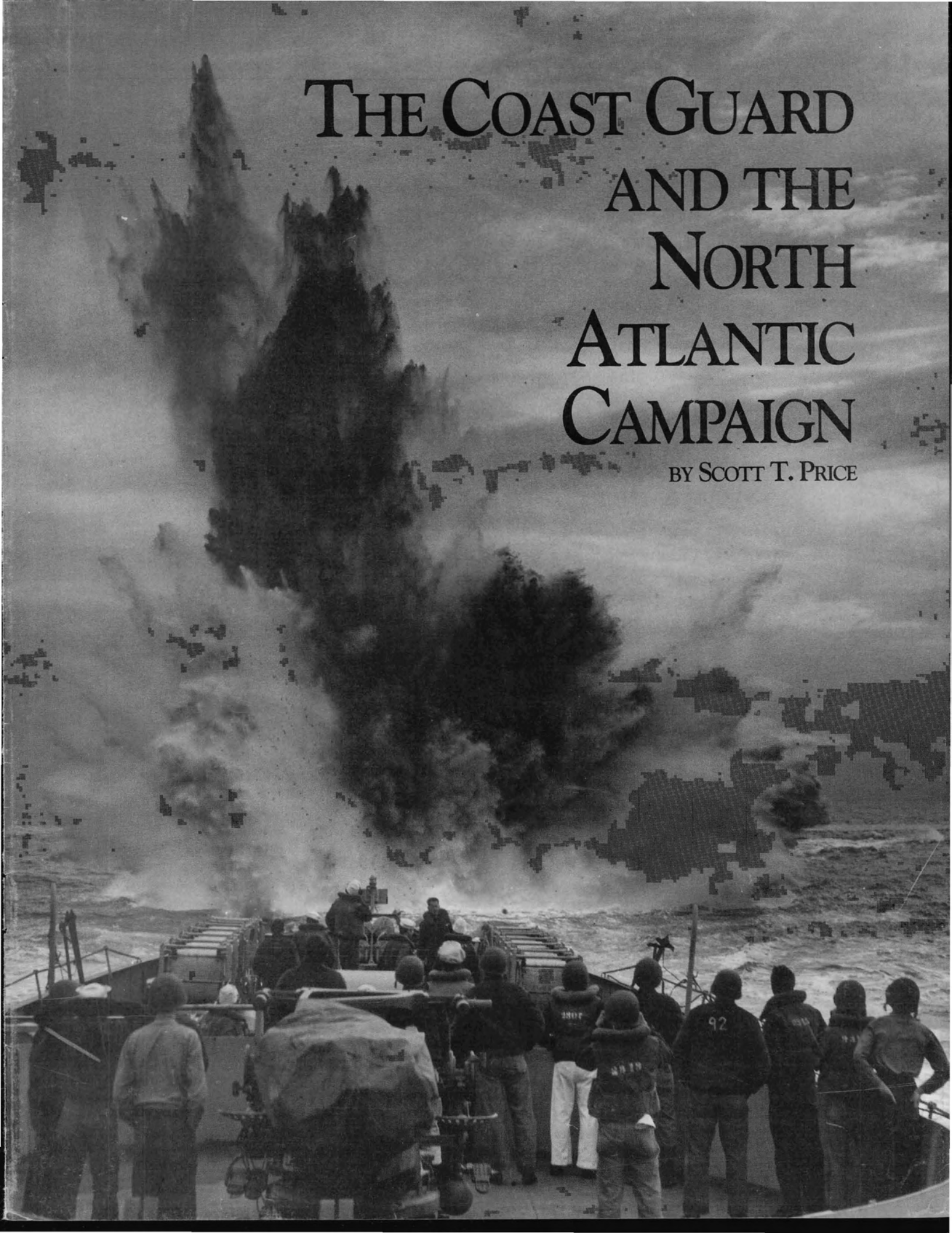
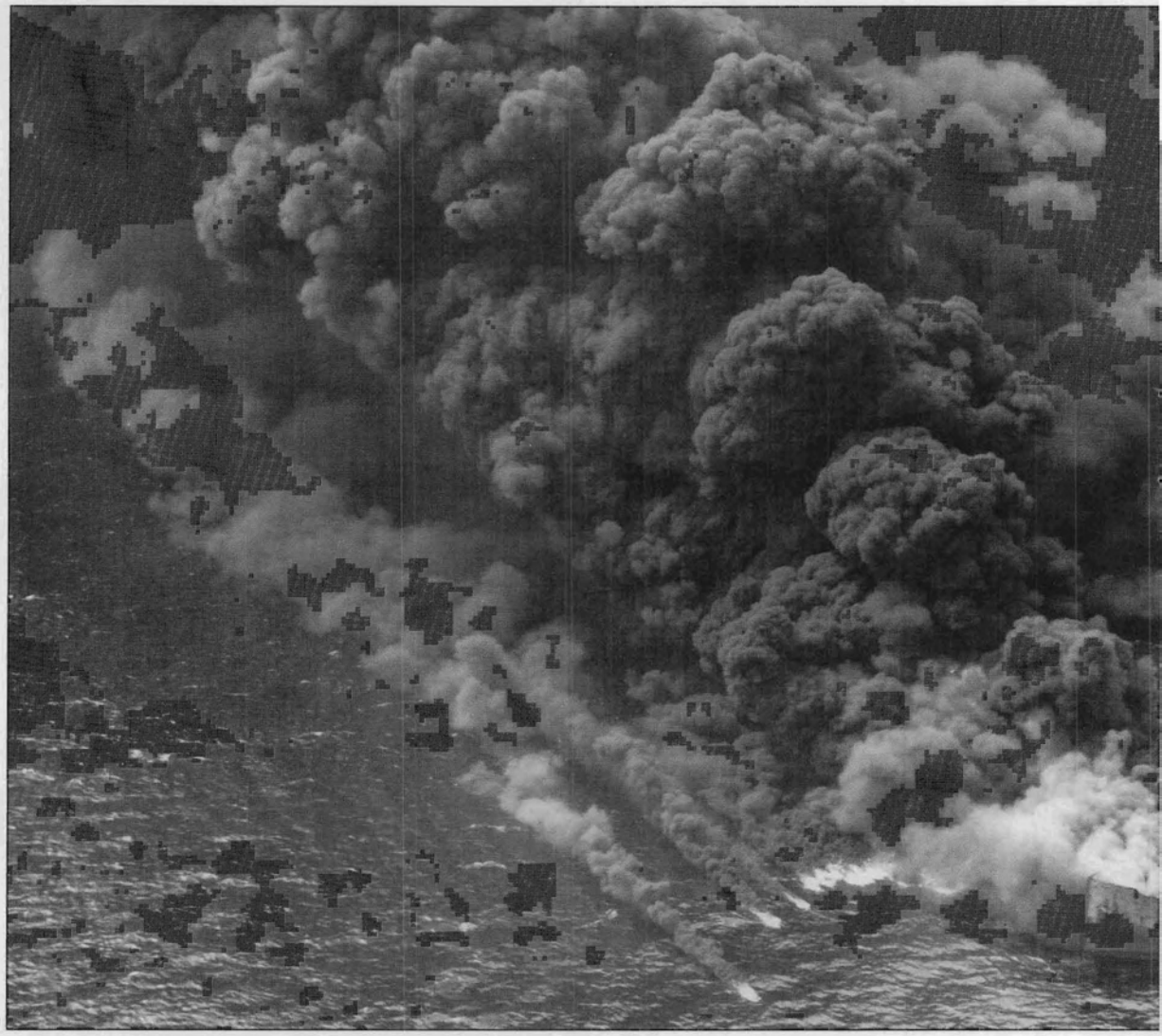


The Coast Guard and the North Atlantic Campaign

BY SCOTT T. PRICE



A torpedoed tanker burns off the U.S. coast. The U-boats virtually halted coastal merchant traffic in the early months of 1942 and burning tankers lit up the sky from New York to Florida.

The cold North Atlantic shows no trace of the struggle that took place on and beneath its surface more than 50 years ago. Unlike battlefields on land, where the scars of combat can last for centuries, the sea shrouds all traces of the "Battle of the Atlantic," which was the longest sustained campaign of World War II.

The Axis powers tried to sever the ocean supply lines between America, Great Britain and the Soviet Union. These supply lines fed and equipped the Allies and permitted the military buildup that led to the liberation of Europe. If they had been cut, the Axis powers might have won the war. But Allied naval forces, including the Coast Guard, defeated them in a running campaign across the treacherous seas of the North Atlantic.

