

The raider in sheep's clothing

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The Wolf: How One German Raider Terrorised Australia and the Southern Oceans in the First World War

By Richard Guillatt and Peter Hohnen

William Heinemann, \$34.95

THERE isn't a dull page in this account of the adventures of Seiner Majestaet's Schiff Wolf in World War I.

Under the command of Captain Kurt Neger, the Wolf, a disguised and armed cargo ship, spent more than a year prowling the Indian and Pacific oceans, laying mines and bailing up other ships, taking their supplies and imprisoning their crews. Neger was under orders not to reveal his whereabouts and for 15 months the Wolf neither stopped at port nor communicated by radio.

Meanwhile the authorities in Australia and New Zealand, whose waters the Wolf threatened, refused to warn mariners of the risks they faced, and the sinking or disappearance of a number of ships was attributed to sabotage.

Some of the ships the Wolf raided carried civilians, including women and children, and the story is so rich in incident and character that it reads like the most old-fashioned kind of ripping yarn. (One of the civilians they took captive was Somerset Maugham's boyfriend, Gerald Haxton.)

There are escape attempts, racial tensions between the different prisoner groups and the growing solidarity of interest between the captives and their captors, including trysts between some of the women and the German sailors.

Peter Hohnen and Richard Guillatt have resisted the temptation to dress the story up: rather they let the well-deployed facts do the work.

First published in The Age, 11 July 2009