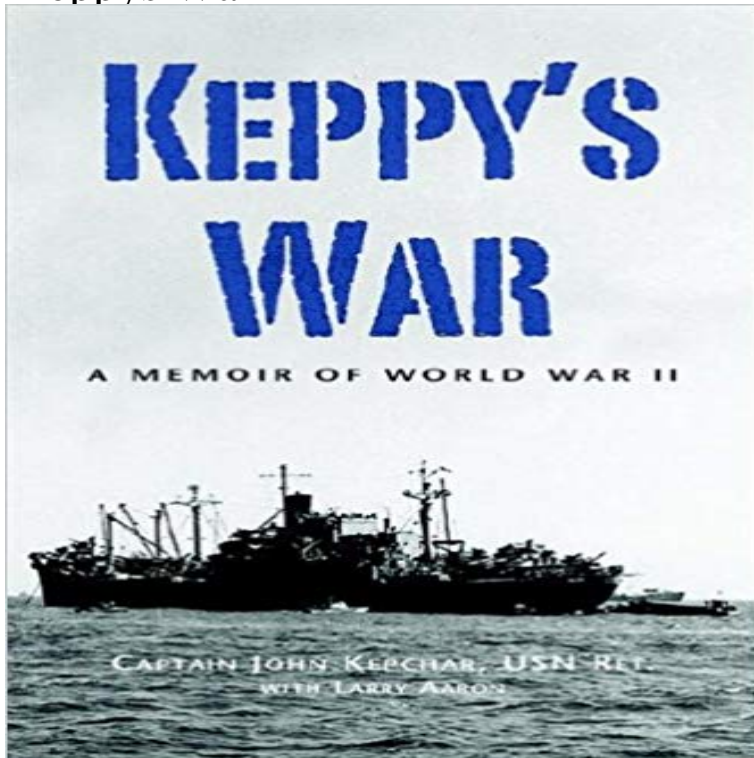


Keppys War



Keppys War A Memoir of World War II
By Captain John Kepchar, USN Retired
With Larry G. Aaron

Keppys War relates the experiences of Radioman John Kepchar (Keppy) while he served three different admirals on their flagships in both the Atlantic and the Pacific theaters during World War II. Because of his position, he handled top-level encrypted messages and observed the war from a different prospective than the soldier on the beachhead. His duties as a radioman involved the naval amphibious landings at Normandy, Southern France, Philippines, and Okinawa. Relating not only the drama of the war itself, but also the human story replete with its full range emotions, John Kepchar allows the readers to experience the war for themselves and identify with those who served in those trying times.. The book includes eyewitness accounts of the Exercise Tiger, a practice for D-Day at Normandy that turned into a tragedy. While Admiral Don Moons amphibious group rehearsed for the invasion of France, a convoy of ships was surprised by German torpedo boats. Because of the enormity of the losses, a veil of secrecy fell across the whole affair. Only in recent years has the secrecy surrounding Exercise Tiger has been lifted, allowing John Kepchar and others to discuss what really happened. Admiral Moon, sometimes referred to as the last casualty of that event, was partially blamed for the deaths, even though the British command was responsible for the safety of the ships. Moon, who earned distinction as the amphibious commander of Utah Beach during the Normandy invasion, took his own life before the eve of the Southern France campaign, partially as a result of that event. At the time he was the first high-ranking naval officer to do so. John Kepchar, who looked at Moon as a father figure, was on board the Bayfield at the time and relates his account of events

surrounding Admiral Moons death. Letters from high-ranking officers commending Moons service and the testimony of those officers who knew him aboard the Bayfield are included in the text. Further insight into the character of Admiral Moons is provided by his daughter Dr. Meredith Moon. Intertwined in John Kepchars war story is the story of his family and friends in his hometown of Windber, Pennsylvania. His father and mothers ancestors had traveled over the Caucasus Mountains in Russia to settle in what is now Czechoslovakia. At the turn of the 20th century his parents and other immigrants from all over Europe immigrated to Windber to work in the Berwind-White coal mines. These immigrant families exhibited a supreme patriotic spirit while sending their sons and daughters back to their homelands to fight for freedom. Many never returned; some of these were John Kepchars closest childhood friends. Since he was the oldest son of a widowed mother, Kepchar was exempt from military service, but he attempted to assist the war effort, first as a ship welder, then as an air plane inspector at the Martin bomber plant in Baltimore. Later, after joining the Navy, he found himself on a troop ship bound for Plymouth England, a city under constant siege by the German Luftwaffe and the V-1 Buzz bombs as the German rockets were called. On the eve of Normandy, beginning June 4, 1944, John Kepchar kept a diary of his thoughts and feelings along with descriptions of events that he observed during the war. As he served Admiral Ingor Kiland aboard the U.S.S. Mount McKinley, Kepchar recorded the furious attacks of the kamikazes, or Japanese suicide planes, and the devastation and loss of life they caused in fiery explosions of U. S. Navy ships at the logistics base in the Keramo Rettos. Added insight into the wartime events described by radioman Kepchar are the words of his immediate superior and life long friend, then Lt. Robert Lewis, who was a communications officer aboard the

Bayfield and the Mount McKinley. Lewis handled top secret, super secret, and

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