



An Honorable German

Charles L. McCain

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In the tradition of Das Boot and The Hunt for Red October comes a sweeping saga of World War II, featuring a heroic and conflicted German U-Boat commander.

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When World War II begins, Max Brekendorf, a proud young German naval officer, fights for his country with honor and courage. With the unstoppable German war machine overrunning Europe, Max looks ahead to a bright future with his fiancée, Mareth.

But as the war progresses, their future together becomes less and less certain. German victories begin to fade. In the North Atlantic, Max must face the increasing strength of the Allies on ever more harrowing missions. Berlin itself is savaged by bombing, making life for Mareth increasingly dangerous and desperate. And as the Third Reich steadily crumbles, Nazi loyalists begin to infiltrate Max's crew and turn their terror on Germany's own armed forces.

Recognizing what his nation has become, Max is forced to make a choice between his own sense of morality, and his duty to the Reich.

With its stirring, rarely seen glimpse of the German home front during WWII, vivid characters, and evocation of the drama and terror of war at sea, An Honorable German is a suspense-filled story of adventure, of love and loss, and of honor and redemption.

An Honorable German Details

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From Reader Review An Honorable German for online ebook

Ben Philips says

I really liked reading this book, considering I came upon it at a used bookstore downtown. I'm definitely a World War II history buff and this book earns my seal of approval.

Charles McCain showed great attention to detail and is very accurate in his information. However, this book being from the enemy point of view captivated me the most.

McCain showed a great perspective of a German navy officer in World War II. The main character, Max, developed into a true leader with great qualities by the end of the book. I was truly able to sympathize for Max also because he was not necessarily in favor of Nazism, but simply fought to protect his homeland and everything he held dear. For that, I do believe this book (as the title says) shows the endeavors of an honorable German.

The only downside of this book is that the ending was very rushed, and I was left wanting a little more closure than what the book offered.

Chris Wolak says

This book caught my eye on the new book display at my town's public library. An Honorable German is the story of Maximilian (Max) Brekendorf, an officer of the German Navy during WWII. The action of the book begins on September 30, 1939 and ends on September 10, 1944. The story of Max's war experience shows the slow destruction of the naval traditions that were Max's passion as well as the repeated bombings of Berlin and the decline of Nazi Germany. There are some great sea battles, details about life aboard ship and a U-boat, and tensions between true-believer Nazis and those who are not.

I love seafaring books and that's the main reason I decided to read the book, but I also thought it would be interesting to read a novel from the perspective of a German naval officer. A few years ago I read Shadow Divers and explored the U505 exhibit at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry, so I had some familiarity with the topic.

The novel gives a glimpse of what it may have been like for a career military man confronted with the political dictatorship of Hitler and National Socialism, which, on the extreme right, wanted to see the eradication of all forms of rank and status. Max had no interest in politics. He'd wanted to serve in the navy since he was a young boy and is trained at the prestigious Marineschule Mürwik.

While McCain makes the point that naval officers were not allowed to join the Nazi Party, through various characters he makes it clear that there were party fanatics in the navy, particularly toward the later years of the war when younger men who were indoctrinated in the Hitler Youth became old enough to serve. Basically, Max is a thinking, moral man, a naval officer who wants to do the right thing and that isn't always in line with Nazi policy. He is on a mission to sink enemy ships, but he also follows the custom of the sea and ensures survivors are rescued and treated well.

The novel also shows the steady destruction of the city of Berlin and how men who were away fighting the

war didn't necessarily know the reality of the conditions that their loved ones were experiencing or, if they did, didn't comprehend the nightmare they were living. There is a striking contrast between Max's life at sea: cruising around for days or weeks trying to find an enemy ship to attack vs. being a civilian in Berlin who experiences regular hours-long, nerve shattering airplane bombings and seeing their loved ones killed and the city turned to rubble. Coming home on leave after a long deployment to see a beautiful city after months/years of bombing was certainly a shock, but it was also a reality check against the official Nazi party propaganda that claimed they were on their way to winning the war.

McCain's offers a succinct description of the RAF's bombing method:

"They began with blockbuster high-explosive bombs to blow the roofs off buildings and blow the windows in, exposing wooden beams and interiors, giving fire endless pathways along which to spread and providing through-drafts of air to rush it along. Then came the small incendiary bombs, falling in their hundreds of thousands into buildings; and then the fires began. Fires medieval in their terror; fires that could not be extinguished because they were composed of burning phosphorus; liquid fire that flowed in burning streams down gutters and into the basements where women and children took shelter; fire so terrible, fire so merciless, there was nothing to do but run from it with all the strength God had given you; fire spreading so fast that running with all your strength was never enough. Fire so hot it set the very asphalt in the street ablaze and if your feet became stuck in the liquid tar, you burned like a torch, your screams unheard over the roaring of the firestorm. This was the hell brought down on Hamburg by the Tommies, and now they were bringing it to Berlin" (263). And then when survivors were digging out those who may still be alive, "Occasional explosions sounded in the distance as delayed –fuse bombs went off—designed to take out the rescuers and onlookers who gathered after a raid" (269). It also happened that water mains were shattered during the bombing and people trapped in the shelter drowned (270).

