

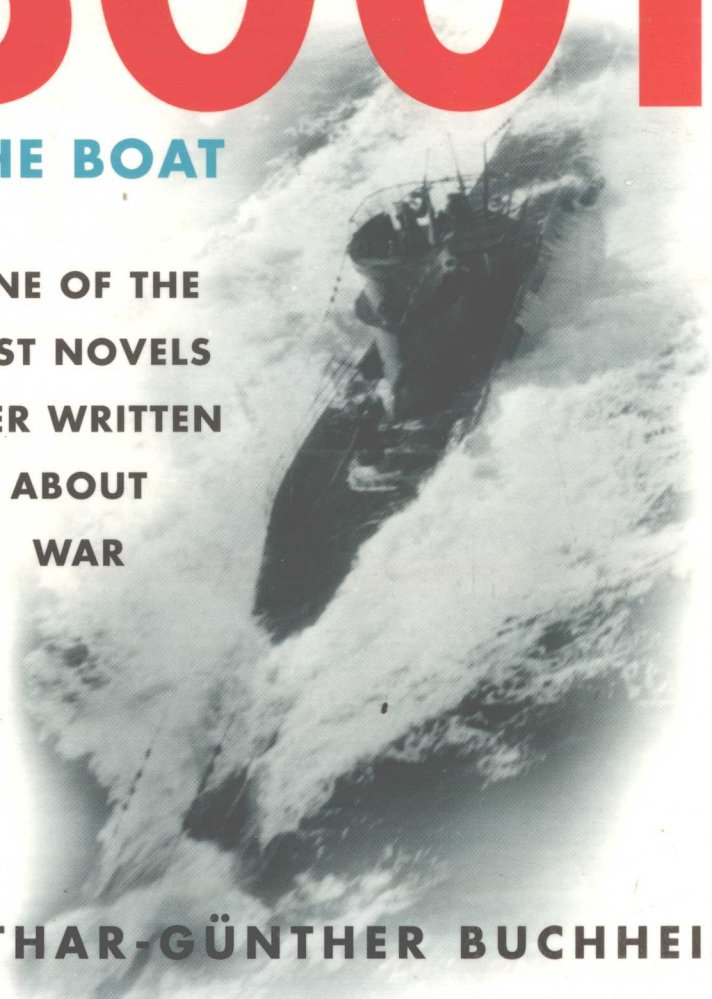
CASSELL MILITARY PAPERBACKS

# **DAS BOOT**

**THE BOAT**

**ONE OF THE  
BEST NOVELS  
EVER WRITTEN  
ABOUT  
WAR**

**LOTHAR-GÜNTHER BUCHHEIM**



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**CASSELL&CO**

Cassell Military Paperbacks

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# **DAS BOOT**

# THE CREW OF THE BOAT

## OFFICERS:

*Commander (the Old Man—also addressed as Herr Kaleun, the standard naval abbreviation of his full title, Herr Kapitänleutnant)*  
*First Watch Officer*

*Second Watch Officer*  
*Chief Engineer (the Chief)*  
*Second Engineer*  
*Narrator—a naval war correspondent*

## PETTY OFFICERS AND SEAMEN ("LORDS"):

*Ario—diesel stoker*  
*Bachmann ("Gigolo")—diesel stoker*  
*Behrmann ("Number One")—bosun*  
*the Bible scholar—control-room assistant*  
*Bockstiegel—seaman*  
*Dorian ("the Berliner")—bosun's mate*  
*Dufte—seaman*  
*Dunlop—torpedo man*  
*Fackler—diesel stoker*  
*Franz—chief mechanic*  
*Frenssen—diesel mechanic mate*  
*Hacker—torpedo mechanic*  
*Hagen—E-stoker*  
*Herrmann—sound man*  
*Hinrich—radioman*

*Isenberg ("Tin-ear Willie")—control-room mate*  
*Johann—chief mechanic*  
*Katter ("Cookie")—cook*  
*Kleinschmidt—diesel mechanic mate*  
*Kriechbaum—navigator*  
*Little Benjamin—helmsman*  
*Markus—helmsman*  
*Pilgrim—E-mate*  
*Rademacher—E-mate*  
*Sablonski—diesel stoker*  
*Schwalbe—seaman*  
*Turbo—control-room assistant*  
*Ullmann—ensign*  
*Wichmann—bosun's mate*  
*Zeitler—bosun's mate*  
*Zörner—E-stoker*

*and fourteen others unnamed. The normal crew for a boat of this class was 50; on this voyage, however, the Second Engineer was a supernumerary, on board for duty training.*

