

Francis Tusa, esteemed editor of Defence Analysis, reviews John Terraine's "Business in Great Waters: The U-Boat Wars 1916-1945".

Apart from being a simply superbly written account of the anti-submarine campaigns on both sides, it has some passages which chime appallingly well to our ears with events that happened close to a century ago in some cases, but which seem to be spring fresh today. Even if one is not that interested in anti submarine warfare, Defence Analysis feels that a few, selected quotes are worth considering ....

*"At the root of the matter by the simple fact; the sheer lack of anti-submarine vessels and anti-submarine aircraft; and at the root of that lay the far less simple fact of a two-ocean war, with a second enemy of a totally different kind, who posed no submarine threat to trade but challenged American sea-power with capital ships, and against whom it was not American anti-submarine craft but American submarines that promised to be an effective weapon."*

This quote comes from a discourse about how the USA was blindsided by the start of World War Two on its own soil, and the immediate problems that it faced at sea....

But it comes over as an evergreen lesson for today, as it reminds one that just because you face one threat - and the US Navy had been pretty directly involved in ASW operations against the German U-Boat fleet well before formally broke out - that doesn't mean that is the only threat. Further, in the same conflict, you can actually face dramatically different wars, which require very different responses.

Conclusion: This quote should remind one about the need to hold balanced, well-equipped, and well-trained armed forces across the piece. So, anyone saying you shouldn't have an Army that can handle both counter-insurgency and high end warfighting is just an intellectual pygmy...

*"I have made up my mind. The obviously right thing is for me to take over command of the U-Boat expansion programme as Director General, or something of the kind at Naval High Command...For this reason the task of supervising the expansion of the U-Boat arm as a whole must be regarded as by far the most important task which Naval Command can be called upon*

*to undertake."*

This from Admiral Donitz's War Diary from 1940, as he faced a shortage of U-Boats, as "other priorities" always tended to supersede his requests.

Defence Analysis found a resonance here with – especially – the British army of today, which doesn't "get" procurement, and seems to regard it as "beneath" it. But here is an example of a commander who could see that without taking direct control of procurement, his chances of mission success would go from quite shaky to impossible.