

## Preface

*To destroy more enemy tonnage than can be replaced by all Germany's enemies put together.*

—German Admiral Karl Doenitz's—Befehlshaber der Unterseeboote (commander of the submarines)—primary objective regarding the utilization of his U-boats; from a press interview intercepted and translated by the Allies during the war.<sup>1</sup>

Photo Preface-1



Drawing by Charles Dixon of the sinking of RMS *Lusitania* on 15 May 1915 by a German submarine, from *The London Graphic*, 16 November 1918. The caption asserts, “The greatest sea crime on record: the sinking by a Hun U-boat without warning of the great liner *LUSITANIA*, with the loss of 1400 lives.” Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 892

Following Japan’s unprovoked attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, the Congress of the United States declared war on Japan at 1610 the following day. On 11 December, Hitler declared war on the United States, Mussolini obediently followed suit and, in response at 1530 that same day, Congress declared war on Germany and Italy.<sup>2</sup>

Attacks by U-boats on U.S. coastal shipping were expected since, in addition to those carried out in the European Theater, Germany had also conducted submarine attacks, off America’s Eastern Seaboard in

World War I. The first attack of the second war occurred on 12 January 1942, when *U-123* torpedoed and sank the British freighter SS *Cyclops* in Canadian waters, 300 miles east of Cape Cod. The submarine was under the command of Kptlt. Reinhard Hardegen, who would become one of Germany's top U-boat Aces during the war. He was credited with 21 merchant ships sunk, and another 4 ships damaged, and also sinking the U.S. Navy "Q-ship" USS *Atik* (AK 101) and also damaging the British armed merchant cruiser HMS *Aurania* (F28).<sup>3</sup>

An account of the action with *Atik* (serving as a "wolf in sheep's clothing") may be found in Chapter 6. Q-ships were rusty, "clapped out," seemingly-defenseless merchant vessels but with concealed weaponry, designed to lure submarines into carrying out surface attacks employing their deck guns. If successful in decoying a U-boat commander to surface (interested in conserving his torpedoes for "bigger game"), a Q-ship could, in theory, rapidly bring her hidden weapons into action, and sink her powerful, but then more vulnerable, adversary.

## **MOST DANGEROUS WATERS IN THE WORLD**

Photo Preface-2



American freighter SS *Carolyn*, circa 1917-1918. During World War II, she became USS *Atik* (AK-101), a Q-ship lost with "all hands" on 27 March 1942, as a result of combat action with the German submarine *U-123*.

U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph #NH 102438

The use of Q-ships as "staked goats," instead of employing capable warships to hunt enemy submarines, gives hint of the dire straits the U.S. Navy found itself in at war's commencement in lack of adequate warships. The Navy was wholly too small – it had too few ships to fight the two-ocean war in which it found itself. Until America's industrial might, and particularly her shipyards, could begin to meet dramatically increased requirements for ships of all types, at-sea commanders did not

have the necessary resources to adequately carry out all their wartime duties and responsibilities.

One of the commands with the greater dearth of naval vessels was the Eastern Sea Frontier which, during the first four months of 1942, had the unhappy distinction of being the most dangerous area for shipping in the whole world. This frontier, formerly named the North Atlantic Naval Coastal Frontier until 6 February 1942, was the responsibility of Vice Adm. Adolphus Andrews, U.S. Navy. He had taken command on 10 March 1941, and would continue until 1 November 1943. In this capacity, he had the daunting task of sweeping free of enemy submarines the entire stretch of the Atlantic between Nova Scotia and Florida.<sup>4</sup>

Photo Preface-3



Vice Adm. Adolphus Andrews, USN.  
Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 56042

Admiral Andrews' challenges were particularly daunting, given the U.S. Navy was woefully unprepared for the U-boat blitz on the Atlantic Coast that began in January 1942. He suffered from a lack of air power (a result of pre-war agreements with the Army) and adequate numbers of suitable naval vessels. He had very little to work with initially, only 100 or so aircraft along the entire coast, and an assortment of District

craft and some U.S. Coast Guard cutters brought under Navy command. The latter shortfall was largely the Navy's fault, particularly regarding a lack of small warships or patrol craft necessary to carry out anti-submarine patrols and coastal convoy escort duties along America's vast eastern coastline.<sup>5</sup>

Map Preface-1



In Spring 1942, the coastal boundary of the Eastern Sea Frontier (which encompassed Naval Districts No. 1, and 3 through 6) stretched from northern-most Maine, which shared a border with Canada, down America's East Coast to the Georgia/Florida border. (For some reason, unknown to the authors, there was no District No. 2) Julius Augustus Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II*, 1959

Recognizing this weakness, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy (17 March 1913 to 26 August 1920), had previously intervened. On sundry occasions before the war, he prompted the Bureau of Ships and the General Board of the Navy

to adopt a small-craft program; but, later sardonically observed, “The Navy couldn’t see any vessel under a thousand tons.”<sup>6</sup>

Photo Preface-4






















Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt in WWI (left-center, wearing light coat) in France, viewing a German big gun emplacement near Chateau-Thierry. It was occupied for a few days by a gun intended to fire on Paris, France. Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 288

Given the lessons taught by World War I, the Navy’s failure to immediately implement a convoy system along the U.S. East Coast was criticized. This was no doubt the result of the limited Atlantic Fleet destroyer force which was heavily tasked and generally in very short supply. Most destroyers (DDs) were committed to escorting transatlantic convoys providing troops and critical war materials to the British war effort, and others to escorting U.S. Navy ships operating in the Atlantic to guard against possible offensive operations by the German surface navy.<sup>7</sup>