*This book is a novel but not a work of fiction. The author witnessed all the events reported in it; they are the sum of his experiences aboard U-boats. Nevertheless, the description of the characters who take part are not portraits of real persons living or dead.*

*The operations that form the subject of the book took place primarily in the fall and winter of 1941. At that time the turning point was becoming apparent in all the theaters of the war. Before Moscow, the troops of the Wehrmacht—only a few weeks after the battle of encirclement at Kiev—were brought to a standstill for the first time. In North Africa the British troops went on the offensive. The United States was providing supplies for the Soviet Union and itself became—immediately after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor—a nation at war.*

*Of the 40,000 German U-boat men in World War II, 30,000 did not return.*

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# I BAR ROYAL

FROM THE OFFICERS' BILLET in the Hotel Majestic to the Bar Royal the coast road describes a single extended curve three miles long. The moon is not yet up, but you can make out a pale ribbon of a road.

The Commander has the accelerator all the way down, as if this were a race. Suddenly he has to brake. The tires scream. Brake, release, brake again fast. The Old Man handles it well, and without skidding, the heavy car comes to a stop in front of a wildly gesticulating figure. Blue uniform. Petty officer's cap. What insignia on his sleeve?—U-boat man!

He's standing just outside the beam of our headlight, waving his arms. His face in darkness. The Commander is about to start forward slowly when the man begins to beat with the palms of his hands on the radiator hood, bellowing:

*You bright-eyed little fawn, I'll get you,  
I'll break your little heart in two . . .*

A pause, more fierce drumming on the hood and more bellowing.

The Commander's face is grim. He's about to explode. But no, he shifts into reverse. The car leaps, and I nearly crack my head on the windshield.

Low gear. Slalom curve. Screeching tires. Second gear.

"That was our Number One!" the Commander informs me. "Tight as a tick."



## 2 • THE BOAT

The Chief Engineer, sitting behind us, swears unintelligibly.

The Commander has barely gotten up speed when he has to brake again. But he has a little more warning this time, because the swaying line caught in our headlights is still some way ahead. At least ten men straight across the road, all sailors in shore uniform.

Flies open, cocks out, a single cascade of urine.

The Old Man sounds the horn. The line parts and we drive between two rows of men pissing at attention.

"We call that the watering cart—they're all from our boat."

Behind us the Chief growls.

"The rest are in the whorehouse," the Commander says. "They'll be doing rush business there tonight. You know Merkel is moving out in the morning too."

For almost a mile not a soul to be seen. Then in our headlights a double file of military police.

"Let's hope none of our boys are missing in the morning," says the voice from behind us. "When they're drunk they like to go after the shore patrols—"

"Don't even recognize their own Commander," the Old Man mutters to himself. "That's going too far."

He's driving slower now.

"I'm not feeling so fresh myself," he says half over his shoulder. "Too much ceremony for one day. First the funeral this morning—for that bosun who caught it in the air attack at Châteauneuf. And in the middle of the funeral another attack—terrific fireworks. It isn't decent—particularly during a funeral! Our flak brought down three bombers."

"And what else?" I ask the Old Man.

"Nothing today. But that execution yesterday turned my stomach. Desertion. Clear case. A diesel engineer. Nineteen years old. Let's not talk about it. And then in the afternoon that hog slaughter at the Majestic. Probably meant to be a banquet. Pudding broth, or whatever the stuff's called—nobody liked it."

The Old Man stops in front of the *établissement*; on the garden wall a sign in letters three feet high proclaims BAR ROYAL. It's a creation in concrete, shaped like a ship, between the shore road and a secondary

road coming in at a sharp angle from the pine forest. Straight across the front—on the ship's bridge—a picture window like a great superstructure.

Monique's the entertainer in the Bar Royal. A girl from Alsace who knows only scraps of German. Black hair, dark eyes, all temperament and tits.

Besides Monique, the attractions are three waitresses with peekaboo blouses and a three-man band, nervous and insipid except for the drummer, a mulatto, who seems to enjoy what he's doing.

The Todt Organization had requisitioned the place and had it repainted. Now it's a mixture of Fin de Siècle and German House of Art. The mural above the orchestra platform represents the five senses or the Graces. Five Graces—three Graces? The U-boat Commander-in-Chief took the place away from the Todt Organization on the grounds that "U-boat soldiers need relaxation"; "U-boat officers can't spend all their time in whorehouses"; "We need a more refined atmosphere for our men."

