

Foreword

The position of the US Navy at the entry of the United States into the war was, to use a metaphor, “back on its heels.” The US in the Pacific was in post-traumatic stress over the surprise and humiliation of Pearl Harbor. In the Atlantic, there was little preparation for the Navy other than the several months of undeclared conflict involving German submarines and US escorts detailed to assist convoys bound for Britain. Certainly, no overarching strategic, or tactical preparation had been completed by December 1941 for Atlantic operations, much less those in the Mediterranean. But that would change dramatically.

Although the USN was unable to quickly respond operationally in 1941 and early 1942, the reality of being involved in trans-Atlantic naval combat was a quick teacher. Throughout 1942, the main interest of the Atlantic Alliance was to keep Britain supplied and this meant convoys of merchant ships from the Americas. But, for complex and sometimes unfathomable reasons, the USN was slow to grasp this exponential growth of escort requirements. As a result, it was not until well into 1943 that escorting of convoys across the Atlantic (and, for that matter, along the US east coast) became a priority for the USN.

But with the realization that German submarines would indeed need to be dealt with, the USN pursued the construction and commissioning of purpose-built escort vessels of about 1500-tons displacement called Destroyer Escorts (DEs). These were often captained by junior officers no more senior than Lieutenants, and crewed by a mix of a few experienced enlisted specialists but with the vast majority of the crews being new Sailors, many of whom had never been to sea until joining the Navy. But this somewhat “pick up crewing” approach, compelled by the reality of few experienced personnel assets at war’s outbreak, was offset by the hard work, adaptability, commitment, bravery, and professionalism of these men who manned these small ships. As a result, it’s hard to imagine a more dramatic transformation and evolution of dominance of a battle space than was demonstrated by these US escorts.

David Bruhn recounts in this excellent book the details of many of these engagements in which young crews and young commanding officers learned quickly how to fight running battles with U-boats. The exploits of people like LT Sheldon Kinney and the crew of USS *Bronstein* are practically impossible to believe in today’s world of electronic sensors and integrated battle management centers aboard ship. Kinney

and his men sank three German submarines in a span of a few days. To do this, he kept the battle space picture in his mind, not having the aid of integrated sensors. And his command was a DE not much bigger in size than the submarines it was hunting.

The author also recounts the practically unsung efforts of Captain Ed Cochrane, USN, who, almost unnoticed, created and developed the design for the DEs that gave them the ability to fight as they did. This program had little visibility, just as the overall escort mission had little visibility, but it was a job that needed to get done, and Cochrane's professionalism and technical skill got this important capability over the goal line.

And a little-known part of the US Navy's war in the Mediterranean is the story of the many DEs that were pressed into service other than the escort mission for which they were principally designed. DEs provided gunfire support and amphibious area of operations ASW protection, in addition to escorting amphibious forces in transit in the Med. They truly were "maids of all work" and their story is also amply told here.

Military history writing often focuses on the pursuit of major aspects of a given conflict. That's what a large number of readers probably expect. In my experience, very often, lesser-known aspects of the conflict are not covered as much as they should be, or worse, ignored altogether. The service, sacrifice, and success of the escorts, particularly the DEs, of the USN in the Atlantic and Mediterranean is just such a story that has not received the kind of treatment it deserves. David Bruhn has taken a major step forward in bringing to light the remarkable, almost improbable, success of the escorts in the Atlantic War. The US crews of the DEs, who fought, died, and yet won the naval battles in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, are now remembered, and will not again be forgotten.

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