What the U.S. Navy sorely lacked was a large number of small anti-submarine craft (“sub-chasers”) like the hundreds that had been hastily built in World War I, then discarded or sold-off. Andrews had an insufficient number of these types of escorts to form and escort convoys; the few vessels that he did have were carrying out anti-submarine patrols off major ports, and in the sea lanes. Assigning these vessels to convoy escort duties would leave shipping entering and leaving ports unprotected. Ironically, massing numbers of coastal merchant ships into inadequately protected convoys would make the U-boats’ job of sinking ships even easier and more effective.<sup>8</sup>

## DESTRUCTION OF MERCHANT VESSELS BEGINS

The massacre of shipping along the Atlantic Coast by U-boats, initiated with the sinking of SS *Cyclops* on 12 January, began in earnest two days after she went down, when U-boats moved into the shipping bottleneck of Cape Hatteras. By month's end, twenty vessels had been sunk in what remained of that month, along the Eastern Seaboard.<sup>9</sup>

Date	Ship	Nationality	Date	Ship	Nationality
12 Jan 42	<i>Cyclops</i> steam merchant	British 	21 Jan 42	<i>Alexandra</i> <i>Hoegb</i> motor tanker	Norwegian 
13 Jan 42	<i>Frisco</i> steam merchant	Norwegian 	22 Jan 42	<i>Olympic</i> steam tanker	Panamanian 
13 Jan 42	<i>Friar Rock</i> steam merchant	Panamanian 	23 Jan 42	<i>Thirlby</i> steam merchant	British 
14 Jan 42	<i>Norness</i> motor tanker	Panamanian 	23 Jan 42	<i>Empire</i> <i>Gem</i> motor tanker	British 
15 Jan 42	<i>Coimbra</i> steam tanker	British 	24 Jan 42	<i>Venore</i> cargo ship	American 
18 Jan 42	<i>Allan</i> <i>Jackson</i> steam tanker	American 	25 Jan 42	<i>Varanger</i> motor tanker	Norwegian 
19 Jan 42	<i>Norvana</i> steam merchant	American 	25 Jan 42	<i>Culebra</i> steam merchant	British 
19 Jan 42	<i>Lady</i> <i>Hawkins</i> passenger ship	British 	26 Jan 42	<i>West Ivis</i> steam merchant	American 
19 Jan 42	<i>City of</i> <i>Atlantic</i> cargo ship	American 	27 Jan 42	<i>Francis E.</i> <i>Powell</i> steam tanker	American 
19 Jan 42	<i>Ciltvaina</i> cargo ship	Latvian 	27 Jan 42	<i>Pan</i> <i>Norway</i> motor tanker	Norwegian 

## BRITAIN PROVIDES MUCH-NEEDED ASSISTANCE


Such protection as Andrews could furnish to shipping during this blitz, was painfully inadequate, but help from an Ally was forthcoming. The

Royal Navy lent the United States Navy 24 anti-submarine vessels (22 converted fishing trawlers and 2 whalers), each equipped with a deck gun, depth charges, and Asdic (sonar). Manned by aggressive, former merchant seamen and commercial fishermen, who had much experience combating U-boats in British waters, these rugged little coal burners, identified below, provided valuable assistance in the Eastern Sea Frontier, and later the adjacent Gulf Frontier as well. (Appendix A provides summary information about the characteristics of these vessels, and Appendix B, a list of the officers who served aboard them from their arrival in American waters through war's end.)<sup>10</sup>

**Twenty-four Royal Naval Patrol Service Vessels**

HMT <i>Arctic Explorer</i>	HMT <i>Lady Rosemary</i>	HMT <i>Pentland Firth</i>
HMT <i>Bedfordshire</i>	HMT <i>Le Tigre</i>	HMT <i>Senateur Duhamel</i>
HMS <i>Buttermere</i>	HMT <i>Northern Chief</i>	HMT <i>St. Cathan</i>
HMT <i>Cape Warwick</i>	HMT <i>Northern Dawn</i>	HMT <i>St. Loman</i>
HMT <i>Coventry City</i>	HMT <i>Northern Duke</i>	HMT <i>St. Zero</i>
HMT <i>Hertfordshire</i>	HMT <i>Northern Isles</i>	HMT <i>Stella Polaris</i>
HMT <i>Kingston Ceylonite</i>	HMT <i>Northern Princess</i>	HMS <i>Wastwater</i>
HMT <i>Lady Elsa</i>	HMT <i>Norwich City</i>	HMT <i>Wellard</i>

**ROYAL NAVAL PATROL SERVICE (RNPS)**

	<p>Unique silver badge awarded to those who served six months or more in the RNPS, worn on the sleeve of the recipient's uniform. Because a majority of RNPS members were Reservists, it became a "Navy within a Navy," one commonly referred to as "Harry Tate's Navy," "Churchill's pirates," and "Sparrows."</p>
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Because of her expansive coastlines, and realizing that there would be German mining and U-boat attacks in adjacent waters, Britain recognized and provided in World War II, as she had in the First World War, hundreds of minesweepers and anti-submarine patrol vessels to allow the Royal Navy some freedom of movement and to keep her ports open to merchant shipping.

At the outbreak of war, the Royal Navy commandeered the Sparrow's Nest at Lowestoft, a private estate in Suffolk, to set up the headquarters for the Royal Naval Patrol Service. The Sparrow's Nest had been built as Cliff Cottage in the 19th century, a summer retreat for Robert Sparrow, the owner of a luxurious country house in nearby

Worlingham. The estate became known as HMS Europa. (Unlike the names of vessels, the names of Royal Navy shore establishments preceded by HMS are not italicised because the ‘ships’ in question are ‘stone frigates’ to which shipboard terminology and customs still apply.) Located at the most easterly point of Great Britain on the North Sea, Lowestoft was then the closest military establishment to the enemy.<sup>11</sup>

Out of necessity, the Royal Naval Patrol Service utilised outdated and poorly armed vessels, mostly requisitioned coal-burning trawlers crewed by ex-fishermen. The RNPS also helped man Royal Navy MMS (Motor Minesweepers otherwise known as “Mickey Mouse”) and BYMS (British Yard Minesweepers). Many of the former were built in Canadian yards while the latter were the British-procured version of the famous U.S. Navy YMS minesweeper.

