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Richard Snow. *A Measureless Peril: America in the Fight for the Atlantic, the Longest Battle of World War II*. New York: Scribner, 2010. Pp. x, 353. ISBN 978-1-4165-9110-8.

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As the front jacket flap of *A Measureless Peril* declares, “only one [WW II] battle—the struggle for the Atlantic—lasted from the very first hours of the conflict to its final day.” Yet, as historians have lamented, the battle remains, despite its magnitude, “half-forgotten” and “little known.” Though a quick Google search for “Battle of the Atlantic” turns up over three hundred books published in the first decade of the twenty-first century, few are battle histories; most only mention the battle in passing. About a dozen are general histories of the Atlantic campaign written for a popular audience, some of them reprints of classic older works by, for example, Samuel Eliot Morison and Winston Churchill. Almost none are serious studies.

Richard Snow, author and long-time editor of *American Heritage* magazine, has not set out to fill the gap. His clearly written account is meant to honor his father’s service in the Allied naval campaign in the North Atlantic. Its readers will be rewarded with a very entertaining popular history of the American role in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Snow opens with a family anecdote. His parents have returned to Bronxville, NY, from a summer vacation, and the building superintendent, a Second World War veteran, helps them carry the luggage in from the car. As he does so, he reminisces about his combat service in the Sicily campaign. This elicits an observation from Snow’s mother, Emma: “I’m so glad that Dick was never in action.” Dick, of course, is Snow’s father, Richard B. Snow, USNR, who was assigned in 1943 to USS *Neunzer* (DE-150). He hunted subs, watched ships explode and sink, and pulled oil-soaked sailors from the waters of the North Atlantic. As he suggests later to his wife, “That’s generally considered having been in action” (2).

Military historians commonly add a human dimension to their grand sweeping histories by inserting colorful, revealing, and down-to-earth experiences of individuals toiling away in the trenches. Snow does the same, but with an important difference. He does not draw on his father’s experiences to put a human face on battle; his history does not so much place his father in the context of war as place the war and its effects in the context of the man he knew as his father.

In that way, Snow explains why his father owned a pair of modest German navy cuff links. They were a gift from Machinist Mate Second Class Waldmar Gaseyk, a prisoner held in his ship after the destruction of his submarine, U-546, on 24 April 1945. So too, Snow acquired a deeper appreciation for Herman Wouk’s 1951 novel, *The Caine Mutiny*, from his father when he was “just old enough to understand it.... No other novel to come out of the war chimed so closely with his own experience. He called my attention especially to this passage, about Wouk’s hero, Willie Keith, cocktail-piano-playing college twerp turned warship commander, on his final voyage home, leaving scorched coral atolls for Manhasset, Long Island: ‘He spent long hours on the bridge when there was no need of it. The stars and the sea and the ship were slipping from his life’” (317-18). In the way of phantom-limb sensations, the passage recalls to any watch officer the long hours spent on a still familiar but now missing bridge. Snow had a similar experience while watching the film *Enemy Below* (1957; dir. Dick Powell) with his father near the end of his life. “That’s just the way it was.”

For all the personal revelations, *A Measureless Peril* does not stint on the history of the North Atlantic campaign. Though Snow begins appropriately enough with a short introduction to his father, the first two-thirds of his book review the history of the battle before his father’s direct involvement. Each of the volume’s thirty-seven chapters considers some specific aspect of the battle’s history. These are not dry, academic discussions; their points are often made by using an entertaining war story as a hook.

The chapter “Hooligan Navy” explains how the situation once became so desperate that small, civilian-owned boats like businessman Clarence “Kit” Johnson’s thirty-foot cruiser *Kitsis* improbably represented the only naval presence along some parts of the Atlantic coastline. The reader learns how everyone pitched in after Johnson and deckhand Ottie Roach rescued twenty-two of the *Java Arrow*’s sailors from the sea. “Kit Johnson came home full of febrile energy; Sis made him scrambled eggs and sent him up to bed. Then she took a bucket of rags, a can of Old Dutch Cleanser, and a mop, drove the family Studebaker to the pier at Fort Pierce, and found the *Kitsis*. After breathing in as much as she could of the morning breeze, she went below to scrub the blood out of the mattresses and hose the decks free of what she called ‘slime’” (172–73).

Some chapters are more expository. “The Moving Square Mile” gives a succinct lesson on the importance of convoying in the two world wars: that the convoy could be an offensive weapon (131) escaped many naval professionals even as U-boats sent their nations’ men, hulls, and cargoes to the bottom.

Snow also explores some out-of-the-way aspects of the navy, particularly the daily workings of the war-time shipyard and naval training command where his father spent significant portions of the war years. The sexier encounters of naval warfare usually take place in more exotic locals, but they would have ended differently were it not for those yards and schools.

By the end of the book, readers will be fully caught up in the mood Snow creates. Having spent time with Richard senior in *Neunzer*, they may well consider wistfully an item in the *New York Herald Tribune* real estate section (November 1946) listing four destroyer escort ships for sale.

As befits a battle history, Snow does not devote much space to his father’s life after the war, but does make clear that the transition to a peacetime existence was not effortless. “The war never laid a glove on my father. The peace nearly killed him” (324). An experienced architect, Richard senior was not like younger soldiers and sailors, who had come to the war from the classroom; he expected to return easily to his profession. As for so many other veterans, it was not to be. “He was delighted to get back to his architectural office. He sat down at his drafting table, picked up a pencil—and froze. Days went by, weeks. When somebody said, ‘Draw a doorway here,’ he’d do a sure and lovely job. But he couldn’t think on his own” (324). After leaving the firm he helped to found, Snow’s father eventually began to put the war behind him. “Slowly things began to lighten for him, and the hardest of all his watches drew to a close” (325). Following a long and successful career, Richard B. Snow died in 2000, at age ninety-five.

Snow relies on well-chosen vignettes and narrative skill to bring to life the longest battle of the Second World War. This solid, well-constructed, and coherent account does him credit and his father honor.