's investigation never gained traction.<sup>217</sup>

It was not that Parshall did not try. Numerous complaints were filed by prisoners

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<sup>213</sup> Whittingham, 102; Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, et al, Testimony of Captain Leland Hebblewaithe, U.S. A.; Testimony of Sergeant Fred L. Bornstein, U.S. A.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., Testimony of Captain Leland Hebblewaithe, U.S. A.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., Testimony of Sergeant Fred L. Bornstein, U.S. A.

<sup>216</sup> Review of Staff Judge Advocate on record of Trial by General Court-Martial, 15 September 1944.

<sup>217</sup> Whittingham, 103-106.

as to the methods he and his men employed. *Bootsman* Werner Reinl complained that on Wednesday, March 15, he was brought in for interrogation and that during questioning he was shown a rope with a knot already tied and told to make a similar knot. Once he had done so he was told that it was the same knot as used on Drechsler, and since he knew how to tie it, he was the murderer. He was then left in a small room alone for a short time, and then two American officers entered the room and told him that two other POWs had identified him as the murderer. They then put a rope around his neck and told him he would hang on Friday. He was placed in solitary confinement. Finally at 1550 on Friday, March 17 four American officers came to his cell and released him back to the general prison population with a curt apology for his ordeal.<sup>218</sup>

The complaint of *Mechanikerobergefreiter* Paul Reum revealed that the Americans did not object to injecting a small degree of humor, although the Germans were probably unaware of it, into their interrogation methods. In addition to being threatened with hanging himself, Reum was confronted by a man he did not recognize who identified himself as Oskar Meyer. In Reum's presence, Meyer identified Reum as one of the men who had committed the crime.<sup>219</sup>

Frustrated with the lack of progress in Parshall's investigation, a special board of investigators was appointed in late March by the headquarters of the Ninth Services Command. Lieutenant Colonel Gerald L. Church, chief of intelligence for the command's Security Intelligence Division was placed in command of the board. Church added Major Francis P. Walsh, Major Herman J. Zabel, and Sergeants Carl F. Blank and Michael

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<sup>218</sup> Entry 459A, Special Projects Division, Administrative Branch Decimal file, 1943-1946, box 1619 (File: Papago Park – General Conditions), complaint of Bootsman's mate Werner Reinl, ISN SG-57 NA, 23 March 1944. Records of the Office of the Provost Marshall General, Records of the Prisoner of War Division, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., Complaint of machinist corporal Paul Reum, 23 March 1944.



Donohue to his team and together they flew to Phoenix to meet with Parshall and his men.

After receiving a briefing of Parshall's investigation the team flew to Washington to try to get information on Drechsler's activities at Fort Hunt. According to Whittingham, the board learned little. "Unfortunately for the investigators, information was not forthcoming from the army, ostensibly because documented information of that sort did not exist—at least it was not in the hands of the army. Navy Intelligence was the least cooperative, saying, in effect, that they had no intention of helping the army." Whittingham wrote that the Navy was "very unhappy" with the fact that the Army had sent Drechsler to Papago Park. He further stated that "in fact, naval officers told the investigators that the army by its actions had sent Drechsler to his death."

The investigators returned to Arizona with a new plan. Leonard Keeler, a lie detector expert from Chicago, was to join them there. Any POW who it was believed could have even remote knowledge in the case would be interrogated using a lie detector and any who failed would be questioned even more intensely.<sup>220</sup>

Slowly, but surely, the interrogators, aided by Keeler's lie detector, began to narrow the focus of their investigation. By the end of April the board had identified a group of twenty-two men who they believed had substantial knowledge in the matter. Among these twenty were; Stengel, Ludwig, Fischer, Franke, Reyak, Külsen, Wizuy, Murza, Elser, and Drechsler's acquaintance from Chemnitz, Gerhard (Heinz) Richter.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Whittingham, 106-107.

<sup>221</sup> Whittingham, 113, 115. Entry 459A, Special Projects Division, Administrative Branch Decimal file, 1943-1946, box 1619 (File: Papago Park – General Conditions), List of POW mustered out of the naval POW camp at Papago Park in connection with the affair Drechsler (22 names). Stengel identified Richter as Heinz Richter. Whittingham gives the name of Gerhard Richter and the list cited above also identifies this man as Richter, Gerhard, 6-113 NA. There is no doubt that it is the same man.

These men were removed from the general population at Papago Park and placed for a brief time in the camp's stockade. Eventually it was decided to transport these men to a secret camp outside Stockton, California. This camp was being used primarily to interrogate Japanese prisoners of war and Japanese-Americans suspected of aiding the Japanese.

The interrogators at the secret camp were highly trained and highly successful. Prisoners at the camp were placed in cells equipped with listening devices and the prisoners' conversations were picked up by monitors manned twenty-four hours a day. Prisoners were taken from their cells at any hour of the day and night for both "formal" and "informal" interrogations.

Captain Oscar Schmidt was the chief interrogator for the "informal" interrogations. Schmidt's techniques varied; sometimes his inquiries were made within the camp's walls, at other times he took the prisoner for a drive; some interrogations lasted only a few minutes, sometimes they lasted all day or night. Whittingham related that, "The exact methods employed in the interrogations were classified information; all that is really known about them is that they were carefully planned and designed for maximum effect."<sup>222</sup> Much about Schmidt and his methods remain a mystery, even; as we will learn, his true identity.

The bizarre existence at the camp began to break the Papago Park prisoners down. The interrupted sleep patterns, persistent questioning, fear and mental strain led to lapses in judgment and resolve. Richter had been one of the most uncooperative of all and was known to be an ardent Nazi, but towards the end of May he let slip that Stengel had told him that he was afraid that the Americans would find his fingerprints at the scene of the

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<sup>222</sup> Whittingham, 113-114.

incident. The Americans now felt sure they had identified one of Drechsler's killers.<sup>223</sup>

Then, on the evening of June 1, Friedreich Murza was called before the board. He had been under interrogation by Captain Schmidt for almost twenty-four hours before being called to face Colonel Church and his board. Sleep-deprived and fearful, Murza blundered through a confused recitation of the events the night of Drechsler's death. Three and a half hours later, when Murza had finished with his version of those events, much still remained to be sorted out, but Church was now sure that Stengel, Rolf Wizuy, and Helmut Fischer had participated in Drechsler's murder.<sup>224</sup>

Otto Stengel was also enduring a thorough interrogation that day and night of June 1. But, unlike Murza, the interrogation Stengel was undergoing was of the "informal" manner. Exhausted by his ordeal, the nature of which will be related later, Stengel surrendered to his fear and fatigue and requested to see the board.<sup>225</sup>

It was now early in the morning of June 2, 1944. It took about fifteen minutes for Colonel Church and his board, minus Major Walsh who was at Florence, Arizona, prosecuting an Italian POW for arson, to be brought in to meet with Stengel. Stengel told the board members that he had participated in the beating and hanging of Drechsler. He identified Rolf Wizuy as a co-conspirator, but claimed that while others were involved, Wizuy was the only other man he knew by name. It was now around 0430, but not wishing to lose the initiative, Church ordered that Stengel be given a pen and paper and placed in an isolated cell to write a full confession.<sup>226</sup>

The first of the seven dominoes had fallen and within a few days the remaining

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 115-117.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 119-128.