The RNPS came to bear several unofficial titles that poked fun at it by others. One that gained prominence was “Harry Tate’s Navy.” This reference dated back to the First World War; it was jargon for anything clumsy and amateurish. It originated from an old music hall entertainer who portrayed a clumsy comic who couldn’t come to grips with various contraptions, and whose act included a car that gradually fell apart.<sup>12</sup>

In WWII, regulars in the Royal Navy used this reference to scorn the trawlers and drifters of the Royal Naval Patrol Service. Nonplused, the members of the RNPS proudly adopted the title “Harry Tate’s Navy” which, as the war went on, became a worthy synonym for courage. Because the peacetime crews of fishing vessels evolved into Royal Naval Reserve seamen in the minesweeping and anti-submarine fraternity, they quickly acquired a special camaraderie with one another. This amity continued throughout the war, though by its end, with the expansion of the service, most RNPS members were Royal Navy Volunteer Service “hostilities only” members with little previous connection to the sea. (An explanation about the differences between the RN, RNR and RNVR follows in a few pages).<sup>13</sup>

The officers and men of the RNPS fought in all theatres of the war, earning over 850 gallantry awards as well as over 200 Mention in Despatches. A Victoria Cross (VC) was won during the Norwegian Campaign by Lt. Richard Been Stannard RNR, the only one awarded to the unit. Stannard was commanding officer of HM trawler *Arab* (FY202) of the 15th Anti-Submarine Striking Force. He received his VC for gallantry under air attack during operations off Namsos, Norway.<sup>14</sup>

Today, some of the few remaining original buildings of HMS Europa in Sparrow’s Nest, Lowestoft, house the Royal Naval Patrol



Service Museum and the War Memorial Museum. There is also a memorial in Belle Vue Park, in the north end of Lowestoft, to commemorate members of the RNPS who died during 1939-1946 and who have no known grave other than the sea, as well as a few who died on shore and who, too, have no known grave.<sup>15</sup>

Photo Preface-5



Rob Hoole with RNPS veteran George Hunt, in February 2020. Hunt served aboard the unnamed motor minesweeper HMS *MMS 1084* and the anti-submarine whaler HMS *Sobkera* (FY331) in World War II. There is still a monthly gathering of RNPS veterans in Portsmouth, which he attends.  
Courtesy of Rob Hoole

## ROYAL NAVY SHIP NOMENCLATURE

Trawlers and whalers taken up by the Royal Navy and other Commonwealth navies, and converted to anti-submarine vessels or minesweeping vessels, were commonly identified by the designation A/S (for anti-submarine trawler or whaler) or M/S (minesweeping trawler or whaler). Commissioned ships in the Royal Navy were identified by HMS (meaning His or Her Majesty's Ship). Trawlers, some commissioned and some not, might have HMT (His or Her Majesty's Trawler) associated with their name in lieu of HMS. (This was unique to Royal Naval Patrol Service trawlers, apparently because of their large numbers; HMW was not used for whalers.)

It is important to note that different references might identify the same ship in slightly different ways. For example, *Bedfordshire*, which was lost to a U-boat in American waters, might have been identified by all of the below, or perhaps even a different name variant:

- HMS *Bedfordshire*
- HMT *Bedfordshire*
- HM trawler *Bedfordshire*
- HM A/S trawler *Bedfordshire*

If this is not confusing enough, European nations commonly use "M/S" to denote motor ships; merchant vessels propelled by internal combustion engines, as opposed to those powered by steam, which are identified by "S/S", "S.S.," or "SS," meaning steam ship. The United States, UK and a few other countries, which also use S.S. for steamships, use M/V or MV to identify diesel-propelled ships as "motor vessels," which are identical to "motor ships."

To avoid, in a reference to a string of Royal Navy ships, having to place HMS before each one, the convention is to use "HM Ships" once (meaning Her or Her Majesty's Ships) with the names of the ships following this descriptor. The prefix HMS was used for all units of corvette and fleet minesweeper size and above. Only smaller vessels, e.g., motor minesweepers, trawlers, drifters, motor launches, submarines, etc., were sometimes named by type but could equally as well be named HMS. For security, sailors' cap tallies had 'H.M.S.' printed on them during wartime; not the complete name of the ship or submarine in which they were serving.

## PROGRESS BEGINS TO BE MADE ON FRONTIER

*Hunting the hornets all over the farm.*

—Description by President Woodrow Wilson of the ill-advised use of destroyers for anti-submarine patrol duties in World War I.<sup>16</sup>

In March 1942, the RNPS vessels arrived in American waters to augment the efforts of a few old Navy ships including Henry Ford-built “Eagle Boats,” Coast Guard cutters, and requisitioned yachts and smaller patrol craft, which had been doing their best to stem the tide of U-boat sinkings of shipping. The following month, some of the defensive measures enacted began to take effect.<sup>17</sup>

One of these measures involved the use of a “bucket brigade” system, as Admiral Andrews termed it. Because of the prevalence of night attacks by the U-boats—which remained hidden by day, resting on the bottom in shallow offshore waters—coastwide vessels were ordered to anchor overnight. These stays were in the Chesapeake or Delaware Bays, and a defensive-mined and protected anchorage was provided for them behind Cape Lookout; a 56-mile-long section of the Southern Outer Banks of North Carolina.<sup>18</sup>

By use of these lay-overs, a vessel could make Jacksonville, Florida, from New York in about four daylight runs. Eastbound shipping from New York bound for Europe, was routed via the sheltered Long Island Sound and Massachusetts Cape Cod Canal. This practice reduced the overall losses, but the coastline from Wilmington, North Carolina, northward to Norfolk, Virginia, continued to be the scene of numerous sinkings. Submarines operating off Diamond Shoals lay on the bottom in shoal water by day and hunted at night.<sup>19</sup>

At this site on 12 May 1942, the trawler HMT *Bedfordshire* fell victim to *U-558* with the loss of all hands aboard. (This tragedy, and a description of the resultant British Cemetery at Ocracoke Island, North Carolina, where four bodies that washed up on the beach at the island, are buried, is the subject of Chapter 1.)

