

Canada's Path to War

The Battle on the Homefront with U-Boats Off Our Shores!

Gerry Madigan

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of my late Uncles Leslie O'Keefe, Jim Madigan, and Frank Madigan.

Leslie was a private soldier (D-144848 Private Leslie Jeffrey O'Keefe), 1 Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's). He participated in the Battle of Moyland Wood. Leslie was posted to "C" Company 1 Can Scot R, who attacked German positions the morning of 18 February 1945, where he was captured, and remained a prisoner of war until war's end. He came home a troubled young man.

My Uncles Jim and Frank both joined the RCN. Why the two Madigan boys decided to join the RCN is unknown to me, but they did.

Uncle Jim (RCN) was posted to MTB 735 in the 65th MTB Flotilla as part of Canada's motor torpedo boat fleet. MTB 735 took part in the D-Day landings on 06 June 1944.

Uncle Frank (RCN) was only the tender age of 17 years old when he joined the Royal Canadian Navy like many of his peers who joined the services at the time. Uncle Frank was puzzled that boys as young as 16 were allowed to join after years of reflection. He also noted that many westerners joined the RCN. Over the three years he served, Frank sailed on two ships. The first was the Medicine Hat, the second, Dundas. He is the rating who recalled the events of "The Promise" in this work.

Contents

Dedication.....2

Prologue.....7

Part 1 - The Build up to the Second World War9

 Chapter 1 – In the beginning..... 10

 A new Sovereign Nation – 1931 Statute of Westminster 12

 The Country was ill prepared..... 13

 The war brought with it other interests 14

 A perspective of Geography and History that sets the tone of Nationhood. 15

 Chapter 2 - Army Preparations 19

 A Nation’s Considerations Leading into War..... 19

 Army Building and Manning A Fortress..... 23

 Military Districts 23

 The Army is mobilized 25

 The Canso Defence Area 29

 Action Stations..... 31

 Parade States 31

 The Support Units 32

 Chapter 3 – Royal Canadian Navy Preparations 34

 Looming War 34

 The Royal Canadian Navy – Ready Aye Ready 35

 Activities to 1940..... 36

 Chapter 4 - Royal Canadian Air Force-Preparations..... 40

 Airpower as one solution 40

Getting Ready	45
Chapter 5 The BCATP a Microcosm Leading to Total War.....	46
A Country Mobilizes for War	46
BACTP Build	47
Growth and Expansion – Training Begins.....	48
Chapter 6 - Dunkirk Changed Everything 1940	52
Access to channel ports	55
Impacts of Extending U-Boat Range to Canada.....	56
Strategic Considerations and Influences Now Brought Closer to Home 1939- 1940	58
Chapter 7 – Making do	59
1940 the Build Up – A Microcosm of Problems.....	59
CANSO Defence Area.....	60
The Bureaucratic Muddle 1939 to 1940	63
Competing Demands.....	67
Part 2 - The Prelude Canada.....	69
Chapter 8 – Standing Alone	69
In-house Fighting	69
1941 RAF Arrives	73
OTU.31 established.	74
As an EAC addition – Maritime patrols.....	77
Increasing U-boat Action	79
Chapter 9 The chickens come home to roost 1942.....	83
An Overview of 1942.....	85
Battle of Gulf of St Lawrence Launched	90

So, The Battle Expands	92
U-132 (10 Jun- 16 Aug 1942)	92
U-165 (7 August-27 September 1942).....	96
U-517 (8 August- 19 October 1942).....	99
U-69 (15 August – 19 October 1942)	102
U-106 (15 August-5 November 1942).....	103
Chapter 10 - The Other Battle in the Gulf of St Lawrence	105
Conception Bay, Belle Isle	105
Into the Breach.....	110
Lessons Learned.....	112
The role of Maritime Air Power Impresses Admiral Dönitz.....	113
Forgotten Lessons Relearned.....	116
Chapter 11 A Third Front – 1942 Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy.....	116
Nova Scotia’s East Coast, In Gulf of Maine and Bay Of Fundy.....	117
Military Commitments	121
PART 3 Eye Witness Accounts	122
Chapter 12 - Tall Tales	123
The keepers	124
Others Felt Their Wrath	126
Stories of U-boats confronting locals	127
Witness Reliability.....	128
Chapter 13 1943 - A Hiatus Of Sorts	131
Story of U-262 special operation.....	131
Other Special ops Weather Station Kurt – 1943	137

Part 4 – Pointing To The End	140
Chapter 14 A crucial year leading to 1944.....	140
The background behind the events leading to a return 1944.....	140
Resolving the “Funnel Trap”	143
Changing Times	149
Paving the way for a return to the St Lawrence in 1944	150
The solution.....	151
Chapter 15 - A Return to Canada	154
Aligning the boats in the Gulf of St Lawrence	154
The plan	156
U-802	157
U-541	160
U-1223	162
U-1228	164
U-1231	165
Chapter 16 The Gulf of Maine and Collateral Operations 1944	166
The Gulf of Maine.....	168
U-1229	168
U-1230	171
The Atlantic and Halifax Patrols	173
U-802 (earlier patrol 1944).....	173
U-233	174
U-1221	175
U-1229	177

U-806	179
U-1222	181
U-1232	184
PART 5 – A Final Throe Of The Dice	188
Chapter 17 1945 – Last action and Losses HMCS Esquimalt	188
The Promise	188
Sketch of HMCS Esquimalt	190
The Adversary U-190	193
Aboard HMCS Esquimalt and the Encounter with U-190	194
Chaos in the aftermath.....	195
HMCS Sarnia’s Story	198
Epilogue.....	203

Prologue

The history of the Second World War is something that many Canadians today ignore. Many are oblivious to the war just off our shores and deep in our heartland. It is as if it never happened. So, a misconception exists that this war never touched our shores nor greatly impacted Canadian families or lives. As such, there is an assumption that Canada was largely untouched by the ravages of the Second World War.

Others feel wars, particularly those that Canada has participated in, are best forgotten or better still, rewritten. It is not surprising then Canadians views are often obscured to the great battles or military operations that have occurred on our very doorstep.

Our Country was built out of war and conflict from its very beginning. These are found in the very explorations and expansions of empire within North America. One particular area of vital importance from the very beginning, has been the Gulf of St Lawrence. It remains the vital passage way to Canada's interior. It has been so, right from the days of Cartier then leading onto the Second World War. Therefore, Canada's geography as such has played a key role in who and what we are as we have become as a nation.

The truth is the legacy of Canadian history is often unseen, lost, or hidden in abandoned forests, fields, and waterways, especially that concerning the Second World War. The engines and tools of the Second World War in particular were eventually transformed from swords to ploughshares. These transformations masks the great Canadian effort that not only sustained us but also our Allies throughout that war.

The once ubiquitous barracks, administration, and other buildings were either abandoned or converted as industrial complexes just after the war. Our history was expunged in the changed facades of these structures. As such, one would never know of its original intent or purposes. The only hint may be a nearby street name of some unknown aircraft, battle, or personage. More importantly though, has been the great reticence of veterans and the citizens who lived through it to tell their tale. As the years pass by and as memory fades, the story of Canada's war effort, sadly fades too unless it is remembered.

Closer to home the war on the home front was the one with U-boats fought off our shore. It was mainly fought in what is known as the Battle of the Atlantic but that also encompassed the Gulf of St Lawrence, Gulf of Maine ,and Bay of Fundy in which Canadian service men and women played a major pivotal role. There is a growing need to revisit and investigate the war on Canada's very doorstep.

All too often our history has been revised or rewritten to suit the modern narratives or tastes lest it offends, shall we say, the easily offended. It often results in a false narrative of what was. This is the story of the U-boat war in Canada, particularly that fought in the Gulf of St Lawrence, the Bay of Fundy, the Gulf of Maine and the Atlantic along Canada's east coast. It is also the story of the build up and historical events leading to that war. That story must also be included. These are foundational to the missions of the Royal Canadian Navy, the Army, and Royal Canadian Air Force in the steps taken before the war that were essential to meeting and containing that threat. It is both a complex and an interesting history.

It is possible that some details may have been either overlooked or misrepresented here. One can only do one's best with the tools at hand in interpreting the scene.

So, I apologize in advance for any errors or omissions made by this raconteur. They are mine and mine alone and are deeply regretted.

Part 1 - The Build up to the Second World War

September 10, 1939, Canada declared war on Germany. This date marked the beginning of six long years of struggle. But to many Canadians it also marked the



end of what was the Great Depression. A significant change in circumstance occurred for many after this date. In part it was to be a time of high adventure and drama. For many, that became the defining moment of their lives. But for the most part, the war ended economic destitution, which opened the doors of investment and employment to all. Thus, the Second World War brought with it a significant tide of change too.

Before that though, war seemed a distant possibility that only loomed on a seemingly distant horizon in 1939. The spring and summer of that year, Canadians and the world only hoped for the best, yet feared the worst. Still there were some bright spots that summer that brought a glimmer of hope. One such hope was found in the Royal Visit to Canada of their majesty's King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (the Queen mother). Their storied visit occurred between 17 May and 15 June that diverted Canadians' attention from pending doom.

The Royals arrived in Canada, that May to much fanfare, receiving a warm welcomes wherever they travelled. The Royal Visit was a whirlwind tour with a side trip to the United States. By 15 June, the Royals made their final stops in Nova Scotia at Pictou where they travelled by rail from New Glasgow to Antigonish. Their visit

Gerry Madigan Archives – Chisholm-MacKeen Family Souvenir Royal Tour Spoon 1939

soon ended thereafter. They sailed from Halifax and less than three months later, Canada and the world were at war.¹

And yet it didn't seem so on August 30, a typical summer day in the Strait of Canso area. It was a balmy 27C. It had not rained in days. But there was already a hive of uncommon activity there.

Lead elements of the Pictou Highlanders arrived and soon occupied quarters at Hazel Hill NS. The Highlanders rented space from the Commercial Cable Company to house a total of 25 men, roughly a platoon strength of men. These men were billeted there ostensibly for local defence.²

It was odd that a military unit was stationed there at all, after all, Canada was still at peace.

Their activity only increased in intensity up to 10 September. But what followed later that September was significant in one respect. Canada made its own and separate declaration of war. Great Britain had declared war on Germany one week earlier than Canada and expected its Dominions to immediately follow its lead.

But there was a delay on Canada's part. Still Canada's own and separate declaration was anticipated, but a suitable time elapsed and was taken for appearances sake. Canada by this slight delay demonstrated its sovereignty and independence. This set Canada on a path towards mastering its diplomatic relations both during and after the war.

The interim also provided Parliament time for debate, to conduct a parliamentary vote, and to ingest the consequences of such a decision. It was done in this manner in consideration of public desires before any action was taken leading the country to war. Canada and the other Commonwealth nations though eventually followed Great Britain's lead.

The Royal Visit that year, ultimately marked the end of an idyllic peace and hope for the future as the world eventually slid toward the open maw of war.

Chapter 1 – In the beginning

¹ Feltmate, Peggy .2017. *White Head Harbour, Guysborough County, NS - Its Stories, History and Families*, Toronto Canada, 2011 (fourth printing 2017), 99

² Canada, National Defence. 1940. "Dead Files 46-4-2, S&T Services, Accommodation for Troops, Strait of Canso Area, 321.009 (D265) Correspondence, Reports, Returns, Requests, Etc. RE ACCN for Troops in Strait of Canso Area, D/15 Sep 1939 / 16 Mar 1940, Initial Dispositions and Accommodations worked out by 25 Sep 1939", 4/97

Canada was ill prepared for the Second World War; however, some steps were taken to prepare in advance. But the state of these preparations was sorely lacking and left largely unattended throughout the 1930s. So, Canada began the war with what it had at hand.³

It did not help that a very sorry state of neglect was compounded by successive governments. Parsimony and continued reduced defence spending and budgeting ruled the day and reigned supreme. After the Great War, Canada's military was left abandoned. Its continued existence relied on the drib and drabs of defence spending. Throughout this time, they were expected to make do with the remnants of stocks, holdovers, and materiel left from that war. There was no interest in modernization or defence at all.

That tact might have been justified given the country's fiscal reality in the day and a coming decline in the future of the depression that eventually followed. Priorities alone of public need eventually and ultimately directed government's interest elsewhere. It all led to program deferrals with no commitments. As such, continued reduced defence spending was the justification used for inadequate funding for Canada's defence requirements, a situation strikingly similar to modern times. Striking an appropriate balance was more often than not, ill considered

But the timing could not have come at a worse time given the rise of increasing international belligerence. The world after the Great War was becoming an ever increasing hostile place, a world in obvious turmoil. But it was done, and done at risk, when the evidence and a modicum of prudence suggested otherwise.⁴

But as war came, the needs of national priorities and the urgency of the situation forced a dramatic shift in attitude. The direction and management of defence matters grew in importance nationally as well as those beyond our natural borders. Then a new focus came with the war where the needs of our Allies also had to be considered and managed. This produced a hubbub of activity particularly in the late fall of 1939 beginning with negotiations of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan and the further mobilization of the Army. All this required a new team that was brought together in Ottawa that saw Canada expand its influence in diplomatic relations, industry, socially and provincially too.

³ Bryce 2005. *Canada and the Cost of Second World War*, 12

⁴ Ferenczi, Thomas X. 2021. *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich - 1933-1939*. Fonthill, the United Kingdom, 30-169

It wasn't just the needs of Canada that mattered now, it was also a whole range of new needs; ones never considered before that brought other interests to the fore. This exposed opportunities and problems.

Problem areas were exposed because of our geography. Solutions to these lay with the promise of new technologies, and thus a revitalization and modernization of industry. It moved Canada from an agrarian-natural resource based economy to the modern industrialized economy of the 20th century. That brought great change to the face of Canada.⁵

The confluence of these interests brought areas that were once considered backwaters to the fore as strategic areas of importance. Canada soon learned that it had to play a new role, one in which the national interests evolved and became matters of sovereign interests. Newfoundland was such a case. And the Battle of the Atlantic and Gulf of St Lawrence would highlight where national and sovereign interests mattered.

A new Sovereign Nation – 1931 Statute of Westminster

Prior to this, new demands for Canada evolved from the promulgation of the Statute of Westminster of 1931. Its promulgation also provides some insight into the nuances and consequences of change imposed by a nation's sovereignty. It highlighted the new duties regarding the protection of the interests of its citizens that could not and were not easily ignored.

The cauldron in which this was brewed was greatly influenced by past history in this nation's struggle by the hold of its colonial past. It wasn't just the enemy that was at play. The United States would come to have an influence as it wished to be the dominant continental power, militarily and economically. It was an ongoing threat that Canada had to consider. Their interventions throughout the war played a major role in determining Canadian policy by either adhering to or redressing US advances.

The Statute of Westminster of 1931 though greatly changed the political landscape and the association and nature within the Canadian-British relationship. All Dominions gained their sovereignty and control over both domestic and foreign policy. It greatly expanded their interests that in the end also expanded their liabilities and commitments as well. It opened the door to expectations and to wider participation amongst a global throng of interests. These interests had to be

⁵ National Film Board. 1945 "The War is Over." Produced at National Film Board Ottawa 1945. accessed: 27 Jun 2024. [The War Is Over - NFB](#)

interpolated and reacted to. This was especially so in the rise of militarism in the 1930s just as they gained their sovereignty, to which they not only had to prepare for, but to anticipate as well.

Also on Britain's part, Dominion interests were now filtered through their own anticipation of national interests. It was an area that they jealously guarded to preserve and control. It became a fine balance of how much leeway they would allow the newly minted Dominions. In reality change, tradition, and expectations were not easily rendered in practice as former colonial states. There were expectations and residual duties to the "Mother Country" to consider as well. "Letting go" for Britain was never easy, neither was the way ahead for Canada.

The Country was ill prepared

Realistically at this time, the country was unprepared for war despite taking some preliminary and tentative steps for preparation in the 1930s. But the extent of Canada's lack of preparation became very evident soon after. This was especially so along Canada's two principal coasts where its maritime and trade interests were of immediate concern.

Canada's most feared threat in the event of war lay along the east and west coast in which occasional seaborne nuisance raids were anticipated. These threats had to be planned for and dealt with by all three services. The Army, Navy, and Air Force had to plan in concert as elements of the enemy's capabilities impacted all.

Although Canada is bounded by three oceans, the Arctic was discarded from the calculus of defence requirements. The Canadian Arctic never was nor is it still considered an area of credible threat.⁶ It was viewed as an impenetrable obstacle at the time and therefore largely ignored. Canadian homeland defence was thus left to the Armed Forces to resolve defence for each area of east and west coast in their own way.

But the Depression had taken its toll on the Canadian economy. Support for any defence spending was very limited prior to the need. In an attempt to balance the books like many subsequent Canadian governments, Mackenzie King attempted to

⁶ Robson, John. 2024. "John Robson - All I Want for Christmas Is a Capable Canadian Military." The Epoch Times, 3 December 2024. [John Robson: All I Want for Christmas Is a Capable Canadian Military | The Epoch Times](#)
Accessed: 5 December 2024

do so by cutting military expenditures. In 1933 the Canadian defence budget was reduced drastically to \$13 million. The result was that by 1939 the country was unable to defend its own coasts effectively.⁷

Canada may not have been physically prepared for war, but it was prepared psychologically and politically to enter the fray without serious division or objection. But that came at the cost of MacKenzie King's no-commitment policy in the intervening years.

Neglect of military and other defence considerations prevented many important preparations from being made.⁸ Cost deferral was also evident in many aspects of Canada's management of its interest during the Second World War. The management of interests was found in the way each service addressed the parsimony of defence spending and funding either in the interim or from the outset of the war.

The war brought with it other interests

Newfoundland posed a unique opportunity for Canada as Canadian naval fighting forces were concentrated there during the war. And perhaps most importantly, this area came under Canadian command despite the fact that Newfoundland was a Dominion in its own right at the time. It was the one task that could be directly related to the defence of Canada and as such, to Canadian interests.⁹

Freedom of command and control in that theatre though was not without some controversy regarding Canadian prospects. The Canadian assumption of responsibility was not smooth. There would be both criticism and interlopers grasping for dominance and control in that theatre of operation.

The RCN's experience clearly demonstrated though the growing demands in Canadian responsibility and interests that came with the war. Many areas previously ignored as irrelevant or inconsequential, now had to be considered. It was both an eye opener and a lesson soon to be learned.

The experience led to Canada considering its own strategic interests. These interests were vast, particularly those that crossed the approaches to the Caribbean passing along its east coast and through the Strait of Canso.¹⁰ The Strait of Canso

⁷ Bryce, Robert. 2005. *Canada and the Cost of World War II*, McGill-Queen's Press – MQUP, 20 May 2005, 12

⁸ Bryce 2005. *Canada and the Cost of Second World War*, 12

⁹ Stacey, ARMS, MEN AND GOVERNMENTS, THE WAR POLICIES OF CANADA, 1939 – 1945, 311 (338/710)

¹⁰ Hanington and Kelly. 1980. 23

was a gateway both in commerce and communication. Any particular areas, approaches or assets associated with that trade had to be given some modicum of protection. This placed a definite focus and priority towards Canada's east coast, interestingly, towards the Strait of Canso in particular. The Strait proved to be a vital choke point in of itself.¹¹

Apart from the Caribbean and West Indies, the Strait of Canso, was a key strategic gateway leading to or off the island of Cape Breton. Sydney was home to a steel plant, vital to Canada's war production. Cape Breton was also a major supplier of coal to the country. All manufactured goods, steel, coal, passed through there on the key link and transportation rail hub.

The transported goods crossed the Strait of Canso between Mulgrave and Port Hawkesbury on a railway ferry moving goods and vital supplies. The Strait was also an open gateway to marine traffic. It was through the Strait of Canso that Canadian National Steamships and other marine interests passed on their way to the Caribbean and American ports in their travels south.

Finally, it was also a communication hub in which vital world communications passed on trans-Atlantic cable links located there at Hazel Hill NS. All these were considered vital points that had to be protected by the Army, Navy and RCAF.

It all pointed to the need that its trade had to be protected and secured in the prosecution of this war. This expanded the demands on Canada's armed forces in doing so.

A perspective of Geography and History that sets the tone of Nationhood.

The Canada known today was based on the exploitation of trade and economic opportunity that presented considerations of economy, defence, and financial matters. Canada was a new, sparsely populated nation bounded by three oceans. Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic. The massive area is second in size only to Russia. Juxtaposed to Canada's southern border, lays a juggernaut of a nation, the United States with whom it shares a 4000 mile border.

Canada had to protect and defend an area of 3,851,809 square miles of territory within these continental boundaries.¹² Protecting this vast area required tremendous resources, something that Canada had very little of. Early American

¹¹ Madigan, Gerry. 2019. *The Canso Defence Area - The Second World War on the Home Front*, Shubenacadie E, NS, Canada, (ISBN 978-0-9959203-3-0), 23 Augusts 2019. madiganstories.com. 10 (11/205)

¹² Winters, The Honourable Robert H., Minister of Trade and Commerce. 1967. *CANADA ONE HUNDRED 1867-1967*. Handbook and Library Division, Dominion Bureau of Statistics Ottawa. Roger Duhamel. F.R.S.C. , Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, Ottawa Canada, 1967, 2

antagonism thrust Canada into protecting its own sovereign interests as well as managing the political interests of state if it was to continue to exist at all.

Canada's population amounted to 3.5 million in 1867, which grew to 20 million by 1967. It had done quite well for itself within that population dynamic and was a very successful industrialized nation.¹³ Canada's current population at 2024 is almost doubled at some 39 million people.¹⁴

In the century before Confederation, Canada identified as a British North American colony. But even preceding that, our history was impacted by events in the 1760s leading to confederation. "New France" came under British control at the conclusion of the Seven Years War through the Peace Settlement of 1763.¹⁵ France ceded all territory on the North American mainland east of the Mississippi to Britain. Canada thereby became British territory and responsibility. Beyond that, the citizens of the thirteen American colonies were likewise relieved of a French presence beyond the Alleghenies. Notably France also ceded territory to Spain for its help in that war. All French holdings west of the Mississippi and at its mouth were the payment in kind to Spain. In effect France abandoned North America in toto.¹⁶

But it was far from a smooth transition. The 13 American colonies moved towards a declaration of independence precipitated, by all things, trade and tea in 1773. It created disgruntlement that eventually led to the revolutionary war with the British.

On the Canadian front a different tact had been taken. The British took a more conciliatory approach with the conquered Canadian French. The British granted them security in their French Civil Law and Catholic religion. This laid the foundation for the British Empire to come. In that Act, Britain also defined what could be considered their jurisdiction, that included all territory north of the Ohio river, the current states of Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. This was considered reasonable in the day as these areas were once French possessions, surrendered to the British, and previously guided by French civil law.¹⁷

Such are the vagaries of history in which a considerable area of territory could just as easily have become a part of Canada. There was more in common perhaps socially and politically in French character that may have safeguarded a claim had it not been for the Revolutionary War. The British Quebec Act was an anathema to

¹³ Winters, 1967, 2

¹⁴ United Nations. 2023. "Canadian Population – Live." Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Population Division. . [World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision](#), July 16, 2023. [Canada Population \(2024\) - Worldometer \(worldometers.info\)](#)

¹⁵ Winters, 1967, 6

¹⁶ Palmer, R.R. and Joel Colton. 1965. *A History of the Modern World (3rd Ed.)*. Alfred.A.Knopf: New York, 255

¹⁷ Palmer and Colton 1965, 325-326

American sensibilities. The American colonists saw it as privilege, sparking objections, and leading to outright outrage for the British pro-French, and pro-Catholic bent of the Act.

The concessions made to Quebec left many Americans dissatisfied and who questioned why the same sensibility was not being addressed to their concerns. The Americans no longer feared the French as their empire was forfeited and troops no longer at the ready. They were less inclined to forgo their interests. It all blew up with a revolt to British authority by the minutemen at Lexington in 1775. The course of North American and world history changed for ever, in a shot heard around the world.¹⁸ Ironically, France came to the revolutionaries' aid during this war.¹⁹

To put a finer point on it, the end result for Canada in particular, was the threat to its existence from several independent colonies, spanning the continent from sea to sea. Canada unaided would be left to defend a massive territory and its own interests.

Each remaining loyal colony within British territory in British North America evolved independently, socially, and culturally, but common problems faced all. Means were sought for their resolution that eventually led to Confederation. Confederation itself was not an all in process, Newfoundland being the last province to join in 1949. But geography made Canada look to its own needs. Geography was also the basis of Canadian prosperity and interests. In the end, Canada not only had to be defended but also protected as well.

No nation especially a small one can afford to sustain and deplete its treasury on its military and security requirements. It has always been a case of a fine balance of having just enough, just in time to meet an obligation or to meet an inherent threat or present danger. All this calls for in part is a requirement for a balanced military and an affordable defence policy for a small nation.

With little to no resources in the beginning, Canada was left to seek British aid for succor in preserving its existence. Britain likewise had an interest for that security that was beyond altruistic. Canada had riches in natural resources beyond measure that they had heavily invested in since 1670 with the establishment of the Hudson Bay Company. That charter alone established British rule and governance over a wide swath of Canada and was an antecedent to the British North American Act leading to confederation.²⁰

¹⁸ Palmer and Colton 1965, 326

¹⁹ Palmer and Colton 1965, 322

²⁰ Palmer and Colton 1965, 574

But geography also appeared to guarantee Canada's security. Canada's defensive safety net thus came to be based on "favourable" geography. Our geographical position seemingly placed a cocoon of distance and wilderness protecting Canada from any real harm or threat. It was an assumption held from the Great War.²¹ This geographic mindset influenced Canada's pre-war defence planning in that Canadian territory was allegedly protected in time, distance, and space. Our principal threat seemed to emanate from south of the border, the United States. The geographic mindset thus influenced Canada's defence planning.

But the safety net of geography and geopolitical position would soon be challenged from a threat emanating westward from Europe. This would become evident when Germany gained access to ports in the Bay of Biscay following the fall of France. This geographic fact brought the U-boat threat 1000km closer to the North American coast both in shorter transit time and distance.²²

During the Second World War, the quiet time for Canada ended 14 October 1940. U99 and other U-boats set sail to wage war off the North America coast. The first victim was Convoy SC-7 out of Sydney, NS. Thirty five ships set sail of which 20 were lost.²³ It became increasingly evident that coastal and maritime defence were vital elements not only to Canada but also to the materiel security needs of its allies.

But up until that time, Canadian coastal and other security needs could be ignored or deferred as the losses appeared manageable.²⁴ Thus; defence was often left to flounder and was bound to the interests of others.²⁵ Canada would learn in time that its geography was no guarantor of peace.

²¹ Oglesby, R.B. 1950. *Canadian-American Co-Operation In The Defence Of Sault Ste Marie, 1941-1944*. Report No. 34, Historical Section (G.S.) Army Headquarters, 24 January 1950. Canada. National Defence. Directorate Of History And Heritage. Last edited: 9 October 2018, [Canadian-American Cooperation in the Defence of Sault Ste. Marie, 1941-1944 - Canada.ca](#) 2 (4/40)

²² Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, 21

²³ Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, 34-47

²⁴ Churchill, Winston S. 1948. *The Gathering Storm*. Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, The Riverside Press Cambridge, 436-438

²⁵ Granatstein, J.L. 2023. "The In-between – After the Great War and before the Second, Canada's defence relied on the small Permanent Active Militia." *Legion Magazine*, January/February 2023, 40-43

Chapter 2 - Army Preparations

A clear and present danger for Canada became evident in 1942 with the German incursion into the Gulf of St Lawrence and the River proper. Suddenly the need for a national response and action was demanded. But the control of and reaction to new dangers had to be learned throughout Canada in the shortness of time. This was especially so in the Gulf of St Lawrence and the River that were truly the heart of the country and in a great way, the *raison d'être* for its existence.

The needs of broad reach required innovation and solutions. In some respects, those solutions were often found in new technologies as they became available. These were applied to conditions that served our military and defensive needs. In the war significant advances in industrial, aviation, and naval technologies were applied to changing circumstances to meet those demands.

A Nation's Considerations Leading into War

In the days and years leading into the Second World War, some small areas in Canada gained vital strategic importance. This was especially so along Canada's east coast. Guysborough County that lies on the eastern shore of Nova Scotia is such an example.

Many small areas were key to Canada's defence and security as they lay along the lines of strategic communication either at land, sea, ports, and more recently telecommunications. Thus, attention was primarily given to the key areas of Halifax, North Sydney, NS and St. John's NB as the principal key hubs, but smaller outlying areas along the path of communications also proved vital as well.

Guysborough's importance was recognized, and whose fortunes rose as the momentum of the war progressed. It was the harbinger of things to come for Canada, seen later in the Gulf of St Lawrence and River.

Military action was often close at hand. It was its proximity to the approaches to Europe that drew attention and that truly placed Guysborough, the Bay of Fundy, and environs, in the cross-hairs of an advancing enemy. That logic and attention would also come to play in the *Kriegsmarine's* expansion of its U-boat campaign and thinking that led towards the Gulf of St Lawrence where the enemy would eventually fare.