<sup>225</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, etal, Testimony of Otto Stengel.

<sup>226</sup> Whittingham, 128-129.

six capitulated also. Rolf Wizuy and Heinrich Ludwig penned their confessions on June 3. It was Wizuy who supplied the board with the names of Ludwig, Fischer, Franke, Külsen, and Reyak. Helmut Fischer, Fritz Franke, Günther Külsen, and Bernhard Reyak wrote theirs on June 8.<sup>227</sup> The Ninth Services Command's Staff Judge Advocate's review of the ensuing court-martial of the seven men described the procedure followed by the board in receiving the written confessions:

During the early part of June, 1944, each of the accused appeared before the board and stated that he desired to make a statement. They appeared separately but the same procedure was followed in the case of each one. Colonel Church, President of the Board, testified as to the accused Stengel: "the first time he was called before the board he was told that he was being called as a witness before the board, Article of War 24 was read to him in English and translated into German by the interpreter. He was questioned to determine if he understood the meaning of the 24<sup>th</sup> Article of War and after the board satisfied itself that he did understand the meaning of 24<sup>th</sup> Article of War by his answers, he was sworn and testified before the board." After the first time "he was advised that he was being recalled as a witness and reminded of his rights under Article of War 24 and reminded that he was still under oath." On the last occasion where he testified before the board, he was told that he would be furnished pen, ink and paper and that the board desired that he go to room and write out all of the facts and circumstances including names, dates, times, and places concerning the murder of Prisoner of War Drechsler, that he should date the first page, number the pages consecutively and append his signature at the end of the statement. All of the accused were advised to substantially to the same effect.<sup>228</sup>

Article of War 24 states:

Compulsory Self-Incrimination Prohibited. – No witness before a military court, commission, court of inquiry, or board, or before any officer conducting an investigation, or before an officer, military or civil, designated to take a deposition to be read in evidence before a military court, commission, court of inquiry, or board, or before any officer conducting an investigation, shall be compelled to incriminate himself or to answer any question not material to the

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<sup>227</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, etal, Written confession of Rolf Wizuy, 3 June 1944, Written confession of Heinrich Ludwig, 3 June 1944, Written confession of Helmut Fischer, 8 June 1944, Written confession of Fritz Franke, 8 June 1944, Written confession of Günther Külsen, 8 June 1944, Written confession of Bernhard Reyak, 8 June 1944.

<sup>228</sup> Review of Staff Judge Advocate on Record of Trial by General Court-Martial, 15 September 1944.

issue when such answer might tend to degrade him.<sup>229</sup>

On June 20 the investigative board adjourned and the transcribed records of its investigation, along with a concise summary of its discoveries and the board's recommendations, were forwarded to the headquarters of the Ninth Services Command at Fort Douglas, Utah, for review before being sent on to the War Department in Washington. Along with recommending that the above-named seven be prosecuted for the premeditated murder of Drechsler, the board recommended that Friedrich Murza and Siefried Elser be charged as accessories before the fact. The charges against Murza and Elser were later dropped and these two men resumed their ordinary prisoner of war status. Charges were preferred against the seven men on June 29, 1944.<sup>230</sup>

The written confessions did not mark the end of the interrogations. The seven accused were moved from Stockton to four different locations in California. Otto Stengel was transferred to Dibble General Hospital in Menlo Park immediately after his confession, where he underwent an appendectomy. Rolf Wizuy was sent to Hammond General Hospital in Modesto. Heinrich Ludwig went to DeWitt General Hospital in Auburn, and Franke, Külsen, Fischer, and Reyak were confined separately at a rehabilitation center in Turlock.

Further interviews were conducted with each of the accused at these locations by Lieutenant Harry A. Baldwin, a Judge Advocate General officer from Fort Douglas.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and the Sick of Armies in the Field (Red Cross Convention), Prisoners of War, Convention Between the United States of America and Other Powers, signed at Geneva, July 27, 1929..

<sup>230</sup> Whittingham, 135, 153: Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, et al, Thomas J. White, Colonel, J.A. G. D., Ninth Services Command Judge Advocate, A Chronology of the Case of: German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, ISN, Fritz Franke, ISN 10G-1083-NA, Guenther Kuelsen, ISN 10G-1073-NA, Heinrich Ludwig, ISN 7G-132-NA, Bernhard Reyak, ISN 10G-1069-NA, Otto Stengel, ISN 6-112-NA, Rolf Wizuy, ISN 10G-1072-NA.

<sup>231</sup> Whittingham, 137-138.

Now formally charged with murder and having lost their status as witnesses, the seven men were now entitled to the protection of the 70<sup>th</sup> Article of War. Baldwin began each of his interrogations with a recitation of the protections afforded the accused and the charges he faced. The following excerpt from the transcript of the beginning of Baldwin's interview of Helmut Fischer will suffice as an example of each such interview:

Prisoner of War Helmut Fischer – I am the investigating Officer investigating the hanging of Prisoner of War Werner Drechsler, which occurred on or about 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> March 1944 in Compound 4, Papago Park, Phoenix, Arizona. Under Article of War 70, and as a German Prisoner of War, you are entitled to the protection of the Articles of War, a thorough and impartial investigation must be made before trial. I am not the prosecutor, nor do I represent the prosecution. I am not your counsel. I am here merely to inquire into the truth of the charges, and to recommend what disposition should be made in the interest of justice and discipline. I am not here for the purpose of securing any military information.

Prisoner of War Helmut Fischer, I will now read to you the Specification charging you and several other prisoners of war with murder, violation of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Article of War:

Charge: Violation of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Article of War.

Specification: In that Prisoner of War Helmut Fischer, Prisoner of War Fritz Franke, Prisoner of War Guenther Kuelsen, Prisoner of War Heinrich Ludwig, Prisoner of War Bernhard Reyak, Prisoner of War Otto Stengel, and Prisoner of War Rolf Wizuy, all of Prisoner of War Processing Station, Angel Island, California, acting jointly and in pursuance of a common intent, did, at prisoner of War Camp Papago Park, Phoenix Arizona, on or about March 12, 1944, with malice aforethought, willfully, deliberately, feloniously, unlawfully, and with premeditation, kill one Prisoner of War Werner Drechsler, a human being, by strangulation.

