In their new monograph, *Long Night of the Tankers: Hitler’s War against Caribbean Oil*, military historians David J. Bercuson and Holger H. Herwig brilliantly narrate the history of the Caribbean theater of World War II. Specifically, they focus on Operation Neuland, the Third Reich’s submarine battle against Allied oil tankers in the Caribbean basin. They effectively explain not only the strategic importance of Caribbean oil to the Allied war effort but also how the Allies cleverly responded to stunning German victories in 1942.

Early in the book, Bercuson and Herwig astutely analyze the availability of oil to both the Allies and the Axis powers during the initial phases of the war. After the surrender of France in 1940, the Axis gained control of the Mediterranean Sea and cut Britain off from its oil supplies in the Middle East. As a consequence, Britain became desperately dependent on oil from Aruba, Curaçao, and Trinidad, “the largest refining complex in the world” at that time (p. 9). This complex was within the neutral Maritime Security Zone that was protected by the US Navy. Despite the significance of Caribbean oil to the British war effort, Bercuson and Herwig note, the Nazis respected the zone’s neutrality until the United States joined the Allied powers in late 1941.

On January 19, 1942, Germany launched Operation Neuland against Allied oil tankers in the Caribbean Sea. In the month of February alone, German U-boats sank seventeen tankers and cargo ships and became, in the words of Bercuson and Herwig, the “masters of the Caribbean” (p. 72). Germany maintained dominance of the Caribbean throughout the spring and early summer of 1942, but the Allies’ industrial ingenuity eventually turned the tide of the battle against the Germans. First, the United States quickly constructed over one thousand miles of oil pipelines, connecting the oil reserves of western North America to the Eastern Seaboard and reducing the importance of Caribbean oil by the end of 1942. Second, and perhaps more important, Allied aircraft outfitted with sophisticated radar destroyed eight German U-boats during the summer of 1943 and decisively won the Battle of the Caribbean.

There are three notable strengths of Bercuson and Herwig’s work. At the end of the monograph, they include a very helpful glossary that provides concise definitions for military terms and abbreviations as well as a bibliography that is conveniently subdivided into archival and non-archival sections. Second, Bercuson and Herwig do not seem reticent to praise the prowess (or include the portraits) of German naval officers, such as Werner Hartenstein and Albrecht “Ajax” Achilles. Their willingness to applaud individual German sailors demonstrates a sensibility that distinguishes them from historians whose analyses get bogged down in their condemnations of the evils of Nazism. Finally, Bercuson and Herwig artfully employ dramatic effect to thrillingly tell one of the lesser-known stories of World War II.
There are no major problems with Bercuson and Herwig’s book. They could have, however, better contextualized the Battle of the Caribbean within the larger Battle of the Atlantic. They do this to some degree, especially at the beginning and near the end of the monograph, but they are not consistent throughout. The result is a narrative that occasionally seems antiquarian.

With the exception of this one small flaw, *Long Night of the Tankers* is an excellent piece of scholarship. Bercuson and Herwig’s well-researched and well-written work offers a judicious analysis of the Battle of the Caribbean. The book should be required reading for all students of the history of World War II, Caribbean history, and military history.

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