The importance of these outlying areas was demonstrated time and again, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, with the advent of aviation and its potential reach! These were not necessarily found in overt actions of war or espionage, but through the demonstration of technological advancement. The

world was becoming increasingly smaller through the conquest of distance, time, and space that these advancements purported.

Guysborough County's strategic importance was quite evident early on in the 20th century, highlighted in the incredible events of aviation's history. On 25 June 1930, Captain Charles E. Kingsford-Smith began an epic journey from Portmarnock Beach, Ireland to Roosevelt Field, Long Island.

Kingsford-Smith's progress was closely monitored by an interested public. It was an epic journey, whose brave attempt was akin to the dangers and adventure of a lunar landing. His flight was closely followed because of his brush with death and mishaps along the way. He was grounded for a time at Cape Race Newfoundland. But once airborne again, and along his broken journey, he reported "Found clear patch and am down one thousand feet. Now passing **County** Harbor, Nova Scotia, on our left."²⁶

The newspapers of the day recorded; "It fell to the villagers of **County** Harbor, one hundred miles from Halifax, on the Nova Scotian coast, to be the first to see the plane. The Southern Cross passed County Harbor, N.S. about 109 miles east of Halifax at 10 a. m. EST, today, according to a message picked up by the coast guard radio station here."²⁷

The skies over **County** Harbour, actually Country Harbour, were suddenly kissed by the brush of history, technology, and the coming age of air travel and air power. Guysborough's residents were amongst the first to see the stretch in aviation's reach in shrinking our world. Even today, looking up into the skies overhead, you can see the contrails of modern aviation flying over the path pioneered by Kingsford-Smith.

Advancing aviation technology and Kingsford-Smith's travels also foretold another story, that of an emerging threat to North American security. It wasn't easy to envisage by Kingsford-Smith's travels alone. However, it was made clearer as our nation's attention was drawn to a new reality in 1934.

Major developments were contemplated by many great nation states, portended by the visitation of the German airship, Hindenburg.²⁸ Now potential threats and reduction of protection of geographical features such as; time and space, were clearly demonstrated as they were surmounted by a new technology, airpower.

²⁶ The Register.1930. "untitled story- Southern Cross." *Santa Ana Register*, California, Datelined TRURO, N. S., June 26, 1930, 1 , Accessed: 5 June 2015, Source: <http://www.newspapers.com/newspage/72295999/>

²⁷ Santa Ana Register, Datelined. TRURO, N. S., June 26, 1

²⁸ Hanington, Felicity and Captain Percy A. Kelly, M.B.E.,.1980. *The Lady Boats – The Life and times of Canada's West Indies Merchant Fleet*. Canadian Marine Transportation Centre, Dalhousie University, 39



Nova Scotia Archives Photo Collection Transportation and Communication - 04

July 1936

(with permission NS ARCHIVES)

Technology brought with it our nation's attention to its alternate, potential uses, and applications in future wars. This altered perception was heightened by the ever-increasing bellicosity and sabre rattling of some nations. It was made even clearer by developments, especially in the rise of air travel, which gave evident warnings throughout the 1930s.

Engines and aircraft engineering greatly improved, which meant, range and flexibility, could be employed for other purposes. New technologies were installed in dirigibles and planes. Subliminally, there was a hype around aviation "firsts." These "firsts" were not solely about national prestige but perhaps, they were also the harbingers of a new technological arms race.

For example, when England flew their advanced R-dirigibles non-stop across the Atlantic in 1930, it was recognized as a technological achievement of great importance.²⁹ It was a first step to opening routes across the globe and empire, much like modern airlines today. That event was witnessed by many. A throng of thousands saw the R-100 dirigible land at St Hubert near Montreal. England was not alone in that quest to conquer the oceans by air. Nor was it alone in the desire to expand or link empire by spanning the globe.³⁰

²⁹ Coggon, Allan. 2004. *Watch and Warn*. Trafford Publishing Victoria, BC, Canada, 2004 2nd ed., v.

³⁰ Roberts, Leslie. 1930. "Mooring For The R100." *Maclean's*, 15 May 1930, Accessed: 27 Nov 2020. Source: [Mooring For the R100 | Maclean's | May 15, 1930](#) (archives)



Figure 1 Photo Getty Images (public domain)

Italian General Balbo ventured from Italy to Shediac, New Brunswick in 1933. He led twenty-four twin-engine flying boats enroute to the Worlds Fair at Chicago.³¹ If anything, Balbo's venture proved to be quite an impressive aerial armada!

Not to be undone,

Germany also advanced air travel in their zeppelin fleet. Germany popularized passenger air travel through the voyages of Graf Zeppelin as well as the giant 800-foot Hindenburg airships. Germany scheduled flights to South America and to New York respectively, which demonstrated its power, prestige, and reach.³²

In fact, it was Hindenburg's journey to New York, that truly brought the attention and concern of Canadian authorities to a head. There was no planned stop over in Halifax, but the airship cruised over the harbour and city, and leisurely photographed the dockyard and all the city's fortifications.

It also continued with many other flyovers, notably St John, NB and St John's, Nfld. A simple fly-over by inquiring eyes demonstrated that Canada had to address a prevailing security threat and that a better means of defence, transportation, and communication were required.³³

The world also perceived the ever-increasing bellicosity prevalent behind all these advances. It was as if the world was moving prodigiously towards an anticipated war, with air power at its core, in airpower's ever-growing reach, means, potential use and danger.

³¹ Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, x.

³² Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, x.

³³ a. Hanington and Kelly 1980, 39

b. Jack, Ronald J. 2014. "Article No. 202, ZEPPELIN SHADOW IN SAINT JOHN - The Hindenburg Overflight of June 1936, The Lost Valley - An Internet History of Saint John, N.B.". Public Historian and Web-Publisher, Canadian History Blog Registered with the Canadian ISSN Agency ISSN 2292 - 2601 History of Saint John (St. John), New Brunswick, 28th May 2014. Accessed: 7 March 2021. Source: [ZEPPELIN SHADOW IN SAINT JOHN - The Hindenburg Overflight of June 1936 | The Lost Valley - An Internet History of Saint John, N.B.](#)

c. Bartlett, Geoff. 2015. "The Hindenburg's final flight took it right over Newfoundland." *CBC News*, Nfld. & Labrador, Feb 08, 2015. Accessed: 9 March 2021. Source: [The Hindenburg's final flight took it right over Newfoundland | CBC News](#)

Army Building and Manning A Fortress

During the Second World War, Guysborough County's importance was recognized. The Army deployed rapidly into Cape Breton at Sydney and in the Strait of Canso, at Port Hawkesbury and Melford. Significant fortresses were constructed and manned. The RCAF built a Radar Station at Cole Harbour, Guys. Co. The Navy constructed a LORAN Station at Queensport manned by WRENS! The potential for military action was always there and the war was close at hand. It was the proximity to the approaches to Europe that truly placed Guysborough, the Bay of Fundy, and environs, in the cross-hairs of an advancing enemy. The unseen U-Boat lurked everywhere it seemed, and it did indeed lurk close into quarters that precipitated offensive action.

Military Districts

Canada's defence, recruitment, internal security, and organization were based around military districts. Those districts were also responsible for the defence of strategic vital points, and those of strategic economic interest, which were often uniquely protected. Each district provides some insight into the considerations, dispositions, and the extent of preparations that Canada employed pre-war and what was considered as "vital."

Military District No. 2 (Toronto), for example, employed two battalions of the 13th Infantry Brigade to protect hydroelectric installations in the Niagara Peninsula. This unit was also responsible for the protection of the Welland Canal locks from aerial attack. These installations were key vital points for energy, internal communications, as well as transport.

Military District No. 5 (Quebec, P.Q.), employed 307 all ranks, divided amongst eight different points. They safeguarded the Dominion Arsenal establishments at Quebec and Valcartier, the Aluminum Company of Canada plants and power units at Arvida, and facilities on Isle Maligne on the Upper Saguenay.

These in-land districts could all be easily viewed as safe havens, as they were well protected within the heartland of Canada. They were within the confines of our seemingly boundless and protected "safe" geography. But Canadian authorities simply had to expect the unexpected, and plan accordingly.

Military District 11 (Bc and Yukon) guarded the west coast from the threat emanating from Japan. Significantly, once hostilities were declared with Japan,

Canada faced a two front war that further challenged the allocation and disposition of its military resources at the time.³⁴

The prime concern at the outset of the war was a focus on Canada's east coast. An immediate threat emanated from Europe between 1939-1941. Military District No. 6 (Halifax, N.S.) had 234 all ranks to defend Halifax, including 100 who guarded the Joint Services Magazine at Bedford Basin and 70 at the oil depot at Imperoyal. That is what was disposed in the Halifax harbour area alone.³⁵

This quick account does not include the tremendous resources required in the Strait of Canso Area, Sydney, the eastern shore, nor all of Cape Breton and the Bay of Fundy. Nor does it include New Brunswick, where Military District 7 was responsible for local defence.

Military Districts 6 and 7 shared responsibility for protecting the heart of the Bay of Fundy.³⁶ These were the bulwark that protected Canada from imminent threat and potential invasion as it was here on the east coast that the enemy's first thrust was anticipated. All to say, the many demands greatly stretched Canada's resources very thinly with so much area to protect.

September 1939 saw the culmination of great activity for Canada, who had set in motion preparations for the defence of the country. But those preparations truly began in earnest that August. At that time, the Pictou Highlanders were pressed into active service. In truth, the government mobilized all of its reserve units the same day, 26 August.³⁷ Amongst the first mobilized were its artillery reserve units.

There were too few artillery units with far too many vital areas to protect. Regardless of the difficulties, it was concluded that three vital areas had to be immediately protected on Canada's east coast; two in Nova Scotia at Halifax and Sydney, and the other, at St John's New Brunswick.

Halifax was a key strategic location, considered second in importance to Liverpool, UK because of its location, refineries, docks and troop embarkation points. It was

³⁴ Dorosh, Michael (editor). 2021. "Domestic Military Organization 1900-1999." Accessed: 15 Jan 2021. Source www.canadiansoldiers.com (See -Districts)

³⁵ Stacey, Colonel C.P. 1948. *Official History of the Canadian Army In the Second World War, Volume I - SIX YEARS OF WAR, The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific, 1948*. Department of National Defence, Historical Section (G.S.), Army Headquarters ,Ottawa, Canada. (First Published 1948). Accessed: 13 August 2010. Source:<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/Canada/CA/SixYears/SixYears-5.html>

Transcribed and formatted by Patrick Clancey, HyperWar Foundation . For access to full publication see: <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/Canada/CA/SixYears/index.html>

³⁶ Madigan 2019. Canso Defence Area, ,19-22

³⁷ Byers (ed), A.R. 1986. *The Canadians at War 1939 -45 2nd Ed.*. Reader's Digest Assoc., 215 Redfern, Westmount, Qc. H3Z 2V9 . ISBN- 0-88850-145-5, 12

also the location of vital stores held at the joint services magazine as well as an airport at Dartmouth.

Sydney was vital for several other reasons. First, Sydney held a commanding position along the Cabot Strait that dominated the Gulf of St Lawrence. It was also an important anchorage that could hold 75 ships. Most importantly, it was home to 50% of Canada's steel production. So, Sydney indeed was a key and vital area to the defence of Canada.

Finally, and less exposed, was St John, NB. It too was important as an industrial area. Its strategic location and position also greatly assisted the RCN over the course of the war. St John was favoured because of its dry dock facilities and, more importantly, as an ocean terminal, which was well protected deep inside the Bay of Fundy. St John's facilities proved to be of great strategic importance to the war effort.³⁸

The Army is mobilized

There were too few military units with far too many vital areas to protect. Regardless of the difficulties, two threats were apparent for Canada's vital areas. First, there was the physical threat of sabotage by the enemy, enemy aliens, or fifth column forces. The other threat emanated from possible massed potential enemy forces either by air or by sea.

Both coasts faced similar challenges. It meant that preparation was always in a state of flux of continual planning under constantly changing conditions throughout the war.

The Atlantic was essentially a large ditch, that effectively obstructed direct assault by land forces. Such an attack would require a considerable effort and coordination with naval forces by the enemy in any case. That threat was highly improbable. But striking threats and feints were indeed feasible. So, control of our vital approaches was critical. This required the mobilization of all Canadian Forces; land, sea, and air. It all looked good on paper, but it was a question of means to do so. The distribution of Anti-Aircraft (AA) artillery is a case in point.

Halifax was amongst the first to see AA batteries deployed. Canada's limited AA resources were distributed equally amongst the important ports of Halifax, NS, Sydney, NS and St John NB.

³⁸ Nicholson, GWL, Maj. 1945. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast*, (declassified 16 October 1986), Canada, National Defence Headquarters, Directorate of History and Heritage Ottawa, 19 Feb 1945, 86 pg. Accessed: 15 November 2017, Source: <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/ahqr-rqga-eng.asp> *Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast*, 19 Feb 1945, Report 4, 5/86 para 23-25

AA defence was stood up in Halifax August 1939. The initial detachment was augmented by 4 AA Battery (BTY) (Permanent Force) who arrived from Kingston, Ontario on 28 August, with modern equipment.

Four 3-inch 20cwt guns were placed in action on the east side of Halifax Harbour; distributed as two guns at Imperial Oil, and two at Burnside. The fire control system was obsolete, a Vicker's Predictor Mark VII with ring site telescope. Predictors were distributed one to each gun-site. The Commanding Officer (CO) of the enterprise was Col C.S. Craig. He would later leave the unit to become the overall Commander of "Halifax Fortress."³⁹

The problems of the smaller areas were not forgotten. AA defence requirements were considered for both the Strait of Canso and St John NB as early as 1939. But no such armament was available for either that September. The priorities lay elsewhere for the moment. A demand remained on the books, but AA guns were never placed in the Canso Area during the war.⁴⁰

A report written in 1942 outlined the placement and positions of AA batteries in eastern Canada. A need for such batteries was recognized, but neither Mulgrave nor Port Hawkesbury in the Strait of Canso Defence Area, were ever listed in the requirement (Figure 1).⁴¹

Figure 1 – Listing of AA Gun Placements 1942

heavy (3.7") and light (40 mm Bofors) AA guns (59):		
	3.7"	40 mm
Halifax	28	16
Sydney	20	8
Saint John NB	8	4
Shelburne	4	4
Gaspe	4	4
Arvida	12 (incl. 4, 3")	16
St. John's-Torbay	16 (incl. 4 US. manned 3")	8
Bell Island	-	2
Botwood	4	4
Lewisporte	4	4
Gander	8	8
Goose Bay	4	4

The arrangement of equipment and scales of establishment remained an undue strain and of great concern to many. The key consideration concerned lay in an

³⁹ Nicholson 1945. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast*, 19 Feb 1945, 6/86 para 26-27

⁴⁰ Nicholson 1945. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast*, 19 Feb 1945, 10/86 para 31

⁴¹ Nicholson 1945. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast*, 19 Feb 1945, 12/86 para 39

ongoing protection of key and vital points. The initial years of the war were challenging enough.

Nineteen thirty-nine to 1942 was a dark period for the soldier manning the guns. It was a time of continuous watch keeping and anticipation in the waiting for an enemy attack that might develop at any moment. In other words, for the troops it was concurrently intense and boring.

For those higher up in the chain of command, it was a time of worry. Were the preparations and adjustments already taken, enough? Only a test by the enemy would reveal the outcome. Regardless, their preparations were a case of making do with what was available and waiting for Canada's industrial capacity to catch up to produce in quantity, the tools required. Was it all up to scratch?

For Atlantic Canada, preparation meant a state of continual planning under constantly changing conditions. This was necessary to achieve the most effective employment of any new armament as soon as it arrived.

Planning required a constant review to balance the scale of resources commensurate to the threat that often changed on the fly. This meant that manning and formations of batteries were under constant pressure. There was also a bill to be paid in the training and movement of personnel that went along with it.⁴²

Additional training for Coastal Defence and AA batteries was considered for Military Districts (MD) 6 & 7 in October 1940. Again, it all hinged on what was immediately available and at hand, commensurate with the changing threat, and other geographical /strategic considerations.

Training was initiated by MGen Elkins of MD 6. He wanted to bring his new and existing units up to war establishment with an increase of 25% in manning alone in MD 6, with an additional 15% increase in manning to MD 7.

MGen Elkins made such recommendations to National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ), Ottawa in which he specifically identified, 16 Coast Bde and 86 Heavy Bty, RCA, both based either at Sydney or in Canso. He mentioned that the range of duties conducted by these units should include the tasks of coastal defence, AA battery, and examination batteries. Coast Defence and examination services were tasks already employed at Canso.⁴³

The Canso Defence Area would not receive any of the newly manufactured 40mm Bofors AA guns. These guns were dispersed elsewhere. It was assumed that they were most urgently and strategically required beyond the Canso Defence Area

⁴² Nicholson 1945. The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast, 19 Feb 1945,11/86 para 37

⁴³ Nicholson 1945. The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast, 19 Feb 1945, 14/86 para 42.- 44 (manning and training)

(figure 1). It must also be assumed that an assessment of air attack in the Canso area was unlikely.⁴⁴

The scale of war time establishments provides some insight into the state of Canada's preparedness. It was only in 1942 that some key vital areas were finally augmented by new manning and scales of equipment. The problem was not for the lack of manpower. There was plenty of that. The problem lay with the lack of pre-war preparation and defence spending. The situation was exacerbated in war by necessity, limited production, and other priorities.

The greater part of Canada's materiel output was exported to the United Kingdom whose needs were considered most vital. There was a constant demand for replacement or augmentation. It was not surprising, given that the United Kingdom was in direct contact with the enemy, losses were incurred that had to be replaced. This situation reversed itself though in 1942. Once war was declared on Japan, the uninhibited industrial capacity of the United States was soon added to the fray, that wiped out materiel deficits in time.

Surprisingly, there came a severe shortage of trained personnel to man equipment despite the increased industrial output. Some equipment remained in Depots because of this lack of trained personnel and the pressures that new establishments placed on manpower.⁴⁵

Until that time in the war, the Canadian Homefront was of secondary importance. But by 1942, the scale of production was ahead of the UK's demand, meaning that new Canadian establishments could be trained to fill the vital AA needs along Canada's East Coast, assuming that personnel were available in quantity to do so.⁴⁶ But by that time, it was too late! Home units were now drafted for duties and active service in the build up of the Canadian Army overseas. These drafts exacerbated demands on our manpower and replacement pool, which created manning shortfalls.

Even though there was always hope that others in Atlantic Canada would receive Bofors guns once production hit its stride, only Cape Breton saw any augmentation of 40MM Bofors Guns. An additional 8 guns were eventually allocated to Sydney.

These guns were there to protect the Naval installation at Point Edward and the RCAF Seaplane Base at North Sydney. Each of these installations were allocated

⁴⁴ Nicholson 1945. The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast, 19 Feb 1945, 14-19 para 42-54

⁴⁵ Nicholson 1945. The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast, 19 Feb 1945, 54-62

⁴⁶ Nicholson 1945. The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast, 19 Feb 1945, 18/86 para 53

two guns each. The bulk of the guns were sited at the Sydney Steel Works who, surprisingly, received an additional 8 guns.⁴⁷

Neither Mulgrave nor Port Hawkesbury received any allocation of AA guns. It was most surprising that they were overlooked. There were vital assets in the crossing of the Strait as Port Hawkesbury was a key rail junction. Goods and services flowed between Cape Breton and the mainland on the railway ferry. It was the Achilles heel of the whole production system. This was the area where the ferry service transported rail cars over the Strait of Canso. It was an exposed target. The aerial threat must have been rated very low, but it still had to be protected.



Courtesy of George Freer Archives

But sorting out the number and types of guns, and their allocations and dispositions, should have been a simple matter in the grand scheme of things. It was nothing compared to issues that arose in their command and control.

The Canso Defence Area

Command arrangements in the Canso Defence Area were assigned to Lt Col Fraser, who was appointed “Officer Commanding” the OC Canso Strait Defence

⁴⁷ Nicholson 1945. The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast, 19 Feb 1945, pg. 19/86 para 54
(Note the math in official records does quite add up. It suggests that 12 additional guns were ultimately allocated in Cape Breton. I’m holding to the record as is though).

Area. Lt Col Fraser was immediately responsible to guard against the opportunity of enemy attack.

Lt Col Fraser was also the Commanding Officer (CO) Pictou Highlanders, but his command also included the 86th Heavy Battery R.C.A, and N.N.S Highlanders (MG). He was further assisted with the assets of a Military Hospital, No. 5 Fortress Signals, No. 1 Fortress Coy. RCASC, 3rd Fortress (E&M) Coy., and P.L. Fusiliers to bolster his resources.⁴⁸ 86 Heavy Bty, RCA was a subordinate unit in the order of battle of the Commander Canso Defence Area. Command of this group all sounded simple on paper, but it was never that simple in effect.

86 Heavy Bty, RCA was an independent unit to a great degree. The commanding officer Canso Defence area was responsible for its administration, care, and maintenance through the provision of logistics support. But he had little direction on its operational control or employment. Operational control rested with the Gun Operational Room (G.O.R.) at Sydney, where 86 Heavy Bty came under command of the H.Q. A.A. Regt.⁴⁹

It went further than that. The CO Canso Defence area had little responsibility or command control even over routine matters within this unit. 86 Heavy Bty, RCA was responsible for its own maintenance, equipment, discipline, pay, leave and furlough when it came to its men. The unit was nominally under control of the OC Canso Defence Area in the normal chain of command, as part of a Defended or Port Area. But 86 Heavy Bty was truly independent though, when it came to regimental matters, which came under regimental command and control.

It was all a complicated matter. But there was a general agreement that the Detachment Commander 86 Heavy BTY would be the liaison between Regimental HQ at Sydney and the OC Canso Defence Area. As such, the Battery Commander would be responsible for all artillery matters, and act as the in-between for the Regimental Commander and the Commander of the Fortress. The many responsibilities of a Commanding Officer of a Defended Port or Area were generally so numerous and onerous, that he likely was quite willing to allow the specialist gunner to run his own show.⁵⁰

Despite all the difficulties 86 Heavy Bty, RCA was an integral component of the Canso Defence Area. But the complicated command arrangements added strain

⁴⁸ Canada, National Defence. 1940. "Situation Reports Aug to Sep 1940." Dead Files 321.009 (D373), 27 Aug 1940, 2/13

⁴⁹ Nicholson 1945. The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast, 19 Feb 1945, 26/86 para. 66 (ii-iii)

⁵⁰ Nicholson 1945. The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast, 19 Feb 1945, 26/86 para. 66 (iii)

and hardship to the command of Lt Col Fraser of the Pictou Highlanders by the ongoing need for resolution of chain of command issues.

Regardless, all units were kept under a training regime, which was interspersed into the chatter and hub-hub of regular duty. All were kept at a high state of readiness, for local protection. They all honed their skills and kept sharp while waiting for the worst.⁵¹ It was not without action!

Action Stations

The 86th Bty RCA, the artillery unit responsible for the protection of the Strait, maintained a constant state of vigilance and readiness to act immediately. Their arcs of fire protected both ends of the Strait of Canso, at the entrances - North to Georges Bay; and South – to Chedabucto Bay. But their prime function was to challenge and identify unknown vessels in the protection of the Strait.⁵² That happened in time.

An American Yacht named “Drift” caused quite a stir 4 September 1940. “Drift” was becalmed in the Strait. More importantly, it failed to answer a challenge. It was subsequently fired upon by the shore battery to get its attention.

The first shot over its bow was dead weight, containing no high explosive, and was only meant to draw “Drift’s” attention. The Drift missed a signal challenge, but it was finally determined that the crew “did not know that they had wandered into a guarded restricted area.”

They were simply attempting to anchor and had not heard the challenge. The incident was investigated, and the situation was resolved to everyone’s satisfaction. No harm or damage was done, and everything was cleared up amicably.⁵³

Parade States

Lt Col Fraser’s command almost doubled in number over the year the Highlanders were in the Strait area. His command grew in strength from 562 in 1939 to 913 by 27 August 1940. The number of units that he was now responsible for and administering also grew from 3 to 10. This growth added to his headaches and eventually, his administrative burdens (Table 1).

⁵¹ Dead Files 321.009 (D373), 4/13

⁵² Dead Files 321.009 (D373), 1-13/13

⁵³ Dead Files 321.009 (D373), 8-9/13

Table 1 - Parade States⁵⁴

Part 1 Unit Strength						
Unit	15-Sep-39	pg 4/13 27-Aug-40	pg 8/13 01-Sep-40	pg11/13 11-Sep-40		
The Pictou Highlanders	487	666	667	665		2%
86th Heavy Battery R.C.A.	48	151	149	149		3%
Attached 86th Hvy. Ety. R.C.A.		6	5	5		
5th Fortress Signals		19	19	18		
1st Fortress Coy., R.C.A.S.C		11	10	10		
21st Field Ambulance		1	1	1		
Military Hospital		13	13	13		15%
Princess Louise Fusilliers /N.NS (MG)/other Units	27	32	32	32		
3rd Fortress (E&M) Coy.		11	10	12		
Canadian Dental Corp.		3	3	3		
Total Str:	562	913	909	908		

Fraser was reliant on all for cooperation and support. He had to compile reports and returns to explain all areas of his command responsibility including those “nominal” units. He was “responsible” for overall operational oversight, particularly in the areas of discipline and health within his area.⁵⁵ It was his signature that was affixed in all correspondence relating to these matters. He was in fact, de facto – the top dog!

Apart from the artillery units, Lt Col Fraser’s command included two other front line operational units beyond his own unit, the Pictou Highlanders. The Highlander’s, an infantry unit were naturally employed in defensive and offensive roles. The Highlanders were also the ready reserve, that is, ready to rush to the needs of other units should the call come.

The final operational unit was the Princess Louise Fusiliers. This unit was a heavy and light machine gun unit that had a key supporting role. Their fixed positions had arcs of fire that protected the vital approaches and facilities on both sides of the Strait of Canso. In a pinch they could be employed in the AA role as well.

The Support Units

People machines and facilities tend to break down and require repair. So, operational units required the support of non-operational units to assist them to

⁵⁴ A. Canada, National Defence, Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4, S&T Services, Accommodation for Troops, Strait of Canso Area, 321.009 (D265) Correspondence, Reports, Returns, Requests, Etc. RE ACCN for Troops in Strait of Canso Area, D/15 Sep 1939 / 16 Mar 1940, Correspondence on file: 1, Accommodation Arrangements for Pictou Highlanders, H.200- -4 15 Sep 1939, pg. 4/97; and

b. Dead Files 321.009 (D373), pages as noted above Pg. 4/13, pg. 81.3 and pg11/13

⁵⁵ Dead Files 321.009 (D373), 1-13/13

maintain peak efficiency. The units tasked with that function were the Military Hospital, 21 Field Ambulance, No. 5 Fortress Signals, No. 1 Fortress Coy RCASC, and 3rd Fortress (E&M) Coy. The function of military hospitals, field ambulance and signals units are obvious, less obvious though, are the functions of No. 1 Fortress Coy Royal Canadian Army Service Corp (RCASC) and 3rd Fortress (E&M) Coy.

The Royal Canadian Army Service Corps was responsible for the provision of logistic support and victualling for units in the field. Support beyond victualling also included supply and transport. There were 11 members in No. 1 Fortress Coy RCASC at Mulgrave. They not only supported the Canso Defence Area, but also other military units, most notably No 5 Radar Unit (RCAF) at Cole Harbour.

3rd Fortress (E&M) Coy was a unit responsible for engineering support for the needs of all in the area. Engineering support included both electrical and mechanical needs of the units concerned.

These were the initial dispositions in the Canso Defence Area. They grew over time. It all had to be managed and directed; it was a task that weighed heavily on Lt Col Fraser's shoulders. In fact, his was the unexpected battle in the Canso Defence Area, that of "the battle of bureaucracy!"

Chapter 3 – Royal Canadian Navy Preparations

Looming War

The lack of Canadian naval preparation was very evident as the war approached. This was especially so along Canada's two principal coasts whose maritime and trade interests became of immediate concern.

Canada's most feared threat in the event of war was in fact along the east and west coast, where occasional seaborne nuisance raids were anticipated. Although Canada is bounded by three oceans, the Arctic was discarded from the calculus of defence considerations as not an area of credible threat.

Our government knew what it would cost to defend Canada's east and west coasts. Regrettably, little was done in providing enough money in 1939 for the rearmament of both coasts. The government was content to leave coastal protection to several destroyers, a few guns, and obsolete aircraft and more importantly, to the Royal Navy.⁵⁶

By September 1939 King placed his hopes on a limited war in which he envisaged Canadian support limited to sending supplies, a limited air force, and some ships to Britain's immediate aid. A large overseas army was not on the plate for the offering.⁵⁷

A commitment grew in the end, nonetheless, leaving many questions unanswered, with policies to be interpreted. What remained on the table were questions regarding Canadian independence, sovereignty, and freedom to act. Canada had little leeway in many matters, and now, Canadian lives would be placed at risk as a consequence.