The name of the accuser is 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Clifford J. Phillips, JAGD. The witnesses against you are as follows – (List of witnesses accused read by the Investigating Officer from the charge sheet).

I will read you at this time Article of War 70: (paragraph therefrom)

AW70 – Charges: Action Upon. -- \* \* \* \* \* No charge will be referred to a General Court Martial for trial until after a thorough and impartial investigation thereof shall have been made. This investigation will include inquiries as to the truth of the matter set forth in said charges, form of charges, and what disposition of the case shall be made in the interest of justice and discipline. At such investigation full opportunity shall be given to the accused to cross-examine

witnesses against him if they are available and to present anything he may desire in his own behalf, either in defense or mitigation, and the investigating officer shall examine available witnesses requested by the accused. If the charges are forwarded after such investigation, they shall be accompanied by a statement of the substance of the testimony taken on both sides.

“Prisoner of War Helmut Fischer, do you understand what I have just read you?”

Once the prisoner had satisfied Baldwin that he understood his rights under Article 70 and the charges against him, he was again reminded of his rights under Article 24. It was only then that the actual interrogation began. Perhaps the most interesting statement made by Fischer at this interview is the following: “Two or three days after the hanging it was said among German prisoners of war, that American authorities also have to take a part of the blame, because they had knowledge that Drechsler was a traitor and sent him to our camp in spite of the fact.”<sup>232</sup> Baldwin completed his interviews on July 5. For all intents and purposes the investigation was over. The charges were referred for trial on July, 11. Special Orders No. 168, issued on that date, appointed a general court-martial board and set the trial date of August 15, 1944, and set the POW camp at Florence, Arizona as the location.<sup>233</sup>

The Swiss Legation in Washington, as representatives of a neutral country, served as the “protecting power” for the rights of German prisoners being held by the Americans. The Swiss were further responsible for relaying complaints about the POWs’ treatment to the German government. As camp spokesman for the German POWs at Papapago Park *Fregattenkapitän* Wattenburg had been kept apprised of the investigation into Drechsler’s killing, and he had not been idle. His office had filed a complaint with

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<sup>232</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, etal ,Oral statement of Helmut Fischer, 5 July 1944.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., Thomas J. White, Colonel, J.A. G. D., Ninth Services Command Judge Advocate; Whittingham, 153.

the Swiss about prisoners being hooked up to some electrical device, and the Americans were compelled to explain that the device was Keeler's lie detector.<sup>234</sup>

Even before the seven responsible men were identified and formally accused, Wattenburg's office wrote the Swiss requesting that "Director of Supreme Court Dr. Hans –Georg von Wick at present Lieutenant P. o. W. (*sic*) at Crossville/Tenn.," be appointed counsel for the defense of any of his men brought before a court-martial. The Swiss forwarded the German request to the State Department on July 11.<sup>235</sup>

By late July the Germans had yet to receive any reply to their request and they wrote to the Swiss again asking that they inform the "proper American Authorities" that the request was being made under "the 62<sup>nd</sup> Article, paragraph 1, of the Geneva Convention." No response was made by the Army's Prisoner of War Division until July 27, and when it was finally made, stated simply that "this request is not favorably considered by this office."<sup>236</sup>

Article 62, Paragraph 1, states:

The prisoner of war shall be entitled to assistance by a qualified counsel of his choice, and, if necessary, to have recourse to the service of a competent interpreter. He shall be advised of his right by the detaining Power, in due time before the trial.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> David Fiedler, *The Enemy Among Us: POWs in Missouri During World War II* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2003), 31; Entry 459A, Special Projects Division, Administrative Branch Decimal file, 1943-1946, box 1619 (File: Papago Park – General Conditions), George Barber, Lt. Col. CMP, Commanding, Ltr. PW Camp, Papago Park, (Karl-Heinz Jaeger; Stabobersteurmänn (CPO), (German Compound #4) Subj: Forwarding of Attached Statements, May 11, 1944.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, Paul Keller, Fregattenkapitän, Prisoner of War Camp Papago Park, to Legation of Switzerland, Department of German Interests, Washington, D.C., 17 June 1944; Ibid., Memorandum, Legation of Switzerland, Department of German Interests, July 11, 1944.

<sup>236</sup> Entry 459A, Special Projects Division, Administrative Branch Decimal file, 1943-1946, box 1619 (File: Papago Park – General Conditions), Paul Keller, Fregattenkapitän, POW Camp Papago Park, to The Swiss Legation D G J, Washington, D.C., 24 July 1944; Ibid., Francis N. Howard, Colonel, C.M.P., Director Prisoner of War Division, Washington, D. C., to Special War Problems Division, Washington, D. C., 15 August 1944.

<sup>237</sup> Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and the Sick of Armies in the Field (Red Cross Convention), Prisoners of War, Convention Between the United States of America and Other Powers, signed at Geneva, July 27, 1929.



Although notified as to the date and location of the trial, the Swiss, entitled as the protecting power to do so, notified the Americans that they would not be sending a representative to attend the proceedings.<sup>238</sup>

The court martial opened on the morning of August 15, 1944. Thirteen U.S. Army officers were appointed to serve on the court-martial board, with Colonel Cassius Poust serving as president. The prosecution team consisted of Major Walsh, of the investigating board, as trial judge advocate and Captain Robert O. Hillis as assistant. The defense counsel was Major William H. Taylor and he was assisted by Major Harold A. Furst. Captain Oscar S. Schmidt was sworn in as the official court interpreter. This was the very same Captain Schmidt who had conducted the “informal” interrogations at Stockton.<sup>239</sup> Most assuredly, Schmidt’s presence in the courtroom could not have inspired any sense of reassurance to the seven accused men.

It is not necessary to recite each step of the trial as it took place, as it was conducted in the proscribed fashion. After the preliminaries were concluded Captain Parshall testified as to the discovery of Drechsler’s body. The next man called to testify was Captain Hebblethwaite. Major Walsh questioned Hebblethwaite as to his actions on the morning Drechsler’s body was discovered. It was during the Captain’s cross examination that the first surprise of the trial was revealed.

“Q. Had you ever seen Drechsler at another camp?

A. I had never seen Drechsler before, sir.

Q. Do you know whether or not he had ever aided the United States in giving information?

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<sup>238</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, et al, A. M. Tollefson, Colonel, C.M. P., Assistant Director, Prisoner of War Division, Washington, D. C. to Headquarters Army Services Forces, Office of the Provost Marshall General, Washington, D. C.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., Proceedings of a General Court Martial; Whittingham, 155.