Here are some examples of the "smaller" details McCain includes:

* The government prohibited the public expression of mourning for a soldier who died because it was considered unpatriotic. After all, it was an honor for a husband/son/brother to give his life for the Führer (274).

* Returning to Berlin Max notes that someone wrote in chalk on the remaining portion of a building's wall: "All members of the Schleicher family are dead" (209).

* All German naval ships employed Chinese laundrymen (15).

* Ship decks were made of teak wood because it doesn't splinter when hit by shells. In the days before ships were made of steel, most casualties in sea battles came from flying splinters (55).

An Honorable German is McCain's first novel and although it is a bit uneven—the tension between the fanatical Nazis and Max is simplistic at times and the POW section is lacking in atmosphere and tension that infuses other parts of the book—I highly recommend this novel to readers who like military fiction, thrillers, or German history.

Deborah Grosvenor is McCain's agent. She's the agent that discovered Tom Clancy (not that I am a big Clancy fan, but that is saying something), so it's probably a safe assumption to say we'll see more naval novels from McCain. I hope so.

Richard says

An Honorable German is an incredibly authentic feeling piece of historical fiction set during World War II

and told from the point of view of a German officer loyal to the idea of Germany but not a Nazi. I've been looking for something set during World War II that takes that point of view for a while and *An Honorable German* scratches that itch.

While it seems a bit pondering at first, it's important to remember the subtitle of "A Novel of World War II" and realize that it's intended to cover the scope of the conflict as opposed to telling a concise story. Still, Max is a very interesting character and his journey through the war is an engaging one.

I'd recommend this to anyone with an interest in reading from the German point of view and anyone interested in the German Navy (We get to see a pocket battleship and U-boat in action) during World War II.

Don says

Really interesting read. The book shows both the progression of WWII and Max (the protagonist) from a German perspective. As a naval officer, Max experiences the war in fits and spurts, fighting at sea for months at a time then returning to war-torn Europe for periods of "rest." One of the things that makes this book so interesting is seeing (through Max's eyes) the changes to the German people during the course of the war. It starts with everything being logical and sensible (we're just taking back the land stolen from us after the First War) and then comes rationing, losses on the Eastern Front, the increasingly dominant Nazi party rhetoric, fear of the Gestapo, failure of the Luftwaffe to protect the Fatherland, etc. Couple this with Max dealing with personal losses throughout the war and you have a very illuminating story. Max's desire to follow orders comes into direct conflict with his desire to fight with honor, to live, and to preserve the men under his command.

Not bad for McCain's first novel.

Peregrine 12 says

I really liked this book. It wasn't perfect, the action scenes were a little clunky, but just for the sheer knowledge of maritime history and German culture, this book is worth reading. It was also a lot of fun.

SPOILERS AHEAD, JA WOHL

It has a happy ending - the main character gets away from the prisoner camp and eventually rejoins his fiancee. But man, what a wild ride this guy had. The ending seemed kind of thrown on there (it didn't mesh as tightly as the rest of the story), but it was fun. It was fun because of the historical accuracy the story entailed, and it was fun because of the high adventure aspect of it.

It is also a little eye opening to read about the bombing of German cities and German civilians by British and American forces. The Brits had bombs that would hit, explode... and then explode again six hours later when people would be standing around trying to clean up. I have to agree with the German's POV - it was diabolical. There were lots of little details in there that made me say, "Really? I didn't know that!" Another cool factoid, for instance, was the phosphorescent lapel buttons that Germans wore at night during blackouts so they wouldn't crash into each other on the street - and the 'true believers' showed their loyalty to the Party by having schwastika-shaped, glow-in-the-dark buttons. (People are the same everywhere you go, it seems to

me.)

I enjoyed it. This one gets 4 stars.

Wendy says

Awesome! I don't usually like war books or movies, but this one was really, really good. Seeing things from a different point of view than the same-old American or British one put a refreshing spin on the usual WWII format. All the little details and the research that went into the book really helped me feel like I was right there with Max, which could be pretty scary at times.

I know some 'official' reviews said it was naive, but it didn't really seem that way to me. I don't know, maybe it's because *I'm* naive, but it seemed like a realistic enough look to me, and if the 'naive' quality was supposed to be because (spoiler) almost all of the likable people live, then I guess it is naive, but that's perfectly okay with me. A large part of the reason I avoid war books and movies is because I know pretty much everyone's going to die, which is depressing. I was steeling myself for that, and was pleasantly surprised when it didn't happen.