The Coast Guard's participation in that campaign has been generally overlooked. Subsumed by the Navy in November 1941, where it stayed until January 1946, the Coast Guard's activities were overshadowed by the larger sea service. Indeed, a Coast Guard officer, aboard the *CGC Ingham,* related that during a North Atlantic rescue one

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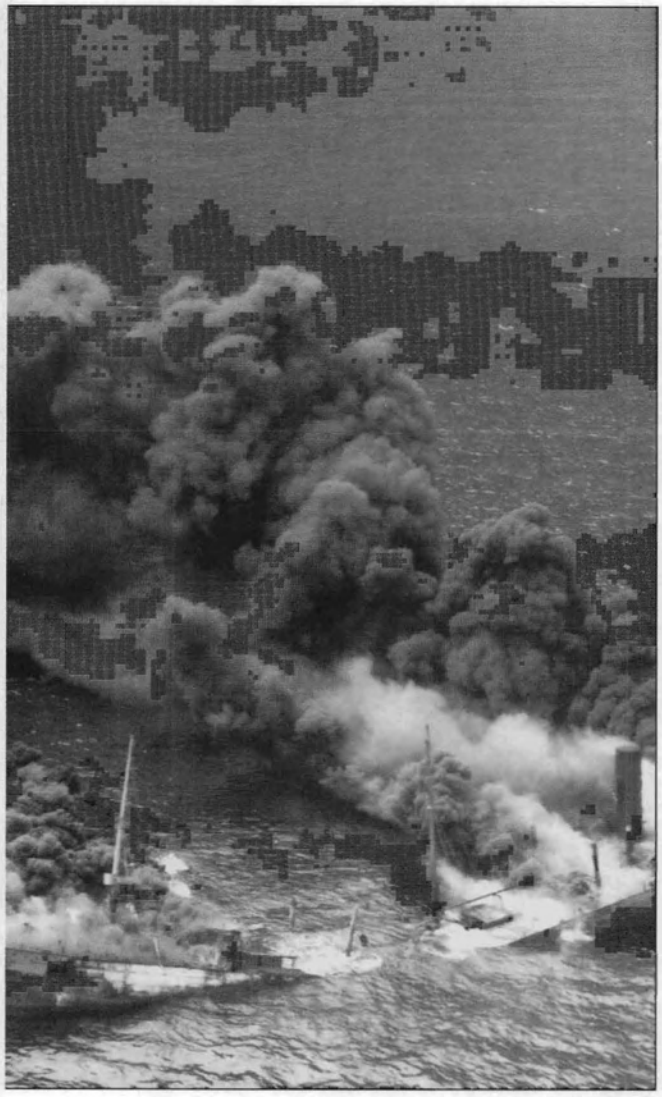
Front Cover: Coast Guardsmen on World War II convoy patrol watch the explosion of a depth charge.

Back Cover: The Coast Guard-manned destroyer escort *USS Chambers*, one of 30 Coast Guard-manned DEs, escorts a convoy across the North Atlantic.



survivor asked, "What ... is the Coast Guard doing picking me up out here?"

While the Coast Guard continued its traditional lifesaving duties along the nation's shores during the war, its ships and aircraft ventured well out to sea, protecting convoys along the U.S. coast, across to Europe and Africa, and throughout the Pacific. Even the Coast Guard's port-security and captain-of the-port duties contributed to keeping the Allied sea lanes open and functioning.

Coast Guard operations on the North Atlantic began before the United States entered the war and included neutrality and weather-patrol cruises. The Coast Guard also began operations in Greenland, a Danish colony, soon after Denmark fell to the Germans in 1940. By October 1941 all Coast Guard and Navy forces in Greenland waters were consolidated into a unified "Greenland Patrol" and placed under the command of Coast Guard CDR Edward "Iceberg" Smith.

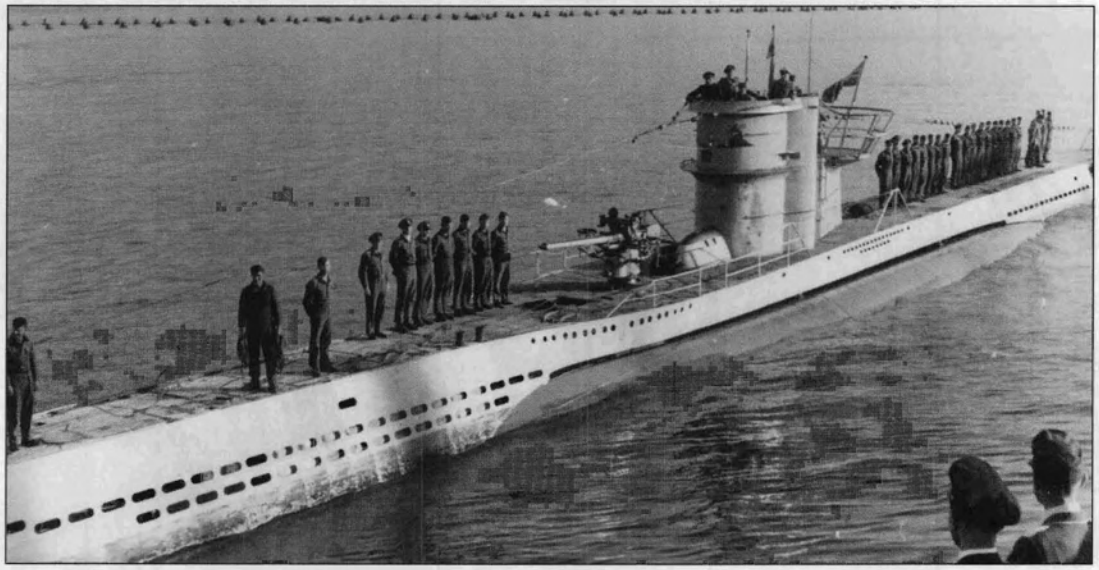
The patrol established bases, escorted convoys, destroyed German weather stations, and rescued survivors from torpedoed ships. A Coast Guard-manned patrol bombing squadron, VP-6, operated over the North Atlantic from its home base in Greenland during the war as well.

Coastal attacks

Following the Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, ADM Karl Doenitz, commander of the German U-boat force, opened the offensive against the United States by sending five long-range U-boats into American waters. Although their numbers were small these five, and other U-boats that followed, were capable enough to give the United States a pasting as severe as the Japanese had that Sunday.

In late 1941, available Coast Guard forces included 56 aircraft, seven relatively new 327-foot Secretary-class cutters, eight other large cutters, 23 165-foot cutters, 31 125-foot cutters, plus a wide assortment of lightships, tenders, tugs, smaller patrol craft and lifeboats.

Three lucky British merchant seamen prior to being rescued on the North Atlantic by a Coast Guard cutter. The icy waters claimed thousands of seamen.



The type VII U-251, *sister U-boat to the* U-255 *which torpedoed and sank the* USS Leopold, *arrives at Narvik, Norway, in June 1942, after a patrol. This class of U-boat made up the majority of the U-boat fleet.*

The enemy

ADM Karl Doenitz, commander of the German submarine force, succinctly described his U-boats and their tactics as: "U-boats are the wolves of the sea: attack, tear, sink!" The majority of the U-boats were the Type VII: a 220-foot-long, 749-ton submersible warship that one U-boatman described as "nothing but a steel cigar tube crammed with machinery and weapons."

The typical patrol lasted for nearly two months, and the cramped conditions and harsh odors aboard made life difficult. A German officer observed, "The heat. The stench of oil. Lead in my skull from the engine fumes ... I feel like Jonah inside some huge shellfish whose vulnerable parts are sheathed in armor."

Their most effective tactics earned the nickname "wolf pack." Deployed in lines across suspected convoy routes, single U-boats would make contact with a convoy, follow it closely, and make constant position reports to other U-boats to home-in for the kill. Typically they attacked on the surface at night, taking advantage of their low silhouette and high surface speed, advantages eventually negated by radar. Daylight attacks were made while submerged. When first used, wolf-pack tactics proved to be effective but nevertheless called for heavy radio use, a vulnerability that the Allies exploited.

Attacking an escorted convoy typically meant receiving a depth-charge attack in retribution. It was a terrifying experience, as one German officer explained:

> "All eyes looked upward. The swishing of propellers reached a crescendo as the destroyer passed over our boat ... three charges exploded ... . After each shattering roar, the hull moaned, the floor plates jumped and kicked our feet, wood splintered, glass disintegrated, food cans flew through the boat; then all was black for long seconds until the emergency lighting came on again."

A combination of technological and tactical factors defeated the U-boat offensive by May 1943. Nevertheless, the U-boats continued to sail forth against Allied shipping through the end of the war. As a result, their losses were heavy. More than 700 U-boats were lost, and with them nearly 28,000 men. In return, they sank about 2,900 ships, killing more than 42,000 Allied merchant seamen and nearly severing the ocean supply line between America and Europe. Their desperate efforts tied up precious Allied resources, and perhaps prolonged the length of the war.

Although many of the cutters hailed from the days of Prohibition or earlier, they proved to be effective escorts. Various smaller craft and other vessels were also commissioned into service as emergency acquisitions.

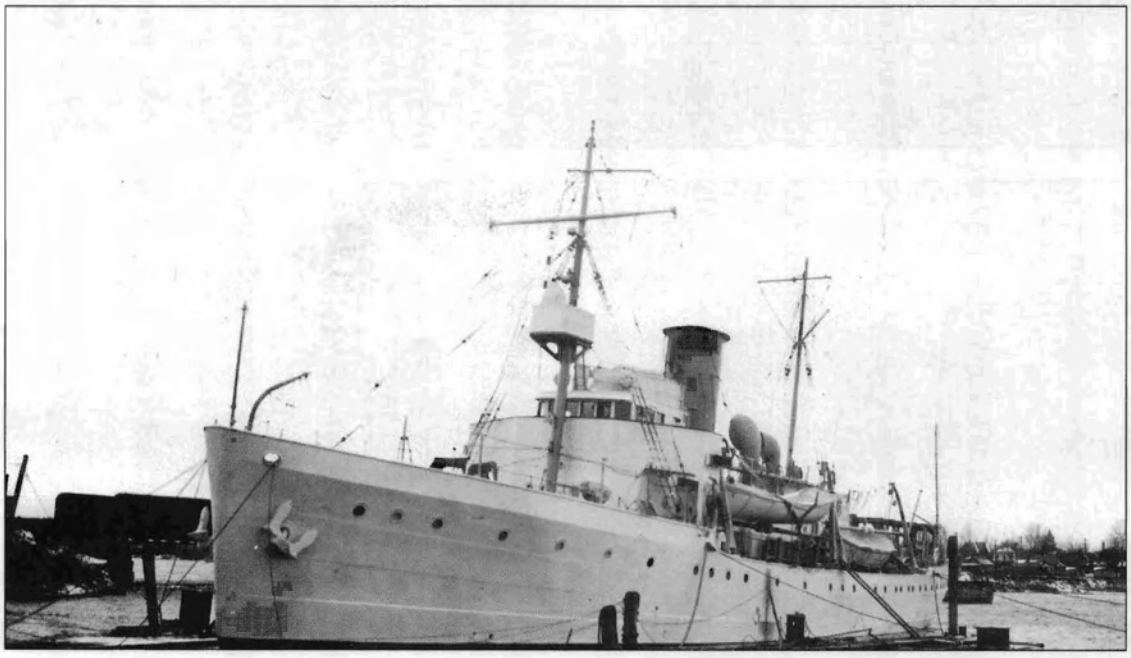
A shortage of escorts, "conflicting priorities" in the allocation of those escorts, and poor planning combined to delay the introduction of a convoy system along the coast until May 1942. As the U-boats attacked the unescorted merchant ships, many Coast Guard units, augmented by reserve and temporary reserve vessels, rescued survivors and chased down suspected U-boat contacts.