A. I heard that later, sir.

Q. What did you hear?

A. I heard that he aided in getting information for the authorities.

Q. Were you present at any time at an interrogation camp in Washington?

A. Yes, I was, sir.

Q. At that time did you question any of the accused here before this court?

A. Not to my knowledge.

Q. Did you know the deceased, Prisoner of War Drechsler, at the time?

A. No.

Q. Did you make a remark to another Officer at the time you heard of the hanging of Prisoner of War Werner Drechsler, that he had done the American Government a lot of good?

PROSECUTION: Objection on the ground that it is incompetent, irrelevant and immaterial.

PRESIDENT: Was that after the deceased had been hung?

DEFENSE: Immediately after the hanging.

PRESIDENT: In what way would his conversation after the commission of the crime be competent?

DEFENSE: It might have some bearing on the status of Drechsler as a traitor.

PRESIDENT: Objection sustained.”<sup>240</sup>

It is quite clear from his testimony that Captain Hebblethwaite, while he may not have known Drechsler personally, knew who and what he was at the time of his arrival at Papago Park, if not before.

The next man to testify was Sergeant Bornstien. For the prosecution he testified about bringing Drechsler to Papago Park in the ambulance, and to helping cut Drechsler’s body down after the hanging. Bornstien’s cross examination also held a surprise.

“Q. Did the man you identified as Drechsler and whom you met at the train have a

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<sup>240</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, et al, Transcript.

beard or mustache when you met him?

A. No, sir.

Q. Did he look any different when he had the beard and the mustache?

A. Just the facial features are the same, sir.

Q. Had you ever seen his face between the lips and the tip of his chin?

A. The beard covered that part of his face.”

Taylor did not pursue in this line of questioning. His following questions concerned the rope with which Drechsler was hung. Our first question is obvious. Bornstien helped cut down Drechsler’s body less than twenty-four hours after he had arrived at Tempe. If he did not have a beard when he arrived at Tempe, when did Bornstein see him with a beard? From Bornstien’s answer it can be deduced that he had seen Drechsler before the day the German sailor arrived in Arizona. Our second question is why Taylor did not ask the sergeant when and where he had previously seen Werner Drechsler.

As the trial continued, Colonel Church testified as to how the accused were always properly informed of their rights before being questioned by the investigating board. He also testified that between 150 and 200 persons, not all of whom were POWs were interviewed by the board. At one point during his cross examination, Taylor asked Church if any of the accused were ever interrogated by “any other officer or person outside of your own board.” The prosecution’s objection to this line of questioning was sustained.

Eventually Taylor zeroed in on the written confession of Otto Stengel, given on June 2, 1944. Church told of how Stengel had notified a guard to ask that the board be convened so that he could offer his confession. Taylor then tried to establish what had occurred to prompt Stengel to confess at that specific time.

“Q. To your knowledge, had accused Prisoner of War Stengel been questioned prior to the time he made the statement that he wished to confess?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. To your knowledge, had coercion or violence ever been used?

A. Not within my presence.

Q. Do you have any information as to the use of coercion outside of your presence?

A. I have some information.”

Q. Would you tell the court at this time what that information is?

A. He had been interrogated at considerable length by other persons than the board.

Q. Was the interrogation done by proper authority or not?”

After a series of objections by the prosecution Poust allowed this line of questioning to continue.

“Q. Do you know what individual did the interrogating you have spoken of?”

Again the prosecution objected, and again Poust allowed the line of questioning to continue.

“A. I can not answer of my own knowledge.

Q. Do you know of the methods used in the interrogation you have referred to?

A. I can not answer of my own knowledge. But there is something that occurred to me now. May I tell it now?”

Church then told of the lie detector examinations conducted by Keeler “during the latter part of April and the first part of May, 1944.” How these examinations, held in early May, at the latest, could possibly have led Stengel to confess in the middle of the night in the first part of June was not explained by Church, but Taylor did not pursue the issue any further.

Church then testified that the fact that confessions had already been obtained from one or more of the accused was not used to acquire confession from the other defendants.

“Q. No use was made of the fact that you already did hold the written statement or

confession which you held in your possession?

A. I don't recall a single statement that was used in that way. To the best of my recollection one of the accused stated that he would advise the others that he had already confessed but the board declined his offer."

After Church's testimony concluded, Major Herman Zabel, who served on the investigating board, and Sergeant Carl F. Blank, who served as interpreter for the board, testified again that the accused were always advised of their rights before being interviewed by the board. The first day of the court-martial ended at 9 p.m. after the defendants' written statements were introduced in evidence.

The second day of the trial began with Lieutenant Harry Baldwin on the stand. Baldwin too, stated that the accused were always advised of their rights before he attained their oral statements. The prosecution rested its case after Baldwin's report and the transcripts of his interviews were introduced in evidence. Court was recessed until 1:30 that afternoon.

When court resumed, Major Taylor did not offer an opening statement for the defense but called Sergeant Held back to the stand. Taylor questioned Held as to whether he was present when Otto Stengel was interrogated by Captain Schmidt in early June.

"Q. Aside from interrogations, what other means were used in questioning Prisoner of War Stengel?

A. Nothing as far as I can remember, sir. I was only there for a very short time.

Q. Did you leave the interrogation before Prisoner of War Stengel and Captain Schmidt left?

A. No, sir. I came in at the end. Very late in the evening.

Q. What time did you arrive?

A. Around 9:30 or 2130.

Q. Do you know how long Captain Schmidt had been with Prisoner of War Stengel?

A. I could not say.

Q. Did you notice anything about Prisoner of War Stengel's being dressed?

A. I remember, sir, that he had an overcoat, sir.

Q. An overcoat. What was the temperature of the weather at that time?

A. Very cool, sir

Q. Was the heat on in the room?

A. No, sir.

Q. Did you notice whether or not Prisoner of War Stengel was sweating?

A. I do not remember, sir.

Q. Did you see any third degree methods used being used?

A. No, sir.”

Eventually Taylor moved on to an interrogation of Helmut Fischer conducted by Captain Schmidt, at which Held was also present.

“Q. How was Prisoner of War Fischer dressed at the time of this interrogation you were present at?

A. In his undershirt and shorts, sir.”

The next men called to the stand as a witness for the defense was Captain Schmidt. Over the prosecution’s objections, Taylor asked Schmidt about his June interrogation of Otto Stengel.

“Q. Did you see him, during an interrogation by yourself, dressed in an Army overcoat?

