

# **ENEMY WATERS: ROYAL NAVY, ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY, ROYAL NORWEGIAN NAVY, US NAVY, AND OTHER ALLIED MINE FORCES BATTLING THE GERMANS AND ITALIANS IN WORLD WAR II**

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This culminating book in Bruhn and Hoole's minewarfare trilogy promises to take the reader on a vicarious sea journey alongside the minewarfare forces of the Second World War, and it succeeds with metaphorical panache. Complementing their detailed works on minewarfare in World War I (*Home Waters*) and the Pacific theatre of World War II (*Nightraiders*), *Enemy Waters* provides a well-researched summary of many minewarfare actions that form part of the coastal battles of Europe's Second World War. Their continued use of emerging primary source data made available through various history websites projects into their narrative a multitude of unique perspectives of these interactions.

Initially focused on allied minelaying, which dominated the early defensive phases of the war, the book opens with an illuminating tale of the minelayer HMS *Manxman*; in August 1941 she was locally re-rigged to look like a Vichy French ship, part of a daring minelay in the enemy-held Gulf of Genoa. Bruhn and Hoole's entertaining account points out that "those onboard hoped she appeared correct, in every detail, from the French pendant at the main masthead to the washed clothes flapping on the quarterdeck". The daring ruse worked, contributing 140 mines to the 77,312 offensive mines laid in areas under British control.

Alongside these descriptions of daring actions, the book contains numerous data tables and historically important lists of sailors, ships and mines that contributed to winning the war. A common thread is their highlighting of the bravery of many such sailors, with regular cross references and quotations from the citations accompanying honours and awards bestowed on mine warfare personnel. It should not be lost to history that "Members of the RN [Render Mines Safe] and Bomb Disposal Units, and the later 'P' [Port Clearance] Parties were among the most highly decorated of the war and were awarded as many George Crosses and George Medals as the British Army and RAF combined."

In an attempt to provide academic purity, they unfortunately conflate the current NATO definitions of types of minefields with those commonly used both in wardroom bars and academia. In the San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea (at page 170), Louise Doswald-Beck usefully codified the global academic usage of 'defensive' minefields as being laid in one's own (territorial) waters, a category repeatedly used throughout this trilogy (including this book), in the vast majority of academic books on maritime warfare (Geoffrey Till being one of the few exceptions) and by many navies globally. Thus, the almost unnecessary inclusion of the post-war NATO definitions whereby 'defensive' minefields are only laid in international waters, with 'protective' minefields being laid in one's own territorial waters, muddies the lexicographical waters for those who are not pedants of the current NATO glossary.

The later section of the book turns its attention to mine countermeasures, and the 57,055 Royal Navy and Dominion personnel (plus US, Dutch, Netherlands and Free French) devoted to countering Axis mines. The graphically described exploits of a small selection of these personnel, and of the 1,115 British minesweepers still in commission at the end of the war (316 having been lost), are a stark reminder of the potency of this threat, eloquently summed up by Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsey who in March 1944 noted of the planned invasion of Normandy that “There is no doubt that the mine is the greatest obstacle to success”.

*Enemy Waters* is a wonderful culmination to an excellent trilogy about naval minewarfare in both World Wars. Having read the complete series, I can highly commend all three volumes to naval historians, to academics, and also to those who need to learn from history that naval mines are a pernicious threat that is ignored at a strategists’ peril.