One of the measures enacted to protect shipping was the use of destroyers for anti-submarine patrols. Woodrow Wilson identified decades earlier that it did not work in World War I and, for the most part, it did not work at this later date. If visibility was even reasonably good, any alert U-boat commander at periscope depth could sight a destroyer well before its sound gear picked up his submarine, and could

easily evade it. Assigning the few destroyers available to roving patrols proved of little practical use, and this action resulted in the loss of the antiquated, World War I vintage destroyer USS *Jacob Jones* (DD-130) on 28 February 1942. Her sinking with great loss of life is described in Chapter 4.<sup>20</sup>

Photo Preface-6



HMT *Bedfordshire* outfitted as an armed trawler.  
Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Photo Preface-7



Destroyer USS *Roper* (DD-147) on convoy duty, in Hampton Roads, Virginia, 1942.  
National Archives photograph #80-G-K-472

## **USS *ROPER* SINKS *U-85* OFF CAPE HATTERAS**

*Fire was begun by all the batteries that could be brought to bear. The No. 1 machine gun opened promptly and accurately to cut down the German sailors as they hurried to their guns. The No. 5 three-inch gun, under a gun captain who had never before been in charge of a gun during firing, got the range quickly and scored a hit on the conning tower. Damage must have been severe for soon after the submarine began to sink. Orders to fire a torpedo were immediately given aboard the *ROPER* but the U-boat disappeared before the order could be obeyed.*

—Commander, Eastern Sea Frontier’s War Diary, April 1942,  
describing action by the destroyer USS *Roper* (DD-147) in  
sinking the *U-85* off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.<sup>21</sup>

By early April 1942, the previous ineffective use of destroyers to randomly patrol sea lanes, had been refined to patrol and search of localized, endangered areas. The destroyers in the Frontier were then still too few to put a convoy system into effect, and provide adequate screens to escort merchantmen.<sup>22</sup>

The “stopgap” practice of assigning available destroyers and anti-submarine vessels to specific important sectors, paid off on 14 April 1942, when USS *Roper* (DD-147) sank the *U-85* with naval gunfire. *Roper*, like her former sister ship *Jacob Jones* (now wreckage on the ocean floor) was a 314-foot Wickes-class destroyer. Well past her best days, having been commissioned on 15 February 1919, she still had a good turn of speed. Geared turbines producing 24,200 shaft horsepower could propel the 1,154 tons displacement trim DD to a top speed of 35 knots. (At least with a clean hull and well-maintained machinery; better yet, new machinery.) Despite, some likely shaking and vibration at speed, *Roper* was able to run down a recently-built German U-boat, less than a year old, trying to outdistance her on the surface to escape.<sup>23</sup>

Lt. Comdr. Hamilton Wilcox Howe, USN, her commanding officer (and of the first American ship to sink an enemy submarine in the waters of the Frontier), was awarded the Navy Cross for this action. Details about this combat action may be found in Chapter 7.

**Photo Preface-8**



**Navy Cross  
Medal**

Lt. Comdr. Hamilton Wilcox Howe, USS *Roper*'s commanding officer, being presented the Navy Cross by Vice Adm. Adolphus Andrews, commander, Eastern Sea Frontier, at his headquarters on 7 July 1942, for the destruction of the enemy submarine *U-85*. U.S. Navy photograph

As shown in the following table, sinkings by Allied forces of U-boats off the Eastern Seaboard continued at a modest pace of one per month until July when, with numbers and proficiency of defensive forces much improved, four were destroyed. Of the seven submarines sunk by aircraft and surface vessels in 1942, three were in the Cape Hatteras area, a favorite U-boat “hunting ground.”

**U-boats sunk by Allied Forces off America’s Eastern Seaboard in 1942**

<b>Date</b>	<b>U-boat</b>	<b>Description</b>
14 Apr 42	<i>U-85</i>	Sunk off Cape Hatteras, by gunfire from the destroyer USS <i>Roper</i> (DD-147)
9 May 42	<i>U-352</i>	Sunk south of Cape Hatteras, by depth charges from the USCG cutter <i>Icarus</i> (WPC-110)
30 Jun 42	<i>U-158</i>	Sunk west of Bermuda, by depth charges from a USN Mariner aircraft (VP-74/ <i>P-1</i> )
3 Jul 42	<i>U-215</i>	Sunk east of Boston, by depth charges from the British trawler HMT <i>Le Tigre</i> (FY243)
7 Jul 42	<i>U-701</i>	Sunk off Cape Hatteras by depth charges from a U.S. Army A-29 Hudson (Bomber Squadron 396)
15 Jul 42	<i>U-576</i>	Sunk off Cape Hatteras, by depth charges from two USN Kingfisher aircraft (VS-9), and gunfire from the Naval Armed Guard of the motor vessel MV <i>Unicoi</i>
31 Jul 42	<i>U-754</i>	Sunk south of Nova Scotia, by depth charges from a RCAF Hudson aircraft (113 Squadron/ <i>P-625</i> ) <sup>24</sup>