The RCN's activities in the first nine months of the war were limited to protecting Canada's east coast and the approaches towards the West Indies. Canada's main responsibility at the time was with the organization of convoys. Two trained Royal

⁵⁶ Rose, Larry D. 2013. *Mobilize! Why Canada Was Unprepared For The Second World War*, Dundurn, 3 Church Street Suite 500, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5E 1M2, 257

⁵⁷ Rose 2013 Mobilize, 259

Navy officers were dispatched from the UK to assist the RCN in that matter at Halifax.⁵⁸

The British Admiralty looked to Canadian participation from the very outset of the war. It was looking forward to the cooperation enjoyed in 1914. But it was in the matter of “cooperation” that King and his government balked. King took a half in/half out approach at the initial stages.

The British Admiralty sent a memorandum September 6, 1939, to prod the Canadian government. They requested Canadian cooperation by placing its six destroyers under Admiralty orders. Given Canada’s past history and precedence of the Naval Act of 1911, Chief of the Canadian Naval Staff, Rear Admiral Percy W. Nelles, was quite prepared to accede to this request and advised his government to do so. This initial request was not passed, and neither was a subsequent request on September 11, 1939 although the RCN had been on active service since the first of September.⁵⁹

Mackenzie King was trying to limit his government’s exposure and commitment within the war.⁶⁰“ How much, how little?” But the gaining pressures of the day forced his hand with some decisions.

The Royal Canadian Navy – Ready Aye Ready

Some initial relief was offered in the order in council, of September 14, that granted authority for the Canadian destroyers

[BLOCK START]

"to cooperate to the fullest extent with the forces of the Royal Navy".

[BLOCK END]

King’s decision in forestalling Canadian action requested by the Admiralty was a fundamental one. In this delay King and his government were exercising the right to decide whether or not to commit its naval forces to any specific theatre or operation. That decision must be theirs. But "co-operation" was never truly defined

⁵⁸ Stacey, ARMS, MEN AND GOVERNMENTS , THE WAR POLICIES OF CANADA, 1939 – 1945, 310 (337/710)

⁵⁹ Stacey, ARMS, MEN AND GOVERNMENTS , THE WAR POLICIES OF CANADA, 1939 – 1945, 308-309 (335-336/710)

⁶⁰ Rose 2013 Mobilize, 258

that left the employment and commitment of Canadian forces wide open to British interpretation.⁶¹

Luckily, enemy activities in a nutshell until 1940, were largely confined to waters around the United Kingdom (UK). The U-boat threat around Canada's East coast thus seemed both manageable and contained. That illusion was about to burst by the summer and fall of 1940. U-Boat activity precipitously increased around the Canadian approaches particularly after the British defeat at Dunkirk.⁶²

The evacuation at Dunkirk brought the might of Kriegsmarine that much closer to Canada with its shorter routing and increased time on station keeping. It wouldn't be long before it crept even closer to inland shores and approaches. This would mark the start of the coming battles in the Gulf of St Lawrence and off the east coast of Canada, a battle fought on our very doorstep.

Activities to 1940

When the Germans gained access to ports in the Bay of Biscay following the fall of France, it brought the U-boat threat 1000km closer to the North American coast.⁶³ The quiet time for Canada ended October 14, 1940 when U99 and others set sail to wage war off the North American coast. It's first victim was Convoy SC-7 out of Sydney, NS. Thirty five ships set sail of which 20 were lost.⁶⁴ It became increasingly evident that coastal and maritime defence were vital.

Newfoundland also posed a unique opportunity for Canada. It was the first time, where the main Canadian, naval fighting force was concentrated, and more importantly, under Canadian command. It was also the one task that could be directly related to the defence of Canada and Canadian interests.⁶⁵ All was neither easy nor rosy for Canadian prospects regarding freedom of command and control in that theatre though. The Canadian assumption of responsibility was not smooth, there would be interlopers grasping for dominance and control in that theatre of operation.

⁶¹ Stacey, ARMS, MEN AND GOVERNMENTS , THE WAR POLICIES OF CANADA, 1939 – 1945, 308-309 (335-336/710)

⁶² Edwards, Bernard. 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, Pen & Sword Maritime, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS (first published 1996 by Arms and Armour Press), 21

⁶³ Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, 21

⁶⁴ Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, 34-47

⁶⁵ Stacey, ARMS, MEN AND GOVERNMENTS , THE WAR POLICIES OF CANADA, 1939 – 1945, 311 (338/710)

The RCN's experience demonstrated the growing areas of Canadian responsibility and interest that would come with the war. Many areas had to be considered. It was both an eye opener and a lesson soon to be learned.

In those early months of the conflict, the Royal Canadian Navy's (RCN) chief task was the defence of Canadian coastal waters. However, this task was soon overshadowed by other matters that became more pressing. The RCN's primary role soon and quickly evolved in the coming Battle of the Atlantic to convoy protection. The U-boat issue became so pressing that it was Churchill's most dreaded fear.⁶⁶ He declared the Battle of the Atlantic in order to resolve it.⁶⁷ The RCN's focus now was clearly shifted to the protection of transatlantic shipping that became a heavy burden.

The Battle of the Atlantic hung in the balance and remained in doubt from the spring of 1941 to the end of 1943.⁶⁸ It fell to the Royal Canadian Air Force to assist the RCN in its defence of Canadian coastal waters. That assistance lay in the provision of bomber reconnaissance and escort aircraft in cooperation. It took some pressure off the Royal Canadian Navy as these additional assets assisted in guarding our coastal waters and transiting convoys.⁶⁹

The Canadian Chiefs of Staff held the view that no invasion of Canada was possible so long as Britain held out. But there was the possibility that Britain would be invaded and then conquered. This possibility dangled over their heads. The Canadian Chiefs had no choice but to look forward. They believed that in the eventuality if Britain fell, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force would probably be based in Canada. But their concerns also took them further afield from considerations of assets to a strategic view of the importance of Iceland. Iceland was ripe for conquering and for the utilization by Germany as a potential base. Their challenge in all this was quite simple, to provide an adequate defence against probable scales of attack without lessening the effort in their one decisive theatre of war, Great Britain.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Doherty, Richard. 2015. *Churchill's Greatest Fear – The Battle of the Atlantic 3 September 1939 to 7 May 1945*. Pen & Sword (Military), 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS, xvi

⁶⁷ Churchill, Winston S. 1950. *The Grand Alliance*. Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, The Riverside Press Cambridge, 122-123

⁶⁸ Roskill, Stephen. 2013. *Churchill And The Admirals*. Pen & Sword Military, 4 Church Street Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS 228-231

⁶⁹ Stacey, ARMS, MEN AND GOVERNMENTS, THE WAR POLICIES OF CANADA, 1939 – 1945, 131

⁷⁰ Stacey, ARMS, MEN AND GOVERNMENTS, THE WAR POLICIES OF CANADA, 1939 – 1945, 131

But much closer to home there were interests of vital concern to Canada that could not be readily ignored that also had to be protected. The RCN would play a role here as well.

Canada had a huge role to play both as an ally and as a supplier of goods and services to Britain during the war. Canada was a key purveyor of agricultural goods, a financier, and a key source of war materiel in the very early days of the war. Consequently, these directed preliminary defence considerations and dispositions.

Canadian strategic and commercial interests in 1939 were founded on trade and access to world markets. These placed an emphasis specific to the defence of both its east and west coast ports. These were sensitive areas, which had to be protected as they were vulnerable to any enemy's potential actions. Canada's interests also extended southwards especially along its east coast towards markets in the West Indies and Caribbean. It was these small nations that supplied trade goods, minerals, and oil that were necessary for both industrial production and the war effort.⁷¹

The Caribbean and West Indies posed a conundrum as a strategic interest for Canada. Lloyd George once proposed in the aftermath of the Great War that Canada take over its administration. Llyod George's suggestion established at the very least, a view towards Canada strengthening an already existing interest there, principally as a key trading partner.⁷²

The West Indies and the Caribbean in particular were key to Canadian food and energy security. There were other strategic resources as well. Canada offered in exchange trade in meat, commercial goods, and tourism.⁷³ So a connection and interest to the Caribbean were well developed before the war.

All these led Canada to a consideration of its own strategic approaches especially as the way to the Caribbean lay along its east coast through the Strait of Canso.⁷⁴ Any particular areas, approaches or assets associated with that trade had to be given some modicum of protection. This placed a definite focus and priority

⁷¹ Morton, Desmond.1985. *A Military History of Canada*. Hurtig Publishers Ltd., 10560-105 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, 185

⁷² MacMillan 2003, 47

⁷³ Hanington, Felicity and Captain Percy A. Kelly, M.B.E.1980. *The Lady Boats – The Life and times of Canada's West Indies Merchant Fleet*, Canadian Marine Transportation Centre, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, Canada, 13-15

⁷⁴ Hanington and Kelly. 1980, 23

towards Canada's east coast, interestingly, towards the Strait of Canso in particular. The Strait proved to be a vital choke point in of itself.⁷⁵

Apart from the Caribbean and West Indies, the Strait of Canso, was a key strategic gateway leading to or from the island of Cape Breton. All manufactured goods, steel, coal, passed through there on the key link and transportation rail hub.

It was also through the Strait of Canso that Canadian National Steamships and other marine interests passed on their way to the Caribbean and American ports in their travels south. Finally, it was also a communication hub in which vital world communications passed on trans-Atlantic cable links located there at Hazel Hill NS.

To improve Canadian economic prospects and trade relations, five ships, "The Lady Boats," were designed and built for the Canadian National Steamship (CNS) line in the 1920s. Some of the Lady Ships carried cargo and passengers through the Strait on their way south to the Caribbean. They were the pleasure cruisers of the day outfitted with great opulence to attract paying passengers. But it was always a tough go for them, as the ships were built and put into service just as the Great Depression hit Canada.⁷⁶

There were two lines for the fleet for the provision of service to the West Indies. The western line made its home port at Montreal and the eastern line at Halifax. "Western" and "Eastern" do not mark the dispositions of the ships at their home ports in Canada. They reflect a designation of the routes taken by the fleet through the Caribbean.

The western route departing from Montreal ventured down the St Lawrence and then turned in the Gulf toward the Strait of Canso. Their path took the boats through the Strait onto the broad Atlantic in their journey to the Caribbean.⁷⁷ These ships would have been familiar sights as they passed through the Strait of Canso whose passage is now limited by the Causeway and Canal.

All these assets had to be protected to ensure the free flow of goods and services either east and west or north and south as they were all vital to Canada during the war. More importantly, commerce broadened Canadian diplomatic interests and focused concerns beyond its borders. And with that came commitments and liabilities that could not be ignored. In effect these brought outside interests under

⁷⁵ Madigan 2019. Canso Defence Area, 10 (11/205)

⁷⁶ Hanington and Kelly. 1980,13

⁷⁷ Hanington and Kelly. 1980, 23

the consideration and consequently, the protection of the Canadian defence umbrella, principally the RCN at sea.

As the Germans gained access to port in the Bay of Biscay following the fall of France, the U-boat threat was brought closer to the North American coast.⁷⁸ This was beneficial strategically. A U-boat could now remain on station longer and also increased their number at sea at any one time allowing German tactics to evolve.⁷⁹ That evolution saw a developing Battle for the RCN for the remainder of the war.

Chapter 4 - Royal Canadian Air Force-Preparations

Airpower as one solution

STRANGE SHIP RAISES FEARS OF FISHERMEN

Two-Masted Craft, Low
in the Water, Re-
ported by Voluntary
Police

Saint John, N.B., Sept. 14.—A radio warning to all shipping in the Bay of Fundy was sent out from the Red Head wireless station to-day, after fishermen reported to Marine Agent H. F. Morrison last night that they had sighted a craft which might have been a submarine.

Fishermen told Morrison they had sighted the vessel—which they said was low in the water and appeared to have two masts—two miles south east of Grand Manan.

The place where it was reported seen is about 50 miles southwest of Saint John harbor.

Fishermen along the New Brunswick coast have been organized into a voluntary police group, with one of their duties to report any suspicious craft or occurrences to coast officials.

Those who reported sighting the craft yesterday said it soon disappeared.

Canada faced a tremendous strategic problem at the beginning of the Second World War with some 3.9 million square miles of territory to protect. In that there were some 528,000 square miles of critical approaches, requiring active surveillance that demanded the country's immediate attention.⁸⁰ Air power was seen as part of the solution to addressing the situation.

As such, Canadian territory presented a massive problem with such an area to defend. Considering it from another perspective, the east coast, west coast, and arctic approaches totalled some 151,019 linear miles at the shoreline alone. Hidden in this seemingly boundless area, were a myriad of routes, with many sheltered spots, inlets, hidden coves, and so on.⁸¹

The problem of the day centred on a consideration of viable air and sea borne attacks. These approaches could be used by a well-placed enemy with a view to strike vital points. It was a complex problem that posed threats to Canada's seaborne trade, ports, industries, and cities. This is what the advent and rapid technological advancement, in which the evolution and development of aircraft, truly portended.

⁷⁸ Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, 21

⁷⁹ Williams 2003. *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 64-67, 83

⁸⁰ Coggon, Allan. 2004. *Watch and Warn*. Trafford Publishing Victoria, BC, Canada, 2004 2nd ed., 12.

⁸¹ Wikipedia. 2020. "Geography of Canada." Accessed: 30 Nov 2020. This page was last edited on 11 June 2024, at 23:14 (UTC). Source: [Geography of Canada - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Canada)

Aircraft could easily surmount geography, in distance, time, and space. Aircraft could also carry tremendous loads over vast distances and were constantly evolving. The advancements hidden in these developments resulted in a large variety of air borne threats both to anticipate and to consider. It clearly demonstrated the ever-changing number of sources or opportunities available to an enemy.

Despite the limitations of existing technologies, limitations still could be easily overcome. Other means were available to a potential enemy such as overseas bases, or even aircraft launched from ships.⁸² Thus, threats greatly concerned Canada's defence planners. There were far too many threats with far too few resources to deal with them all.

Fortunately, strategic long-range aircraft with roundtrip capability was never available to Germany during the war. That development was greatly hindered by their lack of strategic materials and the demands of inter-service rivalry for them.⁸³

But it still remained as a possibility. A long-range strategic capability remained on the German drawing boards until the end of the war. Therein lay the possibility that such a strike, launched from and returning to German bases, existed, right to the bitter end. It remained one consideration that in the desperation of the turning tides of war, the enemy could launch a one-way, suicide mission.⁸⁴ Consequently, large military commitments were required in Canada, thus compounding difficulties in Canadian defence planning and allocations. And these commitments and planning also extended to the Army and the RCN as well. A radar chain was built to cope with that threat, and fortresses built in and around the East Coast in anticipation of both seaborne and airborne raids. And the RCN was strengthened to boot.

The RCAF at the beginning of the Second World War saw the creation of the Home War Establishment (HWE). The HWE set the tone for planning and the organization within the RCAF. But the Canadian government had already considered its necessity well before the Second World War. They were concerned by strategic developments in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans that saw the

⁸² Coggon 2004. *Watch and Warn.*, 2

⁸³ Griehl, Manfred. 2004. *Luftwaffe over America – The Secret Plans to Bomb the United States in Second World War.*, Greenhill Books, Paperback Edition 2016. Frontline Books – Pen & Sword Ltd. 47 Church Steet, Barnsley, S. Yorkshire, S70 2AS, translated by Geoffrey Brooks., 170-175

⁸⁴ Griehl 2004. 174, 193-194.

potential employment of hostile naval and air forces. There came a need to create an organization posed to deal with these potential threats.⁸⁵

But there was an issue. The common world view of many planners was a Canadian safety net based on its favourable geography. Our geographical position seemingly placed a cocoon of distance and wilderness protecting Canada from any real harm or threat. It was an assumption held over from the Great War.⁸⁶ This geographic mindset influenced Canada's pre-war defence planning. The great assumption was that Canadian territory was safe from harm allegedly protected in time, distance, and space.⁸⁷

The geographic factors thus suggested for Canadian defence planners that such threats could be ignored or deferred in dealing with. It had the concomitant effect of leaving defence to flounder in the interests of others, particularly the rival naval powers of the United Kingdom and the United States.⁸⁸ Both had geopolitical ambitions, strategic interests, and designs for global expansion or empire.⁸⁹ If the British and American navies controlled the two great oceans. The danger of any

⁸⁵ Juno Beach Centre. 2024. "Canada in the Second World War -Arms & Weapons – Home Defence – The Creation of the Home War Establishment." Funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage. Accessed: 4 Apr 2024. Source: [Home Defence : Juno Beach Centre](#)

⁸⁶ Oglesby, R.B. 1950. *Canadian-American Co-Operation In The Defence Of Sault Ste Marie, 1941-1944*. Report No. 34, Historical Section (G.S.) Army Headquarters, 24 January 1950. Canada. National Defence. Directorate Of History And Heritage. Last edited: 9 October 2018, [Canadian-American Cooperation in the Defence of Sault Ste. Marie, 1941-1944 - Canada.ca](#) 2 (4/40)

⁸⁷ Greenhouse, Brereton and Stephen J. Harris ,William C. Johnston, William G.P. Rawling. 1994. *The Crucible of War, 1939-1945 - The Official History of Royal Canadian Air Force , Volume III*. University of Toronto Press in cooperation with the Department of National Defence the Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, 17

⁸⁸ Cunningham, D.H. 1949. *Army participation in measures taken by the three services for the security of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the lower river during the period of German submarine activity, 1942-45*. Report No. 30, Historical Section (G.S.) Army Headquarters, 18 November 1949. Canada. National Defence. Directorate Of History And Heritage. , 1 (4/20), Last edited: 9 October 2018, [Army participation in measures taken by the three services for the security of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the lower river during the period of German submarine activity, 1942-45 - Canada.ca](#) and

Juno Beach Centre Home Defence 2024

⁸⁹ Selected citations:

- Kennedy, Alex. 2021." Issued in secrecy off Newfoundland 80 years ago, the Atlantic Charter changed world history." CBC News, Aug 17, 2021 5:30 AM ADT | Last Updated: August 18, 2021 , [Issued in secrecy off Newfoundland 80 years ago, the Atlantic Charter changed world history | CBC News](#) ,
- Granatstein, Jack and Desmond Morton, 2003. *Canada and the Two World Wars*. Key Porter Books, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 219 & 282
- Simons, Graham M. 2020. *The Secret Plan to Overthrow The British Empire – War Plan Red*. Frontline Books an imprint of Pen & Sword Books Ltd, Yorkshire – Philadelphia, 7-112

invasion on Canadian territory was assessed to be virtually nonexistent and therefore, the very thought of war was considered inconceivable as late as 1938.⁹⁰

Canada's alliance with Britain and her contiguity to the United States were considered adequate safeguards of Canadian territory. The investment of any great sums in a Canadian defence capability was deferred, and as such, this was and sadly, continues to be the Canadian default position.⁹¹ Hence it was assumed that the protection of the investments by Britain and the United States in their own strategic interests would likewise secure Canadian interests.⁹²

Air power though was one solution considered in the RCAF's assessment of the situation. Canada was faced with a tremendous strategic problem to consider to which aviation technology was applied. Again, with some 3.9 million square miles of territory to protect, only some 528,000 square miles were seen as critical approaches, where active surveillance was required.⁹³

The laissez faire view changed dramatically by 1938. The need for more robust action was finally recognized that was precipitated by the Munich crisis of

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- ⁹⁰ Morton, Desmond. 1985. *A Military History of Canada*. Hurtig Publishers Ltd., 10560-105 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, 178

⁹¹Selected citations:

- Rossignol, Michel. 1998. *REPLACEMENT OF SHIPBORNE AND RESCUE HELICOPTERS*, Government of Canada, Depository Services Program, 94-3E, Prepared by: Political and Social Affairs Division, Revised 19 October 1998, 12pg. Source: <http://dsp-psd.tpsgc.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/CIR/943-e.htm> (Delay) Accessed; 12 November 2008
- CBC News . 2000. "GTS Katie finally arrives". Aug 10, 2000 10:21 AM ADT | Last Updated: August 10, 2000, Source: [GTS Katie finally arrives | CBC News \(Example of consequences of deferral or delay in purchasing of AOR\)](#)
- McColl, Alex. 2019. "Commentary: Alternative Saab Fighter Could Save Navy By Dodging Extravagant F-35s. *Chronicle Herald*, Posted: Sept. 14, 2019, 4 a.m. | Updated: Sept. 14, 2019, 4 a.m. |, Source: <https://www.thechronicleherald.ca/opinion/national-perspectives/commentary-alternative-saab-fighter-could-save-navy-by-dodging-extravagant-f-35s-352103/>, Accessed: 15 Sep 2019 (Deferral and delay)
- Jacques, Jason Senior Director, Christopher E. Penney, Lead Analyst: Financial Analyst, et al. 2019. "Fiscal Analysis of the Interim F-18." Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Ottawa Canada, 28 February 2019, pbo-dpb@parl.gc.ca (Justification for the short term)
- Pugliese, David . 2019. "Warship rejected by DND years ago will now be the backbone of Canada's future navy." *Ottawa Citizen* in National Post, February 8, 2019. Source: [Warship rejected by DND years ago will now be the backbone of Canada's future navy | National Post](#) (Delay and Deferral)
- Nardi, Christopher. 2023. "Canada's Way of life in jeopardy as governments fail to take security issues seriously – Mark Norman." *National Post*, 10 March 2023. Source: [Canada's way of life in 'jeopardy' as governments fail to take security issues 'seriously': Mark Norman \(msn.com\)](#) . Accessed: 11 Mar 2023
- Editorial. 2023. " More red flags on defence." *Postmedia News*, 3 Dec 2023. Source: [EDITORIAL: More red flags on defence \(msn.com\)](#), Accessed: 4 Dec 2023

⁹² Granatstein and Morton 2003, 188-189

⁹³ Coggon, Allan. 2004. *Watch and Warn*. Trafford Publishing Victoria, BC, Canada, 2004 2nd ed., 12.

September 1938. It was evidence of a coming war. In order to be ready, the RCAF set up Eastern Air Command (EAC) on its east Coast and Western Air Command on the west.⁹⁴

Eastern Air Command (EAC) was established on September 15th, 1938. Its standup brought with it new defence plans that included preparations for building bases and deploying squadrons in the Maritimes. Eventually both the western and eastern commands were placed under the Home War Establishment (HWE).⁹⁵

HWE was comprised of 14 active squadrons, including No 110 (Army Cooperation) Squadron by the end of 1939. No 110 (Army Cooperation) Squadron was soon detached to serve overseas with the First Infantry Division following Canada's eventual declaration of war September 10, 1939.

Regardless, the RCAF remained in a sorry state having only two squadrons with sufficient modern aircraft to carry out their mission. Their initial order of battle was based on No 1 (Fighter) Squadron with seven Hawker Hurricanes, and No 11 (Bomber-Reconnaissance) Squadron with ten Lockheed Hudson. A shortfall remained in a lapsed requirement for funding of at least 16 squadrons with 574 aircraft that were required and to be allotted to HWE in their air defence plan at the time.⁹⁶

The problem from the very beginning of the Second World War in defending Canada's seashore was its inability to obtain modern aircraft. The war eventually put paid to a supply from the United States who would not sell aircraft to belligerent nations because of their neutrality act. It mattered little though. The priority for any aircraft manufactured or obtained was to Great Britain and directed to the needs of the RAF first, and Canada's HWE last.⁹⁷

The Government of Canada finally approved the establishment of 49 Squadron for HWE needs. but the plan was never completed. The later demands of the BCATP took its toll on men, materiel, aircraft, accommodation, and space for bases and ranges.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Juno Beach Centre Home Defence 2024

⁹⁵ Juno Beach Centre Home Defence 2024

⁹⁶ Juno Beach Centre Home Defence 2024

⁹⁷ Juno Beach Centre Home Defence 2024

⁹⁸ Juno Beach Centre Home Defence 2024

Regardless Canada suddenly became one of Britain's biggest partners in the war. Britain's resources were bolstered with the despatch of four destroyers. In addition, the only RCAF squadron armed with modern aircraft was also despatched to bolster England. Finally, the Army's 1st Canadian Division was also sent overseas and in theatre by December 1939.⁹⁹ Thus Canada, the RCN, Army and the RCAF's HWE were weakened considerably.

Getting Ready

Eastern Air Command (EAC) was responsible for the coordination of air defence in the Atlantic region. Its principal boundaries and areas of responsibility included Eastern Quebec, Labrador, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. EAC's headquarters was located in Halifax next to that of the RCN.¹⁰⁰

The two Headquarters cooperated closely in maritime protection from this point on. In order to do so, the RCAF expanded its network of air bases encompassing Halifax, Dartmouth, Yarmouth, Sydney, Gander, Torbay, and Bagotville. It also constructed flying boat bases in Gaspé, Shelburne, and Botwood.¹⁰¹ This was the structure upon which HWE was based that was later fortified by the inclusion of BCATP training bases at Debert (NS), Pennfield (NB), and Prince Edward Island.

And so, the RCAF began the war with its first mission, in September 1939 by accompanying the first transatlantic convoy, HX-1, that left Halifax. Stanraer flying boats of No 5 (Bomber-Reconnaissance) Squadron patrolled the approaches to Halifax Harbour attempting to locate possible enemy submarines. They continued to provide cover as the convoy put out to sea, to the extent of 400-km radius. Beginning November 1939, the more robust Dartmouth-based 11 Squadron's Lockheed Hudson extended the range of patrols to 550 km. Bolingbroke and Digby bombers were also employed.¹⁰²

It was the first tentative operational steps taken that would later be expanded upon as the U-boats entered the Gulf of St Lawrence later in 1942. All air assets would be employed in that battle, both EAC's and the Operational Training Units within

⁹⁹ Morton 1985, 181

¹⁰⁰ Juno Beach Centre Home Defence 2024

¹⁰¹ Juno Beach Centre Home Defence 2024

¹⁰² Juno Beach Centre Home Defence 2024

Atlantic Canada. This operation would entail the use of all Canadian Forces in an undertaking that sought to find and destroy the enemy.¹⁰³

Chapter 5 The BCATP a Microcosm Leading to Total War

A Country Mobilizes for War

Canada's commitment to war in September 1939 was one of great concern to Prime Minister Mackenzie King. King set expectations limiting Canada's participation from the onset. King, like many Canadians, had little desire or thirst for the role of "active" service for the armed forces. The open sores of the Great War were still far too fresh for many who had lived through it and remembered its lingering horrors all too well.

King and Canadians wished to limit Canada's participation as far as possible at least at the beginning of the war.¹⁰⁴ Canadians wanted to be supportive yet, do so without full engagement in all aspects of war. The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) was designed as the sop to that end.

¹⁰³ Morton 1985, 193-194

¹⁰⁴ Berton, Pierre. 2001. *The Great Depression - 1929-1939* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2001), 499

The plan was cast as Canada's major contribution that would contribute materially but limit its military participation. Canada became the "aerodrome of democracy," responsible for the training of Allied aircrews in safety on Canadian soil.¹⁰⁵



Archives National Defence Canada, Directorate of History and Heritage.
PL-5267, 8 October 1941 R.A.F. Station Debert N.S., Hudson Bomber
being prepared for flight. 3/4 STBD front # AM 745

On 17 December 1939, three and a half months after the declaration of Canadian hostilities, Mackenzie King signed the BCATP act into being. Coincidentally, the 17th was also Mackenzie King's birthday.¹⁰⁶ The desire for limited participation came to naught though. Canadian armed forces eventually became engaged in total war as the war progressed.

BCATP Build

King's plans for the BCATP were ambitious enough in 1939. Facilities simply did not exist and had to be created, virtually built from the ground up. Mackenzie King's declaration of 17 December thus increased commitments that set the Canadian defence establishment in motion toward a growing contribution to the war effort. The act that brought the BCATP into being, also set Canada's economy firmly on a war footing.

But it was only early days at the start date of the BCATP commencing 17 December 1939 onward. The BCATP plan had to be implemented by 29 April 1940. The effort to get there was enormous.¹⁰⁷ Nine hundred and eighty-nine million dollars were set aside to commence monthly training of 850 pilots, 510 air observers - navigators and 870 wireless operator/air gunners. In total, the annual training target was to produce 29,000 qualified aircrew.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Hatch, F.J. 1983. *Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan 1939-1945*. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1-2

¹⁰⁶ Hatch 1983, 1

¹⁰⁷ Hatch 1983, 33

¹⁰⁸ Hatch 1983, 16

The BCATP infrastructure and aerodrome building program was simply the most ambitious part of the plan to be implemented. The program required detailed organization, thought, and planning.

The infrastructure construction project alone could have easily strained the allocation of scarce resources and overwhelmed Canada's production capacity. But it was all achieved though through standardization in the optimization of all resources and production capacity.

Standardization was the key. Almost all the training establishments were built on the same pattern that achieved efficiencies, which helped save time, money, and effort.¹⁰⁹ Contractors rapidly constructed facilities because of standardization, pre-fabrication, and simplified construction techniques. These elements further reduced the requirement for skilled labour.

Aerodromes were often completed with all buildings, including hangars, barracks, workshops, and hard surfaced runways within an incredibly short period of a mere eight weeks. Imagine eight weeks from shovel in the ground to planes on the tarmac!¹¹⁰

Yet there were problems despite the effort. The build up was neither perfect nor was it ever smooth. There were hard realities that had to be faced and worked through even after a project was deemed completed.