A. I can not answer that question, sir.

PRESIDENT: You will answer the question.

A. I am not allowed to divulge interrogation methods.

PRESIDENT: You will answer the question as to whether you saw him or not.

A. I don’t remember seeing him with an overcoat on.

Q. Did you use any forceful means or third degree methods in any way or in any form?

A. What constitutes third degree methods?

PRESIDENT: Answer yes or no.

A. I used ordinary interrogation methods.

Q. What are the ordinary interrogation methods that you refer to?

A. I am not allowed to divulge those methods.

PRESIDENT: Ask him leading questions about what he did in this case.

Q. Is it not a fact that you did use a method upon Prisoner of War Otto Stengel which involved the use of a gas mask upon Prisoner of War Otto Stengel?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you use a method which involved the use of an overcoat?

A. I think I did see an overcoat.

Q. In what manner was the gas mask used on Prisoner of War Otto Stengel?

A. I do not quite understand, sir.

Q. How was the use made of the gas mask?

A. It was put on his face and used in the ordinary manner.

Q. Was an onion used in the gas mask?

A. There was.”

After this last answer, Schmidt was excused from the stand. Taylor then moved that Stengel’s statement be stricken from the record. Poust denied the motion. The next witness called by Taylor was Otto Stengel.

Poust explained, through the interpreter, that the accused had three options in relation to offering testimony. They could:

- “1. Remain silent.
2. Make an unsworn statement
3. Testify as a witness.”

He further explained that the court could not “indulge in any speculation whatsoever from your failure to take the stand in your own defense and no presumption of your guilt or innocence arises from your failure to testify.” If the accused chose to make an unsworn statement the prosecution would not be allowed cross examination, but could offer a rebuttal. If they chose to take the stand under oath the prosecution then had the right of cross examination. Stengel chose to offer an unsworn statement.

In his statement Stengel related that Schmidt, Held, an unidentified American lieutenant, and two guards took him for a four hour drive at excessive speed. The car was equipped with a steel bar that moved back and forth. “After the car was stopped on the field, it was called to me in the car, “Do you want to confess now?” Then they returned to the camp. After again declining to confess, he was taken back to the car and “a much

worse trip started.” After another three hour drive, he was again returned to the camp where he collapsed on the stairs suffering from hunger and appendicitis pains.<sup>241</sup> Again he declined to confess and was taken for another drive. The car stopped at a restaurant and he was left in the car as the Americans took two hours to eat. He complained of being bitten repeatedly by mosquitoes as he waited in the car for the Americans to return.

From the restaurant he was once again returned to the camp. Again he refused to confess and at this point “three heavy coats were put on my shoulders and one opened the steam heat. My shirt and underwear were torn and my sex organs were hanging out, at which time I was pushed toward the steam heat and burned myself.” Next, the lieutenant placed a gas mask over his head and Schmidt yelled at him, “Will you confess now or will we give you give you some more of Dachau Treatment?”<sup>242</sup> Still he refused, and now an onion and garlic were crushed and put into the gas mask. “The Lieutenant stood next to me and pushed and stubbed me every time I closed my eyes.”

Held ordered Stengel, “Stand straight. Behind you stands a German Feldwebel.” Stengel stated that by now he was too weak to stand. The lieutenant closed the inlet holes on the gas mask and checked his watch to see how long the prisoner could go without air. The captain yelled at him, “Now you see how it is if slowly the air gets out. That is the way you have done it with Drechsler.” Stengel stated this procedure was done to him about eight times before he collapsed unconscious. He stated also that, “I was threatened continually of being let out and be shot.” Finally, in a state of semi-consciousness he asked to be brought before the board to offer his confession.

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<sup>241</sup> Otto Stengel would be taken to Dibble General Hospital in Menlo Park immediately after his confession, where he underwent an appendectomy. Whittingham, 137.

<sup>242</sup> As the Allied armies discovered and liberated the Nazi death camps in Europe, cries for harsher treatment of German POWs reached a crescendo in the American press. Overall, public opinion in the country hardened toward the German POWs. Doyle, 189.



Before completing his statement Stengel added that a few days before his confession an American doctor had given him three shots which rendered him semi-paralyzed. While in this state an interpreter quizzed him about the Drechsler incident, but he could barely respond.

Taylor next called Helmut Fischer, who also offered an unsworn statement. Fischer offered an account of his interrogation at the hands of Captain Schmidt and Sergeant Held. He stated that the Americans showed him the written confessions of Fritz Franke and Günther Külsen. He was then ordered to stand at attention by Schmidt. He was left in this position, under guard, from 3:15 a.m. until 7 a.m. Schmidt returned with Held at about 5:30 and the two questioned Fischer until about 6:30.

Schmidt ordered the prisoner to press his chin against his chest and cross his arms under the seat of his pants. At that point Held “stepped twice with his shoes on my crossed hands so that I bent over backwards with my body.” Schmidt asked if he should show Fischer some things about Dachau. “Thereupon the interpreter asked me if my shorts were bothering me. If they did bother me, I should denude myself.”

After they had finished with him, Schmidt and Held left the prisoner at about 7 a.m. Fischer stated that, “I was in such a physical condition that I was shaking all over my body.” After a short time Held returned and “told me that all the others had confessed and there would be no further use.” Taylor asked Fischer if he had been advised of his rights before this occasion and the prisoner answered in the negative.

Taylor next called Rolf Wizuy to the stand. Wizuy also offered an unsworn statement. He too, told of a four hour long drive at excessive speed, complete with a restaurant stop. He too, was left in the car as the Americans went in to eat. On their return

to the camp:

Captain Schmidt stood behind me and drew my arms down. When he took me by my shoulders and pressed my shoulder blades together. Then I noticed that the Captain had drunk. He smelled after alcohol. His eyes were bloodshot. He kicked me in the back of the knee to find out if I really stood at attention. I made it known to Captain Schmidt that I did not have anything to eat for 12 hours. Thereupon Captain Schmidt answered something like I was a super man and be able to stand that. It would continue until I would talk.

Wizuy relented, and at about 8 a.m. that morning penned his own confession.

Wizuy, also, stated that he had not been advised of his rights before this interrogation.

With the completion of Wizuy's statement the defense rested its case.

After the prosecution waived its opening argument, Taylor presented the defense's argument, the highlights of which follow. Reading from the *Manual of Courts-Martial*, 1928, Chapter 25, page 116, paragraph 4, Taylor stated:

"Facts indicating that a confession was induced by hope of benefit or fear of punishment or injury inspired by a person competent (or believed by the party confessing to be competent) to effectuate the hope or fear is, subject to the following observations, evidence that the confession was involuntary."

