

International Journal of Naval History

August 2007

Volume 6 Number 2

Teddy Suhren and Fritz Brustat-Naval. **Teddy Suhren, Ace of Aces: Memoirs of a U-Boat Rebel**. Transl. Frank James. Postscript by Helmut Herzig. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006. Includes photographs, postscript, appendix, index.

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This is not a new book. Ghost-written by Fritz Brustat-Naval based on interviews with German World War II U-boat ace Reinhard “Teddy” Suhren, it was originally published in 1983, one year before Suhren’s death. It has been available in German hardback and paperback editions, most recently by Ullstein in 2005. This first English version, translated by Frank James, adds several features not found in the German ones: recently discovered photographs of Suhren and the German U-boat service; a new title; and a brief postscript by Helmut Herzig about Suhren’s post-war career, along with the transcript of a speech Suhren gave before an assembly of U-boat veterans in Hamburg in 1954.

Why James and the Naval Institute Press decided to drop the richly ambiguous title *Nasses Eichenlaub* (Wet Oak Leaves) in favor of the pompous and exaggerated, “*Teddy Suhren, Ace of Aces: Memoirs of a U-Boat Rebel*,” remains unexplained and a curiosity, just as one must wonder why an English translation had to wait almost a quarter of a century after the original publication. One answer may be that the more memorable aspects of Suhren’s story had already found their way into the vast secondary U-boat literature over the years.

“Ace of Aces” Suhren certainly was not, as his confirmed sinking of 18 Allied vessels (he actually claimed 33) leaves him in 38th place overall among the most successful German U-boat captains of World War II. Still, he was a widely popular, likable and colorful character with unquestioned leadership ability in a service branch that tolerated individualists and even encouraged mavericks like him as long as they produced results on their patrols and retained the confidence, loyalty and protection of Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz. Moreover, Suhren had the good fortune of entering the Kriegsmarine at just the right time (1935) to gain command of a boat of his own (U-564) when the hunting was still excellent during the “Happy Times” through the summer of 1942 and to move on to a shore assignment as director of all German submarine operations in Arctic waters just when the tide turned decisively against the U-boats in the Atlantic. Well apprenticed on famous boats like U-47 and U-48, highly decorated, and rapidly promoted to the rank of *Fregattenkapitän* (junior captain) over his ten years of active service, Suhren’s career offers many parallels to that of his good friend and fellow ace Erich Topp,

including frequent criticism of the way the German U-boat war was run, especially in the last phases of the conflict.

Honest, straightforward and chatty, the book makes a good read as it covers the war at sea, the men, mood and morale within the U-boat branch, and many lighter moments in Suhren's life away from the front. The latter illustrate the numerous privileges U-boat commanders enjoyed, from glorious entertainment sprees in Paris and elsewhere, to personal invitations to Hitler's and Nazi Party Secretary Martin Bormann's mountain retreats in the Bavarian Alps. While Teddy Suhren and his older brother Gerd, a resourceful engineering officer, rubbed shoulders with the military, political and social elite of the regime, their identification with Nazi ideology appears to have been rather reserved and lukewarm at best. If Suhren was a "rebel," as the book's title claims, he was less so in a political sense than on account of his irreverence vis-à-vis service traditions and rigid social protocol.

Particularly valuable are the many photographs that accompany the text. They help remind readers how successful U-boat commanders savored the glory their exploits brought them, while remaining mindful of the misery and drudgery that marked their experience at sea in their proverbial "iron coffins." They and their men lived life fully, intensely, even impulsively, as they knew only too well how transitory their moment in the limelight of history was and how quickly fame today could turn into disaster and death tomorrow. This hectic and stressful existence would also explain why the personal affairs of U-boat officers would often suffer. Suhren's first marriage to a much younger woman broke up almost immediately, and as so many other German naval officers after 1945, he struggled to find his bearings in the post-war world before becoming a successful businessman. His personal loyalty to Dönitz prevented Suhren from rejoining the West German Navy in the 1950s as he was not prepared to put the uniform back on while his former superior served time in Spandau Prison.

In short, Suhren's book is a welcome addition to the still expanding list of U-boat officer memoirs and biographies available in English. Stronger on descriptions and narrative than on incisive analysis, it opens yet another window through which to view the cosmos of Kriegsmarine officers in World War II.



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