Coast Guard cutters and aircraft destroyed three U-boats along the coast during this German offensive. The 165-foot *CGC Icarus* sank the more heavily armed *U-352* off the coast of North Carolina. Its sister cutter, the *CGC Thetis,* sank the *U-157* off Key West, Fla., and a Coast Guard aviator destroyed the *U-166* off the coast of Texas with a single well-placed depth charge. Other Coast Guard aircraft made 61 unsuccessful bombing attacks on U-boat contacts by the end of the summer of 1942. They also sighted and reported the location of more than 1,000 survivors and rescued 95 on their own.

The Coast Guard's tenders and tugs also helped keep the coastal trade routes open. Along the coast of Florida, for instance, they salvaged four torpedoed vessels that spring and summer of 1942.

Tenders, such as the *CGC Juniper,* had the solemn task of marking the wrecks of ships sunk by U-boats as hazards to navigation. One tender, the *CGC Acacia,* fell victim to the onslaught when it was shelled and sunk by the *U-161.* The *Acacia* was the only Coast Guard tender lost to enemy action during the war.

When finally established, the convoy systems along the coast deterred the U-boats and ship losses declined. By the summer of 1942, the U-boats left American waters in search of easier prey. Occasional forays by individual submarines continued however, and the escorts of the local convoys, aug-



The CGCs Alexander Hamilton, (left, above) *and the* Escanaba, (left) *were lost on the North Atlantic. Only two of the* Escanaba's *crew of 103 survived the sinking. Three other ships, the* Leopold, Acacia *and* Muskeget *were also lost to U-boat attack.*

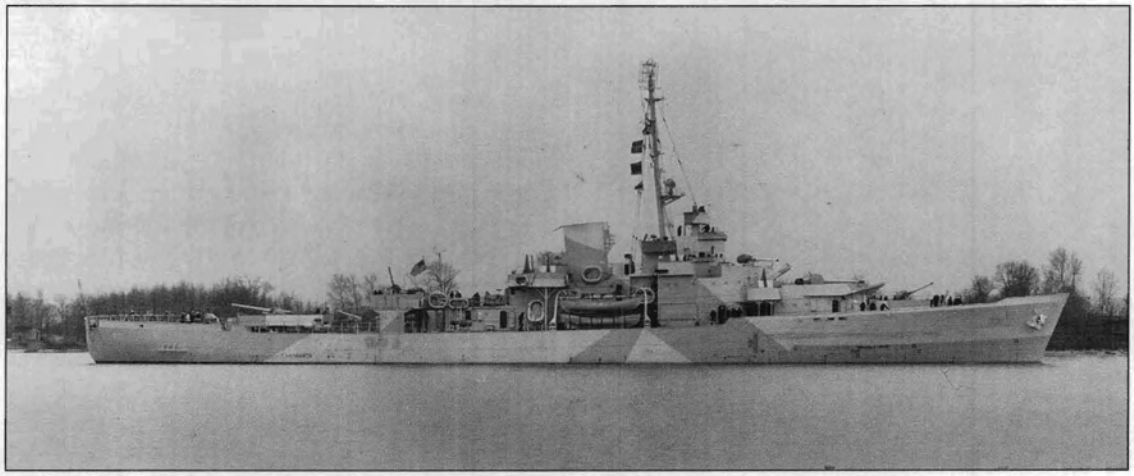
mented by newly constructed 83-foot patrol craft, were forced to remain vigilant.

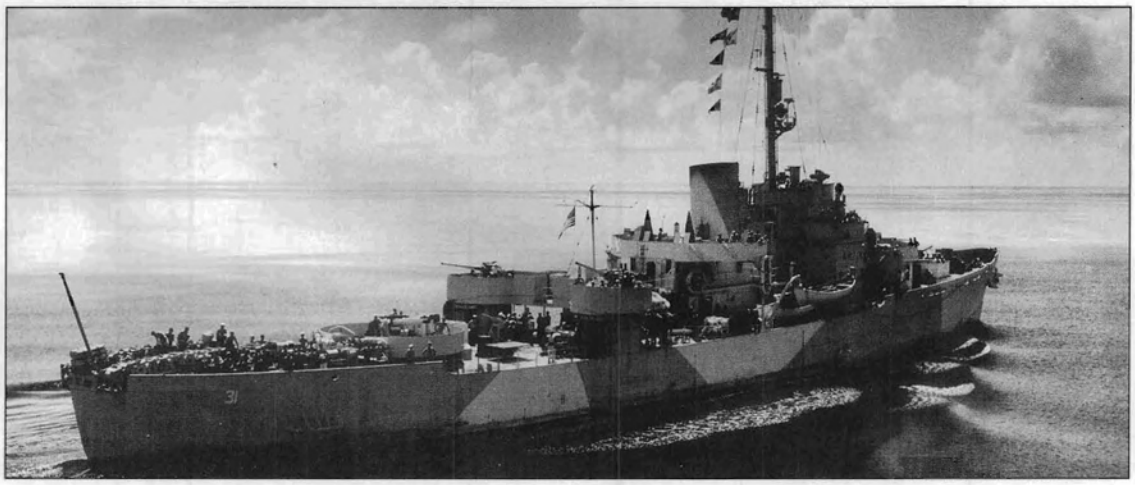
Meanwhile, on the North Atlantic convoy routes, Secretary-class cutters were escorting convoys prior to the official American entry into the war. The first to begin open-ocean convoy duty was the *CGC Campbell,* when it joined the escort force for convoy HX-159 in November 1941. The *CGC Ingham* followed, and by April 1942 four more joined their sister cutters on the North Atlantic convoy runs.

The dangerous nature of escort duty was made plain after the cutter *Alexander Hamilton* fell victim to a torpedo attack in January 1942, but the other five, along with Navy destroyers, continued to be the "mainstay" of the American escort effort through mid-1943.

INTELLIGENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Allies had a number of decisive advantages over the U-boats. Among those was high-frequency radio direction finders,

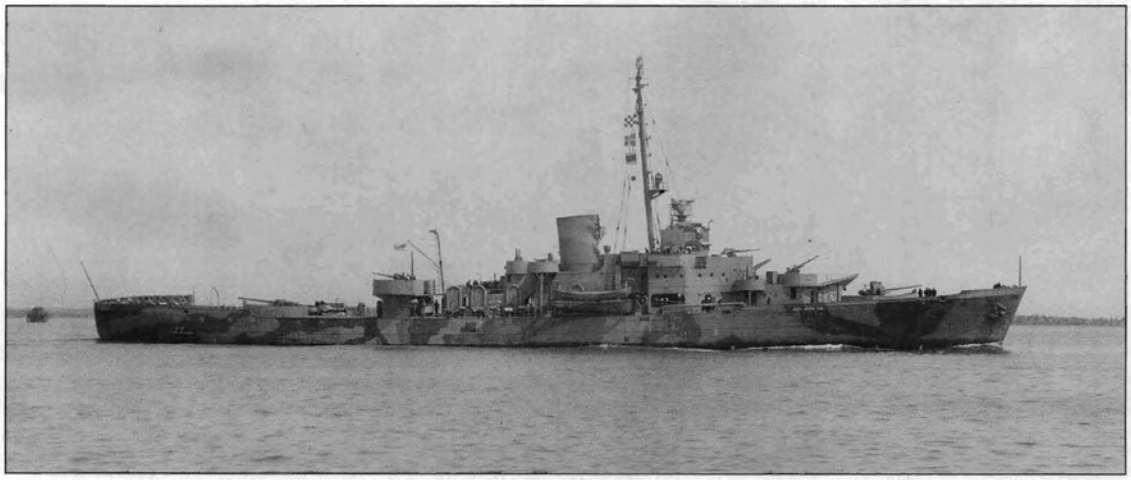




(Top to bottom) *The Secretary-class* CGCs Taney, Duane, Bibb, Campbell, Ingham *and* Spencer *as well as the* Alexander Hamilton *(previous page) all saw service as escorts. For a time they were the largest warships in the escort task groups and were the only U.S. warships to sink a U-boat in the North Atlantic routes until mid-1943. The* Taney *was in Honolulu Harbor Dec. 7, 1942, and served in the Pacific initially.*

or "huff-duff," which determined the bearings of radio transmissions. The Coast Guard had been involved with radio direction finding since 1919 and had gained further experience by the use of both ship and shore-based stations chasing rum runners during Prohibition. The Coast Guard took over the operation of 22 shore-based stations in the United States from the Navy in 1941.