Towards the end of his argument Taylor stated:

"These men consider themselves soldiers. They do not appear in uniform. They are Prisoners of War. They were bitter, just as our soldiers would be bitter. They had seen ships sunk. They did their duty as they saw it. They executed this traitor, a man who might have further obtained information and divulged matters of military importance to the enemy."

In his rebuttal Major Walsh argued, in part:

"I say this, that when a German soldier or sailor is brought into this country as a Prisoner of War, he is subject to all the laws of the United States of America. One of the laws is this – you can not commit a murder. You can not take a person out and hang him. You can not beat him unmercifully and then take him over to the wash room, carried partly by the hair of his head, and hang him."

As to the allegations of coercion used to obtain confessions from the accused,

Walsh stated:

“While all due consideration is to be given to a statement properly presented, the statement is not evidence but a personal declaration or defense, and cannot legally be acted upon as evidence by either the court or reviewing authority.

Having that in mind, you can not take into consideration as evidence the any of the unsworn testaments made by Prisoners of War, Stengel, Wizuy or Fischer, in determining whether or not these confessions were voluntarily obtained through force or coercion. ... That is not the law and the law member will so advise you. Defense Counsel is depending again on the unsworn statements given by these three Prisoners of War. If that can not be used as evidence, I say there is not one scintilla of evidence in this record to show that Wizuy, Reyak, Ludwig, Kuelsen, Franke and Fischer were compelled to tell their stories.”<sup>243</sup>

At the conclusion of the closing arguments the courtroom was cleared of all persons, excepting Poust and the other twelve members of the court martial board. Each member wrote his verdict on a piece of paper, which was then folded and passed to Poust. The verdict of “Guilty” was unanimous. The prisoners and both the counsels for the defense and prosecution were recalled to the courtroom and the verdicts were read aloud.

Once again the room was cleared and the board voted as to the penalty each of the accused would receive. Again the vote was unanimous; “to be hanged by the neck until dead.”<sup>244</sup>

The prisoners were not told of their sentences at this time. They could not be informed until after a lengthy review process was completed. Even then, they would not be officially informed of their fate until the day before their executions.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Whittingham, 218-219.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 257.

## CHAPTER 7

### LEST YE BE JUDGED

I entertain an almost conscientious objection to the imposition of the death sentence upon a soldier who murders a fellow soldier known to be a traitor. I fully realize that no one has the right to take the law into his own hands. Legalized murder in these United States cannot be countenanced. Yet, it is most difficult to set up a standard of conduct that I could not follow. I cannot but wonder if my own natural self-constraint would not be overcome by hatred and contempt for a fellow soldier who betrayed me and my comrades in arms.

*Colonel Thomas J. White, Ninth  
Services Command Judge  
Advocate<sup>246</sup>*

In view of the collapse of Germany and the resignation of Switzerland as the protecting power, compliance with Article 66 of the Geneva Convention has become impossible. There is no German government and there is no protecting power. There is, therefore, no government or agency to which the notice could properly be sent in discharge of the obligation of Article 66. It was not the intention of that Article to require an impossible thing. In my opinion the Article is no longer applicable to German prisoners of war.

*Major General Myron C. Cramer  
to the Under Secretary of War<sup>247</sup>*

Much of the formal review process following the court martial of the seven German sailors has been discussed previously in this work's Introduction. The first to review the proceedings was Major General William F. Shedd, commanding officer of the Ninth Services Command. In a one-paragraph statement issued on September 15, 1944, Shedd approved the court's findings with a recommendation that the sentences be commuted to life imprisonment.<sup>248</sup>

A three officer review board at Fort Douglas again approved the court martial proceedings, disregarding the allegations of coercion in light of the later written and oral

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<sup>246</sup> Review of Staff Judge Advocate on Record of Trial by General Court-Martial, 15 September 1944.

<sup>247</sup> Myron C. Cramer, Washington, D. C., to Under Secretary of War, Washington, D. C., no date given.

<sup>248</sup> Wm. H. Shedd, Major General, U.S. Army, Commanding, Army Services Forces, Headquarters ninth Service Command, Fort Douglas, Utah, 15 September 1944.

confessions. These officers, unlike Shedd, approved of the death sentences because of the brutality suffered by Drechsler. Ninth Services Command Judge Advocate, Colonel Thomas J. White, agreed with the guilty verdicts but recommended life imprisonment in view of the prisoners' patriotic motives. In his appendage to the review board's report, he wrote, in part:

I entertain an almost conscientious objection to the imposition of the death sentence upon a soldier who murders a fellow soldier known to be a traitor. I fully realize that no one has the right to take the law into his own hands. Legalized murder in these United States cannot be countenanced. Yet, it is most difficult to set up a standard of conduct that I could not follow. I cannot but wonder if my own natural self-constraint would not be overcome by hatred and contempt for a fellow soldier who betrayed me and my comrades in arms.<sup>249</sup>

The reports of White and the review board were forwarded on to Washington to the U.S. Army's Judge Advocate General, Major General Myron C. Cramer. It was at this point that the review process hit its first serious stumbling block. Cramer was the second to last step in the review process. From him the review would proceed to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, before moving on to President Truman for final assessment. Documents found in the over 1100 pages which comprise the record of the trial in question reflect the concerns which arose once the review reached Washington.

The first document, a communication to Provost Marshall General Archer L. Lerch, and Ninth Services Command Chief of Staff General John Wilson, states that when General Cramer took the review to Stimson, the Secretary had "refused to sign after being acquainted with all the facts." The document states further that Colonel Church

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<sup>249</sup> Review of Staff Judge Advocate on Record of Trial by General Court-Martial, 15 September 1944.

would “probably have to explain it to Mr. Stimpson (*sic*) in person.”<sup>250</sup>

The next document contains a list of eight questions:

- “1. What authority was there for the use of third degree methods, and who gave them?
2. What was the necessity for use of third degree methods?
3. Who participated in these third degree methods from within the Service Command?
4. Who participated from without the Service Command?
5. What offices or agencies did they represent?
6. Who is Captain Oscar Schmidt? Full identification is desired.
7. Who is Sergeant Held? Give his full identity.
8. Give full report of the facts in connection with this incident.”<sup>251</sup>

Another document appears to be a reply to these questions. Written in paragraph form, this one-page document states that Church received his instructions as to how to conduct his investigation during a visit to Washington. The unidentified author of this document stated that it was not known whether Church was present during any of the interrogations wherein third degree methods were employed. The names “Captain Oscar Schmidt” and “Sergeant Held” were fictitious, but the author believed that the two men’s true names and official positions were known in Washington.

