

Doenitz the Spur of U-Boat War That Held Vast Threat for Allies

His Sea Policy of Destruction Gave Him Power in Reich—Spoke Ardently for Hitler After 'July 20 Plot' in '44

Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz, announced as crumbling Germany's new Reichsfuehrer, a severe, seamy-faced, beak-nosed little man who exhorted his seamen to "Kill, kill, kill!" and to avoid any act of humanity, became the Allies' most ruthless and formidable foe.

From the outbreak of war in 1939 to the middle of 1943, when our anti-submarine defenses became so efficient, it was clear even to the Germans that their Battle of the Atlantic was lost, his far-roaming U-boats came very near to adding years to the long war, and in fact did lengthen it more than any other single weapon in the Axis command.

Admiral Doenitz's once-vaunted Navy is defunct, hundreds of his submarines with their crews are rusting in the bottom of the Atlantic—in the later half of 1943 alone we sank more than 150 of them. His great battleship Tirpitz is a mass of wreckage, and the Bismarck, Scharnhorst, and Luetzow are wrecked or sunk along with most of the other ships that flew the swastika. Above all, his new job has a very short life-expectancy.

Prisoner of British in 1918

Karl Doenitz was born in Berlin-Gruenau on September 16, 1891, the son of an engineer.

Joining the German Navy at the age of 18, Doenitz became a U-boat commander in World War I after first serving on the warship Breslau. In October, 1918, when the U-88 was sunk by a British patrol in the Mediterranean, he was taken a prisoner to England. After the November, 1918, armistice he was confined to the Manchester lunatic asylum, having feigned insanity, according to estimates. He was later repatriated to Germany as insane.

His biographies disclose little of his activities in the years between the wars, but in 1935, after a cruise to the West Indies as commander of the cruiser Emden, he was placed in charge of the submarine service which Germany was then rapidly rebuilding.

Within a few months of the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, Doenitz, a rear admiral, was decorated by Hitler with the Knight Cross of the Grand Cross for his skillful operations of the submarine fleet. In September, 1940, he was promoted to vice admiral for his services in organizing and operating the U-boat warfare.

British losses to enemy submarines were beginning to mount and by early 1942 it was estimated that as many as thirty-four were operating off the Atlantic coast at one time. By 1943, when Doenitz was made commander in chief of the German Navy, with the rank of grand admiral, the Reich had between 300 and 700 submarines and was reportedly building a new one every day.

Built Up "Wolf-Pack" Tactics

In supplanting Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, Admiral Doenitz served notice on the Allies that "the entire concentrated strength" of his navy would be put into submarine warfare. Building was reportedly stopped on other classes of German fighting ships.

Doenitz had quarreled with Raeder, openly accusing his superior of issuing excessive figures on submarine sinkings and demanding that Gestapo and Storm Troop snoopers be stopped in their shadowing, interrogating and arresting of submarine men who, after the stress of long patrols, sometimes made statements that the Gestapo twisted into "sedition."

Described as hating the sea and advocating, rather than sea-power, the destruction of all sea-power by submarines, he fully expected to win the war with his U-boat fleets and their "wolf-pack" tactics that he originated.

Doenitz taught submarine skippers to prowl and attack together, an extremely effective method against convoys, and he built up a highly efficient radio communications system which linked him with every one of his ships no matter how far at sea. He developed the submarine tanker for supply,



Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz
Associated Press, 1939

and spurred new building of electric submarines and the extension "breathing" equipment that permitted his U-boats to remain submerged for long periods.

But our rapidly growing fleet of escort carriers, patrol and escort craft, long-range patrolers of the air and helicopters beat the U-boat fleets, just as the Allied convoy system had bested them in 1918.

During 1942 it was all the American-British ship construction program could do to keep abreast of the sinkings and in some months the sinkings exceeded new construction. But in 1943 we had won the "most critical of all fighting fronts," in the Atlantic.

Acted as Hitler's Spokesman

In March, 1944, Admiral Doenitz took Hitler's place at the microphone and urged the German war machine to greater efforts. Reich Marshal Hermann Goering's air power was unable to stop the severe lashing of Allied bombers and the Reich armies were suffering badly in Russia. As D-day in Normandy approached Allied commanders expected the weakened enemy navy to make a suicide attack, but it failed to do so.

Last July, after the July 20 "plot" on Hitler's life, Admiral Doenitz spoke by radio to the German people and the world, assuring Hitler of his "sacred anger" and promising that the Reich Navy "stands firm." He ordered fanaticism in support of Hitler, and asserted that reorganized U-boat packs would renew war against the Allies.

These attacks never came in force, although U-boats are still in evidence in the Atlantic, in the areas where they once threatened the transportation of the armies and materials that are taking over Germany today.