Thus, the mobilization of Canada's economy happened under extremely tight deadlines. In fact, it went well beyond the needs of the air force. There was a flurry of activity involving the Army and Navy as well. The confluence of these activities brought Canada ever closer to total war in 1939 despite the prevailing opinion for a limited war.

Canadian industry was soon converted to war production and exports. Tremendous government spending was invested and the effort that had to be protected. It eventually set Canada down a path leading to greater participation and to total war, especially at in the long run that would involve all Canadian Forces to contain it. There was no point in building or shipping war materiel if it was all to be sunk to lay waste on the bottom of the ocean floor.

Growth and Expansion – Training Begins

The Royal Air Force (RAF) had designs on Canada as a possible training area in the late 1930's. The RAF anticipated the event of war. Canada was considered a

¹⁰⁹ Hatch 1983, 64

¹¹⁰ Hatch 1983, 64

safe-haven, especially for pilot training. Negotiations for a shared program began in 1936.

But these early negotiations, well before the start of the Second World War, led the RCAF to purchase land in Debert in anticipation of the RAF's needs. This purchase ostensibly for the potential construction of an aerodrome happened in the fall of 1938.

Regrettably, the RAF negotiations fell through, but the land had already been procured. That purchase most likely influenced the Aerodrome Committee's final selection at the start of the war. The choice of Debert was an obvious one; the money had already been spent; the land already purchased.



National Defence Canada, Directorate of History and Heritage,
DNS -29021 Aerial view of Naval Establishments at CFS Debert,

The 1938 land purchase was likely a forerunner that foretold the expansion of Canada's own air force that also hinted at the security and defence policy considerations of the day. It was most illuminating of the early negotiations between Canada and Great Britain that highlights the security considerations pre-dating the war.¹¹¹

But the reasons to forgo an agreement between Canada and Great Britain in 1938 are as familiar today as they were then. Negotiations lapsed, and nothing was agreed upon simply because of money, contributions, control, resources, and Canadian content.¹¹²

Debert and many other small towns would soon welcome young Canadians and others to begin their military training there. This little town, in central Nova Scotia though, in the 1930's never numbered more than 500-600 people, now was suddenly and dramatically transformed by the arrival of so many military

¹¹¹ Air Force. 2010. "CFS / RCAF Station Debert Nova Scotia Canada." www.RCAF.com, Copyright © AEROWAREdesigns 2010. Accessed: 13 December 2010. Source: <http://www.rcaf.com/Stations/stationsDetail.php?CFS-RCAF-Station-Debert-66>

¹¹² Hatch 1983, 7-15

trainees.¹¹³ Debert like many small rural and urban communities truly changed as prosperity came the day the military arrived in town! It is a microcosm of life in the day and the expectations and reality of their time!

The flood gates of public spending opened the doors to prosperity to many small rural communities across Canada. It was government spending on national defence that broke the back of the Great Depression. Prosperity gained momentum throughout the Second World War. Public spending changed the face of Canada.

The influence of proliferate and targeted public spending was one “lesson learned” for many in government and in public service at the time. The impacts of social and economic change that came with public spending were clearly evident. It was a lesson not lost on the government of the day.

Construction of Army and Air Force bases began in Debert in August 1940, whose facilities were literally carved out of the woods. A great construction boom ensued once that land was cleared. Engineers hired local woodsmen to clear the forests and then, were followed by the builders. The work proceeded almost non-stop as Debert’s landscape was transformed from peace to war!

Debert’s transformation alone consumed some 28 million board feet of lumber in its construction. Concrete was poured, roads were built, and runways were paved. The pastoral setting of peaceful farmland, fields and forests was suddenly transformed into training facilities as accommodations and other infrastructure were built.¹¹⁴

The Army project at Debert alone was massive. It was the first project “completed” because it was both vital and urgent. Approximately 13,150 Army personnel had to be accommodated in quarters by Christmas 1940. Failure meant that the men would be billeted under canvas, in the snow. In a nut shell, some 512 buildings, with a fully equipped 500 bed hospital, two fire halls, four dental clinics, a supply depot, a 100 cell detention barracks, quarters, and messes for all ranks were quickly erected to meet the Army’s urgent need.

¹¹³ Langille, Mr. William. Chairman, Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. 2001. “Testimony - Debert Military History Society to Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.” 6 Halifax, Thursday, March 1, 2001, 9:00 A.M., <http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard/comm/va/va010301.htm>

Accessed 13 August 2010. Part of this testimony is derived from the personal recollections of. Don Davidson, a young businessman at that time, operating Davidson’s Store. Mr. Davidson lived in Debert all his life. He grew up there when the war came as a teenager of 15 or 16 years of age

¹¹⁴ Sallans, G.H. 1941. "Wilderness One Week, and a Home for Troops the Next – The Birth of Debert", *The Vancouver*, September 15, 1941 . accessed 23 January 2011. <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=JDNIAAAAIBAJ&sjid=OokNAAAIBAJ&pg=1267,3797474&dq=debert+nov+a+scotia+1941&hl=en>

It was not simply a matter of construction, these facilities had to be supported by collateral infrastructure such as adequate water, sewage, septic and electrical systems if they were to be habitable at all! By the end of 1940, a mere 24 buildings remained under construction and uncompleted for the army.¹¹⁵ The Army project amounted to the construction of a small town completed in very short order.

The Army's project success spared great pain and discomfort for the men there the winter of 1940. The Army could now quarter its men in hard and warm shelters, which avoided undue suffering under canvass in the harshness of Nova Scotia's winter weather. It was to the credit of civilian workers that the Army's facilities were so quickly constructed.¹¹⁶

The construction took an army of sorts too! Some 5400 men were employed in the construction of the army camp and the nearby airfield that began in 1939-1940. But this small army had to be provisioned, housed, and fed as well. So Debert grew in size to accommodate them too!

Despite the success of the Army project, much remained unfinished and incomplete. The work on the airfield was quite another matter that had to be dealt with. Work on the airfield was necessarily deferred because of the army's project and was not fully completed until 1941.

By the spring and summer of 1941 Debert was ostensibly ready and open for business. Initial and other training had already been in place, now it was time for Debert to come and play a role in advance and operational training. It was an important addition to the BCATP and benchmark for the activities of other units who had a training roles and had a presence, at Pennfield, Moncton, Chatham, New Brunswick; Charlottetown, Summerside and Mount Pleasant, Prince Edward Island; and Greenwood, Stanley, Maitland, Yarmouth, and Debert, Nova Scotia in the maritime provinces alone.¹¹⁷

By the end of 1940, the key elements taken by the Army and RCAF had been made and were in place for the defence of Canadian shores. Canada's industrial capacity had been effectively mobilized. The one remaining element was the Royal Canadian Navy and its role in this ongoing effort and engagement.

¹¹⁵ Canada, National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage, DHH File 360.003(D5) undated letter.

¹¹⁶ Sallans 1941. "Wilderness One Week..."

¹¹⁷ Wikipedia. 2024. "List of British Commonwealth Air Training Plan facilities in Canada." [List of British Commonwealth Air Training Plan facilities in Canada - Wikipedia](#). This page was last edited on 23 February 2024, at 11:43 (UTC).

Chapter 6 - Dunkirk Changed Everything 1940

The greatest menace to Great Britain proved to be the U-Boat threat. It became a matter of grave concern to Winston Churchill who by 1940 was in full control in the management of the war. He had his own ideas on how it should be fought and won. He was not only Britain's Prime Minister, but also its Minister of Defence.¹¹⁸

Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister on May 10, 1940.¹¹⁹ Churchill said,

[QUOTE]

“I assumed the office of Minister of Defence, without, attempting to define its scope and powers. Thus, on the night of the tenth of May, at the outset of this mighty battle, I acquired the chief power in the State, which henceforth I wielded in ever growing measure for five years and three months of world war, at the end of which time, all our enemies having surrendered unconditionally or about to do so. At last, I had the authority to give direction over the whole scene.”¹²⁰

[END QUOTE]

By many accounts he was an accomplished, skilled politician and a man of varied experience. More importantly, Churchill was well versed and experienced with how a government should manage a war, which shaped his many decisions and directions.

A change of leadership at this time, not only changed Churchill's fortunes but also, of those who served under his command and leadership throughout the war. The 10th of May 1940 was the defining moment of the crossroads of change that subsequently impacted many lives from that point on.

Up until that day Churchill had very little control over events or anything for that matter save those within his own sphere of influence as First Lord of the Admiralty.¹²¹ Churchill had strong opinions on the naval threats that faced the

¹¹⁸ Churchill, Winston S. 1950. *The Hinge of Fate*. Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, The Riverside Press Cambridge, 60-61

¹¹⁹ Churchill, Winston S. 1948. *The Gathering Storm*. Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, The Riverside Press Cambridge, 666-667

¹²⁰ Churchill 1948. *The Gathering Storm*. 666-667

¹²¹ Anon. 2017. "Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty Entering Admiralty House, September 1939.", winstonisback.com, Accessed: 6 March 2017 Source: <http://winstonisback.com/WinstonIsBackHomePage/4Big.htm> |

country at the time. Most notably he perceived the U-boat as one threat already mastered.

Churchill said,

[QUOTE]

“The submarine should be quite controllable in the outer seas and certainly in the Mediterranean. There will be losses, but nothing to affect the scale of events.”

[END QUOTE]

Churchill foresaw nothing of major importance or of consequence in that first year of war.¹²²

His mood was indicative of the general assessment of the situation at the time. That assessment though may have per forced certain directions, which drove in turn; selections, decisions and priorities in the early management and conduct of the war. The U-boat was an important consideration, but it was not necessarily the predominate nor penultimate threat.

Churchill felt that the U-boat threat would be dealt with in time. His earliest assessment as First Lord of the Admiralty in 1939 provides an insight. Churchill’s train of thought is found in this statement:

[QUOTE]

“I had accepted too readily when out of office the Admiralty view of the extent to which the submarine had been mastered.”¹²³

[END QUOTE]

Churchill was not totally sanguine concerning the U-boat’s capabilities. Churchill when appointed First Lord of the Admiralty immediately ordered a threat assessment of the U-boats potential during the war’s opening days. It would come back to bite him in the end.

The U-boat threat was soon evident. The war at sea commenced 3 September 1939 with the sinking of the Athena. Some 112 souls were lost. Additionally, some 122 thousand tons of vital shipping was also lost, which brought matters to a head.

¹²² Churchill 1948. *The Gathering Storm*,416

¹²³ Churchill 1948. *The Gathering Storm*,416

On September 4, 1939 Churchill's first minute as First Lord of The Admiralty directed to the Director of Naval Intelligence, requested an assessment of the probable scale of the U-Boat menace for the immediate future regarding:

1. a statement of U-Boat forces actual and prospective over the next few months,
2. distinguishing between ocean going and small-size U-boats, and
3. an estimate of their respective radius of action and miles in each case.

Churchill was at once informed that the enemy had 60 U-boats but that 100 more would be ready by early 1940.¹²⁴

Churchill acted pro-actively on this advice. He set in motion the:

1. establishment of the convoy system,
2. arming of all merchant ships, and
3. counter attack of U-boats in the opening days of the war.¹²⁵

He observed and reported to Parliament the following losses and results in the fall of 1939. His report by week for the 1st month of the war noted the following Merchant shipping and U-boat losses (Table 1):

Table 1 British Merchant Shipping losses by enemy action, September 1939

Period	Date	By Submarine (Gross Tons/ships)	Other Causes (Gross Tons/ships)	
1 st week	3-9 Sep	64,595 (11)		
2 nd week	10-16 Sep	53,569 (11)	11,437 (2) mine	
3 rd week	17-23 Sep	12,750 (3)		
4 th week	24-30 Sep	4,646 (1)	5,051 (1) Surface raider	
	Total:	135,552 (26)	16,488 (3)	
	All	152,040 (29)		

Churchill observed that for the losses above, six to seven U-boats were also sunk on the other side of the balance sheet representing 1/10th of the U-boat forces opposing them.¹²⁶ Churchill was brutally honest and candid with his peers. He

¹²⁴ Churchill 1948. The Gathering Storm 423

¹²⁵ Churchill 1948. The Gathering Storm, 435-436

¹²⁶ Churchill 1948. The Gathering Storm, 435-437

assessed the real U-boat threat to be later toward 1941, which then was still some 18 – 24 months away.¹²⁷ The U-boat threat was contained and could be deferred until later.

Churchill's 1939 speech could not foresee events that would drastically change his optimistic assessment. Churchill talked about threats in the future, which was still two years out, to 1941.

By 1942 Churchill faced threats and demands on many fronts that strained his limited resources.¹²⁸ He knew that he simply could not cover all bases and consequently was forced to optimize his forces. In the end he was left with little choice but to curtail any expansion of Coastal Command and Naval air assets at a critical juncture back in 1941. There were simply too many fires to put out with what was available to him.¹²⁹

Still the U-boat issue was so pressing that it remained Churchill's most dreaded fear. He resolved the issue by declaring the Battle of the Atlantic.¹³⁰ Churchill was concerned with the tempo and devastation of the war's destruction. In his estimate, huge convoy losses were generated by no more than 12-15 U-Boats on patrol at any one time up until 1942.¹³¹

Churchill became concerned not only with the number of ships lost, but also with the tonnage of cargo that failed to reach its final destination. Thus, his thinking led to the concentration of his forces that drew his staff's attention to the vital task at hand through a declaration of the Battle of the Atlantic. It was a siren call to arms much similar to his declaration of the Battle of Britain.¹³²

It became only worse after Dunkirk.

Access to channel ports

The U-boat threat and risk around Canada's East Coast seemed both manageable and contained in the early days of the war. That illusion was about to be burst by the summer and fall of 1940 when U-Boat activity increased around the Canadian approaches particularly after the severe naval loss in escorts involved at Dunkirk. In their victory at Dunkirk and by the loss of France, the Germans gained accessed

¹²⁷ Churchill 1948. *The Gathering Storm*, 438

¹²⁸ Churchill 1950., *Hinge of Fate*, 127

¹²⁹ Churchill 1950., *Hinge of Fate*, 121 & 127-129, and

Churchill, Winston S. 1950. *The Grand Alliance*. Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, The Riverside Press Cambridge, 112

¹³⁰ Hatch 1983, 122-123

¹³¹ Churchill 1950., *Hinge of Fate*, 110 -111

¹³² Churchill 1950. *The Grand Alliance*, 122-123

to ports in the Bay of Biscay that also brought them 1000km closer to the North American coast.¹³³

Enemy activities in a nutshell until 1940, were largely confined to waters around the United Kingdom (UK). The U-boat threat around Canada's East coast thus seemed negligible. Following the fall of France though, U-Boat activity increased around the Canadian approaches particularly after Dunkirk.¹³⁴

The quiet time for Canada finally ended October 14, 1940 when U99 and others set sail to wage war off the North America coast. U99's first victim was found in Convoy SC-7 out of Sydney . Thirty five ships set sail of which 20 were lost.¹³⁵ The Germans gained access to ports in the Bay of Biscay following the fall of France. This geographic fact brought the U-boat threat 1000km closer to the North American coast that both lessened transit time and distance, and that greatly increased loiter time on station.¹³⁶

Impacts of Extending U-Boat Range to Canada

Canadian domestic security interests appeared to be neither immediate nor pressing problems. It was only in the early summer of 1940 that the defence of Canadian territory appeared to be truly threatened. Only then did it become a true concern.¹³⁷ Until that time, geography appeared to guarantee Canada's security, but that guarantee was lost with the defeat of the British and Allied Armies on the continent in Europe at their evacuation at Dunkirk. With that withdrawal came the possibility of invasion and defeat of Great Britain.¹³⁸ More importantly Germany had access to the Channel ports that increased the range of their U-boats.¹³⁹ This meant that the enemy could now bring all its focus, power and might directed towards Canada. This drove a reassessment of strategic requirements within our borders.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, 21

¹³⁴ Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, 21

¹³⁵ Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack* 34-47

¹³⁶ Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, 21

¹³⁷ Cunningham, D.H. 1949. *Army participation in measures taken by the three services for the security of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the lower river during the period of German submarine activity, 1942-45*. Report No. 30, Historical Section (G.S.) Army Headquarters, 18 November 1949. Canada. National Defence. Directorate Of History And Heritage. Last edited: 9 October 2018, [Army participation in measures taken by the three services for the security of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the lower river during the period of German submarine activity, 1942-45 - Canada.ca](https://www.history.gc.ca/canada.ca)

¹³⁸ Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, 21

¹³⁹ Helliwinkell, Lars. 2014. *Hitler's Gateway to the Atlantic – German Naval Bases in France-1940-1945*, Seaforth Publishing- Pen & Sword Ltd., 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S70 2AS, 1988, (Translated by Geoffry Brooks), 16-24, 48-49

¹⁴⁰ Stacey, ARMS, MEN AND GOVERNMENTS, THE WAR POLICIES OF CANADA, 1939 – 1945, 131

The Army actually contributed heavily to the defence of Canada. The main effort was found in supplying internal security forces, and by manning fixed defences, Much was done to create a quick reaction force that provided mobile reserves, to be employed in the counterattack in the event of attack on coastal areas.

In those early months of the conflict, the Royal Canadian Navy's (RCN) chief task was the defence of Canadian coastal waters. However, this task was soon overshadowed by other matters that became more pressing. The RCN's primary role soon and quickly evolved in the coming Battle of the Atlantic to convoy protection. The U-boat issue became so pressing that it was Churchill's most dreaded fear.¹⁴¹

The Battle of the Atlantic hung in the balance and remained in doubt from the spring of 1941 to the end of 1943.¹⁴² It fell to the Royal Canadian Air Force to assist the RCN in its defence of Canadian coastal waters. That assistance lay in the provision of bomber reconnaissance and escort aircraft in cooperation. It took the pressure off by guarding our coastal waters and in protecting transiting convoys.¹⁴³

The Canadian Chiefs of Staff held the view that no invasion of Canada was possible so long as Britain held out. But there was the possibility that Britain would be invaded and then conquered. This possibility dangled over their heads. The Canadian Chiefs had no choice but to look forward. They believed that in the eventuality if Britain fell, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force would probably be based in Canada. But their concerns also took them further afield from considerations of assets to a strategic view of the importance of Iceland that was ripe for conquering and for the utilization by the German as a potential base. Their challenge in all this was quite simple, to provide an adequate defence against probable scales of attack without lessening the effort in their one decisive theatre of war, Great Britain.¹⁴⁴

But Dunkirk changed all that. The war was brought much closer to Canadian shores. It set up the conditions and predispositions for the Battle of St. Lawrence later in 1941. It was precipitated by an opportunistic venture by the Kriegsmarine that brought to bear all of Canada's armed forces in dealing with it.

¹⁴¹ Doherty, Richard. 2015. *Churchill's Greatest Fear – The Battle of the Atlantic 3 September 1939 to 7 May 1945*. Pen & Sword (Military), 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS, xvi

¹⁴² Roskill, Stephen. 2013. *Churchill And The Admirals*. Pen & Sword Military, 4 Church Street Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS 228-231

¹⁴³ Stacey, ARMS, MEN AND GOVERNMENTS , THE WAR POLICIES OF CANADA, 1939 – 1945, 131

¹⁴⁴ Stacey, ARMS, MEN AND GOVERNMENTS , THE WAR POLICIES OF CANADA, 1939 – 1945, 131

Strategic Considerations and Influences Now Brought Closer to Home 1939- 1940

Canada's strategic interests were transformed over the course of the Second World War. Somethings had never been considered before; for example, the defence of surrounding territories or approaches. Extraordinarily Iceland came within the special consideration of Canadian Home Defence. Iceland was regarded as a potential staging area for a German amphibious invasion both of Canada and North America.¹⁴⁵ It was also of interest to Britain for use; both as an operating base, and as a staging area for other operations and the ferrying of aircraft.¹⁴⁶

Iceland's strategic value lay more in the potential threat of its use as an air base. It was envisioned that long-range aircraft could be launched against North American cities and industrial complexes to profound effect from there. Albeit long range German air resources were limited in number. But there threat lay in the possibility of the potential of a successful attack. Such an eventuality would likely have prompted a shift in German aircraft production from tactical to strategic air power.¹⁴⁷ The potential alone would have prompted the development and improvement of aircraft types and new variants with new and improve range with new carrying weight of bombs. Any such enhancement of new capabilities thus posed greater threats to our eastern seaboard and its military and industrial facilities.¹⁴⁸ Just like that, Canadian interests grew affecting it industrially, militarily, and economically!¹⁴⁹

But it was the U-boat threat that brought this into closer focus. The secure supply of all goods and materiel was Britain's Achille's tendon. The convoy system was the vital supply line without which Britain could not possibly prosecute the war

¹⁴⁵ Griehl, Manfred. 2004. *Luftwaffe over America – The Secret Plans to Bomb the United States in World War II*, A Greenhill Book, Frontline Books, an impression of Pen & Sword Books Ltd. 47 Church Street, Barnsley, Yorkshire, S70 2AS (2016), 38-40

¹⁴⁶ Christie, Carl A. 1995. *Ocean Bridge – The History of RAF Ferry Command*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, and Buffalo, 122-127, Churchill 1948. *The Gathering Storm*, 600; and Greenhous et al 1994, 375

¹⁴⁷ Hogg, Ian V. 2015. *German Secret Weapons of the Second World War – The Missiles, Rockets, Weapons & New Technology of the Third Reich*. , A Greenhill Book (1999) , Frontline Books, an impression of Pen & Sword Books Ltd. 47 Church Street, Barnsley, Yorkshire, S70 2AS (2016), 58 and Griehl 2004. *Luftwaffe over America*. 40-41

¹⁴⁸ Griehl 2004. *Luftwaffe over America*. 170-175, 193-194

¹⁴⁹ Oglesby, Major R.D. 1950. "Canadian-American Co-operation in the Defence of Sault Ste. Marie, 1941-1945." Report NO . 34 HISTORICAL SECTION (G . S .) ARMY HEADQUARTERS, 24 Jan 1950, 4/40 [ahq034.pdf \(canada.ca\)](#).

with any great effect.¹⁵⁰ Something had to be done. “Making do” would never do. The country would move closer to total war.

Chapter 7 – Making do

1940 the Build Up – A Microcosm of Problems

The build up to war began with mass migration of Canada’s young as they headed towards recruiting centres. It led to their distribution and resettlement to places near and far; thereby creating a unique problem within the war, a housing crisis of sorts and social problems of another sort.

This mass of humanity created its own set of problems requiring resolution. There was a need for administrative infrastructure, sundry buildings, airfields, training areas, classrooms, impedimenta, and other paraphernalia in which to properly house them all and conduct training.¹⁵¹

This problem was separate from the preparation of defence dispositions that too had to be created. It was an indication of how quickly Canada mobilized for war and the problems that beset us along the way. It all came to a head in 1940. The Strait of Canso and Cape Breton are exemplars in a microcosm of the problems facing the Canadian Defence establishment and communities across Canada.

This urgency placed many demands on many who too faced extraordinary tolls when dealing with issues on an ongoing and daily basis. The build in the Canso Defence Area provides an insight in to the problems and the resolutions, and the personal toll paid as the price of that resolution.

It began for many in early September 1939. The declaration of war set in motion preparations for the defence of the country. But for some, those preparations truly began in earnest that August. At that time, the Pictou Highlanders and all of Canada’s reserve units were pressed into active service. In truth, the government mobilized all of its reserve units the same day, 26 August.¹⁵² Amongst the first mobilized were its artillery reserve units.

There were too few artillery units and far too many vital areas to protect. Regardless of the difficulties, it was concluded that three vital areas had to be immediately protected on Canada’s east coast; two in Nova Scotia at Halifax and Sydney, and the other, at St John’s New Brunswick.

¹⁵⁰ Churchill 1950. *The Grand Alliance*, 122-123

¹⁵¹ Hatch 1983,33

¹⁵² Byers (ed), A.R. 1986. *The Canadians at War 1939 -45 2nd Ed.*. Reader’s Digest Assoc., 215 Redfern, Westmount, Qc. H3Z 2V9 . ISBN- 0-88850-145-5, 12

Halifax was a key strategic location, considered second in importance to Liverpool, UK because of its location, refineries, docks, and troop embarkation points. It was also the location of vital stores held at the joint services magazine as well as an airport at Dartmouth.

Sydney was vital for several other reasons. First, Sydney held a commanding position along the Cabot Strait that dominated the Gulf of St Lawrence. It was also an important anchorage that could hold 75 ships. Most importantly, it was home to 50% of Canada's steel production. So, Sydney indeed was a key and vital area to the defence of Canada.

Finally, and less exposed, was St John, NB. It too was important as an industrial area. Its strategic location and position also greatly assisted the RCN over the course of the war. St John was favoured because of its dry dock facilities and, more importantly, as an ocean terminal, which was well protected deep inside the Bay of Fundy. St John's facilities proved to be of great strategic importance to the war effort.¹⁵³

Two threats were apparent for these vital areas. First, there was always the physical threat of sabotage by the enemy, enemy aliens, or fifth column forces. The other threat emanated from the massed potential of enemy forces either by air or by sea.

The Atlantic essentially was a large ditch, effectively obstructing the direct assault by land forces. Such an attack would require a considerable effort and coordination with naval forces by the enemy in any case. That threat was highly improbable. But striking threats and feints were indeed feasible. So, control of our vital approaches was critical. This required the mobilization of all Canadian Forces; land, sea, and air. It all looked good on paper, but it was a question of means to do so. The distribution of Anti-Aircraft (AA) artillery is a case in point.

Halifax was amongst the first to see AA batteries deployed. Canada's limited AA resources were distributed equally amongst the important ports of Halifax, NS, Sydney, NS and St John NB.

CANSO Defence Area

There were too few artillery units and far too many vital areas to protect, especially the Strait of Canso Area. Regardless of the difficulties, it was concluded that at least three vital areas had to be immediately protected on Canada's east coast; two in Nova Scotia at Halifax and Sydney, and the other, at St John's New Brunswick. These priorities would be problematic for Lt Col Fraser as supplies would

¹⁵³ Nicholson 1945. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast*, 19 Feb 1945, pg. 5/86 para 23-25

necessarily flow to the main priorities first. It would become a constant battle in obtaining the resources required in defending the Canso Area.

Halifax was the key strategic location and priority. Sydney was vital for several other reasons. First, Sydney held a commanding position along the Cabot Strait and an important anchorage that could hold 75 ships. But in the greater scheme of things, its needs were secondary to Halifax.

Finally, St John, NB too was important as an industrial area and as a strategic location because of its dry dock facilities and, more importantly, as an ocean terminal, but it was well protected deep inside the Bay of Fundy.¹⁵⁴

The greater part of Canada's materiel output was exported to the United Kingdom whose needs were considered most vital. There was a constant demand for replacement or augmentation. It was not surprising, given that the United Kingdom was in direct contact with the enemy, losses were incurred that had to be replaced. This situation reversed itself though in 1942. Once war was declared on Japan, the uninhibited industrial capacity of the United States was soon added to the fray, that wiped out materiel deficits in time.

Surprisingly, there was a severe shortage of trained personnel to man equipment despite the increased industrial output. So, some equipment remained in Depots because of this lack of trained personnel and the pressures that new establishments placed on manpower.¹⁵⁵

Up until that point in the war, the Canadian Homefront was of secondary importance. But by 1942, the scale of production was ahead of the UK's demand, meaning that new Canadian establishments could be trained to fill the vital AA needs along Canada's East Coast, assuming that personnel were available in quantity to do so.¹⁵⁶ But by that time, it was too late! Home units were now drafted for duties and active service in the build up of the Canadian Army overseas. These drafts exacerbated demands on our manpower and replacement pool, which created manning shortfalls.

Even though there was always hope that others in Atlantic Canada would receive Bofors guns once production hit its stride, only Cape Breton saw any augmentation of 40MM Bofors Guns. An additional 8 guns were eventually allocated to Sydney.

These guns were there to protect the Naval installation at Point Edward and the RCAF Seaplane Base at North Sydney. Each of these installations was allocated

¹⁵⁴ Nicholson 1945. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast*, 19 Feb 1945, 5/86 para 23-25

¹⁵⁵ Nicholson 1945. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast*, 19 Feb 1945, 54-62

¹⁵⁶ Nicholson 1945. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast*, 19 Feb 1945, 18/86 para 53

two guns each. The bulk of the guns were sited at the Sydney Steel Works who, surprisingly, received an additional 8 guns.¹⁵⁷

Neither Mulgrave nor Port Hawkesbury received any allocation of AA guns. It was most surprising that they were overlooked. There were vital assets in the Strait of Canso as it was a key rail junction. Goods and services flowed between Cape Breton and the mainland on the railway ferry. It was the Achilles heel of the whole production system. This was the area where the ferry service transported rail cars over the Strait of Canso. It was both an exposed and a prime target. The aerial threat must have been rated very low, but it still had to be protected.



Courtesy of George Freer Archives

But sorting out the number and types of guns, and their allocations and dispositions, was never a simple matter in the grand scheme of things. But those problems paled in comparison to their command and control.

Command arrangements in the Canso Defence Area were assigned to Lt Col Fraser, who was appointed “Officer Commanding” the OC Canso Strait Defence Area. Lt Col Fraser was immediately responsible to guard against the opportunity of enemy attack.