**EASTERN SEA FRONTIER CONVOYS, AND OTHER DEFENSIVE MEASURES, SPUR MOVEMENT OF U-BOATS SOUTHWARD, AND OFFENSIVE MINING**

As soon as strengthened Allied forces in one area brought diminishing returns to the enemy, Admiral Doenitz generally reassigned U-boat wolfpacks to more promising locations, leaving one or two submarines to patrol former convoyed areas, seek targets of opportunity, and to attempt to pin down naval vessels and planes assigned to the defense of shipping to those areas.<sup>25</sup>

The southern movements of most of the U-boats in the western Atlantic, resulted in increased sinkings in the Gulf Sea Frontier and Caribbean waters, specifically 73 in May 1942. In June, the Gulf, the Caribbean, and the eastern approaches to them became the most dangerous areas for shipping in the World. Particularly, three vulnerable areas: off the Passes of the Mississippi (at the river’s mouth in the Gulf of Mexico), the East Coast of Florida, and the Yucatan Channel (a strait between Mexico and Cuba).<sup>26</sup>

A new type of U-boat activity, which began off Newfoundland in May and which was extended into the Eastern, Gulf, and Caribbean Frontiers, was the sowing of mines off seaports, in the hope of catching

ships entering or leaving. On 15 June, mines laid by U-701 three days earlier in the ship channel to the Chesapeake Capes, sank the tanker SS *Robert C. Tuttle*, and the British trawler HMT *Kingston Ceylonite*, and damaged the destroyer USS *Bainbridge* (DD-246). A second tanker, the SS *Esso Augusta*, was also slightly damaged.<sup>27</sup>

*Kingston Ceylonite* was the third of the twenty-two RNPS trawlers to be sunk in East Coast waters as a result of enemy action. (The other two RNPS vessels sent to America were the whalers *Buttermere* and *Wastwater*.) The first, *Northern Princess*, had been sunk by U-587 on 8 March off the Grand Banks, Newfoundland, even before the trawlers she was voyaging with from Britain made their first port in North America. The second was *Bedfordshire* which, as previously discussed, was torpedoed off North Carolina.

HMT *Le Tigre* partially avenged *Kingston Ceylonite*'s loss when, on 3 July she used depth charges to sink the minelaying submarine U-215, whose task was to sow mines in Boston Harbor. Chapter 10 is devoted to *Le Tigre*, which would become renowned within the Royal Naval Patrol Service as, "the U-boat killer in American waters."

## RCN AND RN CORVETTES REPORT FOR DUTY

*The sudden drop in sinkings in the Eastern Sea Frontier from twenty-three in April 1942, to five in May, to three in August, following the coastal convoy set-up, meant little more than driving the submarines from one area to another.*

—Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Battle of the Atlantic 1939-1943*.<sup>28</sup>

*The losses by submarines off our Atlantic seaboard and in the Caribbean now threaten our entire war effort. The following statistics bearing on the subject have been brought to my attention.*

*Of the 74 ships allocated to the Army for July by the War Shipping Administration, 17 have already been sunk. Twenty-two percent of the Bauxite fleet has already been destroyed. Twenty percent of the Puerto Rican fleet has been lost. Tanker sinkings have been 3.5 percent per month of tonnage in use.*

*We are all aware of the limited number of escort craft available, but has every conceivable improvised means been brought to bear on this situation? I am fearful that another month or two of this will so cripple our means of transport that we will be unable to bring sufficient men and planes to bear against the enemy in critical theatres to exercise a determining influence on the war.*

—Gen. George C. Marshall, U.S. Army chief of staff, communicating to Adm. Ernest King, commander in chief, U.S. Fleet and chief of Naval Operations, on 10 June 1942, his concerns regarding the loss of vital shipping in the Atlantic and Caribbean Sea.<sup>29</sup>

The coastal convoys operating between Key West, Florida, and Norfolk, Virginia from May until September, were dependent primarily on the British trawlers, and eleven Atlantic Fleet destroyers:

- USS *Bainbridge* (DD-246)
- USS *Broome* (DD-210)
- USS *Decatur* (DD-341)
- USS *Dickerson* (DD-157)
- USS *Du Pont* (DD-152)
- USS *Ellis* (DD-154)<sup>30</sup>
- USS *Herbert* (DD-160)
- USS *MacLeish* (DD-220)
- USS *McCormick* (DD-223)
- USS *Roper* (DD-147)
- USS *Simpson* (DD-221)

In August 1942, plans were made to create an interlocking convoy system. Unfortunately, the British trawlers did not have “the legs” (fuel endurance) for assignment to lengthy convoys between New York and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This shortcoming resulted in commander, Eastern Sea Frontier being lent twelve Royal Canadian Navy and Royal Navy Flower-class corvettes, supplemented by three RN destroyers. The newly assigned corvettes reported under Admiral Andrews’ command between 27 August and 3 September; many of them were detached from their existing, temporary escort and patrol assignments in the Gulf and the Caribbean.<sup>31</sup>

The trawlers continued to be used by the Naval Districts for local escort work and patrol.<sup>32</sup>

**RCN and RN Corvettes assigned under commander, Eastern Sea Frontier’s control, as escorts to New York-Guantanamo convoys**

- HMCS *Fredericton* (K245)
- HMCS *Halifax* (K237)
- HMCS *Oakville* (K178)
- HMS *Buttercup* (K193)
- HMS *Columbine* (K94)
- HMS *Godetia* (K226)
- HMCS *Snowberry* (K166)
- HMCS *Sudbury* (K162)
- HMCS *The Pas* (K168)
- HMS *Lavender* (K60)
- HMS *Pimpernel* (K71)
- HMS *Saxifrage* (K04)





**Supplemental RN Destroyers for New York-Guantanamo convoys**

- HMS *Churchill* (I45)
- HMS *Havelock* (H88)<sup>33</sup>
- HMS *Warwick* (D25)



## SUB-KILLING RCN CORVETTE AND HER CAPTAIN

Since Andrews' Frontier suffered the loss of only three ships "sunk in convoy" between mid-May and year's end in 1942 (including the New York to Guantanamo runs), there is no coverage of these operations, owing to space limitations. Instead, several pages in Chapter 12 are devoted to the Flower-class corvette HMCS *Oakville*, a part of the escort force of a Trinidad-Aruba-Key West convoy immediately prior to her assignment to Andrews' command. *Oakville* sank *U-94*, during an attack by the German submarine on the convoy. For this action, the corvette's commanding officer, Lt. Comdr. Clarence A. King, DSC, RCNR, was awarded a Distinguished Service Order and the U.S. Legion of Merit (the first American decoration to be awarded to a Canadian in World War II).

