

# READER REVIEW of **THE CAPTURE of the U-505** by ROBERT McLAUGHLIN



Few people today fully realize the devastation inflicted on the Allied merchant and naval vessels by the German U-Boat campaign during World War II. In the early stages of the War, the German submarines executed a virtual shipping blockade that stretched from the East Coast of the United States to Great Britain. The Allied losses were staggering: over 3,500 merchant ships and 175 naval warships were sunk, with a toll of over 30,000 seamen lost.

Robert McLaughlin's *The Capture of the U-505: A Legion of Heroes* is the perfect book for any reader hungry for the stories lurking behind these statistics. It focuses on several incidents in the Allied effort to counter the U-Boat threat, most notably the disablement and capture of the German submarine U-505 and its crew by US Naval forces off the coast of West Africa in 1944. It was a monumental accomplishment of superb planning, matched by the bravery of those involved in its execution. It also yielded a trove of extremely valuable intelligence, including the latitude and longitude codes used in the German Enigma machine found on-board, which greatly enhanced the ability of the Allies to locate, track and destroy the U-Boats.

The incidents are recounted essentially as stories of that epic struggle. Several are told from the perspectives of both the Allies and the Germans, which enhances the tension

and excitement, bringing to life the terror of the confrontation between the hunter and the hunted. And each has at its core the extraordinary courage of the men involved, without regard to the uniform they wore.

The author is obviously "a man of the sea" and masterfully weaves the historic and nautical details into his stories about his "Legion of Heroes." Here's a sampling:

- Australian Flight Sergeant Ronald Sillcock, who, on a routine air patrol off the coast of Trinidad, spotted a German U-Boat, zeroed in for the depth charge drop, and, to assure destruction of the sub, flew his plane so close that the ensuing explosion severely damaged his plane and caused it to crash into the sea, killing Sillcock and his three crew members. Sillcock's heroic effort was witnessed by the German sailors on the sub, which, although severely damaged, survived and was able to return to its base.
- British Intelligence, MI6, early in the War, in a feat of extraordinary brilliance and good luck, broke the German transmission codes, which gradually shifted the advantage to the Allies by providing invaluable intelligence about locations, routes and battle plans, resulting in escalating "kill" numbers of German subs.
- Commander Daniel Gallery, an American third generation career naval officer, who became an expert in anti-submarine warfare, developed the strategy and tactics that led to the capture of the U-505. The

capture was considered so important that it was kept secret to avoid tipping the Germans that the Allies had their codes—the vessel was painted black and renamed the USS Nimo. The German Naval High Command at Lorient thought it had been sunk and never learned of its capture until after the war was over.

The author candidly tells the reader at the outset that he is a "story teller," not a historian, and even admits that he is not immune from embellishing a point to enhance the tale. His readers should be grateful, for the author has the gift of the natural story teller -- someone who can draw vivid character portraits and who can bring to life the drama and heroism, and in many cases, the humor ("Sank sub. Open club."), of those who fought and in many cases, sacrificed their lives.

All in all, it's a splendid read, and highly recommended.

—John C.

