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Otto Giese and James E. Wise, Jr., **Shooting the War: The Memoir and Photographs of a U-Boat Officer in World War II** (Annapolis: Bluejacket Books, 2003), ISBN 1-59114-298-9, 291 pp, paperback, including photographs, charts, appendices, notes, bibliography, index.

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This work is the paperback reprint of a hardcover book published jointly in 1994 by the Naval Institute Press and Leo Cooper in London. Through lively narrative based on his wartime diaries, as well as over one hundred original black-and-white photographs taken by the author, it tells the story of Captain (then Lieutenant) Otto Giese, a 1914 native of Bremen. His experiences convey a perspective on World War II whose freshness and originality compare favorably with the stale fare of more or less predictable hunt-and-kill adventures involving German submarines, their victims and their pursuers in the Atlantic and its peripheral waters. In addition, Giese's account gains from the editorial touch of retired US Navy Captain James E. Wise, Jr., as well as an epilogue summarizing the author's post-war career as a ship captain and owner a shipping line first in Germany and later in Florida until his retirement in 1981. Giese died in Sarasota in 2001.

Six distinct episodes make up the bulk of the book, all of them well illustrated with original photographs: Giese as a junior officer aboard the North German Lloyd ocean liner *Columbus* until its scuttling north of Bermuda in December 1939; American

internment and subsequent escape across the Pacific to friendly Japan; return to Europe aboard the German blockade runner *Anneliese Essberger* from Kobe, Japan, to Bordeaux, France, in late 1941; U-boat training and deployment as a watch officer on *U-405* to the Arctic Ocean for four eventful patrols in 1942-43; as second watch officer on the legendary *U-181* on its last mission to the Indian Ocean from November 1943 and its prolonged sojourn in Penang, Malaya, and Singapore until the German surrender; and lastly his repatriation from the Far East to Germany and his civilian post-war activities. What strikes readers as remarkable is Giese's ability to adapt to the many different challenges placed before him and the professional, even cheerful manner in which he endured a life that knew few triumphs but numerous setbacks and black days. Undoubtedly Giese's early exposure to the sea as a teenager aboard square-riggers and an even temperament that allowed him to weather adversity with patience and perseverance had much to do with his ability to survive a good many brushes with death, typically half-way around the globe.

Giese's story offers a number of insights into how the Kriegsmarine did business in World War II. One of the more obvious revelations is the inspired use of former merchant marine officers--men essentially unemployable either because of the Great Depression or the Allied blockade after 1939--for a variety of tasks custom-made for them. Their nautical expertise allowed them to serve on surface and underwater craft alike and added to the crews they joined a welcome measure of maturity, confidence and professionalism. The Allies did not enjoy this luxury as their merchant mariners were sorely needed on busy and dangerous shipping routes around the globe. Another interesting reminder is the relative ease with which German naval and merchant officers and ordinary crew members who found themselves stranded overseas between 1939 and mid 1941 made their way home by way of Japan and the Soviet Union to fight another day. Here Giese's experience jives well with that of other merchant sailors and, say, the men of the pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee*, virtually all of whom returned from Uruguay and Argentina with little delay. A further theme of Giese's story is the relationship between Germany and its Asian ally Japan--a partnership which never lived up to its promise and was forever marked by frustration, misunderstandings, and missed

opportunities. Intermittent joint commerce raiding in the Indian Ocean and occasional shipments of strategic raw materials and latest technology to and from Europe appear to have been the primary fruits of this fatally bungled strategic venture.

The book's strength clearly rests on its engaging narrative (despite some irritating made-up dialogue), the sympathetic personality of its protagonist, and on the excellent photographs that accompany the text. Readers should not look for profound and incisive analysis of wartime strategy, nor for overly critical assessments of the Kriegsmarine's leaders and performance. Moreover, and somewhat predictably, Giese stresses the apolitical nature of the German naval service whose prime mission was taken to be the protection of the fatherland rather than furthering the aims of the particular regime that happened to be in power. On the destruction of the Jews, Giese offers familiar fare (p. 233): "Not many Germans had heard of gas chambers before or during the war. The revelation of such atrocities stunned those of us in the U-boat arm." However that may have been, his claim seems more plausible than that of many other Germans inasmuch as he virtually spent no time in Germany between 1939 and 1947.

In short, one should welcome this work back into print. At a reasonable price it offers the wider public not only a good read but glimpses of a fascinating human odyssey like few others in World War II.



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