 <p><b>DSO</b></p>	<p>Distinguished Service Order</p> <p>Established by: Queen Victoria, 6 September 1886</p> <p>For meritorious or distinguished service by officers during war</p>	<p>Distinguished Service Cross</p> <p>Established by: King Edward VII, 28 June 1901</p> <p>For meritorious or distinguished service before the enemy 'by men of His Majesty's Fleet'</p>	 <p><b>DSC</b></p>
 <p><b>LOM</b></p>	<p>United States Legion of Merit</p> <p>Established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 20 July 1942</p> <p>For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements</p>	<p>To be mentioned in despatches describes a member of the armed forces whose name appears in an official report in which their gallant or meritorious action in the face of the enemy is described.</p>	 <p><b>War Medal</b></p>

King, one of Canada's finest naval officers, retired with the rank of Captain in 1946. From the time he was 13 years old, in 1899, until the end of World War II, King spent most of his life at sea. He was 53 years old when World War II broke out, and was decorated in both the First and Second World Wars for destroying German U-boats.

In World War I, while serving in 'Q' ships as navigator, first lieutenant and captain successively, King was credited with one kill and two probable submarine sinkings, and was awarded his first Distinguished Service Cross (DSC). In WWII, in addition to *U-94*, he was credited (while in command of other ships) with participating in the sinking of *U-845*, *U-448*, and *U-247*. During his distinguished naval service, King was awarded the DSO, DSC & Bar, U.S. Legion of Merit, and was twice Mentioned in Despatches. It is noted that Commonwealth servicemembers who are mentioned in despatches (MiD) do not receive a medal for their actions, but are authorized to wear an oak leaf device on the ribbon of an appropriate campaign medal.

## **ROYAL NAVY TRAWLERS / WHALERS ORDERED TO SOUTH AFRICAN WATERS**

As previously noted, German U-boats began moving southward, when they found operating along the Eastern Sea Frontier had become increasingly difficult, to concentrate their efforts in the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico where hunting was easier. May through September 1942 was the most dangerous period for shipping in these southern waters. Navy "top brass," in the early innocent days of the war, had believed that narrow passages, swift currents, and island barriers would offer protection from submarine attack. But in those waters, in five months, enemy submarines sank an average of 1 ½ ships per day. (Coverage of action in the Gulf and Caribbean Sea Frontiers is not within the scope of this book.)<sup>34</sup>

Finally with the Eastern Sea Frontier relatively peaceful in October 1942, and the Royal Naval Patrol Service trawlers and whalers lent to Andrews in receipt of new orders from the British Admiralty, *Send Some King's Ships* departs American waters and follows these intrepid anti-submarine vessels to South African waters.

Of the twenty-two trawlers and two whalers which left Britain in February 1942 for American waters, six trawlers had been lost; three to U-boat actions and three to collisions at sea. The trawlers and whalers (as well as many other small vessels) were not fitted with radar. In peacetime, during low visibility conditions, such as when "socked in by fog," they would likely have remained in port. However, wartime patrol and/or escort duties now existed. Steaming in low visibility conditions (when rain and overcast blocked the sun, or in prevailing fog, or darkness at night) with navigation lights extinguished to help avoid detection by enemy submarines, was risky business.

**RNPS Trawlers lost to U-boats and Ship Collisions**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Trawler/Cause</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Trawler/Other Ship</b>
8 Mar 42	HMT <i>Northern Princess</i> U-587	11 Apr 42	HMT <i>St. Cathan</i> Dutch merchant ship <i>Hebe</i>
12 May 42	HMT <i>Bedfordshire</i> U-558	6 May 42	HMT <i>Senateur Dubamel</i> USS <i>Semmes</i> (AG-24)
15 Jun 42	HMT <i>Kingstone Ceylonite</i> U-701	19 Sep 42	HMT <i>Pentland Firth</i> USS <i>Chaffinch</i> (AM-81)

**CONDITIONS IN SOUTH AFRICAN WATERS MIRROR THOSE INITIALLY IN THE EASTERN SEA FRONTIER**

As was the case in northern waters, once strengthened Allied anti-submarine measures in the Gulf and Caribbean Sea Frontiers began to accrue unacceptable U-boat losses to his forces, Admiral Doenitz shifted emphasis to a new area of vulnerability. This was across the Atlantic in South Africa, through whose water’s large numbers of Allied merchant and naval vessels passed daily.

Similar to the U-boat blitz launched in American waters in January 1942, the commencement of sustained U-boat operations ten months later in South African waters, abruptly awakened there an immediate awareness of the need for dedicated anti-submarine warfare measures.

Large numbers of ship sinkings off the southern African coast, compelled South African and British naval authorities to adopt a series of anti-submarine measures, which succeeded in stemming the horrific losses of merchant vessels, cargos, and crews. This was accomplished by August 1943.