I liked Max, and I really liked how he made the distinction between 'German navy man' and 'Nazi officer'. At first he wasn't really all that likable, with his gung-ho, 'let's go get killed' attitude, but he goes through a lot of character development and ends up more like Langsdorff (who I also liked). It was interesting to see his progression from a young man who looks at Langsdorff with scorn and a doubtful attitude to an older, more seasoned man who understands why his old commander was the way he was and is now very much like him.

I did have a few problems...there were parts that were rather icky, but I suppose that's to be expected from a war book. Also, until much later, I didn't really see why Mareth and Max loved each other, and actually I wasn't convinced that they *did* love each other. It was more a 'sex as love' relationship in the beginning, but later on the love part showed through and I started pulling for them to make it. Still, it took quite a while for it to show. And (another spoiler) a reunion scene between the two of them would've been nice.

All in all, though, I enjoyed this book a lot.

Charles McCain says

Outstanding maritime action sequences are the high points of McCain's otherwise naïve-feeling debut. Max Brekendorf, a young German naval officer during WWII, serves on a battleship in the Atlantic, a merchant raider in the Indian Ocean and, after being adrift in a lifeboat and a convalescence in Paris, he volunteers for the U-boat force. As the war wears on, the navy, an institution that once forbade officers from joining political parties, becomes overrun with Nazi loyalists, creating tensions on Max's submarine that will eventually force him to choose between his moral sense and party directives. Unfortunately, the numerous good German/bad German scenes sustaining this uncomfortable premise are clownish at best. However, the action sequences are undeniably stunning, and McCain is no slouch with details, such as a ship's teakwood deck planks (which don't splinter when hit by shells) or the smell of petroleum in a submarine that permeated even the canned food. Fans of naval fiction couldn't ask for more authentic action, even if the novel falls short of its ambitions to salvage the reputation of the German navy. (May)

--Publishers Weekly

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American readers of World War II stories are familiar with the Allied point of view. First novelist McCain reverses that perspective, portraying the war from the viewpoint of a German naval officer. Max Brekendorff begins the war aboard the "pocket battleship" *Graf Spee*, hunting Allied shipping in the South Atlantic and looking forward to the postwar life he hopes to enjoy with his aristocratic fiancée. The brutality of war and the stodgy German class structure stand in his way, but the most sinister obstacle may be the growing political power of Nazi hard-liners, who seem to become ever more fanatical as Germany's military prospects darken. Exposed to wartime atrocity from both sides, Max may have to choose between loyalty and humanity. No government, Axis or Allied, comes out looking very good in McCain's tale; Brekendorff's moral salvation is up to him alone and could cost him his life and his reputation. A vivid and compelling portrayal of World War II naval service. -Library Journal

Patrick Nichol says

There are plenty of novels about World War II in modern literature, and I've read several of them.

But we scarcely see one from the enemy's perspective.

Charles McCain's brilliant novel, the product of 20 years research, is an engrossing tale of an honourable Kriegsmarine officer and his survival at sea. Max Brekendorff is a professional naval officer with a lovely fiancee and a distaste of Nazis.

McCain's story follows Max as he serves aboard the famed pocket battleship *Graf Spee*, endures weeks in a lifeboat after being sunk, then joins the German Navy's famed U-Boat wolf packs. Along the way, he earns the Navy's highest honours.

Yet he still can't get permission to marry his fiancee because her father, a Nazi official, abhors his working-class background.

All of the ingredients for an excellent war drama is evident in this novel. The title refers to Brekendorff's sense of duty and honour, not just to his country but to his service and his loved ones.

Naval history buffs will love McCain's attention to detail.

This is truly, an excellent first work.

Tom says

I stumbled upon this novel on a library display shelf, and read it on impulse. I found this a compelling story, and the description of the suffering endured by average Germans was the most wrenching part of it. We who live in the countries victorious in the war too often, and understandably focus on the tribulations of the Allied victims of Nazi aggression. But ordinary Germans suffered terribly, none more than the Berliners who found themselves under the bombs raining down from Allied bombers in 1943 and '44. This book admirably

renders the human suffering of "total war".

Liam says

This book was as good as the last one was bad... Charles McCain has written one of the best WWII novels which I have read in a very long time; well-researched and both technically & historically accurate. I have rarely found an American author who was willing to address the various issues of moral ambiguity pertaining to that conflict, but Mr. McCain has had the courage to do so. I almost never burn through a work of fiction in less than a day anymore, both because I am getting older and because I don't find many novels these days that I cannot put down until finished. This one, however, was a rare exception; I would most definitely recommend 'An Honorable German' to anyone who enjoys historical and/or military fiction, or who simply enjoys a well told tale. If you have a penchant for the work of W.E.B. Griffin, et. al. you should like this book as well.