Since German U-boat tactics called for centralized control of the U-boats by radio, huff-duff paved the way to locating them based on their constant radio use. It took time, however, to notify convoys of bearings obtained by shore-based stations. Therefore, ship-based huff-duff was especially critical because the convoys, notified almost instantaneously that a U-boat was nearby, could quickly change course to evade the U-boat or send an escort down the bearing of the radio signal to attack it. The escort, more heavily armed than a submarine, forced the U-boat to submerge and prevent-



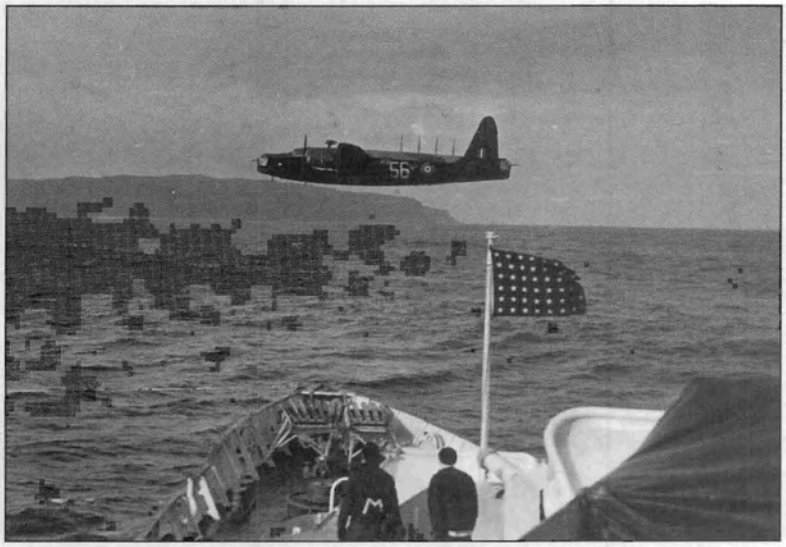
ed it from directing more U-boats to the convoy's location. The *Campbell* and the *Spencer* had the distinction of being two of the first American warships equipped with ship-based huff-duff equipment.

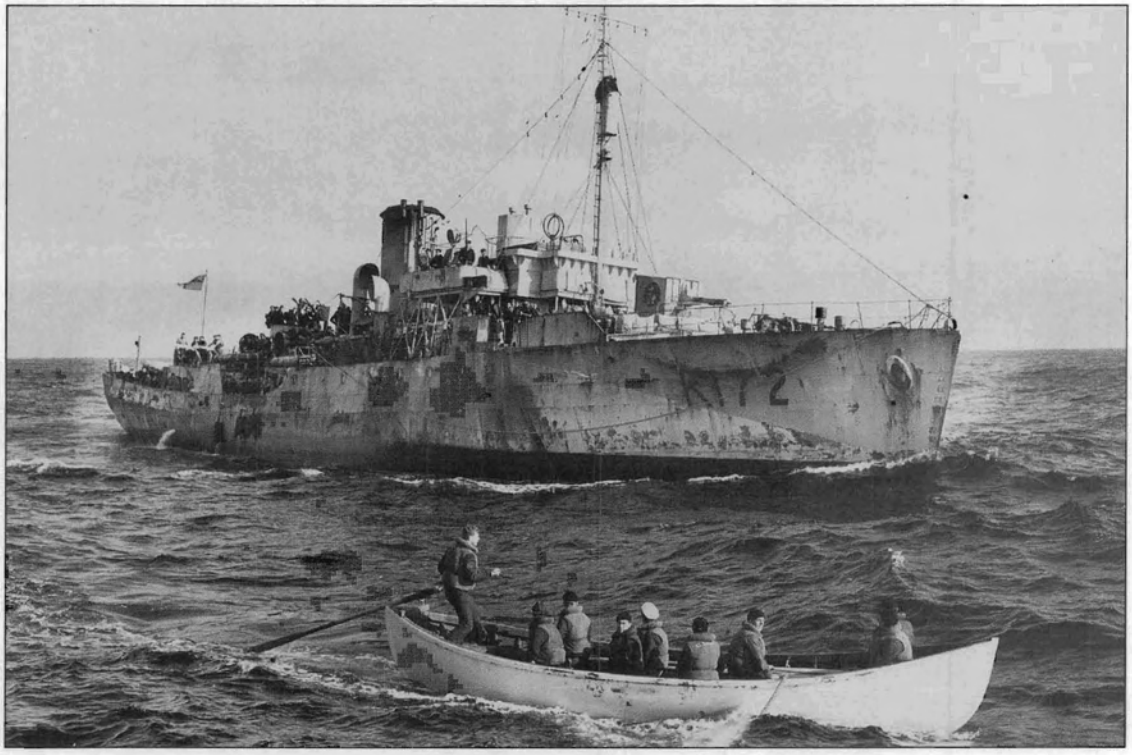
Another advantage, code-named "Ultra," was the effort to break the German's military and naval radio ciphers. When the Allies were successful in breaking those ciphers, they were able to plot the locations of wolf packs and route the convoys around them. Ultra information proved to be decisive but there were blackouts of information when the Germans changed their ciphers, thereby depriving the Allies of this important resource until once again Allied intelligence broke the new cipher.

Another problem complicated the picture. The Germans broke Allied merchant radio codes. With the information they obtained, they were able to determine the sailing routes of some convoys and accurately place their wolf packs for interceptions, even when the Allies were reading German messages. On these occasions and others when the U-boats located a convoy through circumstance, the convoys relied on ship-based huff-duff, "aggressive" escort tactics, and another Allied advantage — radar — to keep the wolf packs at bay.

Radar, such as the sets installed on the cutters before they began escort duty, permitted Allied ships to keep to their designated stations within the convoys during harsh weather, but more importantly it could locate nearby surfaced U-boats.

Escorts tracked submerged U-boats with sonar, an acoustic location and ranging device. The ability to locate a submerged U-boat was an important weapon in the Allied arsenal because it robbed the U-boat of one of its most important advantages: the ability to hide beneath the ocean's surface. Once an escort located a submerged U-boat, it at-





(Above) *A welcome sight to any convoy was protection from aircraft. Here a British Vickers Wellington bomber flys near a Coast Guard cutter. Aircraft proved to be a crucial element in the defeat of the U-boats. (Note the radar antennas on the upper fuselage.)* (Bottom) *The defeat of the U-boats was a combined Allied effort. The cutters served ably alongside British and Canadian warships, among others, during the campaign. Here a Canadian corvette prepares to receive medical supplies from the* Spencer *while on an escort mission across the Atlantic.*

tacked with depth charges, hedgehogs, or other anti-submarine weapons. Learning to use these advantages to their fullest potential took time and experience and losses were consequently heavy during the interim.

North Atlantic convoys

Through March 1943, only one North Atlantic escort group, Ocean Escort Group A-3, was under American command. That distinction was nominal, however, because of the mingling of Allied navies in these groups. Group A-3, for instance, commanded by Navy CAPT Paul R. Heineman, initially consisted of the *Spencer* and *Campbell,* and one British and four Canadian corvettes.

Many of the ships were transferred between groups, and Group A-3, along with the others, was reinforced when under threat of U-boat attack with escorts of various nationalities, or the cutters *Bibb, Duane* and *Ingham.*

These three Secretary-class cutters also escorted smaller convoys from the main convoy routes to Iceland and back again. As one *Bibb* crewman recalled, "Since we had a 12,000 (mile) cruising range we headed back and forth across the Atlantic, never quite getting to the States or England." In fact, they were in such demand that, as he noted, "we never spent one night ashore in over a year."

Long-range aircraft were not assigned to convoy protection duties in sufficient numbers to cover the convoys across the entire Atlantic until the middle of 1943. Consequently there was an "air gap" south of Greenland. It was here that most of the upcoming ocean battles were waged, and the area earned the nicknames "Torpedo Junction" from the Allies, and the "Devil's Gorge" from the Germans.

To make matters worse, weather along the North Atlantic convoy routes bordered on hellish and proved to be equally dangerous as the Germans. In January 1943, the *Ingham* escorted a convoy part way across the Atlantic in the teeth of a winter gale. ENS John M. Waters Jr., aboard the *Ingham,* described what it was like:

> "Though the bridge was 35 feet above the waterline, the seas towered up at a 45-degree angle above that. As a new wave loomed up, *Ingham* rose to meet it, climbing steeply up the front; as the sea slid past, her bow was left momentarily hanging in the air before dropping sickeningly into the next trough ... sending shock waves throughout the ship."

The heavy seas also rendered radar and sonar practically useless. The storms of the winter of 1942 and 1943 were the worst to hit the North Atlantic in more than 50 years. The weather, in conjunction with a renewed U-boat offensive on the North Atlantic convoys, led to the period being nicknamed the "Bloody Winter."

The cutters' first North Atlantic victory came when the *Ingham,* under the command of CDR George E. McCabe, located a submerged U-boat while screening ahead of Convoy SC-112 the night of Dec. 17, 1942.

The *Ingham* attacked, laying depth charges at varying depths to create what

Convoys

The British instituted convoys, a well-tested defensive tactic, to protect their merchant shipping at the start of World War II. Convoys generally consisted of 40 or more ships sailing in columns 1,000 yards apart, with 600 yards separating ships within the columns. Thus, they sometimes occupied as much as 20 square miles of ocean. Around these vulnerable ships sailed their escorts, which searched the surrounding seas with radar and sonar to prevent U-boats from attacking. Depending upon the route taken and the convoy's average speed, the voyage across the North Atlantic could take up to two weeks.