These measures, like those enacted in the Eastern Sea Frontier, included the following:

- employment of patrol aircraft, with the Royal Air Force greatly assisting the modest South African air forces
- ordering the “King’s Ships” in American waters to South Africa, to bolster the South African naval forces whalers and trawlers
- utilization of a coastal convoy system, once sufficient escorts were available to shepherd merchant vessels<sup>35</sup>

These measures, and procedures including the centralized control of naval and air forces, and of escort operations, resulted in the sinking of three U-boats between 1942 and 1944.

## DESTROYER HMS ACTIVE SINKS U-179

In addition to its own modest force of converted whalers and trawlers, the South African Naval Force benefited greatly from the presence of a long-established Royal Navy base at Simon's Town, South Africa. Located in the Cape Area through which all shipping proceeding east or west "round the tip of Africa" must pass, warships operating from there were of great value in those waters.

Photo Preface-9



Simon's Town, South Africa with, in the foreground, the cruiser HMS *Shropshire* prior to her transfer to the Royal Australian Navy, November 1942.

On 8 October 1942, HMS *Active* (H14) was dispatched with the destroyers HMAS *Nizam* (G38) and HMS *Foxhound* (H69), to help collect survivors from the British merchant vessel SS *City of Athens*. Shortly before midnight, HMS *Active* (Lt. Comdr. Michael Tomkinson, RN) obtained a radar contact at a distance of 2,500 yards. Then, an Asdic (sonar) contact ahead at a range of 1,600 yards was gained and a large submarine sighted on the surface. She was the *U-179* (that earlier had sunk the Greek SS *Pantelis*), which appeared to be stopped, seemingly charging her batteries.<sup>36</sup>

*Active* increased speed to 25 knots and altered course slightly to starboard to bring the enemy broader on her beam, so that more guns could bear. At 800 yards, the target was illuminated by searchlight, and B gun opened fire. No hits were scored and, as the range closed to 500 yards, the submarine dove. *Active* altered course, and steadied up with the submarine's conning tower slightly off her bow. As the U-boat passed down the port side of the destroyer at close range on a converging course, *Active* attacked with a 10-depth charge pattern, set to

depths of 50 and 150 feet. The explosives burst all around the U-boat, and the depth-charge party reported that the submarine was blown to the surface as a result of the attack and then sank.<sup>37</sup>

Lt. Comdr. Michael Wilfred Tomkinson, who had previously been Mentioned in Despatches (MiD) on 4 October 1940, and later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross on 25 August 1942, received a Bar to his DSC (signifying a second award of the medal) on 9 February 1943 for this action.<sup>38</sup>

*U-179* was the first of three German submarines sunk by Allied forces in South African waters in World War II.

Date	U-boat	Description
8 Oct 43	<i>U-179</i>	Sunk near Cape Town, South Africa, by depth charges from the destroyer HMS <i>Active</i>
20 Aug 43	<i>U-197</i>	Sunk south of Madagascar, by depth charges from two British Catalina aircraft (Squadron 259/C & 265/N)
11 Mar 44	<i>UIT-22</i>	Sunk south of the Cape of Good Hope, by South African Catalina aircraft (SAAF Squadron 262)

## ROYAL NAVY / SANF TRAWLERS AND WHALERS

Map Preface-2



Coastline of South Africa

As previously mentioned, in autumn 1942, groups of Royal Naval Patrol Service trawlers detached from their U.S. Naval District commands, proceeded southward and traversed the Caribbean Sea to Trinidad, then on to the Brazilian port of Pernambuco (today Recife). There, they “coaled” ship for passage to West Africa across the narrows of the Atlantic. Following arrival at Freetown, Sierra Leone, they made their way down the West Coast of Africa to South African waters.

**Eighteen Surviving Royal Naval Patrol Service Trawlers and Whalers**

<b>A/S Trawlers</b>	<b>A/S Trawlers</b>	<b>A/S Trawlers</b>
HMT <i>Arctic Explorer</i>	HMT <i>Le Tigre</i>	HMT <i>St. Loman</i>
HMT <i>Cape Warwick</i>	HMT <i>Northern Chief</i>	HMT <i>St. Zeno</i>
HMT <i>Coventry City</i>	HMT <i>Northern Dawn</i>	HMT <i>Stella Polaris</i>
HMT <i>Hertfordshire</i>	HMT <i>Northern Duke</i>	HMT <i>Wellard</i>
HMT <i>Lady Elsa</i>	HMT <i>Northern Isles</i>	<b>A/S Whalers</b>
HMT <i>Lady Rosemary</i>	HMT <i>Norwich City</i>	HMS <i>Buttermere</i>
		HMS <i>Wastwater</i>

All of the RNPS trawlers took up their new duties by year's end; the whalers HMS *Buttermere* and *Wastwater* arrived later, in March 1943. The chapters about these vessels' deployment in African waters include some interesting tidbits. Among the many rough, hardfisted ex-merchant seamen and fishermen aboard the King's anti-submarine vessels, was a poet of rare talent. When war broke out, Rhodes scholar Australian Michael Thwaites, who had just left Oxford, joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. He had previously won the Newdigate Prize in 1938 for his long poem "Milton Blind," and he was later to receive the King's Medal for poetry.<sup>39</sup>

Thwaites served aboard HMS *Wastwater* as her "Jimmy" or First Lieutenant (ship's executive officer to USN readers). Following the war, in 1950, after a stint as a Lecturer of English at the University of Melbourne, he was appointed to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, as Director of Counter-Espionage. Additional details about this captivating individual may be found in the body of the book.<sup>40</sup>

The arrival of the RNPS vessels to augment the SANF whalers and trawlers identified in the table, enabled the commencement of merchant ship convoy operations. The SANF vessels, which were too few to perform both harbor protection and to serve as credible convoy escort forces, had previously been limited to anti-submarine patrols only.