The more refined atmosphere consists of tattered carpets, split-leather chairs, white latticework adorned with artificial grapevines on the walls, red shades on the wall lights, and faded red silk curtains over the windows.

The Commander looks around the room with a grin, stares magisterially at the groups at various tables, his chin pulled back and his forehead furrowed. He then methodically straightens a chair, lets himself drop heavily into it, and stretches his legs out in front. The waitress Clementine immediately comes tripping up to him, breasts bobbing; the Old Man orders beer all round.

Before it arrives, the door bursts open and a group of five men crowds in, all lieutenant-commanders by the stripes on their sleeves—and behind them three lieutenants and a second lieutenant. Three of the lieutenant-commanders are wearing white caps: U-boat officers.

Against the light I recognize Flossmann. An unpleasant, irascible individual, square-built and blond, who recently boasted that during his last patrol, in the course of an artillery attack on an unescorted vessel, the first thing he had done was to open fire on the life-

boats with a machine gun, "to make our position clear . . ."

The other two are Kupsch and Stackmann, the inseparables, who were heading home on leave when they got stuck in Paris and since then have been overflowing with whorehouse talk.

The Old Man growls, "Another hour and the whole U-Force will be here. I've been wondering for a long time why the Tommies haven't smashed this shop in one of their dashing commando raids, along with the Commander-in-Chief in his little castle at Kernével. Can't understand why *that* shop hasn't been taken—so close to the water and right next to all that mess around Fort Louis. As for us sitting here, they could take us with a lasso if they wanted to. This'd be a good night for it."

The Old Man has neither the thin, thoroughbred face nor the wiry figure of the picture-book U-boat heroes. He looks rather ordinary, like the captain of a Hamburg-America liner, and he moves heavily.

The bridge of his nose is narrow in the middle, bends to the left, and broadens out. His bright blue eyes are hidden under brows that are permanently frowning from so much concentrated staring at the sea. Usually he keeps his eyes so nearly closed that you only see two slits and, at their outer corners, a burst of wrinkles. His lower lip is full, his chin strongly modeled; by early afternoon it is covered with reddish stubble. The rough, strong features give his face a look of gravity. Anyone not knowing his age would put him in his forties; he's really ten years younger. But given the average age of commanders, he is already an old man at thirty.

The Commander is not given to grandiloquence. In his official reports, his accomplishments sound like child's play. It's hard to get anything out of him. Usually we understand each other by an exchange of fragmentary phrases, tangential speech. A mere hint of irony, a slight pursing of the lips, and I know what he really means. When he praises U-boat Headquarters, looking crosswise past me, it's clear what he means to convey.

Our last night ashore. Beneath the babble of talk al-

ways the nagging anxiety: Will it be all right? Will we make it?

To calm myself I reason it out: the Old Man—a first-class commander. Unflappable. No slavedriver. No crazy, bloodthirsty daredevil. Reliable. Has served on sailing ships. Has always come through. Two hundred thousand tons—destroyed a whole harborful of ships. Always got away, even out of the worst jams . . .

My heavy sweater will be useful if we head north. I've told Simone not to come with me to the harbor. It would only cause trouble. The Gestapo idiots watch us like lynxes. Envious pigs. The Dönitz Volunteer Corps—they can't touch us.

No notion where we are really headed. Mid-Atlantic probably. Not many U-boats out there. A very bad month. Strengthened defenses. The Tommies have learned a lot of new tricks. The tide has turned. The convoys are excellently guarded these days. Prien, Schepke, Krestschmer, Endrass all attacked convoys. And they all got it at almost the same time—in March. For Schepke it was especially nasty. Jammed between the periscope housing and the tower's armor plate when the destroyer rammed his bombed-out tub. The aces! There aren't many left. Endrass's nerves were shot. But the Old Man is still intact, a model of perfect calm. Introverted. Doesn't destroy himself with booze. Seems completely relaxed as he sits there lost in thought.

I have to leave for a minute. In the toilet I hear two officers of the watch standing beside me at the yellow-stained tile wall. "Have to go unload it."

"Don't stick it in the wrong place. You're really pissed."

When the first one is already halfway through the door, the other roars after him, "While you're at it, stuff in greetings and salutations from me too!"

Men from Merkel's boat. Drunk, otherwise they wouldn't be spouting filth like that.

I return to the table. Our Chief Engineer is angling for his glass. An entirely different man from the skipper. Looks like a Spaniard, with his black eyes and pointed black beard, a portrait by El Greco. Nervous type. But

knows the ropes from A to Z. Twenty-seven years old. The Commander's right hand. Has always sailed with the Old Man. They understand each other without much talk.