The ultimate effectiveness of the convoy system and Allied defenses against the U-boats are apparent through one telling statistic. Of the 870 U-boats that served on operational patrols, 550 of them "sank nothing." Ultimately, attacking an escorted convoy became virtually a suicide mission for U-boats; most of the merchant ships that sailed in convoys after mid-1943 arrived at their destination unscathed.

CONVOY DESIGNATIONS

HX:	North America/Great Britain, Fast
SC:	North America/Great Britain, Slow
ON:	Great Britain/North America, Fast
ONS:	Great Britain/North America, Slow
UGS:	United States/Gibraltar, Slow
GUS:	Gibraltar/United States, Slow

McCabe called a "hammer effect." Aboard the cutter deck plates rattled as the charges exploded, causing ocean spray to shoot skyward. Ultimately they found their mark, and the *U-626* went to the bottom with all hands.

In January 1943 the weather was so bad that the U-boats had difficulty locating and attacking convoys, but by February more than 100 were stationed in the air gap. With so many U-boats in the area the Allies had difficulty in dodging them all, even with the information provided by Ultra.

U-boats wreaked havoc among the merchant ships during February and the escorts were kept busy attacking the enemy and pulling survivors from the water. One such rescue typified the Coast Guard's role during the "Bloody Winter" when a U-boat attacked a passenger ship escorted by cutters of the Greenland Patrol.

During the night of Feb. 3, 1943, the *U-233* torpedoed and sank the troop-carrying passenger ship *S.S. Dorchester,* bound for Greenland. Its escorts, the *CGCs Tampa, Escanaba* and *Comanche,* and later supported by the *CGC Duane,* worked in the darkness to save 229 of the 904 passengers and crew. The frigid waters claimed the rest.

This rescue was the first recorded use of the "retriever" technique. A crewman, insulated against the frigid water by a rubber suit and tethered to the ship, was lowered into the sea where he would grab a survivor. Crewmen aboard would then haul both in, recover the survivor, and throw the rescuer back in to retrieve another.

Another rescue demonstrated the brutal nature of combat on the North Atlantic. A wolf pack attacked the eastbound convoy SC-118. The cutters *Bibb* and *Ingham* were temporarily attached to a British escort force for the convoy's trans-Atlantic journey. It was fortunate for the passengers and crew of the troopship *SS Henry Mallory* that the *Bibb* and *Ingham* were there.

The *U-402* torpedoed the *Mallory* as it straggled behind the convoy. The passengers panicked and leapt overboard. Those who did not make it into a life raft died from hypothermia.

Lookouts aboard the *Bibb* sighted one of the *Mallory's* lifeboats and, ignoring an order to return to the convoy, the *Bibb's* commanding officer, CDR Roy Raney, ordered his cutter to begin rescuing survivors.

Many of the *Bibb's* crewmen leapt into the water to assist the nearly frozen survivors, and the cutter *Ingham* assisted. One of the *Ingham's* crew described the scene, a dread-

(Above) *CDR James A. Hirshfield,* (right) *commanding officer of the* Campbell, *directed the successful attack on the U-606, for which he received the Navy Cross. Here he checks a message delivered by ENS Baring Coughin, USCGR.* (Right) *Men of the* Campbell's *crew attempt to patch the gaping hole in the cutter's hull after it rammed the* U-606. *The* Campbell *was towed safely into port and returned to service.*

fully common one along the North Atlantic that year:

> "I never saw anything like it, wood all over the place and bodies in life jackets ... never saw so many dead fellows in my whole life. Saw lots of mail bags, boxes, wood, wood splinters, empty life jackets, oars, upturned boats, empty life rafts, bodies, parts of bodies, clothes, cork, and a million other things that ships have in them. I hope I never see another drowned man as long as I live."

Although many of the *Mallory's* 498 passengers and crew died from hypothermia, the *Bibb's* crew pulled 202 survivors from the frigid water, while the *Ingham's* crew saved 33. The *Bibb* rescued 33 more people from the nearby torpedoed freighter *S.S. Kalliopi* before returning to the convoy.

Meanwhile, the fighting in Devil's Gorge worsened. One of the fiercest battles was waged over Convoy ON-166 in February 1943. The convoy was under the protection of Escort Group A-3, commanded by the Navy's Heineman.

Heineman's flagship was the *Spencer,* which itself was under the command of Coast Guard CDR Harold S. Berdine. The *Campbell,* commanded by Coast Guard CDR James A. Hirshfield, also sailed with the "international" escort group that was made even more so when the Polish destroyer *Burza* reinforced them.

The westward-bound convoy left the waters off Northern Ireland and sailed straight into a gale. As the high seas tossed the ships about, disrupting their formation, 21 U-boats closed in to attack. Hirshfield noted with alarm the number of contacts his huff-duff made, and commented that the convoy was certainly "in for a big party."

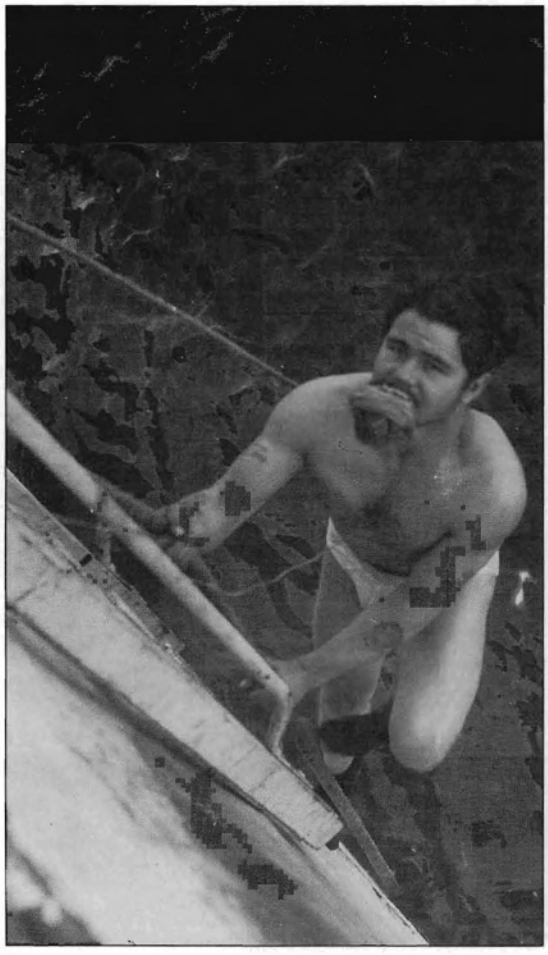
The *Spencer* located the *U-604* on radar the night of Feb. 20. As the cutter closed in, the U-boat dived. The *Spencer* laced the water with depth charges, missing the U-boat, but nevertheless prevented it from reporting the convoy's position. The following night the *Spencer* again obtained a radar contact and sailed to investigate. As it got close, the crew spotted a submarine sailing on the surface. The U-boat crash-dived when the Germans saw the approaching cutter. The *Spencer* established sonar contact almost immediately and, in a replay of the earlier action, attacked with depth charges. This time they were right on target. The *U-529* went to the bottom with all hands.

The *Campbell* also kept busy chasing down U-boats and rescuing survivors. In the running battle the *Campbell* engaged numerous U-boats, forcing them to submerge and damaging at least two. Its crew then rescued 50 survivors from a torpedoed Norwegian tanker.

As the cutter returned to the convoy it detected a contact on radar. The *Campbell* raced toward it and soon made visual contact. It was the surfaced *U-606,* earlier disabled by depth charges from the *Burza.* The *Campbell* closed to ram while its gunners opened fire. The big cutter struck the U-boat with a glancing blow and one of the submarine's hydroplanes sliced open the *Campbell's* hull, flooding the engine room. The crew dropped two depth charges as the submarine slid past, and the explosions lifted the U-boat nearly five feet. Hirshfield later noted, "I felt sure he was ours."

