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Lowell Thomas, **Raiders of the Deep**, with an Introduction and Notes by Gary E. Weir.  
Bluejacket Books, Annapolis Naval Institute Press, 2004

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This reprinting, in paperback, brings to an enlarged audience one of the greatest classics of naval warfare. Originally published in 1928, this edition is a facsimile of the first edition (published by Doubleday, Doran & Company), and is reprinted by arrangement with the Lowell Thomas Residuary Trust. Thomas (1892-1981), celebrated journalist, was commissioned by President Woodrow Wilson to roam the battle areas during World War I and make historical record of the course of the war. Author of some fifty books, this pioneer news broadcaster's voice was known to millions of Americans. And his books, particularly his life of Lawrence of Arabia and his *Raiders of the Deep*, are still regarded as vital views on worlds now past but of imperishable memory.

Interviewing various German mariners, or using other informants and investigators, Thomas portrayed for the very first time the sharp end of naval combat from the German position. Germany was the first nation, we note, to carry on *guerre de course* by submarine, and to do so with amazing precision and uniformity of operation, extending such operations year by year so that by 1917 the nature of war at sea, previously predicated on dreadnoughts, cruisers and torpedo boats, had now gone to the stealthy weapon of the submarine, or U-boat. The grit and daring of these German mariners is appreciated widely by those who have viewed the classic *Das Boot*, of World

War II fame and notoriety. But Thomas had already, many decades previous, unlocked the secrets of war beneath the waves, the war of stealth, the war of attrition at sea. While the British Grand Fleet and the Hoch See Flotte eyed each other warily before, during and after Jutland, the daring U-boat commanders Thomas describes with vivid language defined the strategy, tactics, and art of undersea warfare in its earliest years, its infancy. The book gave these officers of the Imperial German Navy a forum for their views. Thomas presents his readers with the oral histories of men who lived extraordinary lives by any standard. His informants tell their story unhindered by any critical analysis by Thomas, and to a certain degree therefore we can conclude that this form of presentation has resulted in a very long life for this book, one that is perhaps for all time.

The text carries all the triumph and tragedy imaginable. For instance, as the dark shadow of war drew ever closer in August 1914, ready to engulf these German mariners, their level of excitement and uncertainty was profound. Because Germany declared war on France and Russia, German naval authorities expected a surprise attack by the British fleet. "Silently and secretly, in the darkest hour of the night, as befitted the nature of our weapon, we sailed into the World War," wrote Lieutenant Johann Spiess, second in command of *U-19*. Sundown on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August found Spiess and his superior, the exceedingly capable Lieutenant Otto Weddigen, standing beside the conning tower of their submarine, then at base. Spiess records the prophetic moment: "A scarlet sun was set amid fiery clouds. A big gray liner with four stacks foamed past us, headed north, a liner sallying forth on duty as an auxiliary cruiser. For a long minute the splendid ship was silhouetted against the crimson sunset. Weddigen was lost in contemplation of the sight. He seemed very young and dreamily boyish. A shadow of dark thoughts lay across his face." Weddigen turned to his fellow officer, and in a low voice said: "you see how red the light is. The whole world seems bathed in blood. Mark my words, England has declared war on us." (p.15) Sure enough, shortly thereafter the flotilla leader broadcast his message "Be prepared for military offensive measures by England starting to-day."

War came, but not the feared British offensive. Before long the scenario was established, and it was the British who were thrown back on the defensive. On 22

September *U-9* bagged three British cruisers *Aboukir*, *Hogue* and *Cressy* – 36,000 tons, in total -- within the span of an hour, taking the offensive. The German mariners who watched the whole sequence followed the details of these sinkings off the Dutch coast with horror and pity. As for *U-9*, she was destroyed by H.M.S. *Hawke* in the waters of the Orkneys and Shetlands. As for the well decorated Weddigen, he later shifted to a new boat, *U-29*, and was lost at sea when H.M.S. *Dreadnought* sliced her in two and he “went down in his last fight.”

The Imperial German Navy entered the world struggle with but a dozen submarines, pitifully small, so they thought, but lethal nonetheless. Many submarines were lost, rammed by British cruisers or otherwise disappearing without trace. Some of these boats had astounding passages. *U-21*, for instance, sailed from Wilhelmshaven to Constantinople right into the inferno of Gallipoli, after a 18 day passage. H.M.S. *Triumph*, 12,000 tons, lying “in thundering majesty,” three hundred yards distant, was easy work for a single torpedo from *U-21*. The German commander, Hersing, went on to bag another British giant, the *Majestic*. German daring matched British ignorance of anti-submarine measures. But Hersing’s actions were enough to change the course of the war in the Dardanelles, and to change the British and French war plans in this theater. Yet another of the stories told in this book is that of the notorious and misguided Walther von Schwieger, commanding *U-20*, which sank the hapless *Lusitania*. He later took command of a new, big boat of latest design, *U-88*, lost at sea in September 1917 probably in waters between Ireland and Scotland. Perhaps they were sunk by a British Q-ship or even hit a mine. In any event as Thomas’s informant put it “Schwieger and his men had gone to join the victims of the *Lusitania* on the floor of the sea.” (108)

Taken altogether these raiders of the deep – the men and the U-boats – had a disproportionate influence on the conduct and outcome of the war than was ever expected. Their actions are the stuff of history and of legend. It was this naval service that gave the world Karl Doenitz, who does not feature in this book, and it was this naval arm of state that indicated the nature of future naval war. Thus the reprinting of this imperishable, readable classic is a subject of great satisfaction. To Gary Weir, recognized

authority on the history of the Imperial German Navy, who has provided an excellent and comprehensive introduction full of all sorts of insights, go top marks and many congratulations. Readers will find this book as riveting as the materials that Thomas gathered. Truly this is sharp end warfare, the naval face of battle.



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