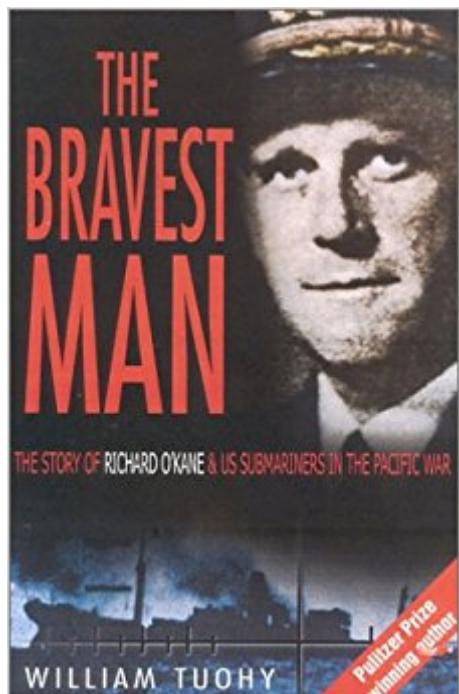


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The Bravest Man



Synopsis

Written by a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, this tells the true story of an all-American war hero, Dick O'Kane and gives insights into the secret troubles of the U.S. Navy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The title of The Bravest Man refers to Richard O'Kane, the most successful American submarine commander in the Second World War. While this book focuses on O'Kane's wartime career on the submarines USS Wahoo and USS Tang, it also examines the careers and exploits of other successful American submarine commanders in the Pacific War. A reader might wonder why another book on O'Kane's career is necessary, given the availability of O'Kane's own book, Clear the Bridge in 1977, as well as Clay Blair's Silent Victory and Theodore Roscoe's US Submarine Operations in World War II. The justification for a new book on O'Kane is provided both by the style and the manner in which the author chooses to deliver this story. Unlike other accounts, which tend to be rather meticulous but dry, the author succeeds in painting a wartime sea saga on a vivid canvas, with the protagonist contending not only against the enemy, but the sea itself, an interfering shore-based naval bureaucracy and even defective torpedoes. In these pages, O'Kane and his peers appear as human beings, not just ciphers in a tonnage-sunk chart. O'Kane started his rise to prominence in the submarine community while serving as executive officer under the legendary "Mush" Morton in the USS Wahoo in 1943. Morton was one of the first sub skippers to break with the over-cautious, unimaginative pre-war US submarine doctrine and embrace a more freewheeling and aggressive combat style. Tenacity was Morton's trademark, and O'Kane later adopted this

mindset when he was given his own command on USS Tang. The author effectively demonstrates the deadly efficiency of the Morton - O'Kane combat team on Wahoo; the real weapon system was the well-trained and aggressive crew, not the submarine itself.

"It's a big ocean," Dick O'Kane once told me. "You don't have to find the enemy if you don't want to." O'Kane was 60 when we met. He was a compact man, straight as a ramrod, with a small smile and bushy eyebrows. He loved to talk, especially on technical matters, but he seldom spoke about what it was like to be a submariner in the Pacific, in a war that claimed the lives of 22% of the Americans who went to sea in the pig boats, as submarines were called. It was a pleasure to meet him again in "The Bravest Man" and to learn more about his remarkable accomplishments in World War II. That a submariner need not find the enemy was brought home to O'Kane in 1942 on his first patrol in Wahoo, under an older captain who had learned caution in the peacetime Navy. The cautious skipper was replaced by Dudley "Mush" Morton, who with O'Kane's support made Wahoo the deadliest American boat in the Pacific, sinking nine ships on one ferocious patrol through the Yellow Sea, between China and Korea. "You can't afford to flinch," Morton said; "you can't afford to give up. You must constantly keep 'rassling, and keep shooting till you destroy him." Wahoo was later lost with all hands, not including O'Kane, who by then -- the fall of 1943 -- had command of Tang. He soon proved that he too had a great desire to keep 'rassling and to sink Japanese ships, despite the second-rate torpedoes supplied to American submarines. On its first patrol, Tang sank five ships; on its second, it rescued 22 American airmen, shot down in the battle for Truk at the center of the Pacific's Caroline Islands. On its fourth patrol, it set a U.S. record by sending 10 enemy ships to the bottom, despite new torpedoes that were sometimes as balky as the old. As a skipper, Richard O'Kane was audacious, persistent and inventive.

The term "Ace" is usually reserved for fighter pilots who shoot down five or more enemy aircraft. But, Captain Richard O'Kane took the term to new levels as a submarine executive officer and later, Captain. O'Kane's career began as fourth officer aboard the USS Argonaut. He was somewhat upset with the Captain's lack of aggressiveness. The problem continued after O'Kane joined the USS Wahoo. The Wahoo's original Captain suffered from the same lack of aggressiveness. However, that all changed when Captain Dudley "Mush" Morton took over the Wahoo. In the coming months, Morton and O'Kane formed one of the deadliest one-two punches in the submarine war. Under Morton's command, Wahoo became legendary, sinking enemy ships at an astounding rate. After five successful patrols aboard Wahoo, O'Kane was ordered to the U.S. for new construction; he was

about to take command of the new submarine USS Tang. After taking command of the Tang, O'Kane used many of Mush Morton's techniques. It wasn't long before O'Kane and the Tang had surpassed Wahoo's impressive record. The Tang was the preferred destination of many new submariners, as O'Kane showed no fear in the face of the enemy. On Tang's last patrol, O'Kane sank ten enemy vessels before a defective torpedo, the last aboard, malfunctioned and circled back upon Tang. The torpedo threw O'Kane from the bridge into the water. A few others managed to escape from the stricken vessel by using Momsen breathing devices. But, they were soon picked up by a Japanese patrol boat and spent the rest of the war as prisoners of the Japanese. O'Kane was later awarded the Medal of Honor. Over the course of the war, no other submarine commander sank more ships, rescued more downed aviators, or made more successful surface attacks than O'Kane.

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