¹⁵⁷ Nicholson 1945. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast*, 19 Feb 1945, . 19/86 para 54
(Note the math in official records does quite add up. It suggests that 12 additional guns were ultimately allocated in Cape Breton. I’m holding to the record as is though).

86 Heavy Bty, RCA was a subordinate unit in the order of battle of the Commander Canso Defence Area. It all sounded simple on paper, but it was never that simple. 86 Heavy Bty, RCA was an independent unit to a great degree. The commanding officer Canso Defence area was responsible for its administration, care, and maintenance through the provision of logistics support. But he had little direction on its operational control or employment. Operational control rested with the Gun Operational Room (G.O.R.) at Sydney, where 86 Heavy Bty came under the actual command of the H.Q. (A.A. Regt).¹⁵⁸ This would prove to be a source of aggravation to Lt Col Fraser that was never truly resolved to mutual satisfaction and was the source of much infighting.

The Bureaucratic Muddle 1939 to 1940

The domain of Lt Col Fraser, commanding officer of the Pictou Highlanders, spanned far and wide. His area of responsibility included not only Mulgrave, but also places as far as St Peters, in Cape Breton, and out along the eastern shore of Guysborough County. It was a widely scattered command.

The bulk of the Pictou Highlanders were concentrated at Mulgrave (387). Detachments of men were despatched from Auld's Cove to Melford in the Strait Area; while others were sent to Hazel Hill on the Eastern Shore, and elsewhere on Cape Breton.

These dispositions though created an unexpected battle, the one against bureaucracy. It was a battle found in finding and procuring shelter, accommodations and defence works for those posted in the Strait of Canso area! The problem was a simple, yet a complicated one. There was little available accommodation, and what was available, was often derelict or unsuitable.

The big issue for Lt Col Fraser, in fact the key issue for many commanding officers in that first year of the war, was the total lack of serviceable and useful facilities. None were available. Added to the burden was the fact that there was a pressing need to get his men sheltered, fed and undercover before the coming of winter snows.

The Pictou Highlanders served on local defence duties in the Canso Defence Area until December 31, 1940. They were disbanded that day and then replaced by an incoming unit. The problem of space simply didn't go away because the Highlanders were posted to duties overseas, January 1, 1941. Over the course of

¹⁵⁸ Nicholson 1945. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast*, 19 Feb 1945, 26/86 para. 66 (ii-iii)

their time in the “Area,” Lt Col Fraser tried to move mountains to properly accommodate and shelter his charges. In fact, that task started the very day the unit entered the Strait area and began immediately upon arrival.

One of Lt Col Fraser’s first forays, was an attempt to contract a facility known as the “Irish Facilities.” Fraser wanted to use this building as an Officer’s Mess. He sent a letter on September 11, 1939, one short day after Canada’s separate declaration of war, to arrange for its use as such. His request was briefly considered and then denied by higher authorities who designated this facility for use as a hospital.¹⁵⁹ The word or needs of the man on the ground mattered little.

So, began Lt Col Fraser’s struggle with a bureaucracy, that was many miles displaced from the scene, and was out of touch with the reality of his immediate and urgent requirements.

It was the problems of means that became the bane of Fraser’s existence over the coming months. The problems of command, the stresses of leadership, and problems of proper equipment and accommodation for his men, had a dramatic impact on his health that were greatly aggravated in his attempts to find suitable local accommodation, especially in the outlying areas.¹⁶⁰ The state of these were often substandard but regrettably, that was the only material immediately available and at hand.

The needs of the 86th Bty RCA were particularly urgent too. Men showed up with no proper accommodation to shelter them. Their problem; and that of others, was solved in the short term. Canvas was drawn from stores at Antigonish for their immediate needs and huts eventually erected in due course.¹⁶¹ But canvas was only to be a very short-term solution.

The staff of the Pictou Highlanders finally conducted a survey of availability and commenced lease negotiations to contract and occupy local facilities. But this became a bureaucratic hell. Facilities were identified, permissions sought, questions asked by higher headquarters, responses made in reply, paperwork fiddled, diddled, and lost, and frustration and indecision reigned supreme!

¹⁵⁹ Canada, National Defence, Dead Files 46-4-2, S&T Services, Accommodation for Troops, Strait of Canso Area, 321.009 (D265) Correspondence, Reports, Returns, Requests, Etc. RE ACCN for Troops in Strait of Canso Area, D/15 Sep 1939 / 16 Mar 1940, Initial Dispositions and Accommodations worked out by 25 Sep 1939, 1, Accommodation Arrangements for Pictou Highlanders, H.200- -4 15 Sep 1939, 2/ 97

¹⁶⁰ Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4, 17 Nov 1939, pg. 30-32/97 – personal letter from Lt Col Fraser CO Pictou Highlanders to OC Military District 6 MGen CF Constantine

¹⁶¹ Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4, Major Clark Accommodation Issues, 22 Sep 1939, 6/97

For the most part, the Pictou Highlander's hands were tied. They had very little authority either to procure or arrange locally at this time. They were advised that it was the responsibility of the Quartermaster General in Ottawa to coordinate all necessary arrangements. Further all leased arrangements were to be directed through them; thence onto Public Works for consideration.

The Army bureaucracy was bad enough. It was only made worse with the insertion of another government department in the process! All that involved another layer of staff and paperwork. In the meantime, winter was fast approaching. There was a very real possibility that the men would suffer as bureaucratic inertia settled in and procurement ground to a halt.¹⁶²

Still several properties were identified that warranted further scrutiny. The unit identified to Ottawa October 12, 1939 the following facilities would greatly assist their immediate requirements:¹⁶³

1. W.N. Meagher Garage - \$12.00/mo.
2. Two former Irving Oil stations \$5.00/mo. each
3. Hillcrest Hotel \$20.00/mo.
4. N. Manseur House \$20.00/mo.
5. N.V. MacLean House (Port) Hawkesbury -\$75.00/month.

The N.V. MacLean House was identified as the alternate for use as a hospital as the Irish Facilities were found to be unsuitable to that purpose.

Thus, their telegram initiated a long odyssey on the road toward approvals. The process was marked by frustration and questions all along the way. Without getting into specifics, it involved a series of letters, telegrams, hastening all for inputs to make the key contracting decisions. Submissions were also lost or delayed in the trail of the paperwork, either in the mail or within the internecine battles of the bureaucracy!¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4, Canadian National Telegram, 27 Sep 1939, 5/97

¹⁶³ Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4, Rentals for Pictou Highlanders – Telegram: Government of Canada Radio Telegram Services Administered by Disarmament of National Defence, 12 Oct 1939, 7/97

¹⁶⁴ Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4 – Issues, Reports and Demands:

a. Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4, 9/97

b. Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4 10/97

c. Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4 – urgency – permission given to make local arrangements if reasonable, pg. 11/97

d. Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4. 12/97

e. Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4, 13/97 – local arrangements made to rent Ms. Hattie home offices and mess \$60/mo. pending approval occupancy 1 Nov 1939 otherwise

f. Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4, 14/97– continuing report problems

The bottlenecks along the way understandably frustrated Lt Col Fraser. But it had a more deleterious impact on his charges for whom he was directly responsible. Continuing delays led to his men being improperly fed, left unwashed, and out in the cold.

The staff made one suggestion, to issue the men with a subsistence allowance. This would provide them the means to make their own arrangements for feeding and victualling. That suggestion appears to have been accepted:

[QUOTE]

“In lieu of the difficulties encountered by us on our quarters and rations payment problem... our suggestion is that the Unit Commander be furnished at this month end with the full amount of allowances in lieu of quarters and rations due the unit as at 30th September 1939. Therefore, all personnel in the unit regardless of how they are billeted, or fed are shown now as drawing full allowances.”¹⁶⁵

[END QUOTE]

It wasn't just that his men were being fed irregularly, it was also that they were left unwashed. Few facilities were available where a man could wash or shower. Lt Col Fraser detailed his woes to his Commanding Officer in a personal letter. Bureaucratic indecision lay at the heart of all his problems.

Fraser was initially promised that decisions on accommodation would be made within three weeks of his arrival. Further, he was promised that construction would commence three weeks thence. What was promised and what was delivered, led to inadequate accommodation for his men. What was leased and available, were nothing more than fire traps.

Fraser's appeals to his superior was indicative of the level of stress that he was under. He became increasingly frustrated with the unnecessary roadblocks placed in his way. This began to take a personal toll that eventually led to illness from the stress and worry.

Ablutions were of a great concern. His men were only able to shower once a week. Getting his men adequately accommodated that coming winter meant there was little time to train. So, it became increasingly difficult to move the markers in the training syllabus. All this added to Fraser's worries who eventually had to go to hospital for a few days to re-coup and recover.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4 Letter E.L. Clark, Major OC 86 Heavy Battery, RCA., 22 Sep 1939, 6/97

¹⁶⁶ Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4 Personal letter from Lt Col Fraser CO Pictou Highlanders to OC Military District 6 MGen CF Constantine, 30-32/97

Apart from bureaucracy, Lt Col Fraser had other problems arising from local matters. One task, a detail to guard the Commercial Cable Company at Hazelhill, became problematic. The section of men detailed there had not acquitted themselves well. In fact, they trashed their rented accommodation, which raised the ire of its Superintendent and brought forth a complaint to the military staff!

Once again, a series of letters were written on the matter. The original letter of complaint from Mr. Drover of the Commercial Cable Company was followed by a missive from headquarters. It was a missive that Lt Col Fraser did not need, he already had enough on his plate. Fraser in the end, wrote a letter of apology with a promise that the Commercial Cable Company would be compensated for their trouble and losses.¹⁶⁷

This was not the unit's most glowing moment. Lt Col Fraser made no excuses for the behaviour of his men. He freely admitted that their behaviour was unacceptable. The unit should have left it cleaner and in a fair state of repair as it was when first occupied.

Competing Demands

An investment in infrastructure set in motion a boom as the government built the facilities from 1939 through to 1940. This boom set up many competing demands. We can see that effect in the evolution and build-up of the BCATP alone as a competitor for goods and services. The BCATP program encompassed the build of 56 flying establishments and 13 ground/support establishments.¹⁶⁸

Over two billion dollars (\$2.2B) were spent on the BCATP throughout the war. But the largesse and the apparent inefficiency of spending had become of great concern to one prominent politician. Eventually the Army was made to account for all its wartime investments to 1943. The scrutiny of wartime spending notably at Debert came under a parliamentary review headed by John Diefenbaker Conservative MP then in opposition.

¹⁶⁷ Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4:

- a. Letter of complaint of damages convey by Lt Col A.H.W. Landon to COL Fraser on behalf of Mr. Drover Superintendent Commercial Cable Company Hazelhill, troops wrecked kitchen of leased facility 31 Aug - 29 Oct 1939., pg. 27/97
- b. pg. 28/97 sent same day...letter of apology LT COL Landon to Mr. Drover, Commercial Cable Company, Hazelhill
- c. pg. 29/97 ... Commercial Cable Company telegram imitated by Mr. Drover to Lt Col Landon raising first complaint and details therein

¹⁶⁸ Hatch 1983, 203, Appendix C.

Diefenbaker's introspection and questions prompted the government to report on its spending. This was necessary to deflect some of the acrimonious criticisms particularly on the state of the earlier construction effort. Politics played a role in adding to everyone's discomfort as they tried to move things along in anticipation of threats and wider defensive needs in the war.

These inquiries had consequences for many subordinate commanders too. There is a much larger story to that found in the problems that faced Lt Col Fraser in his time in command of the Canso Defence Area from 1939-1940. But an equilibrium of sorts was finally achieved by December 1940.¹⁶⁹ The Strait settled down for a period of rest. The troops were trained and quartered in warmer quarters. His job was done! His troops were finally accommodated, fed, and trained meeting their basic requirements. Christmas had come at last. Time was now spent with families and friends. They were rested and were readied for the coming season.¹⁷⁰

Looking back, the Strait of Canso finally closed to marine traffic January 6, 1941. The army was officially notified by Commodore GC Jones, RCN that the withdrawal of the southern examination vessel for the winter would take effect January 3rd.¹⁷¹ The examination of naval traffic was concluded for the season and would only open again in the spring.¹⁷²

Life for all between 1939-1940 was highly charged, not only operationally, but also was the mix of politics, economy, and social intercourse that made their lives most challenging. It was the war within the war, a war of competing demands that sometimes had to be reluctantly satisfied, often to no one's great satisfaction. But these preparations, made in 1940, would all play a role in what turned out to be a pivotal year, 1941. That year was the year that brought the war even closer to Canada in which our resolve and preparations would be tested.

¹⁶⁹ Madigan 2019. Canso Defence Area, 47-62

¹⁷⁰ Madigan 2019. Canso Defence Area, 54-55

¹⁷¹ Canada, National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage. 1941. "Dead files 321.9 (D372), Corresp. Instrs., recce reports, etc. Canso Defs generally." Sep 40/May 41, 10 & 11/21

¹⁷² Madigan 2019. Canso Defence Area, 54-55

Part 2 - The Prelude Canada

Chapter 8 – Standing Alone

Great Britain and the Commonwealth stood alone in the last days of summer in 1940. It was commonly perceived that defeat would follow France's earlier demise. It didn't happen that way. The English Channel, the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, and sacrifice of the British Army kept Germany at bay.

But the strategic balance was not in Great Britain's favour. The Battle of the Atlantic was in full force. Britain hung on by a mere thread. Defeat appeared imminent. The thin red line, "Air Power," was in very short supply. The trip wire in the English Channel, the navy, was heavily tasked. The merchant navy, the North Atlantic lifeline, was heavily mauled. The Army, the shield, was battered and virtually unarmed having lost most of its arms following its retreat from France at Dunkirk.

Great Britain had great need for all types of defence stores. The only access, which was crucial to survival and for pursuing the war, was from across the Atlantic. The industry, stores, and warehouses of Canada and, soon the United States, were set in high gear manufacturing materiel and supplies for the war effort.

Winston Churchill was in full control in the management of the war by 1941. He had his own ideas on how it should be fought and won. He was not only Prime Minister but was also his own Minister of Defence.¹⁷³ By many accounts he was an accomplished, skilled politician and a man of varied experience. More importantly, Churchill was well versed and experienced in how government should manage a war, which shaped his many decisions and directions.

In-house Fighting

The U-boat threat was so pressing that it remained Churchill's most dreaded fear, and he resolved it in declaring the Battle of the Atlantic.¹⁷⁴ Churchill was concerned with the tempo and devastation of the destruction. In his estimate, huge convoy losses were generated by no more than 12-15 U-Boats on patrol at any one time up until 1942.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Churchill 1950. Hinge of Fate, 60-61

¹⁷⁴ Churchill 1950. The Grand Alliance, 122-123

¹⁷⁵ Churchill 1950. Hinge of Fate, 110 -111

Despite the declaration of the Battle of the Atlantic, strategic bombing was viewed as “the priority.” Churchill and the Commonwealth devoted much time, resources, and manpower toward achieving that priority. ¹⁷⁶

By 1942 Churchill faced threats and demands on many fronts straining his limited resources.¹⁷⁷ He knew that he simply could not cover all bases and consequently was forced to optimize his forces. In the end he was left with little choice but to curtail any expansion of Coastal Command and Naval air assets at a critical juncture brewing as far back as 1941. There were simply too many fires to put out with what was available to him. ¹⁷⁸

A major change in the Royal Air Force (RAF) command structure occurred April 1941. Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Bowhill was relieved as Commander Coastal Command and transferred to a newly created position in Canada.

¹⁷⁶ Meilinger, Phillip S. 1996. “Trenchard and “Morale Bombing”: The Evolution of Royal Air Force Doctrine Before Second World War.” *The Journal of Military History*, Vol.60, No.2. , April 1996, 251

¹⁷⁷ Churchill 1950. *Hinge of Fate*,127

¹⁷⁸ Churchill 1950. *Hinge of Fate*, 121 & 127-129, and

Churchill 1950. *The Grand Alliance*,. 112



There was an air of optimism surrounding Bowhill's new posting. The public face and spin was somewhat different to the reality and events that transpired behind the scenes.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Time Magazine, 1941. "World War: IN THE AIR: One-Way Airline." Monday, Oct. 20, 1941. Accessed: 14 February 2011 Source: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,851303,00.html>

Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Bowhill, then Commander in Chief of Coastal Command, was problematic to the management of the RAF. Bowhill fought tenaciously for a fair share of resources for his fighting arm.

Bowhill as Chief of Coastal Command was also a threat to the “orthodoxy” of the day. He directly challenged the RAF’s and Churchill’s position regarding the doctrine of strategic bombing.¹⁸⁰

Uncharacteristically Bowhill was a forward thinking commander who was sensitive and sympathetic to the needs of the Royal Navy. Bowhill held regular meetings with the Royal Navy, whose sole purpose was the direct coordination of a joint effort in the prosecution of maritime warfare.¹⁸¹ Put quite simply, Bowhill was not seen as a company man.

Bowhill’s true misfortune was being in command at a time when he was held accountable for desultory results. He was blamed for the lack of achievement, which was unfounded. Coastal Command’s results and failings rest squarely with the failure of the system in adjusting the priorities and in its failure to allocate Coastal Command a fair share.

Bowhill’s performance was continually attacked from behind the scenes. Churchill and the RAF cast a disparaging view on Coastal Command’s results. This barrage casted a pall on Bowhill’s overall performance. He was not publicly blamed for Coastal Command’s poor performance during the first years of the war though.

The Royal Navy’s support eventually led to a commitment that would see the expansion and modernization of Coastal Command’s resources by some 15 squadrons in 1941. This represented a diversion of approximately 100 squadrons (15%) of planned strength that was heretical to the leadership of Bomber Command.¹⁸²

Bowhill was a threat! Bowhill had on paper, a force of sorts at the beginning of the war. It was never the far-ranging reconnaissance aircraft and bombers required though. His prime job was to protect British shipping, to catch submarines, to spot German naval units with what he had at hand.¹⁸³

Bowhill’s removal was imminent and was coincidental with a transfer of some operational training units to Canada. These units would become critical elements in addressing the looming challenges of his new role. The problem was Bowhill was

¹⁸⁰ Goulter, Christina J.M. 1995. *A Forgotten Offensive: Royal Air Force Coastal Command's Anti-Shipping Campaign*. London: Frank Cass, 1995, 115, 121-122

¹⁸¹ Goulter 1995, 125

¹⁸² Goulter 1995, 125

¹⁸³ World War: In the Air: One-way Airline, 1941

no lightweight, and notwithstanding his command's disparaging results, it was hard to put the full blame squarely on Bowhill's shoulders. The question remained as "what to do with a man of his stature?"

Bowhill was finally removed from his position at Coastal Command and transferred to head Ferry Command in Canada. His new command encompassed resources from the RCAF, including training establishments then in development, notably at Debert and Greenwood, N.S. and Pennfield, NB.¹⁸⁴

1941 RAF Arrives

An airbase at Debert was completed and ready for business by 1941. Its mandate was about to grow in scope with the arrival of Operational Unit 31 to Canada from Great Britain. Its arrival also coincided with Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Bowhill's posting to Canada.

Operational Training Units (O.T.U.) were an integral part of the Royal Air Force (RAF) training system to 1938. They groomed trainees in the many varied aspects of operational flying for all the Royal Air Force's fighting capabilities.

Graduates of initial flight training were streamed through the operational training system to fighter, bomber, and maritime commands. From there trainees were subsequently posted to operational squadrons upon completion of this operational training phase.

The operational training system was designed to remove a huge burden from front-line RAF operational squadrons. Surprisingly, they were only officially designated as Operational Training Units (O.T.U.) in April 1940.

But the war soon complicated that training in Britain. Britain was a dangerous place, and more over, training required safe havens that were, by 1940 becoming increasingly difficult to find.

Training in Britain was often conducted in or around actual areas of active combat operations. As such, trainees were exposed to possible enemy action. The training units had become an encumbrance. However, a fortuitous appeal made by Air Vice-Marshal Breadner (RCAF) in December 1940, eventually saw several units relocated to Canada.

¹⁸⁴ Halliday, Hugh A. 2007. "Bridging the Ocean: Air Force, Part 20." *Legion Magazine*, March 1, 2007. Accessed: 5 December 2014. Source: <https://legionmagazine.com/en/2007/03/bridging-the-ocean/>

Air Vice-Marshal Breadner's desire to move operational training units from Britain was fortuitous as they became part of the BCATP augmenting Canadian resources. The RAF agreed and began with the movement of four of its O.T.U.s in May 1941.

The movement of the elements of operational training units from Britain to Canada would be their answer to Air Vice-Marshal Breadner's earlier appeal. It was also a move designed to redress a problem in moving a backlog of ferrying aircraft to Britain.¹⁸⁵

The units selected to move to Canada included No. 1 School of Navigation, No. 7 & No. 10 Service flying Schools, and No. 2 School of General Reconnaissance. These units were quickly loaded, transhipped by sea, and moved to Canada in three echelons.¹⁸⁶

The first echelon assembled in the U.K. on April 25th, 1941, sailed on May 2, arrived in Halifax on May 21st. The second echelon assembled May 9th, sailed 11 May 1941, arrived June 4th. The third echelon formed on May 23rd, sailed May 30th, and landed on June 16th, 1941.¹⁸⁷

All four O.T.U.s were safely transferred to Canada with all their equipment and staff. These units were subsequently re-numbered upon arrival in Canada. The unit arriving in the first echelon became the seed crop for Operational Training Unit (O.T.U.) 31, stationed at nearby Debert, NS.

There were high hopes for O.T.U. 31 and the airfield at Debert, N.S. It was expected that operational training would begin in earnest very soon after their arrival.¹⁸⁸ But nothing ever happened as planned. Training was very regrettably delayed until August of that year as the airfield was still in an unfinished state.¹⁸⁹

OTU.31 established.

Operational Training Unit (O.T.U.) 31 became one busy unit soon after its arrival in Halifax May 1941. The incoming unit was to instruct and train on what was then, an unfamiliar airframe. The unit's aircraft were replaced with the Hudson Bomber. Neither of the two instructors included in the first echelon from Britain had ever flown the Hudson bomber.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Canada, National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage, DHH File 74/13 No. 31 O.T.U.,3 February 2011, 8

¹⁸⁶ Goulter 1995, 139

¹⁸⁷ DHH File 74/13 No. 31 O.T.U.,3 February 2011, pg. 2

¹⁸⁸ Hatch 1983, pg. 74

¹⁸⁹ Hatch 1983, pg. 74 -75

¹⁹⁰ DHH File 74/13 No. 31 O.T.U.,3 February 2011, pg. 8-9

The Hudson bomber was chosen as the primary aircraft for training for very good reasons. It was the most ubiquitous aircraft in theatre in Great Britain at the time. Coincidentally, it was also the ubiquitous aircraft in backlog.

Presumably, the Hudson was selected because of the dire need for any combat aircraft and that this aircraft was readily and commercially available. Secondly the aircraft type was very modifiable and adaptable to growing and changing needs.

Apart from aircraft selection, the mission, and dispositions at Debert were soon in a constant state of administrative flux. Every change, addition, or deletion had to be reviewed and dealt with by the newly arrived staff.

All these changes added up to an administrative burden. The staff's burden was also exacerbated because the unit was broken up and dispersed on arrival. Experienced officers were selected as a seed crop for needs elsewhere, for other schools, both operational and training units.

The first issue to be sorted out was the unit's mission and mandate. Operational training at Debert had two functions. First, it was to conduct operational training proper. Second, it was to conduct a short conversion course for the ferry program. These two functions were challenging enough notwithstanding the steep learning curve on the unfamiliar Hudson Bomber.

The tasks were conducted because the strategic situation demanded they be done. There were pressing operational needs. The movement of critical aircraft, backlogged on Canadian soil, was viewed as one of the most vital and urgent operational needs.¹⁹¹

The training objectives at Debert were made very clear to the staff:

1. Train selected BCATP graduates for the ferrying operation to move aircraft across the North Atlantic to Great Britain,
2. Direct this effort to speeding up the delivery of crucial aircraft,
3. Make the training as realistic as possible,
4. Train over long distances, in marginal flying conditions,
5. Train out of sight of land and under operational conditions, and
6. Select and train those pilots capable of a trans-Atlantic crossing to do so!

The decision to conduct the training on the Hudson airframe was ultimately the necessary one. Crews selected for the ferry operation had to be familiar with what

¹⁹¹ World War: In the Air: One-way Airline, 1941

was then, the most prolific aircraft in the inventory backlogged in the pipeline of shipments overseas.

Debert became part of the solution to provide the qualified pilots and navigators to do so. The Hudson bomber was part of this training simply because it was necessary. Hopefully, it was the solution that assisted Bowhill to clearing the backlog.¹⁹²



National Defence Canada, Directorate of History and Heritage, PL-5267

8 October 1941 R.A.F. Station Debert N.S., Hudson Bomber being prepared for

Debert was well placed to meet these requirements and challenges. But doing so proved difficult and had consequences for those who eventually trained there!

Matters were compounded by the fact that Debert was far from ready for business when O.T.U. 31 arrived in May 1941. The airfield and infrastructure were very rudimentary; and

barracks, barely liveable at best. The airfield was neither ready for the full pressures of training. However, there was no choice in the matter but to proceed. It was simply a case of making do and getting on with the job!

In and amongst the hustle and bustle of getting established and aircrew training, construction continued fast apace all around the gathering horde. The shells of buildings were soon occupied simply because there was no choice but to inhabit them. Facilities lacked the creature comforts of heat and basic plumbing. Beyond the buildings and barracks, the airfield itself was a moonscape.

Robert Wilson Harris remembered his arrival just as the airfield opened.

[QUOTE]

¹⁹² DHH File 74/13 No. 31 O.T.U., 3 February 2011, 6

“R.C.A.F. Debert was under construction. The drill hall, barracks and mess hall had already been built and large earth-movers were busily dumping a hill into a bog to build the airfield.There was mud everywhere and yawning gulfs where sewers and drains were being installed.”¹⁹³

[END QUOTE]

The initial batch of BCATP students began training under appalling conditions.¹⁹⁴ Conditions were chaotic. The trainers trained, while builders built. The facilities became fully habitable and functional over time. But that came only when the airfield was finally completed. It just wasn't so as its first candidates arrived there.

The inevitable happened. The first serial of twenty pilot trainees arrived at Debert late August 1941 to begin training on the Lockheed Hudson Bomber. Ernest E Allen was one amongst that first group of 20 posted to Debert.

As an EAC addition – Maritime patrols

Canada was a dangerous place to be. Sometimes the “operational” component of the war on Canadian shores was downplayed for a variety of reasons. Much was necessarily kept from public view. Consequently, the war effort on Canadian soil was often considered inconsequential as it was downplayed.¹⁹⁵

But very real missions were conducted at Debert and elsewhere on Canada's east coast during the war. Debert's prime operational mission was an anti-submarine patrol that was also a significant component of its air training.

Debert's anti-submarine training was conducted just off shore, in a box south of Nova Scotia, between Halifax and Yarmouth. This box lay just off the continental shelf in an area of vital approach to Canadian waters that had to be protected.

Anti-submarine patrolling was a mind-numbing duty involving long periods of intense concentration. Aircrew often flew on station with little or nothing to show for the effort. But at other times, that duty was punctuated by brief moments of exhilaration and sheer terror.

Debert's patrols made very few contacts or air attacks on marauding U-boats. Only two attacks were ever officially recorded out of the numerous sorties flown. The large time on station for the most part, confirmed both the futility and the

¹⁹³ Harris, Sergeant R. W. 2010. “Memories of Debert, N.S.” undated Written account in Debert Military Museum Archives. Source: <http://www.debertmilitarymuseum.org/harris.htm>. Accessed: 5 October 2010

¹⁹⁴ Dunmore, Spencer and William Carter, Ph.D. 1991. *Reap the Whirlwind – The Untold Story of 6 Group, Canada's Bomber Force of Second World War*. McClelland & Stewart Inc. Toronto, Canada, 43

¹⁹⁵ Sarty, Roger. 2003. “the “Battle We Lost at Home.” Revisited Official Military Histories and the Battle of the St. Lawrence, *Canadian Military History*, Volume 12, Numbers 1& 2, Winter/Spring 2003, 41

tediousness of the effort to its students. But it was an important duty and a necessary task nonetheless!

The air role was critical to Canada's security at the time. The need for air support in the anti-submarine role became evident during 1942. The Royal Canadian Navy was heavily committed. There was a shortage of naval escorts, too few to meet all the demands and commitments required for the North Atlantic convoy system.¹⁹⁶

It all came to a head when Canada felt the sting of war in its littoral waters. The first naval attack occurred in the Gulf of St Lawrence in 1942. It was the first such incursion on such a scale since the War of 1812.¹⁹⁷

At this time, O.T.U. 31 still had a commitment to conduct an anti-submarine patrol for EAC. O.T.U. 31 conducted this task regularly until 21 December 1943. It kept the requirement for the unit alive under RAF control.

Ironically, RAF officials at O.T.U. 31 argued at the time that this task was an undue strain on the training program and asked that O.T.U. 31 be relieved of the task. The anti-submarine commitment impacted the unit by creating a lag in training. This lag was also exacerbated by delays arising from weather and from a general shortage of available aircraft. All these factors, it was argued; drained resources that were already thinly spread.¹⁹⁸

Looking ahead, EAC finally relented and agreed that O.T.U. 31 could curtail this role commencing January 19, 1944, so it could get on with its primary role of training. It was a compromise of sorts.