"Where's our Second Watch Officer?" the Old Man wants to know.

"On board. Still on duty, but he'll probably turn up."

"Somebody has to do the work. And the First Watch Officer?"

"In the cathouse!" says the Chief, grinning.

"Him in the cathouse? Don't make me laugh! Probably writing his will—that's one man who always has everything in order."

About the apprentice engineer, who is going to be joining the crew on this voyage and is supposed to take over the Chief's job afterward, the Old Man doesn't ask at all.

So there will be six of us in the Officers' Mess, a lot of men at one small table.

"What's become of Thomsen?" asks the Chief. "He wouldn't just stand us up."

Philipp Thomsen, a commander of the UF and very recent recipient of the Ritterkreuz, had reported in during the afternoon. Seated deep in a leather chair, elbows propped up, hands folded as though in prayer, his eyes staring grimly over them at the opposite wall. ". . . we were then harried for three quarters of an hour by depth bombs. Right after the explosion, at a depth of about two hundred feet, we took six to eight canisters fairly close to the boat. Flat pattern. One especially well placed, about the height of our gun and over two hundred feet to one side, hard to be more precise. The others all fell eight hundred to a thousand yards away. Then an hour later, another series. That was in the evening, about 23.00. At first we stay down and then make a silent run, rising slowly. After that we surface behind the convoy. Next morning a cruiser makes a dash in our direction. Wave force three, and moderate wind. Rain squalls. Rather cloudy. Very favorable for surface attacks. We submerge and position ourselves for the attack. Fire. Wide of the mark. Then again. Destroyer proceeding at slow speed. Make a try with the

stern tube. That works. We then run behind the convoy until we receive orders to turn about. The second convoy announced by Zetschke. We maintain contact and supply running reports. Toward 18.00 we catch up with it. Weather good, sea two to three. Fairly cloudy."

Thomsen paused. "Very odd; all our successes were on days when one of the crew was having a birthday. Really extraordinary. The first time it was the diesel stoker's. The second, a radioman's. The unescorted ship went down on the cook's birthday, and the destroyer on the torpedo technician's. Crazy, isn't it?"

Thomsen's boat had four pennants on its half-raised periscope when it ran in early this morning with the flood tide. Three white ones for merchant vessels and a red one for the destroyer.

Thomsen's hoarse voice rang out like the bark of a dog over the oil-covered, brackish water. "Both engines twice stop!"

The boat still had headway enough to glide noiselessly up to the pier. Its outlines were sharp; out of the sticky, oily scum of the stinking harbor water it rose like a tall vase with a much too tightly bunched bouquet in it. Not much color—a bunch of dried flowers. Blossoms like pale patches amid the dark moss of beards. As they approached, the patches became emaciated white faces. Chalky skin. Deeply shadowed hollow eyes. Some glittered as though with fever. Dirty, gray, salt-crusted leather clothes. Mops of hair under caps that were almost sliding off. Thomsen actually looked ill: thin as a scarecrow, his cheeks cavernous. The grin on his face—certainly meant to be friendly—looked frozen.

"Respectfully report UF back from action against the enemy!" Whereupon we: "Heil UF!" at full pitch.

From Supply Depot One an echoing squawk, and then another, weaker, from the Penhoët wharf.

The Old Man is wearing his oldest jacket to show his contempt for all the fancy dressers. The front of this ancient peajacket has long since ceased to be blue and is more of a faded gray filmed with dust and spots. The

once-golden buttons are green with verdigris. His dress shirt is also an indefinable color—lilac shading into blue-gray. The black, white, and red ribbon of his Ritterkreuz is no more than a twisted string.

"This is not the old gang," the Old Man complains, casting an appraising glance over a circle of young watch officers at the center table. "These are the tadpoles—all booze and big talk."

Lately two groups have formed in the bar: the "old warriors," as the Old Man's crewmates call themselves, and the "young strutters," the philosophically oriented youngsters with faith in the Führer in their eyes, the "chin-thrusters," as the Old Man calls them, who practice intimidating looks in front of the mirror and clench their asses extra-tight, just because it's in style to move springily on the balls of the feet with buttocks held in and body inclined slightly forward.

I stare at this assemblage of young heroes as though I were seeing them for the first time. Hairline mouths with sharp grooves on either side. Rasping voices. Swollen with their own superiority and crazy for medals. Not a thought in their heads but "The Führer's eyes are upon you—our flag is dearer than life."