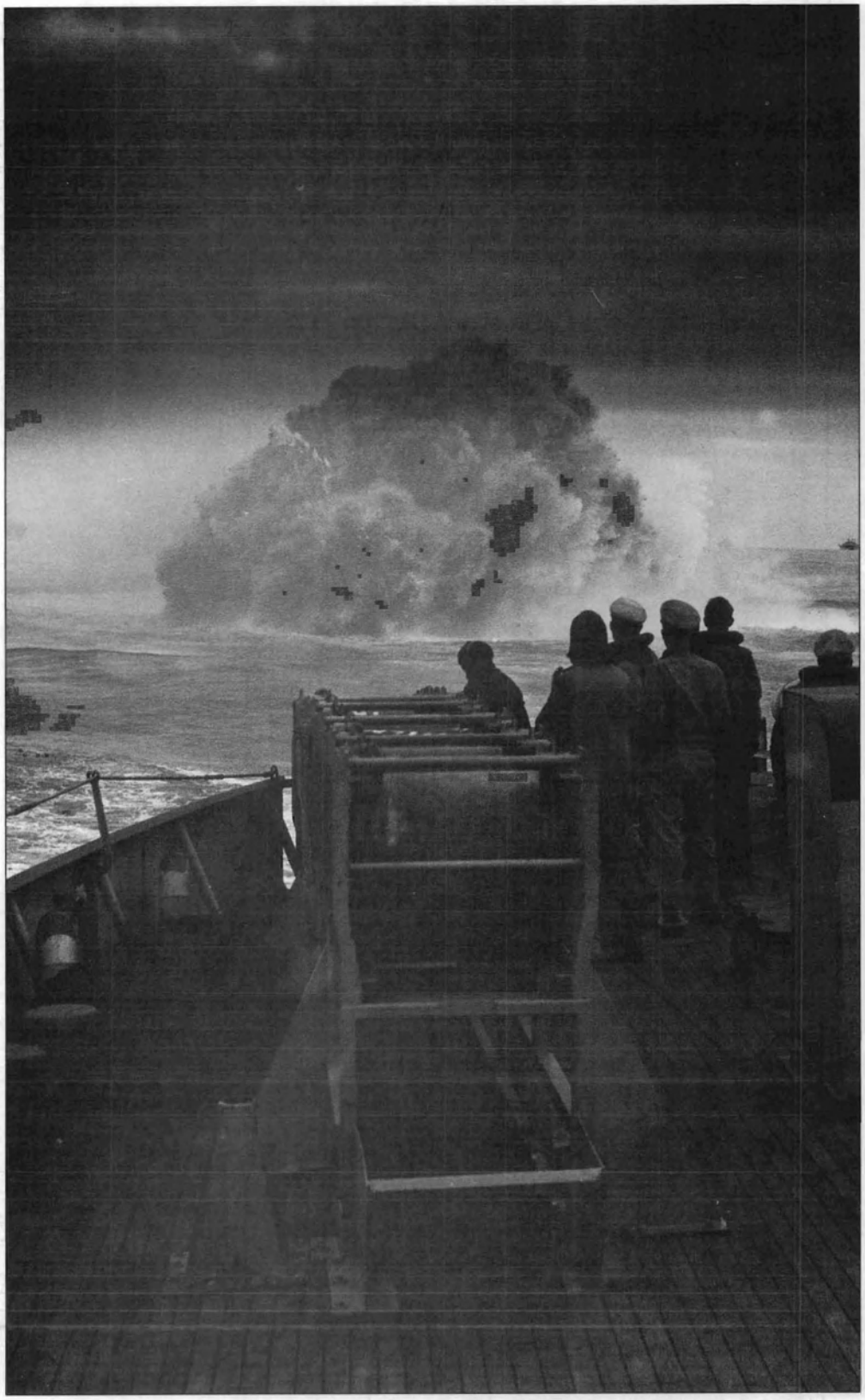
The *Campbell* illuminated the U-boat with a spotlight and the gunners continued to fire into the submarine's conning tower and hull. The two vessels were so close, one crewman said that, "You just couldn't miss."

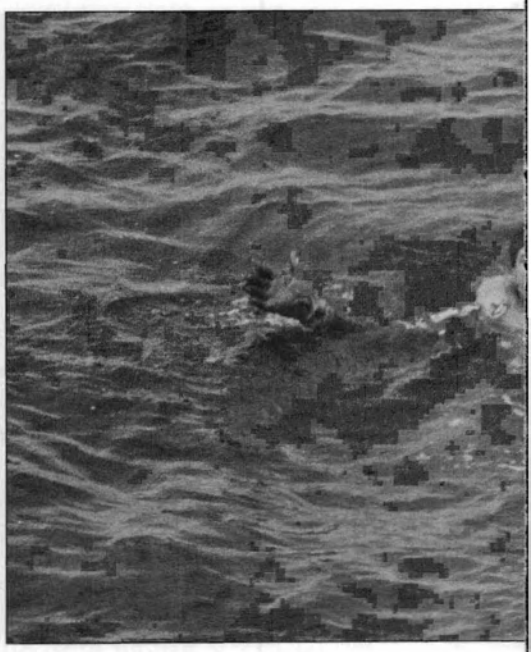
Hirshfield was hit by shell fragments but remained at his station. When he realized the Germans had given up, he ordered his men to cease firing. The crew then rescued

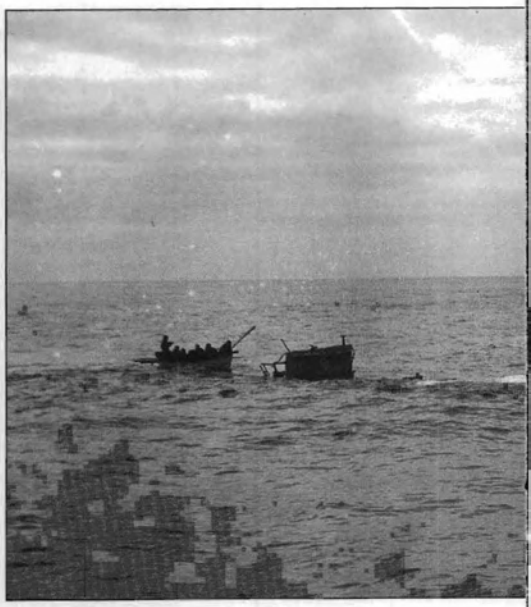


(Left) *Fireman First Class Colon Swindell volunteered to swim in the frigid water to help secure a patch to the* Campbell's *hull.*

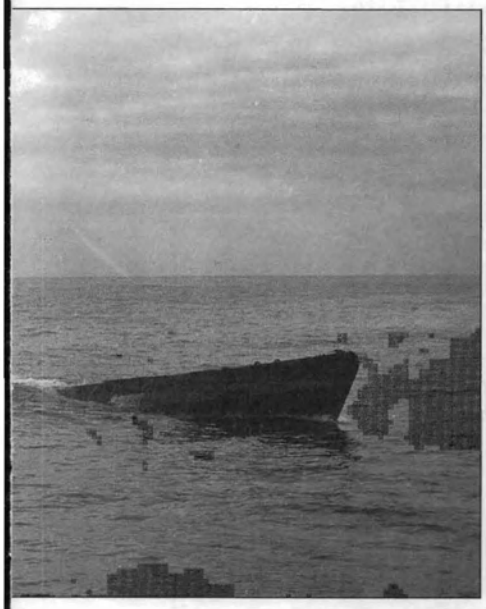
Spencer sinks the







U-175



(Far left) *A depth charge explodes in the wake of the* Spencer. *This was one of three attacks that brought the* U-175 *to the surface.* (Center, top) *The* U-175*'s senior surviving petty officer yells for help. Ironically, before they abandoned their submarine, he ordered the crew to not ask the Americans for help once they were overboard.* (Center, bottom) *The* Spencer*'s boarding party moves away from the sinking* U-175. *The U-boat was sinking too quickly to attempt to salvage it.* (Left, above) *Another crewman of the* U-175 *is brought aboard the* Spencer. *The* CGCs Spencer *and* Duane *rescued 41 of the* U-175*'s crew. Note his escape lung, the standard German survival gear issued to the U-boatmen.* (Left, bottom) *Pharmacist Mate first class William Crumbaugh assists U-175 chief engineer Leopold Noworth. On his own responsibility, Noworth ordered the* U-175 *to surface when chlorine gas from the damaged batteries filled the U-boat.*

five of the *U-606's* crew.

The *U-606* was finished, but so was the *Campbell* for the immediate future. The cutter was dead in the water with a flooded engine room. Hirshfield directed the repairs while the *Burza,* and later a corvette, screened it from an attack by a U-boat. A tug arrived nearly four days later and towed the crippled cutter to Newfoundland. It was later repaired and returned to service.

With the *Campbell* out of action the now weakened Group A-3 continued to fight off attacking U-boats. The *Spencer* located the submerged *U-454* as it attempted to attack the convoy and depth-charged it so severely that it was forced out of the action. The cutter sailed to rejoin the convoy, and the battle wound down as they neared Newfoundland. It had lasted nearly a week and had taken place over 1,000 miles of ocean.

Allied Losses Mount

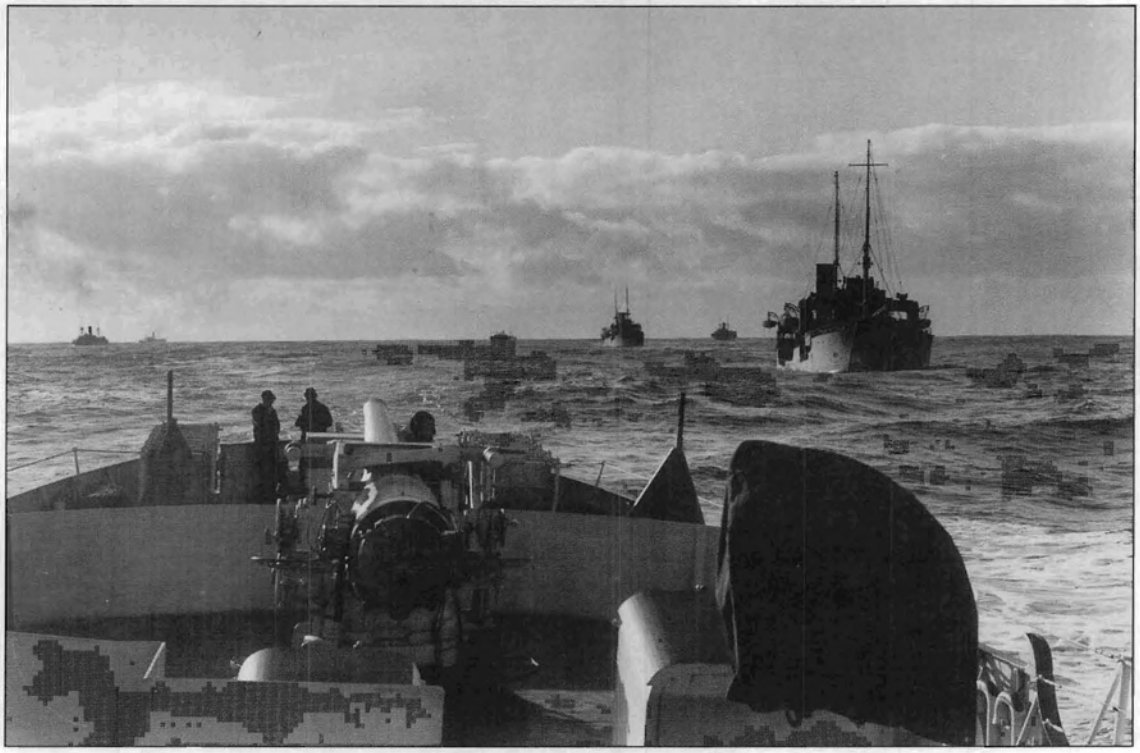
March 1943 proved to be one of the most devastating months of the campaign for the Allies. The Germans changed their naval radio cipher, depriving the Allies of the precious Ultra information, and consequently the Allies were unable to locate all of the wolf packs. During the first three weeks of the month the Allies lost 97 ships, and at that rate American production could not keep up with losses.