O.T.U. 31 was eventually released from its anti-submarine patrol commitment. But little had changed in effect. The training profile and anti-submarine commitment were modified slightly. It may have resulted in an overall reduction of hours devoted to the anti-submarine role. But it remained a significant commitment, nonetheless.

O.T.U. 31 maintained an anti-submarine commitment of two days of patrols of 3-1/2 hrs. and 5-1/2 hours, respectively. It also maintained one night patrol of 3 hours duration. These reduced hours were subsequently fitted into the training schedule commencing January 19, 1944.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Sarty, Roger. 2003. "The "Battle We Lost at Home" Revisited Official Military Histories and the Battle of the St. Lawrence." Canadian Military History, Volume 12, Numbers 1& 2, Winter/Spring 2003, 43

¹⁹⁷ Mosseray, Fabrice. 2002. "The Battle of the St. Lawrence -A Little-Known Episode in the Battle of the Atlantic." *UBoat.Net 1995-2010*, 29 Mar 2002. Source: <http://uboat.net/articles/?article=29> Accessed: 30 November 2010

¹⁹⁸ DHH 74/13, 5

¹⁹⁹ Canada, National Defence, Director of History and Heritage, File 181.002 (D237). 1941. – "Operational Commitments - 31 O.T.U.", 3 February 2011 (letter RCAF G 32A 1100M-10-41 (1022) H.Q. 1062-9-36, Letter "R.A.F. Schools, Debert, N.S. 25th January 1941)

This reduced commitment though was likely enough to hasten the decision to close this RAF school. However, the RAF did not wish to relinquish control so easily.

Increasing U-boat Action

It was not surprising that the RAF wanted out of the Anti-submarine patrol commitment. The results were desultory at best. Little was known concerning the efficacy of airpower against the German U-boat during the Second World War. Its power was greatly masked by the lack of data. Determination of its impacts on maritime or anti-submarine warfare was especially hard to do.

It was also a matter of training then applying that on operations. It all took time. Still, even when the odds lined up in your favour, the matter of sinking a U-boat successfully, was often simply a matter of pure luck. There was much more to it than getting an aircraft in position to attack.

At the juncture of the war near 1942 with the Battle of the Gulf of St Lawrence on the horizon, disposition of air assets would increasingly be guided by operational research. Air assets were directed to areas of known concentration of U-boats based on a combination of intelligence and probability analysis.

On the Canadian side of the Atlantic, EAC reported 84 attacks on U-Boats between 1941 and 1945 with a resulting confirmation of 6 U-Boat kills. This was quite an achievement given the resources at hand.²⁰⁰

There were four key air zones in Canada based on density analysis that guided EAC's operational units. Table 1 provides a picture of these zones as they existed in February 1942:²⁰¹

Table 1 – Density Analysis Zones (Source: Ruffili, 2001, pg. 70)

Zone - miles from Base	Probability of Finds- Uboats
0-200	48
200-400	82
400-600	106
600-800	47

²⁰⁰ Halliday, Hugh A. 2006. "Canadian Military History in Perspective, Hunting U-boats From the Air: Air Force, Part 15." *Legion Magazine* May 1, 2006. Accessed: 22 March 2011. Source: <http://www.legionmagazine.com/en/index.php/2006/05/hunting-u-boats-from-the-air/>

²⁰¹ Ruffili, Dean C. 2001. "Operational Research and the Royal Canadian Air Force Eastern Air Command's Search for Efficiency in Airborne Anti-Submarine Warfare, 1942-1945.", Wilfrid Laurier University, 2001 (thesis), 70. Accessed: 1 February 2014. Source: <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk3/ftp05/MQ65204.pdf>

O.T.U 31 was a subset of EAC’s operational data (Table 2). O.T.U. 31’s results for 1943 (only year data available) when compared to EAC’s summary profile for 1942 in observed U-boat attacks has a high positive correlation of 0.92 (1.00 a perfect correlation).²⁰²

Table 2 – 1942 1943 U-boat Contact Summary East Coast Canada

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Sorties</u>	<u>Hours</u>	<u>U-Boat sightings</u>	<u>Attacks</u>	<u>Damaged</u>	<u>Destroyed</u>
EAC	1942	8600	51000	63	40	16	3
O.T.U.31	1943	1404	6541	7	2	1	
				0.928773893			

Coastal Command had very different expectations of EAC’s effort. Coastal Command held to expectations and results based on operations found in Great Britain and therefore, expected one U-Boat kill for every 50 sorties.

The lion’s share of U-boat losses between 1939 and 1942 were largely attributable to naval action. The contribution of land based aircraft during this period appeared to be marginal. It was only after 1942 though that land based aircraft came to have a real impact and play a role in mounting U-boat losses.

The empirical evidence available between 1939 and 1941 suggested that it was naval action, not air action that achieved results against U-boats. There was little evidence supporting the role of air power in the destruction of U-boats during that period. It would be easy for any observer to conclude then, that use of air power in the direct pursuit of U-boats was ineffectual and a misuse of vital and scarce resources. (Figure 1)²⁰³.

²⁰² Ruffili, 2001, 74-75, and

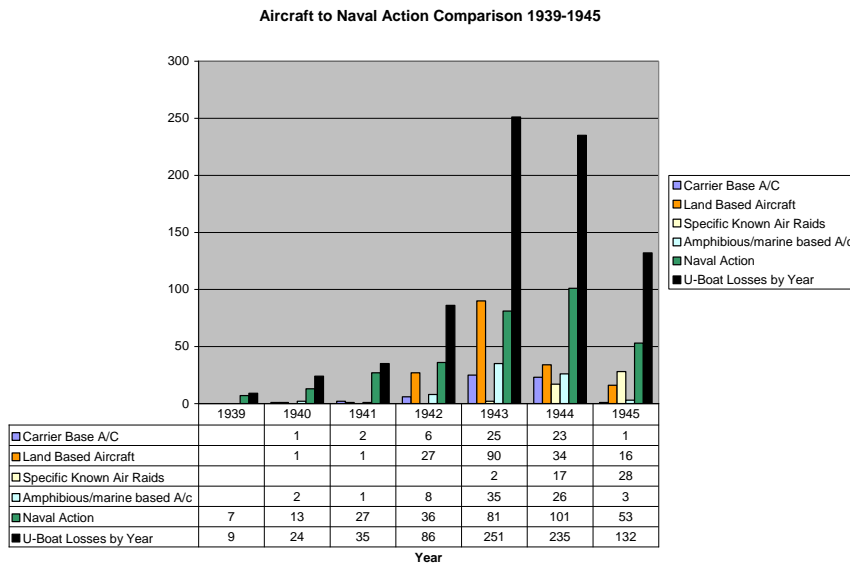
DHH File 74/13 No. 31 O.T.U, pg. 4-5, D.D. 14/7/43

²⁰³ U U-Boat.Net . 2011. “1995-2011, U-Boat Fates – U-Boat Losses 1939-45.” 10 June 2011

Accessed: 10 June 2011. Source: <http://www.uboat.net/fates/losses/cause.htm>

Author’s note. The data presented here was manually transcribed was a compilation of data from a review of each U-boat record of loss from 1939-1945. Some variances may be due to a difference in categorization and grouping by different observers. Consequently, any resulting error is strictly my own.

Figure 1



The leading champion of U-boat sinkings on the face of events was, indeed, naval action. It was not until 1942 that airpower in total and land based aircraft in particular, started to produce results in quantity that even matched the results from naval action (Figure 1).

The point that is often lost in the discussion though, was that these land based attacks played a vital role. The destruction of a U-Boat may have been the direct object, but land based aircrafts' importance was often lost in the unseen and indirect result. Airpower kept the U-Boat submerged, which was probably its most important service and purpose.

The suppression of U-boat activity and operability were likely the more important and vital objects that contributed to limiting a U-boat's operations and actions. It was the limiting of U-boat operations that saved lives and materiel. But maintaining an air umbrella was most likely viewed as the more costly option when compared to strategic bombing in terms of fuel, crew requirements, and aircraft. In the end it simply did not play to the air force doctrine of hitting at enemy morale at a time when the force of personality and public opinion demanded so.

In the meantime, the value of land based aircraft was marginalized and was largely discounted. What was significant in the employment of land based aircraft was the effort made in the role of ‘denial and suppression.’ This is where land based aircraft most likely had the greatest impact.

The problem was that the impact was not directly measurable. It was virtually an unseen and an indirect effect. Any effort or attribution was easily written off in importance as by appearances, it suggested that nothing at all was contributed.

The “anti-submarine” role was a particularly important consideration. Even though the RAF was on record in stating that the anti-submarine task was not what they were there for, they took that as an opportunity to delay the handover of the Debert airfield to the RCAF.

Thus began the slow process of the handover of the school. Maintaining an airfield was a costly venture at this stage of the war. But one deadline after another passed in the delayed handover from RAF to RCAF control.²⁰⁴

The RAF was the senior service relative to the RCAF. The delay in the handover nominally may have been due to a reticence of serving under its junior partner. But there may also have been a certain reluctance and hesitation in handing over a mature facility developed and commanded by the RAF too. Debert had been their home for a number of years.

By June 1944, the number of RCAF personnel posted to Debert finally hit the magic number. The appropriate transfer date was set as June 30, 1944. Organization Order No.383 was then signed. O.T.U. 31 was disbanded effective July 1, 1944. No.7 O.T.U. RCAF was subsequently created and stood up by order, NO.384.²⁰⁵

The mere presence of patrolling aircraft whether on operations or training on Canada’s east coast was therefore a real asset. It was the mere presence of these same aircraft that posed a danger and a present threat to U-boat operations. And they were there. Their moment would soon come in what the Kriegsmarine called the “Happy Times”. A battle would soon be fought all along the North American east coast. It was only a matter of time before they would venture even far deeper into Canadian waters.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ DHH 74/13, 5

²⁰⁵ DHH 74/13, 5

²⁰⁶ Hadley, Michael L. 1985. *U-BOATS against Canada – German Submarines in Canadian Waters*. McGill-Queen’s University Press, Kingston and Montreal, Canada

Chapter 9 The chickens come home to roost 1942

Much transpired in Atlantic Canada the summer of 1942 . Twenty three ships were torpedoed with 22 lost in the Gulf of St Lawrence.²⁰⁷ Canadian littoral waters had suddenly become a hotbed of activity and a battleground. German U-boats now posed an imminent threat to the heartland of Canada.

The U-boat threat around Canada's East coast up until that time seemed both manageable and contained. That illusion was somewhat burst during the summer and fall of 1940 when increased U-Boat activity was noted in and around Canadian approaches. This activity followed Britain's defeat at Dunkirk, particularly after the severe naval loss in escorts involved that weakened their dispositions. The Germans gained access to ports nearest the Bay of Biscay with the fall of France to which Donitz move his headquarters and bases. It brought his U-Boat force 1000km closer to the North American coast that eased their travel and logistics burden as well as increased their loiter time.²⁰⁸

But the intensity increased following the German declaration of war on the United States shortly after Pearl Harbor, December 7,1941. What followed was a full-blown assault beginning on North American territory then down into the Caribbean.

The first U-boats following Germany's declaration were quickly dispatched to North America with U-84 in the lead, one of seven boats comprising Wolfpack Seydlitz departing St Nazaire December 27, 1941. That group had no initial success but nonetheless, it was quickly followed by the dispatch of an additional 12 boats as part of Wolfpack Zithen.²⁰⁹ The kid gloves were off; and now, it was

²⁰⁷ Stacey, Colonel C.P. 1948. *Official History of the Canadian Army In the Second World War, Volume I - SIX YEARS OF WAR ,The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific, 1948.* Department of National Defence, Historical Section (G.S.), Army Headquarters ,Ottawa, Canada. (First Published 1948), 175

<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/Canada/CA/SixYears/SixYears-5.html>

Accessed: 13 August 2010

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For access to full publication see: <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/Canada/CA/SixYears/index.html>

and

Canada, National Defence Headquarters, Directorate of History. 1949. *AFHQ Report 30, Army Participation in Measures Taken by The Three Services for The Security of The Gulf of St. Lawrence And the Lower River During the Period of German Submarine Activity, 1942-45.* original 18 Nov 1949, Ottawa, Canada
[ahq030 list ships sunk 1942 -1944 Gulf of St Lawrence.pdf](#)

²⁰⁸ Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, 21

²⁰⁹ Carey, Alan C. 2019. *Sighted Sub, Sank Same – The United States Navy's Air Campaign against the U-boat.* Casemate Philadelphia & Oxford.1950 Lawrence Road, Havertown, PA 19083 USA, 9

an all out war. To the Germans the operations against the US and Canada were part of Operation Drumbeat also known as the Happy Times.

It came as a visceral shock to many Canadians that German U-boats dared to enter our waters and were now pointing a dagger at the very heartland of Canada. U-boats operated from Newfoundland in the north, up the St Lawrence estuary, and over far south below Halifax in 1942. In fact, if you look at any map with a discerning eye, it was a significant area of operation.²¹⁰

The Canadian war zone and waters were broadly defined in an “RCN Operational Plotting Sheet – East Coast of Canada” that was developed by the Department of Mines and Technical surveys, Ottawa, 1942. Broadly speaking the area spanned longitude 50 to 69 degrees west, encompassing the Gulf of Maine to the Strait of Belle Isle, thence from New York to Labrador and then eastward to 41 degree west.²¹¹

That was the official view. This battle area can be further subdivided, both externally and internally. Externally the battle lay along the convoy lines to the west and the area immediately off the Atlantic coast and along the continental shelf. Internally that battle area is easily defined in two areas, the Gulf of St Lawrence and the Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy, a body of water contiguous between the US and Canada, where the highest tides in the world occur.

It’s significant to note that the Kriegsmarine had no plans for incursions into the St Lawrence. Their first incursion was merely accidental. However, the Kriegsmarine quickly realized an opportunity. U-553 who had settled there for some repairs, successfully attacked shipping, that prompted German consideration that their initial attack truly struck at Canada’s heartland and morale. Canadian military dispositions seemed to be lacking, were unprepared, and were largely disorganized.

The great prize then, was indeed the blow to Canadian morale. Questions were soon raised by many “as to how German submarines could have carried out such vicious attacks with complete impunity within Canada’s territorial waters?”²¹² Up until this, Canadians were ambivalent to the U-boat threat in home waters.²¹³

The naval resources at Canadian disposal in the summer of 1942 protecting the Gulf of St. Lawrence amounted to one Bangor class minesweeper, two Fairmilies class motor launches, and an armed yacht. This naval task force was insufficient

²¹⁰ Hadley 1985, ix and Plates, xxiv-xxv

²¹¹ Hadley 1985, ix and Plates, xxiv-xxv

²¹² Mosseray 29 March 2002

²¹³ Hadley 1985, 52

for the requirements of patrolling, much less protecting, a water course 575 km long and 110 km wide at some points.

The operational area roughly bounded an area from Sept-Îles, Quebec to the Strait of Belle Isles on the North Shore of Quebec and Labrador, and on the South Shore from Rivière du Loup to the Gaspé Peninsula, thence to New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island with Newfoundland as the cork in the bottle to the east.²¹⁴ The other area deep within Canadian waters lay between Nova Scotian on the one shore, and New Brunswick/Maine on the opposite shore, with the body of water known either as the Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy. Each posed unique opportunities for the Kriegsmarine to exploit that had not gone unnoticed.

An Overview of 1942

Nonetheless it was not surprising that many tantalizing targets in and around Canada's east coast existed that tempted Doenitz and the U-boats. Lucrative targets drew the Kriegsmarine closer into Canadian shores. There were other tempting targets other than ships at sea. Those targets included industrial and military facilities and infrastructure along the inland shores. The existence of such temptations also heightened Canada's awareness to a growing security concern and threat.

And it only got worse day by the day in the first half of 1942, following the United States' declaration of war on Japan in December 1941. Germany likewise emboldened, declared war against them. Germany now fulfilled their obligations under the Tripartite Agreement with Japan and Italy. U-boats were amassed and the gloves came off. Germany was no longer contained by "American neutrality." US shipping was now a legitimate target. It opened a hornet's nest that saw an increased U-boat presence and activity off the North American seaboard that had consequences for Canada as well.

U-boats could just have easily wreaked havoc all along Canada's eastern seaboard, but the Kriegsmarine chose to select and concentrate on the more lucrative targets of US merchant shipping. Sadly, the US failed to employ the lessons learned by Canada and Great Britain to convoying merchant shipping. In fact, they failed to protect their merchant shipping initially. US authorities incorrectly presumed that this shipping was safe from harm and current measures were adequate.

The worst happened. U-boats it was said rode "... on the wave of success unprecedented in the history of sea warfare." Sinkings world wide were three

²¹⁴ Mosseray 29 March 2002

million tons in the first half of 1942.²¹⁵ A significant number of that tonnage was sunk off the North American seaboard.

But as the summer wore on, the Americans finally gained the upper hand. Sea and air resources gained control over their coastal waters and a convoy system was finally implemented. The lesson was learned the hard way. U-boats were forced back out into the Atlantic where they took positions along the North Atlantic convoy routes.²¹⁶

U-boat tactics then were to harry and attack the convoy system all along the Western Approaches for both east and west bound traffic. West bound traffic was attacked until reaching safe waters off Newfoundland.²¹⁷

These tactics suggest that most of the action was to the North and East of Nova Scotia. It's true to an extent as the German Navy concentrated their forces there to do maximum damage. But U-boats ranged far and wide. In fact, on November 11, 1942, there were 128 U-boats on war patrol in various parts of the globe.²¹⁸

It was their concentration first along the US east coast, that eventually led to an incursion into the Gulf of St Lawrence. All began with the engine troubles of U-553 that led to increased activity there. It was the unintended consequence of that trouble, which brought surprise to Canadian defence planners, and an increased danger found in a U-boat presence within Canadian waters.

For example, seven boats were on patrol off Newfoundland, Maritime Canada, and the eastern Coast of the United States. There were several boats placed near or in Canadian waters. U-518 commanded by Oblt. Friedrich-Wilhelm Wissmann was in position at 48.45N, 63.15W, inside the Gulf of St Lawrence, south of Anticosti Island, east of Percé Qc. Notably, U-518 had departed Kiel on September 26, 1942 and was at sea 47 days.

U-183 (type IXC/40) commanded by Kptlt. Heinrich Schäfer was in position 44.15N, 63.15W just off the mouth of Halifax. U-183 departed Kiel on September 19, 1942 and remained at sea 96 days, returning to Kiel, December 23rd.

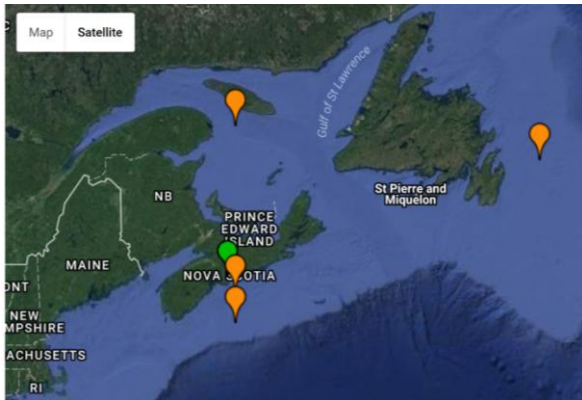
U-106 (type IXB) commanded by Kptlt. Hermann Rasch was in position 43.21N, 63.15W south of Nova Scotia, off the Continental Shelf. U-106 departed Lorient on September 22, 1942 returning December 26th and was at sea for 96 days.

²¹⁵ Edwards 2014. *Donitz and the Wolf Pack*, 74

²¹⁶ Edwards 1996, 74

²¹⁷ Edwards 1996, 75

²¹⁸ Uboat.net 2024. "War, U-Boats on Patrol this date, 11 November 1942." © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason . Accessed: 29 January 2018. Sources: 1. [U-boat patrols by date - Boats - uboa.net](https://www.uboa.net/boats/patrols/search.php), and 2. <https://www.uboa.net/boats/patrols/search.php>



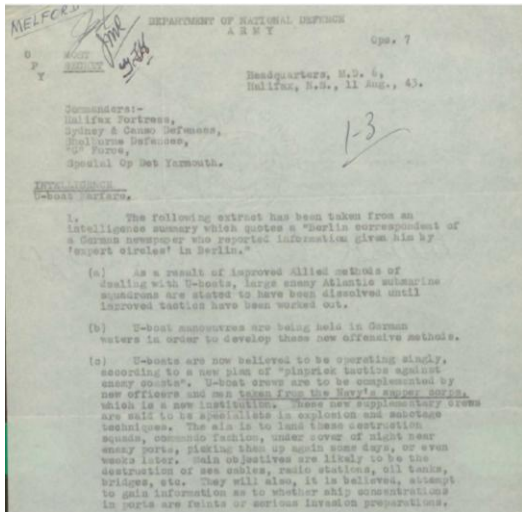
Source: UBoat.net (google maps) 11 November 1942²¹⁹

U-518's patrol was one of special interest and, one that presented a great danger to Canada. Hans-Günther Brachmann was in command on the new type IXC boat U-518, August 19, 1942. It was Wissmann's first patrol on this new type. Moreover, it was a special mission. Wissmann was tasked to land an agent in North America.

Wissmann departed his home port at Kiel, Germany on September 26, 1942 and reached North America at the end of October. U-518 entered Conception Bay on November 2nd. Wissmann announced his presence in Canadian waters by sinking 2 vessels (Rose Castle and P.L.M. 27). This likely jeopardized his primary mission; nonetheless, he successfully landed an enemy agent November 9th at Baie des Chaleurs, in New Brunswick Canada.

²¹⁹ Uboat.net 11 November 1942

Having completed his main mission, Wissmann headed for open waters. Twelve days later he intercepted convoy ON-145. He did further damage by sinking one other ship and damaging two more. His patrol continued and on 23 November he sank one last ship before heading to France. Wissmann, reached his home port on 15 December, completing what was a very successful mission.²²⁰



From Files Melford Battery, Directorate of History and Heritage, Dead files 142.61B8609(D2) (B.B.S. 1-2), OP Orders, instr for 86 Coast Bty at Forts Beacon and Melford Jan 42/Feb 45, Pg. 56 of 75

Wissmann operated deep in Canadian waters, but other patrols had an impact as well. The patrol of U-106 was of interest. At 1547 hours on October 11, 1942, U-106 sighted a British ship, Waterton commanded by Master William Lutjens. Waterton was in convoy BS-31.

Waterton was hit by two torpedoes from U-106 (Type IXB) and sank by the stern north of Cape Breton Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. This was

close enough to bring alarm to the growing danger of lurking U-boats in Canadian waters. The master of Waterton, 24 crew members, and two gunners survived this ordeal. They were fortunate to have been picked up and rescued by HMCS Vison commanded by T/Lt W.E. Nicholson, RCNR where the survivors were landed at Sydney.²²¹

U-183 (Type IXC/40) had the quieter patrol. It too sunk one ship. This attack happened approximately at 09.49 hours on 3 December 1942. It happened much further away from Nova Scotia's coast line but still well within Canadian waters. The Empire Dabchick commanded by Master Philip Edward Birch; OBE was in convoy ONS-146. The Empire Dabchick was attacked, torpedoed, and sunk by U-183. The position was about 200 miles southeast of Sable Island, Nova Scotia. The master of Empire Dabchick, his crew of 36, and the eleven gunners were all lost.²²²

Germany was no longer contained by "American neutrality." US shipping were now legitimate targets. U-boats could just have easily wreaked havoc all along

²²⁰ Uboat.net 11 November 1942, U-518

²²¹ Uboat.net 11 November 1942, U-106

²²² Uboat.net 11 November 1942, U-183

Canada's eastern seaboard, but the Kriegsmarine chose to select and concentrate on the more lucrative targets of US merchant shipping. The sad fact is, the USN failed to adequately protect their merchant shipping. US authorities incorrectly presumed that this shipping was safe from harm and current measures were adequate.²²³

Admiral Ernest King, failed to heed both Canadian and British advice. King was likely an Anglophobe suspicious of British ambitions.²²⁴ In fact, the US commander-in-chief of the fleet admonished the RCN in 1942 with this insensitive statement;

[QUOTE]

“Your people, have as yet had little opportunity to conduct the work involved on the scale required.”²²⁵

[END QUOTE]

King insulted Canadian sensitivities as they had been at war for two years before the US had even entered the conflict. And in the meantime, the RCN had learnt its lessons, built up considerable forces, and prepared defences around major ports like Sydney, and St. John's. All were strengthened and fortified with new artillery, bunkers, and anti-submarine nets. Furthermore, the RCN learned the value of airpower in combination with naval assets that saw high cover aircraft extended further into the mid-Atlantic, providing a protection to all convoys beneath their wings. So, the Canadians had a deeper appreciation, experience, and resolve that was misunderstood or unappreciated by Admiral King.

U-boat captains were wary of these tactics and sought lucrative targets elsewhere. That “elsewhere” in 1942 began with Operation Paukenschlag (Drumroll) along the US east coast that saw the slaughter of merchant shipping begin.²²⁶

Admiral King saw little value in the convoy system. He took an aggressive approach to seeking out the U-boats to destroy them, but he had little in the manner of warships, aircraft, or other weapons to do so. So, US merchant shipping steamed off the US coast, using open radio frequencies, and were illuminated by shore lighting silhouetting many. Consequently, these were often targeted and destroyed

²²³ Cook, Tim. 2024. *The Good Allies: How Canada An The United States Fought Together To Defeat Fascism During The Second World War*. Penguin Random House Canada Limited 225-226

²²⁴ Barris 2022. *The Battle of the Atlantic-gauntlet to victory*, 210-212

²²⁵ Cook 2024, 223

²²⁶ Cook 2024, 225

sending many ships and cargoes to the bottom. The US had much to learn but took little advice from the RCN.²²⁷

Unexpectedly, the seeds of the Battle of the Gulf of St Lawrence began here too.

Battle of Gulf of St Lawrence Launched

The Battle of the Gulf of St Lawrence was both expected and yet was also a complete surprise to Canadian military authorities.

The Battle began with U-553 laying down a gauntlet with the campaign commencing on May 12, 1942. It started with an incursion a few kilometres off Anticosti Island where its torpedoes sunk the British freighter *Nicoya*. Less than two hours later U-553 once again destroyed a ship, the Dutch freighter, *Leto*.²²⁸

Originally U-553 had been on a patrol line just off Boston. But U-553 encountered some engine trouble. It changed course northwards heading towards what was assumed to be calmer waters in the St. Lawrence for urgent repairs.²²⁹

The Kriegsmarine had no plans for incursions into the St Lawrence. This first incursion was merely accidental. However, the Kriegsmarine quickly realized it as an opportunity. U-553's attack truly struck at Canada's heartland and morale. Canadian military dispositions seemed to be lacking, were unprepared, and were largely disorganized.

The great prize then, was the blow to Canadian morale. Questions were soon raised by many "as to how German submarines could have carried out such vicious attacks with complete impunity within Canada's territorial waters?"²³⁰

Naval resources at Canada's disposal in the summer of 1942 protecting the Gulf of St. Lawrence were minimal. They amounted to one Bangor class minesweeper, two Fairmilies class motor launches, and an armed yacht. This naval task force was insufficient for the requirements of patrolling, much less protecting, a water course 575 km long and 110 km wide at some points.

The operational area roughly bounded an area from Sept-Îles, Quebec to the Strait of Belle Isles on the North Shore of Quebec and Labrador, and on the South Shore from Rivière du Loup to the Gaspé Peninsula, thence to New Brunswick, Nova

²²⁷ Cook 2024, 226

²²⁸ Mosseray 29 March 2002

²²⁹ Mosseray 29 March 2002

²³⁰ Mosseray 29 March 2002

Scotia, and Prince Edward Island with Island of Newfoundland as the cork in the bottle to the east.²³¹

Canada was unprepared and had to quickly reorganize its resources. But so too was the German navy. It too was most unprepared for war in 1939. It would be two years before U-boats began to seriously threaten the western Atlantic.²³²

Thus, up until 1941 the German Navy confined its activities largely in the approaches to the British Isles. It was inevitable though that they would come to operate further in the western Atlantic and ultimately in the Gulf of St Lawrence, so their untimely arrival was indeed expected. It was only a question of “when”?

Until it actually happened, Canada only planned contingencies for such an eventuality. These plans included the employment of Quebec -Sydney convoys and the establishment of a naval base at Gaspé for a Gulf escort force. There was also consideration given to the need of routing materiel overland for cargo which normally went by river to Canadian Atlantic port facilities.²³³ The St. Lawrence traffic was considered valuable but was secondary in importance to the needs of ocean going convoys to Great Britain and to that of the oil tankers transiting along the American coast from the Caribbean.

Canada’s contingency plans were not a mere afterthought. The Canadian Government had considered both its East and West Coast defence needs well before the Second World War. Eastern Air Command was established on September 15, 1938 because of the threat posed by the Munich crisis in that year. Defence plans were developed that included bases and squadrons of aircraft. But little was done.

