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Gerald L. Duskin and Ralph Segman. **If the Gods are Good: The Epic Sacrifice of the HMS Jervis Bay**, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2004. Notes. Index. Pp. 304.

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*If the Gods are Good: The Epic Sacrifice of the HMS Jervis Bay* is a joint effort of Mr. Gerald L. Duskin, who first read the story of the *Jervis Bay* in 1940 as a teenager while selling newspapers in the United States, and a professional journalist, Mr. Ralph Segman. This book is the result of Mr. Duskin's long fascination with the battle and his collection of stories and articles over a span of decades. The result is a balanced account of the battle between the armed merchant cruiser (AMC) HMS *Jervis Bay* and the German pocket battleship *Admiral Scheer*.

The book begins with a lengthy introduction that reviews the progress of the war through 1940, explaining the world political situation and Britain's situation in the air, on land, and at sea. There is also a brief history of the German Navy starting with the scuttle of the High Seas Fleet at Scapa Flow in 1919. The effect of the scuttling and the limitations of the Treaty of Versailles were crucial events in the development of the *Admiral Scheer* and her sister ships. Before beginning the main story, the authors briefly recount the *Admiral Scheer*'s operations before the war and the demise of her sister ship, the *Admiral Graf Spee*, after the Battle of the River Plate.

The history of the *Jervis Bay* is covered in more detail. At the time of her requisition and conversion, the Royal Navy felt that AMCs could adequately protect convoys. Essentially, the idea was to obtain an inexpensive and marginally effective warship at short notice. The Royal Navy would place guns from preexisting stocks on merchant ships that had been reinforced to accept the gun mountings. A rudimentary fire control system directed the fire of the guns. While these ships could fight a similarly outfitted auxiliary cruiser or drive off a U-boat operating on the surface, they were really in no position to take on the fast, modern warships that the Germans produced during the interwar period. Nevertheless, AMCs were used early on to patrol maritime chokepoints and escort convoys, sometimes as the sole armed escort.

The descriptions of the outfitting and training of *Jervis Bay* as an AMC will be familiar to anyone who has joined an inexperienced ship and had to form and train a diverse group of sailors into a cohesive team. However, that is exactly what the leadership of *Jervis Bay* achieved, especially under her second commanding officer, Captain Fegen. The book is as much a tribute to his leadership as it is to the performance of the crew during the battle to save their convoy

from the *Admiral Scheer*. Captain Fegen would not survive the battle but his bravery and sacrifice would earn him the Victoria Cross.

The book follows the experience of *Jervis Bay* and her convoy both prior to and during the battle in detail. The encounter and battle with the *Admiral Scheer* are dramatic but not overly so. The hope, fear, desperation, and in some cases, resignation to one's fate come through the confusion of a battle fought in a steadily darkening night where the only illumination was gunfire, explosions, and fires onboard damaged and sinking ships. Especially poignant is the story of the crew of the tanker *San Demetrio*. These men abandoned their ship and its cargo of volatile aviation fuel under fire only to reboard her later to ultimately make port against long odds. Equally well portrayed is the German side of the story starting with the *Admiral Scheer's* breakout into the Atlantic. The descriptions of the seas, sounds, and hazards will bring back memories to anyone who has sailed in abysmal weather.

The end of the book, in comparison, seems anti-climatic. The course of the participants on divergent paths leads to a fragmented end as the authors follow ships and individuals to their various destinies. However, the authors are to be commended for following as many as they could. They have told a remarkable story.



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