As to the methods of interrogation employed by “Schmidt” and “Held,” and “Schmidt’s” refusal to reveal those methods at the court martial, the author wrote: “It is my understanding that all military personnel entering the questioning center are sworn to secrecy and are permitted to reveal nothing they may see or hear within; and only the Chief of Staff of the Army may permit any information to be given. Since Colonel Church received his instructions in Washington, I think the information the Secretary of War desires may be available there.”

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<sup>250</sup> Whittingham, 256; General Archer L. Lerch, Washington, D. C., to General John Wilson, Fort Douglas, Utah, 27 January 1945.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., List of questions in relation to previous document.

The final paragraph reads, “I wonder if it would be proper, under any circumstances, for this headquarters to seek the information requested, and to convey it in writing; and especially so since the entire details are probably known to some of your people.”<sup>252</sup>

The transcript of a telephone conversation between Generals Lerch and Wilson is also less than revealing about “Captain Schmidt” and his methods. It reads, in part:

“Gen. W: Well, now here’s the thing. That was all done at the installation at Tracy.

Gen. L: Yes, that’s what I suspected.

Gen. W: And we don’t want to come out and – we don’t feel we ought to make this information available. No one knows – no one here knows –

Gen. L: I realize your exact circumstances.”

A memorandum addressed to General Cramer from Major General Clayton Bissell, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, states that an investigation had been made into the coercion allegations. That investigation refuted most of the allegations. The memorandum states that car rides were the normal form of transportation between interrogation locations. Prisoners “were not subjected to heat or pushed against steam pipes.” There were not, in fact, any steam pipes in the room where interrogations were held. The only shots the prisoners were administered were for syphilis. The only time they were denied food were in those instances when the interrogations lasted through regular mealtimes, and in those instances they were fed as soon as the interrogation ended. They were not forced to bend over with their hands behind their legs and their hands were never stepped on.

The memorandum did allow that a gas mask was used in one interrogation, but “only for a period estimated at less than five minutes” The interrogator had acted under

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., Reply to questions.

own initiative without his commander's permission, that officer being in the hospital at the time. Had the commander been present, this tactic would not have been allowed, as "methods of this sort are distinctly forbidden."

The memorandum also allowed that certain of the prisoners were made to "stand at attention for a prolonged period but not as much as three hours." The interrogator felt this was "justified as a matter of discipline" because some of the prisoners "were extremely arrogant and considered themselves heroes because of the part they had played in the murder." General Bissell states that this too would not have been allowed had the commanding officer been present.<sup>253</sup> Given that the interrogations in question had taken place before the prisoners had made their confessions, one has to wonder just how "arrogant" the prisoners could have acted about a murder they had yet to confess to.

Apparently the answers offered in the above documents proved sufficient to mollify both Cramer and Stimson. On February 14, 1945 Stimson recommended to Truman that he approve the court martial's decision.<sup>254</sup> The Secretary's contradictory paragraph regarding the German prisoners' complaint of improper treatment, quoted in the Introduction to this work, can only serve to give credence to the very complaints he now chose to dismiss.

Under heavy guard the seven condemned men had boarded a train in Florence, Arizona, on the morning of January 27, 1945. Their destination was the United States Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. With Stimson's recommendation to Truman all that remained of the review process was Truman's approval. The prisoners

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<sup>253</sup> Major General Clayton Bissell, Washington, D. C. to Major General Myron C. Cramer, Washington, D.C., 1 February 1945.

<sup>254</sup> Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, Washington, D.C., to President Harry S. Truman, Washington, D.C., 14 February 1945. Papers of Harry S. Truman, White House Central Files, Confidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO.



had still not been notified as to their sentences. Behind the scenes two obstacles yet remained in the way of the death sentences.

Negotiations were underway to exchange these seven men, and eight other German POWs facing death sentences for similar actions, for American POWs in German custody who also faced sentences of death. However, the Germans surrendered on May 8, 1945, and by early July all but two of the American POWs had been accounted for and were back in Allied hands. A memorandum dated July 2, 1945, reads:

Lieutenant James M. Greyfield” and “Pfc. Snowden” are not accounted for. Diligent search has been made for each of them. Careful examination of the records of the Office of the Adjutant General and all other pertinent records appears to have been made for Lieutenant Greyfield, Search was also made of British records. No such officer has ever been identified. While Private First Class Snowden is yet unaccounted for it appears unlikely that he is held under German control or that there is a possibility of reprisal against him.<sup>255</sup>

Thus, the German surrender had effectively closed the door on the first remaining obstacle to the executions. The surrender also led to the elimination of the last remaining chance to save the seven men from Leavenworth’s gallows.

This last chance rested with Article 66 of the Articles of War, which reads:

If the death penalty is pronounced against a prisoner of war, a communication setting forth in detail the nature and circumstances of the offense shall be sent as soon as possible to the representative of the Protecting Power, for transmission to the Power in whose armies the prisoner served. The sentence shall not be executed before the expiration of a period of at least three months after this communication.<sup>256</sup>

In a memorandum to the Under Secretary of War, General Cramer stated the Army’s position that Germany’s surrender had rendered Article 66 moot:

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<sup>255</sup> Major General Myron C. Cramer, Washington, D. C., to Brigadier General Harry E. Vaughn, Washington, D. C., 2 July 1945.

<sup>256</sup> Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and the Sick of Armies in the Field (Red Cross Convention), Prisoners of War, Convention Between the United States of America and Other Powers, signed at Geneva, July 27, 1929.

In view of the collapse of Germany and the resignation of Switzerland as the protecting power, compliance with Article 66 of the Geneva Convention has become impossible. There is no German government and there is no protecting power. There is, therefore, no government or agency to which the notice could properly be sent in discharge of the obligation of Article 66. It was not the intention of that Article to require an impossible thing. In my opinion the Article is no longer applicable to German prisoners of war.<sup>257</sup>

With all the obstacles now cleared, President Truman signed the order of execution on July 28, 1945. The seven German sailors went to their deaths early on the morning of August 25, 1945.<sup>258</sup> Were they villains? Were they cold-blooded murderers? Werner Drechsler died at their hands, but were they alone responsible? What of their claim that the Americans had sent Drechsler to Papago Park expecting him to die there at German hands?

The fact that the Army disregarded the Navy's recommendation to keep Drechsler separated from other *Kriegsmarine* POWs does not constitute evidence of some "grand conspiracy" on the part of the U.S. Army to have Drechsler murdered by German POWs. The same may be said of the fact that both Hebblethwaite and Bornstein knew, before his murder, that Drechsler was a traitor, and subsequently had to know, that he would be in grave danger if left unprotected in the midst of Papago Park's general POW population. The fact that it was these two very men who removed Drechsler's body from the building in which he died also is not evidence of such a conspiracy. It was, after all, Hebblethwaite's duty assignment to identify the body.