Based on Canada’s preliminary planning, a U-boat threat was indeed anticipated but the practicality of dealing with it, all came down to a question of resource allocation. The disparity of resources and organization was not felt until the first action in May 1942; hence the surprise on their arrival there. Until then, because

²³¹ Mosseray 29 March 2002

²³² Halliday, Hugh A. 2006. “Canadian Military History in Perspective, Eastern Air Command: Air Force, Part 14.” March 1, 2006, *The Legion Magazine*. Accessed: 27 January 2011. Source: <http://www.legionmagazine.com/en/index.php/2006/03/eastern-air-command/>

²³³ Cunningham, D.H. 1949. *Army participation in measures taken by the three services for the security of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the lower river during the period of German submarine activity, 1942-45*. Report No. 30, Historical Section (G.S.) Army Headquarters, 18 November 1949. Canada. National Defence. Directorate Of History And Heritage. Last edited: 9 October 2018, 2 .Source: [Army participation in measures taken by the three services for the security of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the lower river during the period of German submarine activity, 1942-45 - Canada.ca](http://www.history.gc.ca/military-history/1942-45-german-submarine-activity)

there was virtually no action in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the resources were simply allocated to where they were most needed, and a level of risk accepted.

Although much thought and considerable effort had been put into Canada's defence needs, other priorities contrived to limit access to modern aircraft, technology, and other resources. Dealing with a theoretical U-Boat threat was deferred until events necessitated a re-evaluation.²³⁴ In any case, any plan would have to be augmented from resources at hand.

So, The Battle Expands

Following U-553's recent success and its impact on Canadian morale, the Kriegsmarine quickly seized the opportunity to point a dagger at the heartland of Canada striking fear everywhere. Several U-boats followed U-553 in quick succession over the summer and fall of 1942. Their stories follow.

U-132 (10 Jun- 16 Aug 1942)

Following U-553 next into the Gulf was U-132. Its journey began June 10, 1942, beginning at La Pallice upon leaving its home base. It was to be its second patrol that year under command of Ernst Vogelsang. Vogelsang's orders took U-132 in the direction of North America. His outward bound journey proved to be eventful. On June 13th, U-132 was attacked in the Atlantic where it sustained considerable damage to its periscope.²³⁵ This event occurred while U-132 operated with Wolfpack Endrass (12-17 June 1942) as a part of this patrol.

U-132 also sustained damage in its engine room by gunfire and then found itself rattled from depth-charging from an unknown escort vessel. B.d.U. ordered an immediate return to La Pallice for repairs but Vogelsang demurred. Instead, he continued across the Atlantic then into the Gulf of St. Lawrence following his original orders. His records indicated that this sortie began on July 6th, from whence *U-132* bagged three merchantmen out of convoy QC15. He was attacked for his efforts with a depth charges at the hands of HMCS *Drummondville*.²³⁶

²³⁴ The Juno Beach Centre. 2024. "Canada in the Second World War -Arms & Weapons – Home Defence – The Creation of the Home War Establishment." Funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage

Source: [Home Defence : Juno Beach Centre](#)

Accessed: 4 Apr 2024

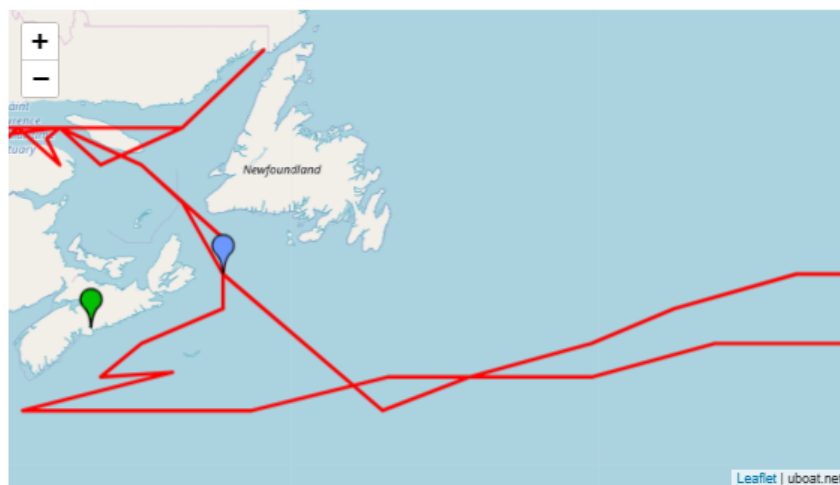
²³⁵ Morgan, Daniel & Bruce Taylor. 2011. *U-Boat Attack Logs – A Complete Record of Warship Sinkings from Original Sources 1939-1945*. Seaforth Publishing, Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 47 Church Steet Barnsley, S Yorkshire, S70 2AS, 193

²³⁶ Morgan & Taylor 2011, 193

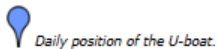
Prudence suggested a return to La Pallice, but Vogelsang pressed on with his mission, nonetheless.

To delineate the beginning of a Gulf patrol, U-132's foray into the Gulf of St Lawrence will be used as an example. U-132's position on Jun 30, 1942 was at the entrance into the Gulf marked by a selected arbitrary line between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland in the area of the Cabot Strait. U-132 then proceeded from this point into the Gulf for a patrol that lasted 24 days, exiting July 23rd. It was a considerable effort in which U-132 devoted some 35% of its 68 days at sea on this patrol in the Gulf before returning to La Pallice.

U-132's position on 30 Jun 1942



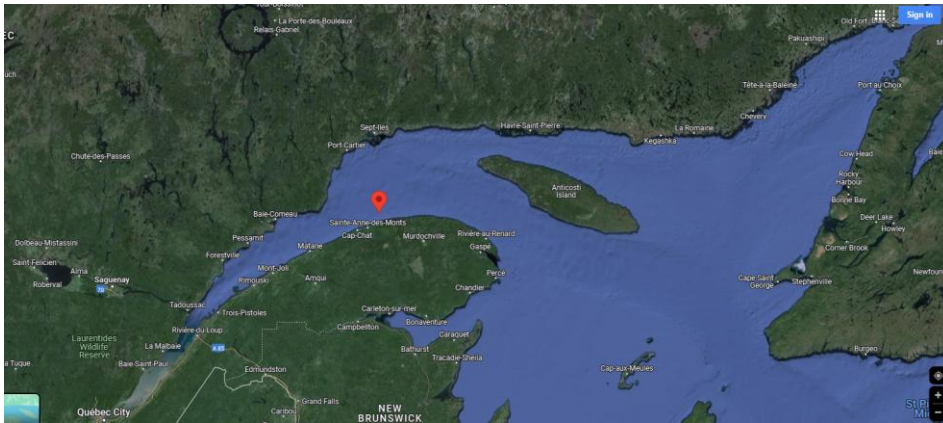
Legend



Source: [Patrol of German U-boat U-132 from 10 Jun 1942 to 16 Aug 1942 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](#)

U-132's action began July 6th in which three ships were sunk near Cap Chats/Ste Anne de Monts at 49.30, -66.30. Subsequently; Anastassios Pateras, Hainaut, and

Dinaric with QS-15 in convoy from Quebec to Sydney, NS were lost.²³⁷ For his efforts, U-132 received the attention of HMCS Drummondville. U-132 sustained considerable damage, and hunted relentlessly when at 12:21 a.m. on July 7th, it once again received a severe mauling.²³⁸



Remaining in the narrows of the St Lawrence was not an option. U-132 escaped and moved eastwards up along the North Shore of Quebec towards Sept Îles. Here on July 8th, a submarine was spotted on the surface just a few miles away from Sept Îles. The public observed members of a U-boat crew seen diving and swimming underwater near the boat. Apparently they were investigating damage to the hull.²³⁹

U-132 was then pursued and harried. From Sept-Îles it made its way toward the southern approach to Anticosti Island where on the 8th, it rounded the Island, and then on the 9th, headed eastwards towards the Strait of Belle Isles. U-132 required an unobtrusive place to hide to effect repairs.

²³⁷ UBoat.Net 2024. U-132 Patrol details

²³⁸ Greenfield, Nathan M. 2004. *The Battle of the St Lawrence – The Second World War in Canada*, Harpers-Collins Publishers Ltd. 2 Bloor Street, 20th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 61

²³⁹ Greenfield 2004, 63

Perhaps that can be explained in the following events. During the summer of 1942 (no time frame given), a U-boat was observed by one excited young man of Natashquan, a small, isolated town on the North Shore of Quebec astride the Gulf of St Lawrence. His alleged U-boat sighting was reported to his local mayor. He in turn tried to illicit some action from RCAF authorities at Mont Joli, the nearest airbase. It finally took an intervention from Ottawa to get Mont Joli to despatch an airplane. But by then, it was too late either to locate or to confirm the U-boat after seven hours.²⁴⁰

This U-boat incident was not a solitary case. Another was also observed surfaced at or near an old lighthouse again, near Natashquan.²⁴¹ Interestingly this boat was observed for well over an hour while its crew seemingly went for a swim. That in of itself seems unbelievable. Any one who has had some experience of swimming those waters, even at the height of summer, will find the experience to be an excruciating one. The extremities turn blue in short order. But perhaps given the desperate conditions in a U-boat, any chance to clean the body; however uncomfortable, may have been both a welcomed and a necessary distraction.

Many residents recalled that in one day alone five ships were sunk in the Gulf of St Lawrence, so locals were well aware and attuned to the dangers and the importance of rapid reporting.²⁴² These incidents may have been attributed to U-132 and perhaps a bellwether of things still to come in the Strait of Belle Isle when torpedoes were used to attack shipping and other facilities, perhaps by a separate U-Boat on 27th and 28th August of that year.²⁴³

From the 10th to the 20th of July U-132 meandered in the Gulf. From 9-12 July in particular, U-132 headed in a westward direction towards its highest approach in the Gulf of St Lawrence in a position nearest Blanc Sablon opposite the Quebec-Labrador border. It brought U-132 into one of the narrowest chokepoints of its journey along Canadian shores.

²⁴⁰ Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, 64-65

²⁴¹ Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, 64-65

²⁴² Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, 64-65

²⁴³ Wikipedia. 2017. "Convoy LN-7." page was last edited on 29 June 2017, at 11:06 (UTC). Accessed: 1 Feb 2021.

Source: [Convoy LN-7 - Wikipedia](#)

Commented [GM1]: The identity of that U-Boat to be confirmed

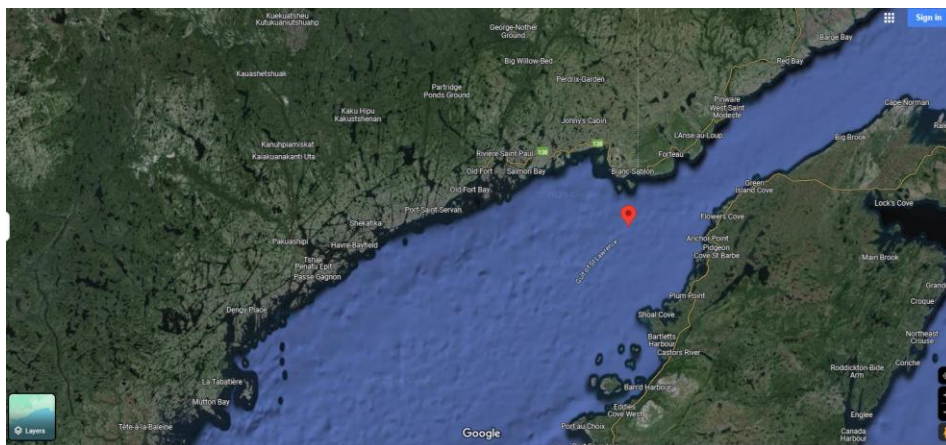
Commented [GM2R1]: Presumably U-165 who entered the Gulf through there 28 Aug...limited daily reports for this boat none on the 27th and a series missing after the 29th!

Commented [GM3R1]: Nope not this one according to [Battle of Bell Island - Wikipedia](#) It was Belle Island U-513 Sep 1942 that did the deed.

Commented [GM4R1]: Bell Island in Conception Bay Nfld...no where near Starit of Bell Isle...so dis regard this line of attack

Commented [GM5R1]: On Positive side this provides and interestin story for action I the Atlantic and the attempted capture of ST John's NFLD

Google earth Map coordinates: 11 Jul 1942 – off Blanc Sablon on QC/Labrador Border



At this point, U-132 once again proceeded back down river toward its original Godbout/Matane patrol line. Here it remained for a time before egressing from the Gulf proper, July 23rd. Before that though, on July 20th, U-132 attacked and severely damaged *Frederika Lensen* then in convoy *QS-19*^[31] near Anticosti Island. The ship was subsequently towed to Grand Valée Bay and beached. But the damage was done, and the ship considered beyond repair. U-132 broke *Frederika Lensen's* back. The ship was abandoned as a total loss.²⁴⁴

One more loss was attributed to U-132, July 30th, Pacific Pioneer in convoy with ON-113.²⁴⁵ Pacific Pioneer was torpedoed on U-132's homeward bound voyage.

U-132 spent 68 days at sea, accumulating 5 victories for its effort.²⁴⁶ It was a significant haul. U-132 returned to La Pallice August 16th.

U-165 (7 August-27 September 1942)

²⁴⁴ Wikipedia. 2024. "German submarine U-132 (1941)." Accessed 30 April 2024. page was last edited on 6 March 2024, at 23:19 (UTC). [German submarine U-132 \(1941\) - Wikipedia](#)

²⁴⁵ UBoat.Net 2024. U-132 Patrol details

²⁴⁶ Wikipedia. 2024. "German submarine U-132(1941)."

U-165 was ordered to the Gulf of St Lawrence to continue the German onslaught. U-165's foray into the Gulf of St Lawrence was not to be a one of event. It proved to be a tag team match in concert with U-517 who had accompanied her through the Strait of Belle Isle roughly the same date.

U-165 departed Kiel August 7, 1942 arriving at the entrance of the Strait of Belle Isle August 28th. An unusual approach into the Gulf of St Lawrence, U-165 began its transit into the Gulf by passing through the narrows between the shores of Newfoundland-Labrador and Quebec. It then moved westward towards a line where most of its peers lay at one time a point between Matane and Godbout. It would appear from the scant records that U-165 also patrolled between Matane and Anticosti Island orbiting somewhere in the middle of the St Lawrence River.

U-165's passage through the Strait of Belle Isle was most propitious. On its arrival U-165 caught two ships in its sights; Arlyn and USS Laramie (AO 16) then in convoy with SG-6. U-165 attacked and damaged both ships that announced its arrival in the Gulf.

U-165 attacked both ships at 0232 hours in quick succession, one with a spread of four and the other, with two torpedoes at the north end of Belle Isle Strait that day. Three detonations were heard. Hoffmann claimed the two ships; noting the following; one 10,000 grt sunk, and a second ship of 5000 grt damaged. In fact, he did not achieve those results. Both the fleet oiler USS Laramie (AO 16) and the Arlyn were only damaged.²⁴⁷

Arlyn was subsequently sunk later the same day, August 28th by U-517 (Härtwig). The ship initially stayed afloat for a time, and then levelled off with its decks awash. Most of its crew abandoned ship.

Arlyn had its own protection and was manned with 14 armed guards who defended the ship with one 4in and four 20mm guns. Its gunners remained aboard until the last possible moment defending the ship. Arlyn was finally dispatched by U-517 at 0844 hours on the same day. Three officers and nine men were lost out of the 49 souls aboard.²⁴⁸

The second ship, USS Laramie was only damaged by U-165 and escaped further mayhem. As an auxiliary oiler, USS Laramie carried high octane fuels at the time. It was indeed struck by one of U-165's torpedoes on its forward port side. The detonation immediately caused Laramie to list to port. She went down some 37

²⁴⁷ UBoat.net. 2024. "Ships hit by U-boats – Arlyn – American Steam Merchant." © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 1 May 2024. [Arlyn \(American Steam merchant\) - Ships hit by German U-boats during WWII - uboa.net](https://www.uboa.net/Arlyn-(American-steam-merchant)-Ships-hit-by-German-U-boats-during-WWII-uboa.net)

²⁴⁸ UBoat.net. 2024. "Ships hit by U-boats – Arlyn – American Steam Merchant."

feet by the bow. Her Captain took extraordinary efforts saving her by extensive flooding forward. U-165's damage resulted in a hole 41 feet long and 34 feet high.²⁴⁹

USS Laramie was then safely escorted back to Sydney, NS by US Coast Guard cutter, USS Mohawk (WPG 47). On August 30th, the ship received temporary repairs, so she was able to steam back to Boston from the 2nd to the 5th of September for final damage repairs.

USS Laramie's master, Cmdr P.M. Moncy, received the Navy Cross for his extraordinary feat, by taking immediate and effective action saving his ship. USS Laramie was a floating bomb and Moncy's courageous efforts were noted. He put his life on the line in saving his ship in spite of flooding and the imminent danger of explosion.²⁵⁰

U-165's tally mounted when on 6/7 September in attacked several ships in convoy QS-33. Merchant ship Aeas was torpedoed by U-165 September 6th on the Godbout Matane line at 49° 10'N, 66° 50'W - Grid BA 3836. She was in convoy QS-33 at the time. Significantly several other ships were also attacked between the 6th and 7th September in which HMCS Raccoon was also sunk.

Aeas had a complement of 31 in which two died and 29 survived this attack. There were 31 aboard HMCS Raccoon. There were no survivors.²⁵¹ HMCS Raccoon under command of LCdr J.N. Smith, RCNR was reported missing. Unfortunately, what led to HMCS Raccoon demise was that she left convoy QS-33 at midnight to engage a U-boat and subsequently sunk. Only debris remained and sadly, with one body found days later.²⁵² There was more to this story.

A closer inspection of U-165's patrol is telling of just how vicious and tragic this campaign truly was. On September 6th, U-165 launched a torpedo at the Greek merchant ship Aeas, killing two. But U-165 had been sighted a few days earlier near Matane, by HMCS Raccoon. In that encounter, U-165 launched two torpedoes towards HMCS Raccoon that crossed its bows at perilously close range. It was a close call, but Raccoon escaped unscathed on this occasion, but not for long.

Other ships in company with Raccoon guessed it had been pursuing U-165 as they heard what they thought were depth charges dropped. It was later discovered that

²⁴⁹ UBoat.net. 2024. "Ships hit by U-boats – USS Laramie – American Fleet Oiler." © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 1 May 2024. [USS Laramie \(AO 16\) \(American Fleet oiler\) - Ships hit by German U-boats during WWII - uboat.net](#)

²⁵⁰ UBoat.net. 2024. "Ships hit by U-boats – USS Laramie – American Fleet Oiler

²⁵¹ UBoat.net. 2024. "Ships hit by U-boats – Aeas." © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 2 May 2024. Source: [Aeas \(Greek Steam merchant\) - Ships hit by German U-boats during WWII - uboat.net](#)

²⁵² UBoat.net. 2024. "Ships hit by U-boats HMCS Raccoon"

the sounds heard were those of a German torpedo ripping through the converted yacht. HMCS Raccoon and its entire crew of 37 were lost in an instant.²⁵³

Amongst Raccoon's dead was Supply Assistant John Sheflin. Ironically as his ship went down, a train sped through nearby Rivière-la-Madeleine. On that train was his wife Marguerite and his two pre-school children. On a spur-of-the-moment decision they moved from Toronto to join family in Eureka, Nova Scotia, so that they could be near him when he took his occasional shore leaves. It would be years before his family discovered just how close they were before this terrible tragedy tore them apart forever.²⁵⁴

On September 16th, U-165 added to its tally sinking steamship Joannis out of convoy QS-36, once again in the area of the Matane/Godbout line. U-165 attacked and sunk this ship at 1200hrs and then went on to damage the Essex Lance and Pan York. Fortunately, all 32 of its complement survived. Of the two damaged ships only, the Pan York suffered one fatality that day.²⁵⁵ But it proved to be a very fruitful day for U-165.

U-165 ended its Gulf Patrol on September 19, 1942 having spent 23 days (44%) of its 52 day patrol there. U-165 wasn't to receive any accolades upon its return presumably to Lorient, France. Her success was not celebrated for U-165 was sunk on its homeward bound journey September 27th in the Bay of Biscay, where it was attacked and sunk by a Wellington bomber out of 311 Czech Squadron RAF, piloted by FO V Student.²⁵⁶

U-517 (8 August- 19 October 1942)

Quick on the heels of U-165's arrival in the Gulf came another boat, U-517, on the next day August 8th 1942. Considerable detail is available concerning U-517's patrol that provides an in depth view of the struggles that were faced in the Gulf. U-517's foray was a teamed assault with U-165. Both boats were Type IX's (C), relatively new platforms with extended ranges and performance capabilities. The Battle in the St Lawrence began in earnest with their arrival.

²⁵³ Veterans Affairs Canada. 2005. *The Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence*. ©Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada. PDF Format. Cat. No. V32-84/2005. ISBN 0-662-69036-2 [The Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence \(veterans.gc.ca\), 14](https://www.veterans.gc.ca/14)

²⁵⁴ Veterans Affairs Canada. 2005. *The Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence*, 14-15

²⁵⁵ UBoat.net. 2024. "Ships hit by U-boats Joannis" © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 2 May 2024. Source: [Joannis \(Greek Steam merchant\) - Ships hit by German U-boats during WWII - uboat.net](https://www.uboat.net)

²⁵⁶ Morgan & Taylor 2011, 429, and Niestle, Axel, 2014. *German U-Boat Losses During World War II – Details of Destruction*. Frontline Books, London, Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 47 Church Street Barnsley, S Yorkshire, S70 2AS, 121

U-517 sunk the merchant ship Chatham August 27th. But later on, the 28th, the merchant ship, Arlyn, was attacked and damaged by U-165 that was initially credited with its sinking. But Arlyn in fact was later dispatched by U-517. These two sinkings announced to Canadian authorities the close proximity of at least two U-boats in the vicinity.²⁵⁷

It is difficult to assess from available records U-165's daily position on the 27th as there was no recorded daily log position report for that date. U-165 was later sunk on its return to homeport on only its first and final patrol. The daily position reports that do exist likely come from the limited radio contact reports conveyed when possible. U-517 daily position reports exist because its logs were transcribed and recorded upon the conclusion of their safe return following this patrol.²⁵⁸

Both boats entered the Gulf of St Lawrence through the Strait of Belle Isle August 27, 1942. U-517 remained on station at the entrance to the Strait of Belle Isle for several days from the 27th to the 31st of August. At one point it retreated and headed north up the Labrador coast, where it rested on August 31st on the Atlantic side, before turning back down and entering the Strait once again on September 1st then proceeding inland towards the Gulf of St Lawrence.

On September 3rd U-517 attacked and sunk a merchant ship, Donald Stewart as it was transiting the Strait of Belle Isle, near Blanc Sablon mid-channel in between Quebec and Newfoundland. On the 7th U-517 reaped a bountiful harvest sinking three ships in quick succession; Oakton, Mount Pindus, and Mount Taygetus in the St Lawrence, midway between Anticosti Island and the Gaspé Peninsula.

U-517's harvest continued on September 11th with the sinking of HMCS Charlottetown in the St Lawrence river on the Godbout-Matane line in the narrows between these two points one, Godbout on the north, and the other, Matane on the south shore of Quebec.

HMCS Charlottetown (K 244) was attacked and sunk about 5 miles off Cap Chats in the Gulf of St Lawrence. T/LtCdr J.W. Bonner, RCNR) was in command of this ship when it was hit on its starboard side by two torpedoes. Bonner and five ratings were lost. The survivors were picked up by HMCS Clayoquot (J 174), T/Lt H.E. Lade, RCNR in command. HMCS Charlottetown had been escorting convoy SQ-35 to Rimouski when it was attacked on returning to Gaspé alone.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ UBoat.net. 2024. "German submarine U-517." Accessed 4 May 2024. 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason . [War Patrols by German U-boat U-517 - Boats - uboat.net](#)

²⁵⁸ Uboat.net. 2024. "German submarine U-517."

²⁵⁹ UBoat.net. 2024. "Ships Hit by U-Boats. HMCS Charlottetown (K 244)." Accessed 7 May 2024. 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason . [HMCS Charlottetown \(K 244\) \(Canadian Corvette\) - Ships hit by German U-boats during WWII - uboat.net](#)

September 15 proved another successful day in which U-517 sunk another two ships; Inger Elisabeth and Saturnus, once again in the St Lawrence, midway between Anticosti Island and the Gaspé Peninsula. These were the last of U-517's undertakings in the Gulf. U-517 then lingered in the Gulf from September 16 to October 8, 1942.

U-517's patrol line though is very suggestive of the hot pursuit by the RCN and RCAF. From the 16th to the 18th of September, U-517's patrol line strayed not very far from where it sunk Inger Elisabeth and Saturnus. On September 19 it began making its way to exiting the Cabot Strait, then it reversed course on September 20th heading back towards Anticosti where it remained for two days, 21-22 September.

From 23-24 September, U-517 once again turned its attention inland, heading down river towards the Godbout-Matane line where it remained for two days. From there it headed towards Anticosti Island on the 25th. U-517 appeared to be exiting the Gulf on the 26th where it lay in the Cabot Strait area between Nfld/NS on the 27th.

But U-517's patrol was as yet complete. Once again it turned inland then headed north where on September 28 it lay in the Cabot Strait area. Not to be undone, it turned its attention towards Anticosti Island on the 29th where U-517 remained in location for five days from September 29 to October 3rd.

Then U-517 returned inland toward the Godbout-Matane line October 4, from whence it turned westward along the North Shore near Port Cartier- Sept Iles. On 5-6 October it turned southward, but on the 7th it headed outwards towards the Cabot Strait area. U-517 finally exited the Gulf of St Lawrence October 8, 1942.

U-517's patrol began August 8 and ended October 19, 1942. It spent 73 days at sea. Entering the Gulf August 27 and exiting September 8, it spent an arduous 43 days (59% of its time) in the Gulf. For its efforts it sunk 8 merchant ships and HMCS Charlottetown.²⁶⁰

U-517 last known patrol was only five days. It was lost with all hands November 17, 1942 in the North Atlantic South West Of Ireland. Its loss is recorded at 46.16N, 17.09W. Its demise by depth charge from an Albacore aircraft (817 Sqn FAA/I) from the British carrier HMS Victorious.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ Uboat.net. 2024. "German submarine U-517."

²⁶¹ Uboat.net. 2024. "German submarine U-517."

U-69 (15 August – 19 October 1942)

U-69 with four patrols of note in 1942. The first two of which began; one January 19 and the other January 31, 1942. These were directed to operations in the North Atlantic. The January 19th patrol was cut short, and U-69 returned to its home port before returning once again January 30th. Its third patrol, 12 April – 25 June 1942 was targeted south of North America towards operations in the Caribbean. Here U-69 sunk 5 ships and concluded a very successful patrol June 25th before returning to St Nazaire. This demonstrates the wide range of dispositions and frequency employed by the Kriegsmarine in 1942 that also took tactical advantage of the poor state of preparations in and around North America.²⁶²

It's U-69's fourth patrol that is of particular interest. U-69 departed St Nazaire August 15th only to return November 5, 1942 after 83 days at sea. It too was designated to operate in North America beginning with mine laying operations off the US coast at Virginia Beach. It then proceeded north towards Canada and into the Gulf of St Lawrence around September 30th.²⁶³

While there, U-69 spent approximately 16 days of its time patrolling in the Gulf of St Lawrence; covering the expanse of the Strait of Canso, Anticosti Island to Matane in the Gaspé from 30 September to 15 October 1942. U-69 spent 8 of these days from the 11th onwards on a patrol line encompassing Baie Comeau, Port Cartier, Godbout, and Sept Îles on the North Shore. It also ventured in the waters in between a line from Matane to the Gaspé on the upper south shores meandering into the narrows of the St Lawrence. U-69 sunk the merchant ship Carolus on October 9th, and then significantly five days later, the ferry, SS Caribou as it was approaching the exit to the Gulf on the 14th.²⁶⁴

In the early morning at around 1230 am, Caribou came within U-69's sights in quadrant BB5456 on Kriegsmarine charts. This placed Caribou 40 miles off Port O'Basque. U-69 spent several hours maneuvering into position. Its commander had some concern whether to attack or not, given the intensity of EACs planes surveillance and attacks in the area.

Regardless, U-69 sometime over the next three hours maneuvered into a firing position. At 3:21 AM the decision was made, and torpedo number 20236 was

²⁶² Showell, Jak P Mallmann. 2013. *Donitz, U-Boats, Convoys – The British Version of His Memoirs from the Admiralty's Secret Antisubmarine Reports*. Frontline Books, London, , Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 47 Church Steet Barnsley, S Yorkshire, S70 2AS, 52-61; and

Wiberg, Eric.2017. *U-Boats Off Bermuda – Patrol Summaries and Merchant Ship Survivors Landed in Bermuda 1940-1944*. First published in the United Kingdom and the United States of America Fonthill 2017, 14

²⁶³ U-boat. Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-69." " © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 10 May 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-69 from 15 Aug 1942 to 5 Nov 1942 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](https://uboat.net/patrols/german-uboat-u-69-15-aug-1942-to-5-nov-1942)

²⁶⁴ U-boat. Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-69."

launched that exploded 3 feet below the waterline of the Caribou sinking her in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.²⁶⁵ A day later U-69 lay opposite the entrance to the Strait resting in that position from 15-16 October 1942.²⁶⁶

Caribou was sailing from Sydney to Port Aux Basques on its regular run when the ferry was attacked on the morning of the fourteenth at 3:40AM. There were 237 souls aboard; 73 were civilians, including 11 children, and 118 military personnel, plus a crew of 46. One hundred and thirty-six perished that night.²⁶⁷

Everything that floated in the Gulf of St Lawrence became a prize and target of war. That tragedy brought that fact to light to the Canadian public who up until then, were largely ambivalent to the dangers within our inland waters.

