

Foreword

Ingram's Fourth Fleet by Commander David D. Bruhn, USN (Ret.) focuses the reader on a World War II theater that has received less historical attention, but was vital to Allied operations. The flow of supplies to Great Britain to sustain her ability to fight and later to build up for the invasion of Europe was essential. Additionally, with the Mediterranean Sea closed to the Allies during the early years of the war, a flow of supplies around the Cape of Good Hope to the Near-East, Russia, and Australia was also vital.

From an overall strategic perspective, the Allies imposed a blockade on Germany to prevent war material from reaching her. In the Battle of the Atlantic, the Germans sought to impose a counter-blockade on the flow of supplies to the European and other theaters by the use of submarines, German surface warships of the Kriegsmarine, and aircraft of the Luftwaffe. Because of the ranges involved and aircraft limitations, German aircraft played no part in their South Atlantic effort. By default, the Allies had total control of the air.

Two factors that were crucial to successful Fourth Fleet operations were geography and politics. Brazil was the only South American country to actively support the Allied war effort. U.S. Navy ships gained basing access to Brazilian ports during the Neutrality Patrol period prior to U.S. entrance into the war, and U.S. patrol aircraft began operating out of Natal, Brazil, in December 1941. If Brazil had not made the decision to allow the stationing of American ships and aircraft at bases in Brazil, the United States would have been severely constrained in its ability to keep the South Atlantic sea lanes open. Basing at Natal in December 1941 and Ascension Island after July 1942 gave Fourth Fleet patrol aircraft access to the entire area of operations assigned to Fourth Fleet.

Ingram's South Atlantic Force began Neutrality Patrol Operations as a Cruiser Division, augmented by a destroyer squadron in April 1941. Additional surface combatants and support ships were added over time as they could be made available from Atlantic Fleet assets. They were not available in large numbers and were never intended for offensive operations. They were sufficient for use against blockade runners, auxiliary cruisers, and convoy escorts, but their coverage was

limited. The primary asset employed against German naval units and available in much greater relative strength were long range Navy and Air Force patrol squadrons. The Allies had total Air Superiority in the South Atlantic and had the range and depth for complete coverage of the operational area. As Commander Bruhn thoroughly documents in his book, all but two of the German submarines sunk between 1942 and 1944 were aircraft kills.

Another important factor that contributed to Fourth Fleet success was Ingram's performance in a diplomatic capacity. In May 1941 he entered Recife, Brazil, in command of two cruisers ordered to Neutrality Patrol. Local officials wanted to know why he was there. He, being the representative of a country at peace, groped to explain. Within a year, after a crucial meeting in April 1942 with Brazilian President Vargas, the president charged him with the protection of Brazilian shipping. After Brazil declared war on Germany in August 1942, President Vargas placed the Brazilian Navy and Air Force under Ingram's operational control. Additionally, Ingram established informal but effective control over U.S. Army and Air Force units in Brazil by telling them he was in charge. These diplomatic and command qualities, as described in Commander Bruhn's book, illuminate the breadth of Ingram's leadership and organizational abilities. In short order he produced a cohesive command structure that led to operational successes—enemy ship kills and successful convoy transits.

It's also noteworthy that when Ingram first arrived in Brazil as the commander of Task Force 3 (later Fourth Fleet) there was no logistical infrastructure present, other than Panair do Brasil—an Brazilian airline—facilities and fledgling U.S. Army sites in the early stages of construction. As a result of his negotiation with Brazil and under his direct supervision, air fields, and naval stations with support facilities for task force ships were operational even before Brazil declared war.

A very interesting aspect of German operations in the South Atlantic was the success of German auxiliary cruisers/raiders against allied merchant shipping. Germany's principal strategic concept behind these heavily-armed ex-freighters was to force the allies to divert assets to hunt them and thus dilute concentration of Allied forces in European and North Atlantic areas. The large number of sinkings the cruisers achieved was an important collateral benefit. Factors that contributed to cruiser success included: 1) the Germans expended considerable effort to provide the cruisers with the means to disguise themselves, particularly through the use of false superstructures; 2) their operational control came under the same

command that controlled the German submarine force, allowing close employment coordination; 3) the Germans used VLF broadcast communications that required minimal response from cruisers or submarines and could not be intercepted; 4) senior Naval officers, considered too old for U-boats, commanded the cruisers and exercised great ingenuity under near autonomous conditions; 5) a global logistics network embedded in almost every important seaport of the world successfully arranged for covert resupply of both submarines and cruisers at remote locations; and 6) the German's broke the British merchant marine code giving them access to sensitive routing information. By way of comparison in all theaters (not just the South Atlantic), nine auxiliary cruisers accounted for 141 (872,891 tons) merchant vessels sunk or captured, while the eighteen U-boats sunk by Allied forces in the South Atlantic were responsible for 104 (561,075 tons) merchant vessels sunk or damaged. Unfortunately for the Germans this success could not be sustained in the face of rapidly expanding patrol by radar equipped aircraft.

Commander Bruhn describes in great detail, Germany's concerted effort by the use of auxiliary cruisers and submarines to disrupt and destroy shipping in the South Atlantic. They failed. By August 1943, Fourth Fleet had accomplished its mission of defeating the submarine threat. In his comprehensive analysis of the many engagements between Allied and German units, consistent lessons emerge:

1. Long range patrol aircraft were essential, but airborne radar was crucial. Without it, the number of aircraft required for effective search would have been much greater.
2. High Frequency Direction Finding (HF/DF), both ashore and afloat, were very effective for initial detection and cueing of enemy threats. In particular the coordination between shore, surface, and airborne units in Fourth Fleet was very strong.
3. The Germans were at a huge technical disadvantage against airborne radar. At the outset they had no detection capability. Early in the war they had some success with Metox, a receiver that could detect longer wave length radars. However, when the Allies shifted to shorter wave lengths, they were once more defenseless. When they deployed a receiver that could detect shorter wave length radars, the limited sensitivity only gave the German submarine about 1 minute warning, insufficient to the need. The submarine's goal was to remain invisible. Radar defeated this goal.

Ingram's Fourth Fleet is extremely well-researched and delivers an engrossing history that informs the reader on many levels. Historical context is excellent. Higher level strategic concepts that are essential to an understanding of operations at the theater level and interservice contributions are thoroughly evaluated. Descriptions of engagements between individual units are presented in intimate detail. Supporting material in the form of personnel diaries, tables, and photographs provide excellent summaries and reinforce the text.

There is also a wealth of reference material to direct readers to greater detail. This is a scholarly work that carries the reader forward through page after page. I think the book does an excellent job of supporting important theses associated with naval warfare:

1. A country with the necessary resources for wartime production of necessary equipment and the training and equipping of necessary forces can be pivotal if equipment and personnel can be delivered to where it's needed.
2. Protection of merchant shipping and sea lanes.
3. Effective planning and execution of cooperative force employment.
4. Control of air, sea, and land space.
5. Courage and perseverance.

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