<b>Cape Town Anti-Submarine Flotilla</b>		<b>Durban Anti-Submarine Flotilla</b>	
<b>Ship</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Ship</b>	<b>Type</b>
HMSAS <i>Blomlei</i>	trawler	HMSAS <i>Rondevlei</i>	whaler
HMSAS <i>Mooivlei</i>	trawler	HMSAS <i>Smalvlei</i>	whaler
HMSAS <i>Sonneblom</i>	whaler	HMSAS <i>Blaauwberg</i>	whaler
HMSAS <i>Immortelle</i>	whaler	HMSAS <i>Sydostlandet</i> (lost)	whaler
HMSAS <i>Pretoria</i>	whaler	HMSAS <i>Cedarberg</i>	whaler
HMSAS <i>Vereeniging</i>	whaler	HMSAS <i>Odberg</i>	whaler
HMSAS <i>Turffontein</i>	whaler	HMSAS <i>Tordonn</i>	whaler
HMSAS <i>Standerton</i>	whaler		

The African Naval Forces boasted fourteen (excluding HMSAS *Sydostlandet*) A/S whalers and trawlers, assigned to either the Cape Town or Durban Anti-Submarine flotillas, for duties in the Southern Cape and Eastern Cape areas, respectively. HMSAS *Sydostlandet*, previously a unit of the Durban A/S Flotilla, had been lost in April 1942, when she ran aground near the Umgeni River mouth during rough weather. She is listed in the table, but was no longer a unit of the SANF. (A list of the officers who served aboard the South African whalers and trawlers may be found in Appendix C.)

The final four chapters of the book are devoted to the ceaseless efforts of the RNPS and SANF trawlers and whalers, and a few other Allied escort vessels, to safeguard merchantmen in South African waters. These waters then had the unhappy distinction, following preceding similar periods in the Eastern Sea Frontier, thence the Gulf and Caribbean Frontiers, of being the most dangerous waters for shipping in the world.

The King's Ships (trawlers and whalers) remained in South Africa until war's end. After returning home to Britain, the vessels were paid off by the Royal Navy in 1945, and disposed of. They were returned to their original owners—if requisitioned (taken) by the Admiralty for naval service—or placed on the Disposal List for sale to merchantile (commercial interests)—if instead purchased for naval service. Most, if not all, took up working the North Sea fishing grounds, and continued their service into the early- to mid-1960s.

## ROYAL NAVY

*The RNV/R (classic, wartime reservists known as 'Saturday night sailors') were gentlemen trying to be sailors.*

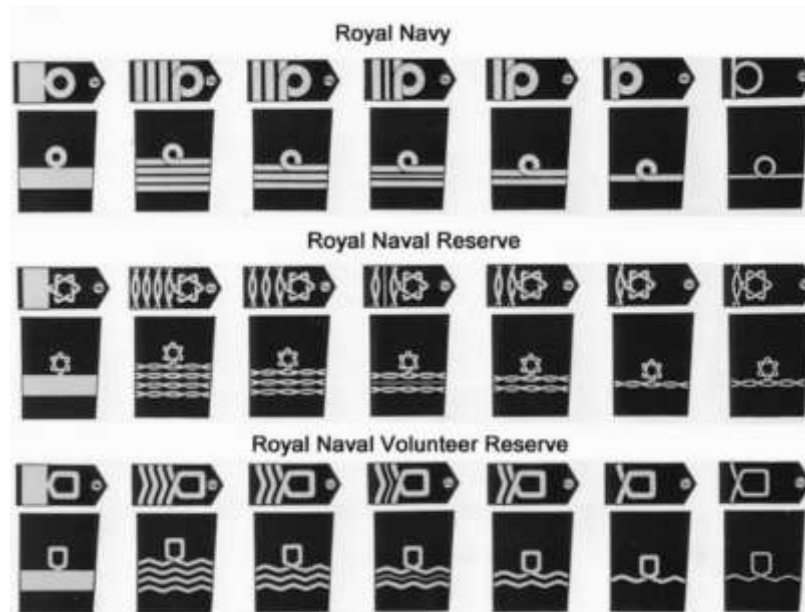
*The RNR (professional seamen and part-time Navy officers) were sailors trying to be gentlemen.*

*and The RN (regular Navy officers) were neither trying to be both.*

—Old saying in the Royal Navy, courtesy of Rob Hoole

The Naval Reserve Act of 1859 established the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) as a reserve of professional seamen from the British Merchant Navy and fishing fleets, who could be called upon during times of war to serve in the regular Royal Navy. In 1862, the RNR was extended to include the recruitment and training of reserve officers, who

wore on their uniforms a unique and distinctive lace consisting of stripes of interwoven chain. The Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) was created in 1903.



World War II British Naval Officer shoulder boards and sleeve insignia

While the Royal Naval Reserve was composed of personnel from the merchant marine and fishing communities, members of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve came from other civilian backgrounds. Another difference was the gold braid officers wore on their sleeves to denote rank. Those of the RNR were in intersecting waved pairs, while the pattern of RNVR braid was single waved lines—thus the RN moniker “wavy Navy” when referring to the latter officers.

The Royal Naval Patrol Service was mostly populated by RNR and RNVR members, and the same held true for the Dominion navies. At the onset of war, some regulars serving in the Royal Navy made fun of RNR and RNVR personnel, whom they termed amateurs. However, the amateurs soon became professionals in anti-submarine patrol, escort, and mine clearance duties. In particular, dealing with sea mines (not covered in this book), was a warfare area generally underappreciated by Navy “top brass” who’d gained promotion aboard battleships, cruisers and destroyers.

Having completed this comprehensive introduction, it’s now time for readers to (vicariously) stand out to sea with the crews of “minor



warships” sent in harm’s way to combat formidable enemy submarines, because they were among the few naval forces available to do so.

### **World War II-American Theater 1941-1946**



Escort, antisubmarine, armed guard and special operations  
banner with 1 Bronze Star