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Patrick Bishop, *The Hunt for Hitler's Warship*. Washington: Regnery, 2013. Pp. xxii, 426. ISBN 978-1-62157-003-5.

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The German battleship *Tirpitz* accomplished very little in its short life (February 1941–November 1944): it carried out only a single real mission, an inconsequential bombardment of the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen. The ship spent most of its operational life huddled behind torpedo nets, while at anchor in Norwegian fjords. British war correspondent and military historian Patrick Bishop has shaped his book around a chronicle of the Allied attacks—by carrier aircraft, miniature submarines, and heavy bombers—that damaged and then finally sank the last large warship in the German navy.

Bishop enlivens an unpromising story by including the graphic testimony of many real people—sailors, pilots, admirals, and prime ministers. He sought out both surviving crew members of the *Tirpitz* (at their annual reunion) and British and Norwegian men who monitored and attacked the battleship. He draws as well on letters and other primary documents, besides the standard secondary sources on the war at sea as it pertained to the *Tirpitz*.

The book is especially good on the exploits of the X-Craft submarines during their raid on the *Tirpitz* in October 1943. These miniature vessels were towed underwater across the North Sea and then released by Royal Navy submarines once they were close to the *Tirpitz's* anchorage deep in a Norwegian fjord. Bishop has added color to his story by talking with some of the few living participants in the raid.<sup>1</sup> He describes in detail the training in British waters for the attack—realistic to the point of using Royal Navy battleships as practice targets. The voyage to Norway was itself almost as dangerous as the final attack (one tiny sub sank with all hands while under tow). In the end, two X-Craft vessels successfully deployed their massive charges.

At 8:12 a.m. the [ship's] diary recorded "two heavy detonations." The entire 50,000-ton weight of the *Tirpitz*, ship, men and stores, "bounced vertically and sharply." The blasts were almost simultaneous. The charges had been designed so that an explosion by one would detonate any others in the vicinity. The shockwaves surfed through bulkheads and down passageways, ripping up decking and slamming men into hard metal. On deck, a twenty-two-year-old seaman, Fritz Adler, was flipped into the air, landing on his head on a mound of anchor chain to be killed instantly. Others suffered broken limbs and cracked skulls. The real damage, though, was to the ship. The forward charges split the port side plating but it was X-7's charge amidships that did the greatest harm, tearing a gash more than twenty feet long, swamping the port outer compartments and partially flooding engine rooms. Everywhere electrical synapses crackled and shorted and all the lights went out. (283)

The battleship was out of action for several months.

The author turns next to the role of Royal Navy aircraft carriers. When it was clear that the *Tirpitz* had been repaired, the British began to carry out air raids, using fighters to strafe the ship to make it easier for the dive bombers to find their target. The first of several raids—Operation Tungsten (3 April 1944)—was the most successful, killing over a hundred of the *Tirpitz's* crewmen, destroying part of its secondary armament, and putting it out of action for three months. The Germans responded by surrounding the ship with more and more flak guns and smoke generators: the smokescreens, in particular, helped frustrate subsequent carrier attacks, which Bishop does not cover in much detail.

Succeeding chapters in *The Hunt for Hitler's Warship* have, frankly, little to do with the *Tirpitz*. For example, two of them concern the ordeal of Convoy PQ 17, one of dozens sent through Arctic waters north of Norway to deliver weapons from Great Britain to the Soviet Union. The tenuous link to the *Tirpitz* is that

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1. He also makes good use of Thomas Gallagher, *The X-Craft Raid* (NY: Harcourt, 1971), written when it was still possible to interview many British, German, and Norwegian witnesses and participants.

the battleship's presence in Norway posed a threat to convoys, even though it in fact never attacked a single ship. Bishop also describes the terrible fate of the smaller German battleship *Scharnhorst*, based in Norway for much of the war—hesitating to attack a convoy, it ended up being sunk by its British escort.

Bishop is back in his element with the final air raids (September and November 1944), which punched a big hole through the *Tirpitz*, causing it to capsize in shallow water off Tromsø, Norway, killing much of the crew. The assaults were carried out by big Lancaster bombers armed with the Tallboy: a six-ton, spin-stabilized, high altitude bomb far more potent than any ship's armor could resist. Bishop interviewed several of the participants in these attacks, both British and German, and tells their stories in exciting detail.

The strengths of the book are its vividly drawn characters and action sequences. These will please military history readers who want a good story rather than technical details or deep background. Unfortunately, Bishop tries to magnify his British heroes by wrongly denigrating their weapons. Without citing a source, he writes that "The British navy had been starved of funds in the postwar years, and little effort had been made to develop new weaponry. Torpedoes and shells carried feeble charges and lacked penetrative power" (16).

Only a single battle pitted a modern British battleship against a German counterpart: the Battle of the Denmark Strait, where HMS *Prince of Wales* met the *Bismarck*, *Tirpitz*'s sister ship. Three British armor-piercing shells struck the German vessel; one detonated, none struck strong armor. The *Bismarck* hit the *Prince of Wales* four times; two shells actually entered the ship, though they did not penetrate armor or even explode. Not an especially impressive performance for either nation's ordnance. In other encounters—both mentioned by Bishop—British ships were more effective, damaging the cruiser *Hipper* and sinking the battlecruiser *Scharnhorst* (July 1941) with shells and torpedoes. Nonetheless, Bishop claims, "Despite their names, the 500-lb. semi-armor piercing (SAP) and 2,000-lb. armor-piercing (AP) bombs had had little success in penetrating the well-armed craft of the modern German fleet. Any that landed on *Tirpitz* were likely to bounce off" (108). This is simply wrong. British torpedoes delivered by submarines, destroyers, and aircraft performed more reliably than either American or German weapons. Bombs—armor-piercing or not—were much less dependable, although two pierced the armored decks of the *Scharnhorst* (without detonating) and exited through the hull below. A strike by a 1,000-lb. general-purpose bomb in 1942 did so much damage to its sister ship—the battlecruiser *Gneisenau*—that it never sailed again.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these missteps, the book features a well written narrative that moves briskly even when little is happening. More importantly, Bishop gets the big picture right: the *Tirpitz* was not a major threat to the Allied war effort. Its presence in Norway and the obsessive efforts to sink it were the doing of two men—Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill—who should have been busy with other things. Hitler neither understood naval warfare nor trusted his admirals. The sudden, shocking sinking of the *Bismarck* made him averse to risking its sister ship. He kept the *Tirpitz* in Norway for two reasons: fear of an attack if it tried to sail back to Germany and the mistaken belief that the Allies planned to invade Norway. For his part, former First Lord of the Admiralty Churchill was wrong to insist that the Royal Navy and RAF sink the battleship, even after it had been severely damaged. He goaded his commanders into unnecessary attacks that cost lives and resources while gaining little.

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2. On these various engagements, see William H. Garzke Jr. and Robert O. Dulin Jr., *Battleships: Axis and Neutral Battleships in World War II*, rev. ed. (Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 1985), which also provides much technical information about the *Tirpitz*, especially the damage it suffered in the British attacks. These details are missing from Bishop's account.