

# The Anatomy of a Possible Future Exhibit — Maybe

By Stan Cronwall

As I like to say if I'm still on my perch and have most of my marbles, this is about a future philatelic exhibit that I would like very much to do.

First, the proposed title will be something along the lines of, "Hitler's High Seas Fleet" or maybe a step back from that grandiose idea because in truth his navy never approached the size, or relative strength of the Kaiser's at the time of World War I.

Instead, it is more accurate that the exhibit title should include the word "small" or "puny" or even "minimalist".

But I digress.

The head of the Kriegsmarine, Grand Admiral Erich Raeder had drawn up plans for a major naval build-out, but it wouldn't be ready for war until 1945.

Hitler's personal military history was on land only, so he almost totally lacked an appreciation for what a strong navy could provide.

He understood that a delay until 1945 meant that his recently built up armored and air forces would be matched or outdated by potential enemies rushing to re-arm, upgrade and increase the numbers of their own forces.

With that in mind, Hitler's plans to conquer the nations of Western Europe and acquire lands to the east for "Lebensraum" (room to grow for the German population) meaning the Soviet Union were time critical. He could not wait.

Yes, submarines could be built fairly quickly, were relatively cheap, and would be useful to interdict sea lanes and cut supplies to Great Britain and the Soviet Union. But there was not sufficient time to build and launch capital surface ships.

With this background, here is how I see the exhibit unfolding and what is needed to make it happen:

1. Photo postcards of the relatively few ships that made up Hitler's surface fleet from destroyers to the aborted carrier, "Graf Zeppelin" These cards would show the ships under construction, the commissioning ceremony, sea trials or just at sea or in harbor.

It might be interesting to also include schnellboats (similar to our PT Boats), disguised raiders, and surface supply ships for the raiders and U-Boats.

2. Correspondence (cards or covers — best with letters) to/from officers and/or crew members of each ship.
3. Obtain translations (German to English) of cards/letters. (Optional portion of Exhibit)
4. Photo postcards or other means of reporting the end disposition of the ships whether sunk, given to other nations at war's end.

Thus far in the 5-6 years of gathering input for the Exhibit, materials on hand include photo postcards of several destroyers, Admiral Graf Spee, Prinz Eugen, Bismarck, Hipper, Koln, and Tirpitz at sea or in berth; as well as for several supply ships. There is also correspondence to/from Graf Spee during its blockade duty in support of the Condor Legion during the Spanish Civil War.

It has been suggested that an attempt should be made to obtain copies of photos of the ships during construction or later by soliciting help through my longtime membership in the German Philatelic Society. This might also be a source for copies of correspondence to/from crew members.

Any other source suggestions are welcome. Thanks in advance.