There was little rest for the cutters as they were desperately needed on the North Atlantic. Consequently there were constant breakdowns in equipment due to a lack of time for repairs. The *Ingham,* for instance, sailed with inoperative sonar for nearly six weeks before it was permitted to go into dry-dock. The crews, too, were offered little rest. A crewman of the *Bibb* related that "we were always exhausted. It was get resupplied, refueled, and back out."

In early March, Group A-3 sailed east toward Great Britain, escorting 59 ships of Convoy SC-121 through a winter gale. Again, through heavy seas, U-boats closed to attack. The storm dispersed many of the merchant ships and the U-boats picked off the stragglers.

The *Spencer* attacked and drove off at least four U-boats, but the cutter and the few corvettes became overwhelmed. Heineman requested reinforcements and soon the *Bibb* and *Ingham* departed Iceland and headed to support their sister cutter and Allies. Even with the reinforcements, however, the heavy seas continued to disperse the convoy. Seven of those that did not relocate the convoy were sunk by U-boats, and six others were sunk while in the convoy.

Many of the escorts' sonars and radars were inoperative due to the heavy seas or lack of proper repairs. This accounted for the lack of U-boat kills. But the escorts' counterattacks, under Heineman's direction, kept the U-boats from sinking even more ships. Convoy SC-121, battered but still in formation, sailed into harbor March 15, 1943. The supply lines to



The Spencer escorts a convoy across the North Atlantic during the "Bloody Winter." The ship sank two U-boats during its wartime career and continued in service, as did its surviving sister cutters, into the 1980s.

Great Britain remained open.

The British broke the new German naval radio cipher late in March and once again the Allies were able to route the convoys around most of the wolf packs. More aircraft, equipped with new radar sets, also became available, and the tide of war began to turn in the Allies favor. Driven from the surface, the U-boats were forced to make more submerged attacks where their slow underwater speed and limited endurance meant that they could not keep up with the convoys or quickly escape an attacking escort. The wolf-pack tactics began to falter.

Group A-3 persevered through March and escorted Convoy ON-175 westward across the Atlantic, arriving unscathed in Newfoundland April 7, 1943. The *Duane* and the Canadian destroyer *Skeena* reinforced the group, and they departed for Great Britain April 11, escorting Convoy HX-233.

For five days no U-boat made contact, but on April 16 the *U-262* sighted the convoy. The *Spencer* picked the U-boat up on radar and attacked, forcing it to submerge. While the cutter failed to destroy the submarine, its prompt attack prevented the *U-262* from sending a contact report. Another U-boat, however, located the convoy and guided in two other U-boats.

One ship was torpedoed, and after the *Spencer* screened the rescue of survivors its sonar operator located the *U-175* as the U-boat attempted a submerged daylight attack from within the convoy. The U-boat's commanding officer had the tanker *S.S. G. Harrison Smith* in his periscope but the *Spencer* intervened. Sailing between the columns of ships, the cutter delivered three accurate attacks on the unsuspecting U-boat.

As one of the *U-175's* crew later recounted, "The (depth charges) were bad ... everything was shaking ... we came up and saw you in the periscope, but you saw us and we knew it was all over ... our chance to get you was gone."

The submarine surfaced and the *Spencer, Duane,* and many of the merchant ships' naval armed guard opened fire. The *U-175's* crew abandoned their submarine after opening its dive valves. The *Spencer* sent over a boarding party. LT Ross P. Bullard climbed aboard and

Escorts and Crews

The first Coast Guard vessels to join the North Atlantic escort groups were the Secretary-class cutters. They were large escorts, stable, heavily armed, with an extremely long range. They entered the war manned almost entirely by regular Coast Guard crews, and as one author noted, they were "probably the most experienced seamen in the Battle of the Atlantic."

Nearly 23,000 Coast Guard members manned two classes of Navy escort vessels that saw service on the North Atlantic: destroyer escorts and frigates. The destroyer escorts began to join the fleet in mid-1943, and the Coast Guard ultimately manned 30 of these well-armed and maneuverable warships. The Coast Guard also manned the entire class of 75 frigates which began to enter service in late 1943.

Each escort trip across the Atlantic took up to two weeks through some of the most dangerous seas in the world. The U-boats were one problem; the weather was almost as dangerous. The experienced sailors slept "boots and saddles." This meant, as one crewman said, that "I sleep with my shoes and clothes on, and, OK, my life jacket also," because they were never sure when a torpedo might hit their ship.

Combatting the U-boats took a great deal of training and experience. Drills, such as general quarters, damage control, and fire and collision, were practiced almost daily. Shipboard routine never varied. One crewman noted, "Everyone stood four hours on watch and four off, and (you) did your regular duty besides ... gun crews and 13 lookouts were on watch 24 hours every day."

These warships, along with their compatriots, kept the U-boats at bay and the supply lines to the Allies open, thereby leading to Germany's ultimate defeat. But victory was not without cost. Three cutters, the *Alexander Hamilton, Escanaba,* and the *Acacia,* one weather ship, the *Muskeget,* and one Coast Guard-manned warship, the *Leopold,* were sunk by enemy action during the Atlantic campaign.

determined that the U-boat was sinking too fast to salvage. Nevertheless, Bullard became the first American serviceman to board an enemy warship "underway at sea" since the 19th century.

Afterward, the cutters rescued all 41 surviving Germans. One of the *Spencer's* crew had been killed by "friendly fire" and several others were wounded, but the Coast Guardsmen were nonetheless jubilant. One officer described what the crew was feeling:

> "The uncertainty, along with the cold and discomfort, is hard to take. Of course, our job really is well done if we get most of a convoy through. But it's hard to sell that to the crew ... they want excitement and battle. Well, they got it. I bet the morale is better on this ship tonight than any in the whole damn navy."

(Right) *The hunter becomes the victim. As the tanker it just torpedoed burns in the background, the* U-550 *sinks after being depth-charged to the surface by the Coast Guard-manned* USS Joyce. (Below) *Commanding Officer of the* Joyce, *LCDR Robert Wilcox, conducts a funeral service for Heinrich Wenz, crewman of the* U-550. *Wenz died from wounds after being rescued by the* Joyce.

ADM Sir Max Horton, Royal Navy, commander in chief of the Western Approaches, signaled the crew of the *Spencer* "well done."

The Tide Changes

Although the crews did not realize it at the time, the Battle of the Atlantic had reached a turning point. Growing Allied numbers, radar, Ultra, huff-duff, offensive escort tactics, and greater protection by aircraft turned the tables on the U-boats. The Allies sunk 41 in May, and ADM Doenitz, realizing the battle had turned against him, retired his U-boats from the northern convoy routes.

The Secretary-class cutters were transferred to the central Atlantic, Mediterranean and Caribbean convoy routes. Although the retreat of the U-boats from the North Atlantic signaled that the Allies had achieved a strategic victory, Doenitz continued to send them into the Atlantic in piecemeal fashion until the end of the war. Critical Allied resources were therefore still needed to construct escort vessels. Two such classes of warships, the mass-produced destroyer escorts and frigates, began to enter service in 1943.

The Coast Guard ultimately manned 30 destroyer escorts. These were formed into five escort divisions consisting of six destroyer escorts each. Each destroyer escort was fully manned by Coast Guard crews, and the five divisions were under the command of a senior Coast Guard officer. After their crews were trained and their new warships put through their shakedown exercises, they began escorting convoys to Great Britain and the Mediterranean.

One became the first destroyer escort sunk by enemy action. The *U-255* torpedoed the Coast Guard-manned *USS Leopold* in the cold waters south of Iceland in March 1944. A sister ship, the *USS Joyce,* under the command of Coast Guard LCDR Robert Wilcox, dodged two other torpedoes fired from the U-boat. He called out to the *Leopold*'s survivors, "We're dodging torpedoes, God bless you, we'll be back."

Both torpedoes missed but the *Joyce* was

unable to locate the elusive *U-255.* The *Joyce* then returned to rescue 28 surviving *Leopold* crewmen. The Germans' torpedo and the icy waters claimed the rest.

In April 1944 the *Joyce* avenged the sinking of the *Leopold.* The tanker *Pan Pennsylvania* was torpedoed by the *U-550* as it straggled behind its British-bound convoy. The *Joyce* and the *USS Peterson* rescued the tanker's surviving crew, and then the *Joyce* detected the U-boat on sonar as the Germans attempted to escape after hiding beneath the sinking tanker. The *U-550's* engineering officer later said, "We waited for your ship to leave; soon we could hear nothing so we thought the escort vessels had gone; but as soon as we started to move– bang!"

The *Joyce* delivered a depth-charge pattern that bracketed the submerged submarine. The depth charges were so well placed, a German reported, that one actually bounced off the submerged submarine's deck before it exploded.

The attack severely damaged the U-boat and forced the Germans to surface, where they manned and began firing their deck guns. The *Joyce, Peterson,* and a Navy destroyer escort, the *USS Gandy,* returned their fire. The *Gandy* rammed it, and the *Peterson* dropped two depth charges which exploded near the U-boat's hull.