Two weeks ago in the Majestic one of them shot himself because he'd caught syphilis. "He gave his life for Volk and Vaterland," was what they told his fiancée.

In addition to the crew of old warriors and young recruits there is also the outsider Kügler, who sits with his first lieutenant close to the washroom door. Kügler of the oak leaves, who keeps aloof from everyone. Kügler, noble knight of the depths, Parsifal and torch-bearer, unshakable believer in Final Victory. Steel-blue eyes, proud bearing, not an ounce too much fat—an immaculate example of the Master Race. With tapered index fingers he shuts his ears when he prefers not to hear cowardly misgivings or the sneers of doubting cynics.

The flotilla surgeon occupies a neighboring table. He too has a special position. His brain is stuffed with a collection of the most astounding obscenities. Hence he is known concisely as "the filthy pig." Nine hundred and

ninety-five years of the thousand-year Reich are already gone, in the opinion of the flotilla surgeon, an opinion broadcast whenever he sees fit or is drunk.

At thirty, the surgeon enjoys universal respect. On his third sortie against the enemy he took over command and brought his boat back to base after the commander had been killed during a concentrated attack by two aircraft and both lieutenants lay badly wounded in their bunks.

"Somebody die around here? What is this, a wake? What kind of place is this anyway?"

"There's enough noise as it is," growls the Old Man, taking a quick swallow.

Monique must have grasped what the surgeon was saying. She brings the microphone close to her scarlet lips as though she means to lick it, flourishes a bundle of violet-colored ostrich feathers with her left hand, and bawls in a smoky voice, "*J'attendrai—le jour et la nuit!*"

The drummer uses his brushes to evoke a sexy whisper from his silver-mounted drum.

Shrieking, sobbing, moaning, Monique acts out the song with contortions, undulating her opulent blue-white, shimmering breasts, valiantly exercising her derrière and performing a lot of hocus-pocus with the feather fan. She holds it behind her head like an Indian war bonnet and taps her pouting lips rapidly with the flat of her hand. Then she draws the fan up from behind and between her legs—"*. . . le jour et la nuit!*"—and rolls her eyes. Tender stroking of the feathers, bumps and grinds toward the feather bush—drawn up again from below—hips swaying. She pouts again and blows on her fluttering prop.

All at once she winks in the direction of the doorway, over the heads of the men around the tables. Aha, U-boat Commander with his adjutant! This beanpole topped by a diminutive schoolboy's face is hardly worth more than a brief wink. He doesn't even give a smile of recognition, but glares around as if looking for another door to escape through unobserved.

"A highly distinguished visitor come to consort with the mob!" roars Trumann, an especially recalcitrant



member of the old guard, in the midst of Monique's sobbing— "*. . . car l'oiseau qui s'enfuit.*" He actually staggers over to the Commander-in-Chief's chair. "Come on, you old Aztec, how about charging the front line? Come on, here's a good spot—orchestra seat—the whole landscape from underneath . . . not interested? Well, one man's meat is another man's . . ."

As usual, Trumann is dead drunk. His spiky mop of black hair is covered with a drift of cigarette ash. Three or four butts have become entangled in it. One still smoldering. He may burst into flames at any moment. He wears his Ritterkreuz back to front.

Trumann's boat is known as "the barrage boat." Since his fifth patrol his bad luck has become legendary. He's seldom at sea for more than a week. "Crawling back on knees and nipples," as he calls it, has become a regular routine for him. Each time he has been caught during his approach to the theater of operations: bombed by flyers, harried by depth bombs. And there were always malfunctions—broken exhaust pipes, ruptured compressors—but no targets. Everyone in the flotilla is privately amazed that he and his men can bear up under their totally disastrous lack of success.

The accordion player stares over his folded bellows as if he'd seen a vision. The mulatto is cut off somewhere around the level of his third shirt button by the moon of his big drum: either he's a dwarf or his stool is too low. Monique makes her roundest and most carp-like mouth and moans into the microphone. "In my solitude . . ." And Trumann leans closer and closer to her until he suddenly shouts, "Help—poison!" and throws himself over backward. Monique falters. He thrashes about, then starts to get up again and bellows, "A real flame-thrower—she must have eaten a whole string of garlic—god-oh-god-oh-god!"

Trumann's Chief, August Mayerhofer, appears. Since he wears the German Cross on his jacket, he's known as "August of the Fried Egg."

"Well, how did it go in the whorehouse?" Trumann yells at him. "Are you all fucked out? It's good for the complexion. Old Papa Trumann certainly ought to know by now."