

GERMANY'S GREATEST SUBMARINER

LOTHAR VON ARNAULD DE LA PERIERE WOULD RACK UP A SCORE OF VICTORIES AGAINST ALLIED SHIPPING THAT WOULD NEVER BE EQUALED

BY KELLY BELL



Germany was the first country whose military fully realized the implications of submarine warfare. In both world wars, German U-Boats were the nation's main naval weapon and, in both conflicts, almost was the deciding factor. Britain twice came close to being starved into submission by fleets of German submersibles that sank supply/troop vessels and warships in ever-increasing number. High-scoring U-Boat commanders were idols in the Fatherland and — with rich irony — the greatest of them all was descended from Germany's ancestral enemy. His name was *Kapitanleutnant* Lothar von Arnauld de la Periere and, for the Allies of the First World War, his exploits were an on-going clinic in destruction and frustration.

He was an unorthodox predator in that most of his kills were achieved by using deck guns rather than torpedoes. He strictly adhered to "prize regulations" that forbade sinking merchant vessels without warning. The 1909 Declaration of London saw maritime powers Japan, Britain, Germany, and the United States sign a 71-article accord that created a stringent code of conduct in maritime warfare.

Participating nations' warships (both submarines and surface raiders) would halt merchant vessels then board and search them. In the event these boats were carrying martial contraband bound for the inspecting ship's enemies, the merchantmen could be seized, manned by a prize crew, and sailed to their nearest port. In the event the captors could not take on captives, they would sink the supply ship after "all persons on board had been placed in safety." Since submarines could neither accommodate prisoners in their cramped confines or spare sufficient crew members to man captured vessels, they were expected to allow the crews of targeted boats to board lifeboats, and then sink their cargo carriers by scuttling, torpedoes, or deck guns. Throughout such operations, subs were compelled to remain on the surface and hence vulnerable to the enemy.

Early during World War I, naval paladins of both the Allies and Central

For his Great War exploits, de la Periere would be awarded the *Pour le Merite*.

Powers assumed that because of their small size, fragility, and early lack of deck guns, submarines would be unable to comply with these restrictions and were thus no threat to maritime supply lifelines. The Germans, however, could see the implications of going to war with an enemy like the United Kingdom, that fielded a navy that was both gargantuan and bristling. The *Kaiser* and his admirals quickly realized they could ill-afford to not exploit any and all available opportunities when it came to such an opponent and accel-



German propaganda leaflet displaying the effectiveness of Germany's U-Boat fleet in destroying Allied shipping.

Official portrait of Lothar von Arnauld de la Periere. What is interesting is that the U-Boat skipper would gain the majority of his victories by using his deck guns rather than torpedoes.