An argument which could hold merit, however, is that the Army, Hebblethwaite, and Bornstien, all, failed to take obvious steps to protect Werner Drechsler. A series of

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<sup>257</sup> Myron C. Cramer, Washington, D. C., to Under Secretary of War, Washington, D. C., no date given.

<sup>258</sup> Presidential Order, 28 July 1945, Papers of Harry S. Truman, White House Central Files, Confidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO.; Whittingham, 280-281.

inter-Army memoranda after the Drechsler murder leave the impression that the Army was not inclined to adopt any laborious measures to prevent any future occurrences of a similar vein. One such letter, dated 16 July 1944, relates the circumstances which led to Drechsler's death, and cautions of further such incidents, contains the following sentence. "This result could or should have been foreseen, to put it mildly."<sup>259</sup>

A reply to this letter states, "it must be clearly understood that we cannot set up a camp especially for this type of person. If he is an anti-Nazi, send him to an anti-Nazi camp, but do not attempt to provide for special categories of persons, because in the general movement of prisoners such special categories will entail too great a burden."<sup>260</sup>

We will probably never know with absolute certainty who, if any one person was indeed responsible, within the Army's bureaucracy for sending Drechsler to Papago Park. Clearly there was, in one of the military's most commonly used acronyms, a "SNAFU," at a number of levels. Doctor Eric Rust of Baylor University, a highly respected authority on the *U-bootwaffe*, commented that, "The British were much smarter than U.S. authorities, for instance, by isolating *Kapitänleutnant* Hans-Joachim Rahmlow of the *U-570* for the balance of the war after his treasonous actions. If he had shown up in any Allied camp for *Kriegsmarine* officers (including my father's camps in Canada), Rahmlow would have been a dead duck."<sup>261</sup>

What motivated these seven men to exact the ultimate penalty from the traitor delivered into their midst. Loyalty to each other was undoubtedly a major factor. In his

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<sup>259</sup> Entry 452, (Formerly) Security-Classified General Correspondence, 1942-1946, box 1403 (File: 704, Gen #2), Subject: Prisoners of War Who Have Acted As Informants for American Intelligence, 16 July 1944. Records of the Office of the Provost Marshall General, Records of the Prisoner of War Division, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., Prisoner of War Division-Attn: Legal Branch, 28 July 1944.

<sup>261</sup> E-mail from Dr. Eric Rust, Baylor University, to author, 23 November 2010.

written confession, Rolf Wizuy wrote that “my comrades, due to their loyalty to me, went so far as to help with the hanging of Drechsler.” Duty also was part of their motivation. In his confession, Otto Stengel wrote, “I have committed a murder; however, I don’t consider myself a murderer but a conscientious German soldier.”<sup>262</sup>

Leadership may also have been a motivating factor. In his groundbreaking study on the reactions of human beings when placed in the situation of taking other human life Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman wrote. “To be truly effective, soldiers must bond to their leader just as they must bond to their group.” Grossman gives four criteria necessary for the leader to be effective in a killing situation; proximity, respect, intensity and legitimacy.<sup>263</sup>

It must be remembered that only six men engaged in the initial assault on Drechsler. After releasing him, and allowing him to run back to his barracks, these men were prepared to disperse and allow the beating they had administered to suffice as the traitor’s penalty. It was only then that Otto Stengel joined them, thus attaining proximity to the group. Stengel was the oldest of the men and had been a POW longer than any of the others, allowing him respect and legitimacy. It must also be remembered that Wizuy stated that Stengel, “seemed to have a great hatred of Drechsler.”<sup>264</sup> In other words, Stengel must have been burning with intensity, and it was he who insisted at that point that Drechsler must die.

What of Nazi ideology? Did the environment in which these young men had reached maturity influence their actions that night? Rust does not believe so.

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<sup>262</sup> Record of Trial of the following German Prisoners of War: Helmut Fischer, etal, Written confession of Rolf Wizuy, 3 June 1944; Ibid., Written confession of Otto Stengel, 2 June 1944.

<sup>263</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995; Boston: Back Bay Books, 1996), 144-145.

<sup>264</sup> Written confession of Rolf Wizuy, 3 June 1944

I do not think that tracing the ideological indoctrination of Drechsler's killers can reveal much about what they did. It is tempting to delve into them attending meetings of the HJ or Marine-HJ. My own research in the military archives in Freiburg over several decades, conducting one-on-one interviews with *Kriegsmarine* veterans, ..., minimizes youthtime socialization and emphasizes wartime experience of *Kriegsmarine* personnel. Drechsler may well have been influenced by his pre- *Kriegsmarine* education and family values, but his killers acted primarily out of convictions either instinctive or acquired by U-boat service exposure of the kind that any U.S. serviceman then or today would understand and endorse. They saw a traitor delivered into their hands and acted accordingly (whether the U.S. Navy and Army had intended it to happen that way or not). ... Sometimes we need to let self-explanatory actions stand for what they are or were: self-explanatory.<sup>265</sup>

Lowell May is the author of *Camp Concordia: German POWs in the Midwest* and co-author of *Prisoner of War Camps in Kansas, 1943-1946*. In researching his books, he too interviewed many former German POWs. He differs in his opinion from Dr. Rust.

Each German would state that they were not, and never had been, a Nazi. I expected them to say that and have never talked to a German that would admit to being a Nazi. However, they would readily admit that there was a Nazi element in the camps. Most would also readily state that for a POW to be critical of the Nazis was to invite at least a beating and very possibly death. We must remember that most of the German POWs were in their early twenties and had grown up under the Nazis. This environment had to play a role in how they conducted themselves as prisoners of war. Most had been in the Hitler Youth and had been thoroughly indoctrinated in the Nazi philosophy. They also went to schools where a pledge to Hitler was said every morning and the subjects were "politically correct," meaning the content was Nazi approved. While they may not have been a "hardcore Nazi" they would still retain some of what they had been taught. To say otherwise is to say that religion, education, the Pledge of Allegiance and youth clubs have no effect on young people and we know that is not true.<sup>266</sup>

Again, we will never truly know exactly what motivated each of these men. They acted in concert, but each held his own thoughts, and his own sense of what constituted justice to the traitor in their presence. Those of us who wish to pursue the exercise will each render our own verdict, our own summary justice if you will, to all eight of these young men.

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<sup>265</sup> E-mail from Dr. Eric Rust, Baylor University, to author, 23 November 2010.

<sup>266</sup> E-mail from Lowell May, to author, 24 March 2011.

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