Sibel says

It is rare that I have put a book down and simply felt a sense of... best I can describe it is gravitas. The sense that I have been witness to something epic and am both deeply satisfied at the journey and the ending (Egads!!! What an ending that was!!), but already missing it. Similar to other fabulous tales that suck you in, I wished to be again upon the ship of the narrative for the first time. And I'm sincerely jealous of those who are yet to jump aboard.

The story-telling is fantastic! The rhythm changes masterfully. Being a sucker for a good turn of phrase, I always make little dog (puppy?) ears at the bottom of each page that has a section that I want to revisit and highlight. The bottom corner of the book is now visibly thicker.

The research is meticulous and informative, yet does not dry out the rest of a great story. I learned sooooo much! About naval warfare and ships. About the sayings and cultural nuances of the WW2 German navy. About the everyday experience of the battered German population and the evolution of propaganda & their relationship with it. It was all very accessible in terms of language and the amount of information given was perfectly portioned out. Never enough to feel academic, never too little to feel sparse.

Ultimately though, it's very much a story about a deeply honourable man devoted to his nation, courageously struggling to navigate a world gone awry.

As I reflect upon it more, I deeply hope that when faced with such pressures, I would be as good of a person.

Needless to say, this book has inspired and educated me. Bravo Sir! I eagerly look forward to your further works!

-Sibel

Jakob says

it was really good, it gave a new perspective on world war II that I've never really thought of before; that the majority of Germans in the war didn't want to be there at all and they didn't like the Nazi party. that being said i was disappointing because it wasn't what I expected from the advertisements and the back of the book. I was led to believe that it would be an actually story that would grow and develop into a climax, but it was more of a compilation of stories throughout brekendorf's life. I was also led to believe that it would be a submarine book much like the hunt for the red october but in 14 chapter of the book they are on a submarine for maybe 3 or 4 chapters. it felt like a fictional biography interlaced with fact. the facts mad it interesting to me. capitain langsdorff was a reall man and the events of the pocket battle ship Graff Spee were real.

worth the read but I would never read it again.

Lauren says

An Honorable German by Charles McCain is a military history buff's dream. It is poignant, lyrical fiction woven around what I can only determine are historically accurate facts. It is noted in author Charles McCain's biography that more than twenty years of research went into this novel. The research is quite apparent since McCain puts the reader right on board with the German Navy. The descriptions of the warships, of the situations taking place aboard and in the North Atlantic waters surrounding the ship are stark, fresh, and intimate. At times the military terms became a little much for me to follow and process, yet I was still entertained.

Max Brekendorf is the admirable, young officer dealing with both the harsh realities of war and the difficulties in her personal life. His love for his fiancée Mareth is clear, as is hers for him, and the two plan to marry despite her parents' disapproval. Max is learning and changing internally at the same time as his country is. He remains a sympathetic character, especially as his country crumbles around him and he watches his best friend pass before his eyes. (The scenes that surround this event are quite striking.) When incredibly questionable behavior begins to come into play and is exposed, the novel hits a real turning point. It is exciting to follow Max through these harrowing times as he struggles and perseveres. And I will say that the ending of this novel was WONDERFUL. All in all, once you push through the heavy military speak, this book is a definite A.

Brendan says

I thoroughly enjoyed this novel by Charles McCain. It's great, cracking, piece of straight ahead historical fiction. It follows the career of a young German Naval officer who starts off aboard the famous pocket battleship Graf Spee. Through his eyes you follow the ship's exploits in the South Atlantic during the first months of the War, including its scuttling in the Rio del Platte. Anybody who is interested in the German Navy will definitely enjoy this read. It is very atmospheric, a good story, a lot of excitement, some romance, some politics, without either flinching or getting heavy handed. Author McCain really knows his stuff, he's spent years researching his subject and it really shows, I just hope he'll continue writing about the German Navy.

JD says

I really enjoyed this book, it is the story of a young German naval officers' journey through World War 2. It starts aboard the Graf Spee and it's commerce raiding journey at the beginning of the war and the subsequent Battle of River Plate, then briefly aboard an auxiliary cruiser and then onto the Uboatwaffe. It also covers life in Nazi Germany and the horrors of the strategic bombing campaign against them. The story is great as it is through the eyes of a young German full of confidence and bravado at the beginning and then systematically becomes disenchanted with the war until he thinks all hope is lost. Great book, hope Mr McCain writes another one!!

PS: The part in the book about the Battle of River Plate is one of my favorite book parts ever.