Realizing they were defeated, the U-boat's crew prepared scuttling charges and abandoned their submarine. The *Joyce's* crew rescued 13 of the *U-550's* crew, one of whom later died from wounds received during the firefight.

A mere 13 minutes had passed from the moment the *Joyce* detected the U-boat to the time it surrendered, an indication of the effectiveness of Allied anti-submarine capabilities. Although all three shared credit for the kill, it was the *Joyce's* depth-charge attack that brought the U-boat to the surface and ensured its destruction.

MEDITERRANEAN DUTY

Besides convoy duty on the North Atlantic and along America's shores, Coast Guard forces escorted convoys across the central Atlantic and into the Mediterranean. Although the seas were calmer they were subject to attack from U-boats, and once past Gibraltar, from German torpedo-armed aircraft. These proved to be just as deadly as the German submarines.

On one voyage in April 1944 the *Taney* served as the flagship for the two accompanying escort divisions, one of which was entirely Coast Guard-manned. They guarded an African-bound convoy from the United States.

The trip proved uneventful until they entered the Mediterranean where, off the coast of Algeria, at least 20 German bombers attacked at dusk. One torpedo obliterated the ammunition-laden freighter *Paul Hamilton*, killing all aboard. Three more merchant ships were seriously damaged. Another torpedo blew apart the destroyer *USS Lansdale*. The Coast Guard-manned *USS Menges,* commanded by LCDR Frank M. McCabe, survived the aerial onslaught, downed one of the bombers with anti-aircraft fire, and rescued 137 *Lansdale* survivors. The crew also rescued two German airmen.

After delivering the surviving merchant ships to Tunisia, the warships turned around to escort another convoy back to the United States. This time a U-boat under the command of an experienced 25-year-old officer stood in their way. The U-boat surfaced behind the convoy near the coast of Algeria and the *Menges* picked it up on radar. McCabe immediately reversed course to investigate. The *U-371* fired an acoustic torpedo at the closing destroyer escort and then quickly submerged. The torpedo blew the *Menges's* stern off, killing 31 crewmen. Although seriously damaged, the *Menges* remained afloat.

(Left) *An oil-covered seaman of the* USS Lansdale *is treated by crewmen of the Coast Guard-manned destroyer escort* USS Menges. Menges *crewmen rescued him after his destroyer was torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean.*

McCabe and his crew stayed with their ship while the Coast Guard-manned *USS Pride*, under the command of CDR Ralph R. Curry, located the submerged U-boat and seriously damaged it with a depth-charge attack. The *Pride* then tracked it and, in concert with an international team of escorts, cornered it near the African coast. Surrounded, with water leaking in the hull and the batteries almost dead, the U-boat's crew

surfaced, scuttled, and abandoned their submarine.

The *Menges* was safely towed into port and later to the United States where it received a new stern off of another damaged destroyer escort. It rejoined the fleet and after making two more convoy runs, the *Menges* reported for duty in the first Coast Guard-manned hunter-killer group to see service on the North Atlantic. The group's sole function was to hunt down and destroy U-boats.

Final Actions

This hunter-killer group, consisting of the Coast Guard-manned *Pride, Menges, Mosely* and *Lowe* was commanded by CDR Reginald French. In the spring of 1945 they tracked and located the *U-866* after it was reported operating off of Nova Scotia. The *Lowe* attacked twice with depth charges and the *Menges* followed up with another attack. Soon wreckage floated to the surface, confirming the kill. The U-866 had been blown to pieces.

Yet another U-boat, the *U-857,* ventured into North American waters in late March 1945 and torpedoed an empty tanker. A hunter-killer group under the command of the *Pride's* former Commanding Officer, Curry, who flew his flag from the frigate *Knoxville,* was ordered to find and sink the offending U-boat. Curry knew his business by now, for his division had tracked down and sunk the *U-869* off Morocco earlier that year. His group was again successful. On the morning of April 7 they located the *U-857* on sonar, hiding on the ocean floor off Cape Cod, Mass., and sank it as ordered.

Doenitz, who assumed power in Germany after Adolf Hitler committed suicide in late April 1945, ordered his U-boats to surrender to the Allies May 4. The *U-853,* patrolling off of Rhode Island, which either did not receive that order or chose to ignore it, torpedoed the steamer *S.S. Black Point* on May 5, 1945.

The frigate *USS Moberly,* in concert with the *USS Atherton*, located and sank the *U-853* in a coordinated attack that closed the Battle of the Atlantic. The *U-853* was the last U-boat sunk during the war. The Coast Guard's final military action in the North Atlantic occurred later in May when the *USSs Durant* and *Vance* accepted the surrender of the *U-873,* and the *U-234* surrendered to the *USS Forsyth.*

The Coast Guard's contribution to Allied victory over the U-boats went far beyond estimation. Although the majority of the Coast Guard units could not claim a U-boat "kill," this was not the only measure of success. Each escort helped to keep the U-boats at bay, ultimately ensuring the timely and safe arrival of personnel, food and military cargoes.

Coast Guard units also rescued nearly 1,000 Allied and Axis survivors along the North Atlantic convoy routes, 1,600 along the American coast, and 200 in the Mediterranean, thereby carrying on one of the most historic of the Coast Guard's missions.

This then is a dual legacy that the Coast Guard may look back on with pride. In accomplishing its mission, the Coast Guard earned the respect and admiration of both allies and enemies when their paths crossed with America's oldest sea service. One former crewman of the *U-175* was overheard by intelligence officers telling a fellow prisoner-of-war, "When I came up on deck, I saw one of those cutters . . . making straight for us. It was . . . Coast Guard! Do you know them, those American ones?"

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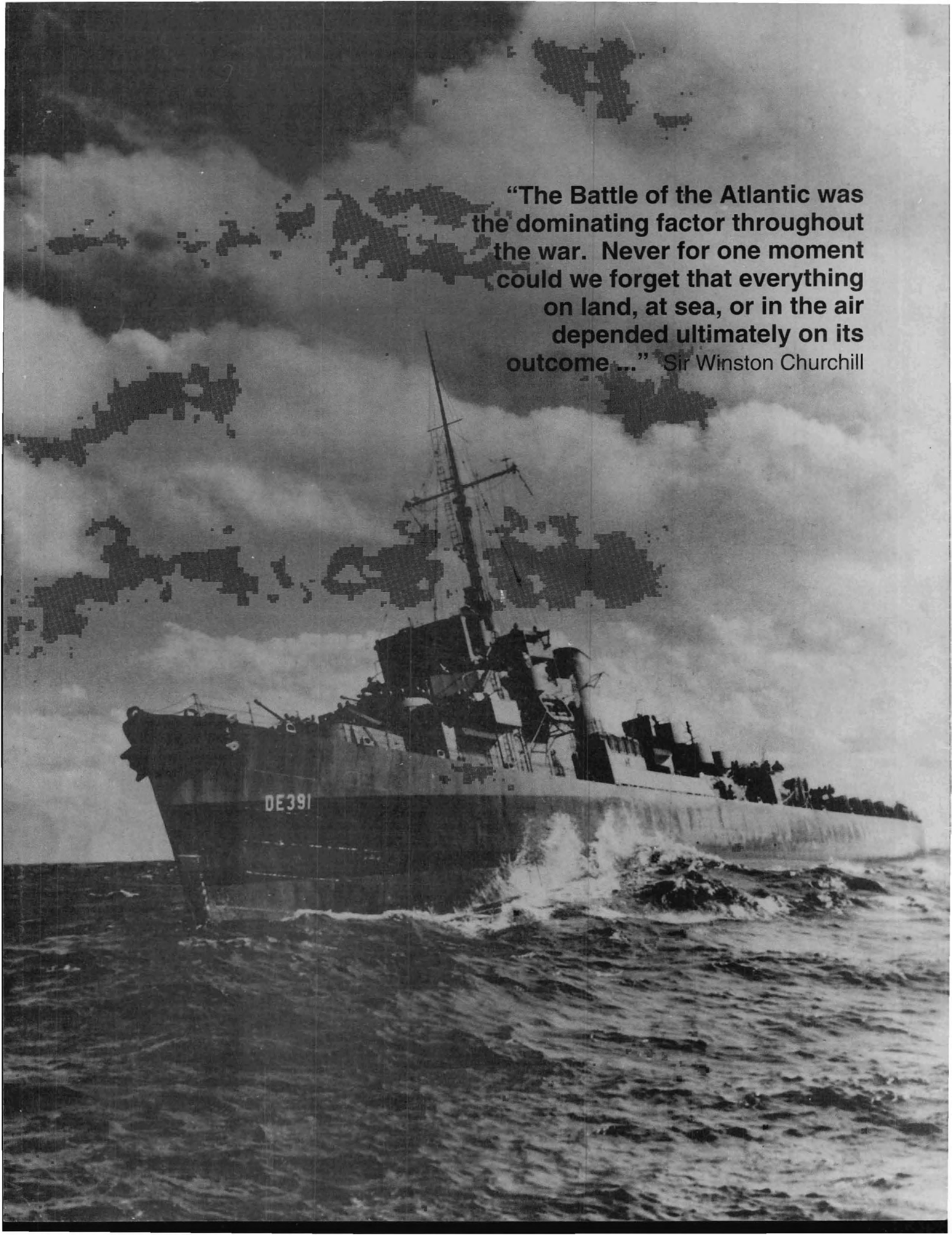
CG faces of the North Atlantic Campaign


"The Battle of the Atlantic was the dominating factor throughout the war. Never for one moment could we forget that everything on land, at sea, or in the air depended ultimately on its outcome ..." Sir Winston Churchill
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