Das Boot, a Wolfgang Petersen film, based on the novel by Lothar-Günther Buchheim, is a Columbia Pictures release, now showing at the Sack Beeson Hill.

Das Boot is an anti-war film brought to use by the people who brought you WW II. Its message is very clear: people get killed, and besides, the food isn’t very good.

In Das Boot, we see through the eyes of a German journalist stationed on board a U-boat (German submarine) to produce propaganda complete with photos for the folks back home. This point of view enables us to see all parts of the ship, and to hear confessions of love and lässt das Boot nicht aussehen, in which each other.

The film takes place almost entirely on board the ship, covering the time span of a run on the North Atlantic—a search-and-rescue mission in one of the worst storms for sailing anywhere. There are long periods of boredom interspersed with short bursts of terror.

The men, like the boat, tend to come across under pressure. They are not the supermen we feared, nor do they all have unyielding faith in what they are fighting for. The older men, in particular, seem to have an ironic or even sarcastic attitude toward leadership.

We follow the men in this movies, but the one star is the boat itself. This reconstruction of a WW II U-boat is remarkably realistic in every detail (in fact, the same submarine and still imperfect). The tension-filled moments, the boat is forced deep under water, and the whole crew watches the boat go as far below recommended levels. The crew starts to pop and the whole structure threatens to collapse from the water pressure, but if it does, they will suffer a certain death.

In a scene at the beginning of the film, we are told that 30,000 of the 40,000 men assigned to U-boat missions died. This fact, and our look at the men’s horrible condition (one bathroom for all the men, three men in rotation for each bed, and a huge number of sick) made us all think of the possibility of modern warfare.

Das Boot is different from other war films, taking the perfect detailed realism of equipment and conditions, and in the fact that since we are seeing the German side of the war, we are forced away from our stereotypes of what it means to be a good war. Das Boot is not a war story, it is a story of survival.