U-69 met its demise February 17, 1943. It was sunk in the Atlantic east of Newfoundland by HMS Fame commanded by Comdr. R. Heathcote. All 46 crew aboard were lost.²⁶⁸

U-106 (15 August-5 November 1942)

U-106 was a most active boat with 4 patrols alone in 1942. Two were centred on operations off the Atlantic coast and mid- Atlantic convoy operations. A third was interrupted after five days in due to an attack that damaged the boat, so it had to return to port. Several crew members were injured in this attack.

U-106 had achieved its highest success on its first patrol from January 3rd to February 22nd 1942. It sunk five ships before returning to its homeport at Lorient with Kapitänleutnant Hermann Rasch in command.

U-106's second patrol yielded 4 ships sunk and one damaged in the Gulf of Mexico and one sunk in the Atlantic, from April 15th to June 29th, 76 days at sea. U-106's third patrol was interrupted as noted above after a mere five days at sea.

On July 7th 1942 at 15.30 hrs, it was attacked in the Bay of Biscay, while outbound. Damage to the boat was caused from strafing and bombing by a Wellington bomber from 311 Sqn RAF/A. I WO, Oberleutnant zur See Günter Wißmann was killed and its commander wounded. The boat had only left Lorient

²⁶⁵ Greenfield 2004, 184-185

²⁶⁶ U-boat. Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-69."

²⁶⁷ Collins, Paul .2006. "Sinking of the Caribou." ©2006, Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage Web Site

Source: <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/politics/caribou-sinking.php>

Accessed: 3 March 2018

²⁶⁸ Niestle 2014, 43

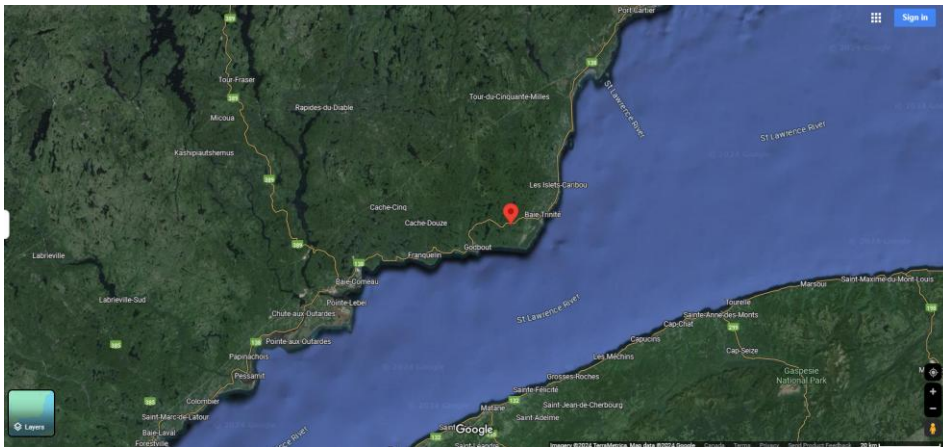
two days earlier and thus was forced to return to base by severe damage and a loss of leadership.²⁶⁹

U-106 was repaired and its commander Rasch recovered. U-106 was subsequently dispatched to North America once again for patrol that ran from September 22nd to December 2nd 1942 (96 days at sea) . U-106 entered the Gulf of St Lawrence on the in-bound portion of its patrol on 10 October 1942. It proceeded into the Gulf and reached the apex of its journey 15 October 1942 and laid off somewhere near Godbout Qc.

U-106 Deepest Penetration into Gulf near Godbout 15 Oct 1942:

[49°23'24.0"N 67°27'00.0"W - Google Maps](#)

Accessed: 29 Apr 2024



Given Rausch's recent experience in the Bay of Biscay, it was very surprising that he chose to go towards the narrowest part of the Gulf at this point. The Bay of Biscay was a notable choke point for U-boat aerial attack which he had experience and the St Lawrence at this point was much narrower than the Bay of Biscay. It was both a brave and bold move! But U-106 did little more than patrol here and only made one fruitful attack on its inbound approach to the Gulf sinking the British steam merchant Waterton (2,140 GRT) on October 11th at 15h47.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ U-Boat.net "Patrol Log U-106 - 25 Jul to 29 Jul." [Patrol of German U-boat U-106 from 25 Jul 1942 to 29 Jul 1942 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](#)

²⁷⁰ U-Boat.net "Patrol Log U-106 - 25 Jul to 29 Jul."

U106 exited the Gulf October 22nd having spent 13 of its 96 day (13%) patrol there. It then proceeded to patrol off the North American and Atlantic approaches but did not register any more kills at this point.

But U-106's storied career would eventually come to an end. It was severely pursued in 1943. It was no stranger to air attack. On August 1st 1943, U-106 was attacked by a British B-24 Liberator in the Bay of Biscay leading to events towards its demise. No damage resulted from the Liberator's two depth charges dropped. But notably, strafing killed one crewman and wounded two others.

Then on August 2nd, it was re-engaged once again, this time by a Canadian Wellington bomber out of 407 Sqn RCAF/C in the Bay of Biscay. It was a close run thing as U-106 was straddled by six depth charges. One these was seen to have bounced off the stern then exploded close nearby.

Miraculously the boat survived this onslaught as well but was severely damage and forced it to return to port. U-106 was a lame duck and an easy target. U-106's fate was then sealed and sunk August 2nd 1943 in the North Atlantic north-west of Cape Ortegal, Spain.

Depth charges from British and Australian Sunderland aircraft from 228 Sqn RAF/N & 461 Sqn RAAF/M did the deed. U-106 suffered 22 dead but there were 36 survivors.²⁷¹

U-106 distinguished career totalled 10 War patrols with a grand total of 496 days at sea. It rated 20th amongst the highest successful U-boats for its efforts and was a formidable foe.

Chapter 10 - The Other Battle in the Gulf of St Lawrence

Conception Bay, Belle Isle

Alfred Morine, a concerned citizen, wrote a letter to the editor of the Globe and Mail July 27, 1940. Morine made a case for the defence of Newfoundland, then still a colony of Great Britain. In his deposition, Morine supported an earlier assessment written by General Crerar in that the defence of Newfoundland was vital to the defence of the continent. Newfoundland was on the front line should

²⁷¹ U-Boat.net . 2024 "U-106. " © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 18 Jun 2024. [The Type IXB U-boat U-106 - German U-boats of WWII - uboat.net](https://u-boat.net)

Britain fall, and given the circumstances of that year, that was a very real possibility.²⁷²

Newfoundland both strategically valuable to Canada and Germany was a key to the safe convoy of men and materiel necessary to Britain. It offered strategic harbours from which to launch attacks. St. John's harbor provided an easy access to the Atlantic as it was almost completely landlocked.

St. John's, strategically protected from the ocean by hills, was a formidable feature, that are at least six to seven hundred feet high. If its seawalls were adequately fortified, that harbour was easily defended. The one down fall was its shallow harbour that could not accommodate large warships the size of battleships.²⁷³ For Germany, St. John's offered a strategic focal point from which to attack as it could best concentrate its limited resources there.

Morine the pointed out the significance of the problem and the key to how it could be easily resolved, He pointed to Bell Island that lay nearby in Conception Bay. It was not far from Newfoundland's capital of St. Johns.

Bell Island lays within the confines of Conception Bay. It was also the site of what was then, the greatest iron mine in the world, an asset key to the Canadian economy and that was a potential lure for Germany who required iron ore. Conception Bay was a large expanse where there was sufficient space to accommodate great fleets, offering convenient anchorage and a similar level of protection for naval forces as those found at Scapa Flow, then the wartime home port to the British fleet.²⁷⁴

Some argued that Morine's concern and analysis were pure whimsy, that the Germans would never consider it a target given the great distance and logistics requirements. But Morine pointed out that it had been seriously considered. He cited a German pre-war in an article, published by New World called "Invasion Next," The article was based upon a book written by a German named Colin Ross.

Ross had proposed, three routes for the invasion of North America:²⁷⁵
(1) through Hudson Strait into Hudson Bay,

²⁷² Morine, Alfred B. 1940. Toronto Letter to Editor, "Fortify Newfoundland To Defend Canada." *Globe and Mail*, 27 July 1940. Accessed: 12 May 2024

<https://collections.museedelhistoire.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5103273>

²⁷³ Morine 1940.

²⁷⁴ Morine 1940.

²⁷⁵ Morine 1940.

(2) by ports in Eastern Labrador, near Hamilton Inlet, and
(3) by using the Island of Newfoundland as a base.

Morine cautioned that:²⁷⁶

[QUOTE]

No time should be lost in dealing with this matter. Now is the time for action . To falter may be to court destruction. A hostile fleet upon the Atlantic 'convoying store ships and airplane carriers to Newfoundland, seizing upon the great airport already there, could make it a base from which to reduce Canada and the United States to actual helplessness.

[END QUOTE]

Ross's book gave an insight into Germany's potential strategic intent and the difficulties that they were willing to consider overcoming them in order to achieve their goals. Morine's warning was a harbinger of things to come for Newfoundland.

Bell Island's iron mines were critical to Canada's war effort. These mines were the largest high-grade iron ore mines in the British Empire. Bell Island was the sole source and supplier of iron ore to steel mills in Sydney, Nova Scotia, which produced one-quarter of Canada's iron and steel in 1942. Iron ore was the crucial raw material required to make steel. It was an asset desired by both Canada and Germany.²⁷⁷ Its presence and industry there set Bell Island as a potential target.

That potential resulted in an actual attack in 1942. German U-boats attacked Bell Island twice on two separate occasions leading to the destruction of four ore boats with the loss of 60 lives. It was one of the few places in the Dominion of Newfoundland raided during the Second World War.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ Morine 1940.

²⁷⁷ Newfoundland Bell Island Heritage Society Inc. & Shipwreck Preservation Society of Newfoundland & Labrador Inc. 2020. "Importance of the Bell Island Mines to the Allied War Effort." Accessed: 12 May 2024. [Importance of the Bell Island Mines to the Allied War Effort | When World War II Came to Bell Island, Newfoundland \(communitystories.ca\)](#)

²⁷⁸ Wikipedia. 2024. "Battle of Bell Island." Accessed 30 April 2024, page was last edited on 2 July 2023, at 09:02 (UTC). [Battle of Bell Island - Wikipedia](#)

The German engagements at Bell Island are considered by some as part of the larger Battle of the St. Lawrence.²⁷⁹ These losses are nominally recorded on their own and are not a part of the tally of losses recorded in the Gulf of St Lawrence for 1942.²⁸⁰ They may well have been ignored in official histories at the time as Newfoundland was still a British colony. However, they are indicative of Germany's strategic intent of taking the battle to the heartland when and where possible.

Canada is a maritime nation where its shipping lanes, in and out of the St Lawrence, transited both through the Cabot Strait and Strait of Belle Isle. For example, U132, captained by Ernst Vogelsang, pressed forward into the Gulf on the 10th of July 1942 where it entered the Gulf of St Lawrence through the Strait of Belle Isle.²⁸¹

U-132 found itself in the highest approach in the Gulf of St Lawrence in a position nearest Blanc Sablon opposite the Quebec- Labrador border. It was brought near to Natashquan on the upper North Shore of Quebec. This approach is indicative of one of the three routes Ross proposed for the invasion of North America by using the Island of Newfoundland as a base.²⁸² It is this passage through the Strait of Belle Isle that links Belle Island and other areas as a base and conduit to the Battle of the Gulf of St Lawrence.

So, Newfoundland and Labrador was a strategic key and linchpin for Canadian defence, and could not be ignored indefinitely, especially the capital and port of St John's. Extensive planning was given to its defence, and destruction should the occasion arise.²⁸³ Given German intentions, the threat was very real in thought, word, and deed.

Although the Germans did not assault Newfoundland in any concerted effort, it was considered a valuable prize, nonetheless. Newfoundland for one thing was strategically located, at the crossroads to North America. This alone offered much to the Nazis as a target-rich environment that included two naval bases, five military and civilian aerodromes, two seaplane bases, five army bases, as well as a

²⁷⁹ Wikipedia. 2024. "Battle of Bell Island."

²⁸⁰ Wikipedia.2024. "Battle of the St. Lawrence." This page was last edited on 30 January 2024, at 19:54 (UTC). Accessed: 13 May 2024. [Battle of the St. Lawrence - Wikipedia](#)

²⁸¹ Wikipedia. 2017. "Convoy LN-7." page was last edited on 29 June 2017, at 11:06 (UTC). Accessed: 1 Feb 2021. Source: [Convoy LN-7 - Wikipedia](#)

²⁸² Morine 1940.

²⁸³ Collins, P. 2011. "Fortress Newfoundland: How the Fear of Nazi Attack Turned Newfoundland into an Armed Camp during World War II." *Newfoundland Studies*, 26(2), 197–213

variety of civilian assets important to the Allied war effort. All were equally desired by the Germans should they have decided to execute a much larger plan and assault had they the means to do so.²⁸⁴

But an assault did occur that began September 4, 1942. U-513, under the command of Kapitänleutnant Rolf Ruggeberg, followed an iron ore carrier, Evelyn B, into Conception Bay. U-513 spent the night under twenty metres of water and attacked the next morning on 5 September. The ships attacked and sunk were SS Lord Strathcona and SS Saganaga. A total of twenty-nine men died all aboard Saganaga at the time. The RCAF was overhead within an hour of notice but never caught sight of U-513.²⁸⁵ Significantly U-513 successfully escaped and surfaced out of Conception Bay.²⁸⁶

Regrettably, there was no naval protection in place at the time of his first attack. Regardless, the RCN was informed within minutes of the beginning of the assault and immediately dispatched two corvettes: HMCS Louisburg and HMCS Chicoutimi, the minesweeper HMCS Minas, as well as four Fairmile motor launches. These arrived from St. John's to Bell Island, to search for the U-boat. However, they arrived four hours later too late, and despite the RCAF's effort, by this time U-513 made its escape unharmed.²⁸⁷

Several defensive measures were subsequently taken in the aftermath of this destruction. The first was the permanent assignment of two Fairmile motor launches to patrol Conception Bay. Further either a corvette or minesweeper would join these patrols when an ore boat was in the Bay and loading. Finally, ore ships were made to travel in convoy from Bell Island, Nfld to Sydney, NS under naval escort.²⁸⁸

It was not to be a single effort. The next assault came from U-518, that attacked and sunk two iron ore freighters and also managed to damage another at Bell

²⁸⁴ Collins, 2011. *Fortress Newfoundland*, 197

²⁸⁵ Wikipedia.2024. "Battle of the St. Lawrence."

²⁸⁶ Newfoundland Bell Island Heritage Society Inc. & Shipwreck Preservation Society of Newfoundland & Labrador Inc. 2020. "Bell Island Sinkings." Accessed: 11 May 2024. [Bell Island Sinkings \(heritage.nf.ca\)](https://heritage.nf.ca/bell-island-sinkings)

²⁸⁷ Newfoundland Bell Island Heritage Society Inc 2020. *The Aftermath of the U-boat Attacks*

²⁸⁸ Newfoundland Bell Island Heritage Society Inc. & Shipwreck Preservation Society of Newfoundland & Labrador Inc. 2020. "The Aftermath of the U-boat Attacks." Accessed: 12 May 2024. [The Aftermath of the U-boat Attacks | When World War II Came to Bell Island, Newfoundland \(communitystories.ca\)](https://communitystories.ca/when-world-war-ii-came-to-bell-island-newfoundland)

Island in Conception Bay on November 2, 1942. Significantly U-518 was en route to a patrol off the Gaspé Peninsula. It was attacked along the way by an RCAF patrol aircraft but survived. U-518 then set on its primary mission, that successfully landed a spy, Werner von Janowski at New Carlisle, Quebec. Janowski's mission was very short-lived. He was quickly captured at the New Carlisle railway station shortly after landing on the beach.²⁸⁹

HMCS Drumheller and two Fairmilies were on patrol in Conception Bay November 2nd. Surprisingly, these assets never detected U-518 with their sonar, either before or after the attack.²⁹⁰

These attacks appeared to have been decidedly a one sided affair and, in large measure they were. But in the initial attack on September 4th, at least the nearby merchant ships Evelyn B, P.L.M. 27, Drakepool, and Rose Castle fired their stern guns at U-513. The Coastal Battery also joined the milieu by bringing their guns to bear from Bell Island, firing several rounds at uncertain targets.²⁹¹

1942 was a very significant year for Canada. Although the year was ending, it was made very clear from these attacks that Newfoundland was indeed vulnerable and open to attack from a determined enemy. It was also very clear that Canada and its approaches were on the front line of enemy action despite the government's efforts to either hide or downplay that fact.

Into the Breach

The Battle of the St. Lawrence engaged all of Canada's Armed Forces in dealing with the growing U-boat threat. It was a hard fought battle in Canadian waters, one with its own tremendous costs and loss, and one closest to home that focused all our military resources to that end.

The battle mobilized the army fortresses and coastal defences in the Maritimes that were alerted, buttressed, and ready to do battle. It brought all our air resources together, both regular and training squadrons, in the hope to seek out and destroy the enemy in combination with the navy. This stretched Eastern Air Command (EAC) resources to its limit.

²⁸⁹ Wikipedia.2024. "Battle of the St. Lawrence."

²⁹⁰ Newfoundland Bell Island Heritage Society Inc 2020. The Aftermath of the U-boat Attacks

²⁹¹ Newfoundland Bell Island Heritage Society Inc 2020. The Aftermath of the U-boat Attacks

The air role was doubly important as the Royal Canadian Navy was heavily committed in 1942. There was a shortage of naval escorts due to demands of the North Atlantic convoy system. Eastern Air Command of the RCAF accepted the navy's request for a major share of the responsibility of the defence of shipping in the gulf.

Eastern Air Command diverted some of its assets from Atlantic duties in order to concentrate there. EAC placed as many as 48 front-line anti-submarine bombers at the disposal of this battle for air protection in the gulf and towards the ocean approaches.²⁹² Coincidentally there were 44 Hudson Bombers on establishment at O.T.U 31 from May 1941 on. Some of these assets were employed in this role and along with the assets of other training establishments, they contributed greatly in this battle.²⁹³

Despite reorganization and new dispositions of existing assets, resources were still sadly lacking. In the end the training schools and advanced training establishments had to be mobilized as well. For example, 31 General Reconnaissance School based at Charlottetown, PEI was mobilized to fly anti-submarine and convoy protection patrols where 31 General Reconnaissance School employed the Avro Anson aircraft carrying two 250-pound bombs.²⁹⁴ Operational Unit 31 at Debert, Nova Scotia was another unit brought into the fray.

An operational burden was placed on the training establishments in coping with the threat. EAC's available resources in 1942 included 307 aircraft. This pool was then augmented by 259 training aircraft (84%). Thus, the total available aircraft devoted to the threat rose to 483 aircraft by 1943. Significantly that pool was again augmented by 386 (80%) available training aircraft for both duty in the Atlantic and St Lawrence approaches.²⁹⁵

The operational tempo was high once the decision was made to mobilize the schools. For example, O.T.U. 31 conducted regular anti-submarine and convoy patrols for Eastern Air Command and did so until December 21, 1943. Four especially fitted Hudson bombers were kept at the ready and available for the antisubmarine-convoy patrol.

It was agreed that O.T.U. 31 would diminish this role commencing 19 January 1944 because of the needs of its primary training role. Despite a diminished capacity, O.T.U. 31 maintained a commitment for the anti-submarine role of two days of anti-submarine patrols of 3-1/2 hour and 5-1/2 hours respectively, and one

²⁹² Sarty 2003, 43.

²⁹³ Canada, National Defence, Director of History and Heritage, File 74/13 No. 31 O.T.U., 3 February 2011, 2

²⁹⁴ Halliday 2006, Part 14

²⁹⁵ Canada, National Defence, Report No. 30 18 Nov 49, 7

night patrol of 3 hours that was fitted into its training schedule starting 19 January 1944.²⁹⁶

Some may question the utility of employing the operational training units in the anti-submarine role. But in the end, they were a value-added asset that harkened back to the forgotten lessons of World War I which were only now being re-learned.²⁹⁷ They were a force multiplier at a time when resources were short on the ground.

Lessons Learned

One lesson of air power from World War I was the importance of shore-based air patrols to fighting the U-Boat threat. The mere presence of any aircraft was a cause for concern to many a U-Boat captain and greatly hindered not only their operations but also their mobility.²⁹⁸

Despite all this, EAC's best efforts were limited as conditions were more favourable to the enemy who made great strides in the Gulf. Air attack was very weather dependent and estuarine conditions shielded them from sonar-ascdic contact by the navy whose Asdic was limited by the bathyscaphe effect.²⁹⁹

U-boats were very vulnerable however when surfaced. This is where air power showed its true potential. When caught on the surface, U-boats were attacked relentlessly. But more importantly, air cover, even a single engined training plane, kept them submerged and dwelling in fear.

The German perspective provides some insight as to the effectiveness of the Canadian effort. They considered three pillars in the battle that was of grave concern and necessary for their success. These pillars were radio intelligence direction based on radio direction finding, traffic analysis, and decryption. The enemy considered that it was the effect of radio intelligence that that had the

²⁹⁶ Canada, National Defence, Director of History and Heritage, File 181.002 (D237) .1941. "Operational Commitments - 31 O.T.U." 3 February 2011 (letter RCAF G 32A 1100M-10-41 (1022) H.Q. 1062-9-36, Letter "R.A.F. Schools, Debert, N.S. 25th January 1941)

²⁹⁷ Hannable, William S. 1998. *Research Studies Series, Case Studies In The Use Of Land-Based Aerial Forces in Maritime Operations, 1939-1990*, Air Force History & Museums Program, Washington, D.C. September 1998, 3-4

²⁹⁸ Time Magazine, 1941. "World War: IN THE AIR: One-Way Airline." Monday, Oct. 20, 1941 Source: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,851303,00.html> Accessed: 14 February 2011

"Sir Frederick decided to attack submarines with pure bluff. Banking on the well-founded fear that submarine men have of planes in general, he sent his flyers out in almost anything he could buy, beg or borrow. His motley "Honeymoon Fleet" consisted mostly of light Tiger-Moth trainers, no more lethal than the tiny yellow Cubs that put-put around U.S. airports. But against German submarine commanders, grooved in routine, the Tiger-Moths were almost as effective as dive-bombers. Whenever the U-boats saw a speck in the sky they submerged and stole away."

²⁹⁹ Greenfield 2004, 60

greater influence on Allied operational and tactical decisions.³⁰⁰ Thus Canadian and allied efforts in employing these pillars, placed land based aircraft on or in the vicinity of known U-boat locations.

Admiral Dönitz , fastidious for daily position reports in his management of the Battle, insisted on daily positioning reporting. It was this insistence and the use of the box square system that was of value to fixing U-boat positions and concentrating Allied air and naval resources to great effect. This was probably the key to Dönitz's conviction of the dangers inherent in the confined area of the Gulf of St Lawrence.³⁰¹

The role of Maritime Air Power Impresses Admiral Dönitz

The story of maritime airpower and the anti-submarine role played out on Canada's east coast during the Second World War is an interesting, but a lesser known one. The application of airpower in the Gulf of St Lawrence and elsewhere in 1942 made a significant impression on Admiral Dönitz.

First, Admiral Dönitz was impressed by the number of their attacks, by both the RCN and RCAF despite the fact that not one of his U-boats was sunk by Canadian pilots or the RCN.³⁰² The presence of air cover greatly deterred him from pursuing a campaign in the Gulf in 1943 because of this fear. The St Lawrence was considered a dangerous place!³⁰³

Second despite this impression, Admiral Dönitz also concluded that although Canadian defences proved to be comparatively weak, his forces were too exposed when surfaced. His U-boats would only return to Canadian waters in quantity in the ST Lawrence in 1944 because of the introduction of `snorkel`.³⁰⁴ Snorkel was a technical advantage that protected U-Boats because of the ability to recharge their

³⁰⁰ United States of America, U.S. Naval Academy Annapolis. 1977. "Ultra and the Battle of the Atlantic." *Naval Symposium*, DOCID: 3726627, October 28, 1977, Approved for Release by NSA on 07-26-2010 FOIA Case # 62049, *The German View*, Jurgen Rohwer,13

³⁰¹ United States of America, U.S. Naval Academy Annapolis. 1977. "Ultra and the Battle of the Atlantic." *Naval Symposium*, DOCID: 3726627, October 28, 1977, Approved for Release by NSA on 07-26-2010 FOIA Case # 62049, Patrick Beesly, 7. 7

³⁰² Andrews, David. 2008. "The Battle of the Gulf of St Lawrence." *Royal Canadian Legion Branch # 98* © 2008 All Rights Reserved, 9. Accessed 2 October 2010. Source: www.kingstonlegion.com/.../Battle%20of%20the%20Gulf%20of%20St%20Lawrence.doc and <http://www.kingstonlegion.com/Poppy/Call%20to%20Remembrance.html>

³⁰³ David Andrews, 2008, pg. 9

³⁰⁴ Goette, Richard . 2004. "Squadron Leader N.E. Small: A Study of Leadership in The RCAF's Eastern Air Command, 1942.", *Canadian Military Journal*, Spring 2004, 47

batteries while remaining and running submerged.³⁰⁵ It hid them from prying eyes of surface ships and loitering aircraft.

The prevailing conditions in the Gulf of St Lawrence estuary favoured the enemy for it was a perfect place to hide. The current state of Allied technology and estuarine conditions hid the U-boats from Canadian sensors. The estuarine conditions of the Gulf of St Lawrence actually cloaked U-boats, making them virtually invisible when submerged. Estuarine waters effectively shielded his U-boats from sonar-ascdic contact then employed by the navy.³⁰⁶

The Asdic system of the day was limited because of the bathyscaphe effect, which occurred when saline, fresh, hot and cold water mixed and blended together. It was an environmental condition that was prevalent in estuarine environments and the Gulf of St Lawrence in particular.³⁰⁷

The bathyscaphe effect masked submerged U-boats that acted as a virtual cloak of invisibility effectively creating an electronic distortion hiding U-boats from detection.³⁰⁸ Air power was a means of putting more eyes toward accessing and targeting the enemy. Air power thus employed came to have an influence on German strategy.³⁰⁹ U-boats had to surface at some point, this airpower was an important asset in 1942, and perhaps more so in 1944 despite the advantage of schnorkel.

But these advantages were offset by an increase in the number of Canadian units searching for the enemy.³¹⁰ The experience of U-517 is telling. U-517 was on the receiving end of considerable Canadian attention. U-517 was severely damaged while on patrol in the fall of 1942, before departing for its home base at Lorient 5 October 1942 for repairs.³¹¹

That pummelling left U-517's crew with a lasting impression, not only the crew but also, its commander, as well as the Commander of the German U-boat Headquarters. The commander of U-517 calculated that he was on the receiving end of at least 27 bombs and 118 depth charges dropped by aircraft during his sortie in the Gulf of St Lawrence. The ordnance was dropped near enough to his

³⁰⁵ Mosseray 29 March 2002.

³⁰⁶ Madigan 2016. *At the Crossroads of Time*, 117

³⁰⁷ Madigan 2016. *At the Crossroads of Time*, 117

³⁰⁸ Greenfield 2004, Canada, 60

³⁰⁹ Madigan 2016. *At the Crossroads of Time*, 117

³¹⁰ Madigan 2016. *At the Crossroads of Time*, 117

³¹¹ Madigan 2016. *At the Crossroads of Time*, 117

vessel causing him considerable discomfort.³¹² The boat and crew were lucky to have made it out of their alive.³¹³

The collective experience of all U-boat commanders then operating in the Gulf of St Lawrence, made a deep and lasting impression on Admiral Dönitz who was impressed by both the number and intensity of the RCN and RCAF attacks.³¹⁴

One of those distinct impressions came out of No. 113 (BR) Squadron (RCAF), based at Yarmouth NS. The squadron fought bravely and diligently during the Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. No. 113 (BR) Squadron distinguished members included Pilot Officer R.S. Keetley and crew who aggressively sought and attacked U-517.³¹⁵

Pilot Officer R.S. Keetley was a deadly and persistent foe. Keetley had previously attacked U-165, September 9, 1942. It escaped. Keetley later launched a separate attack on U-517 on September 16th. Regrettably both vessels escaped destruction, but both noted suffering blows from the intensity of Keetley's attacks.³¹⁶

Between September 24–25 No. 113 (BR) Squadron registered three more attacks on seven sightings on U-517 alone. But U-517 kept successfully eluding all its pursuers. Still, it was spotted from time to time. U-517 was spotted once again, engaged, and attacked September 29th this time by Flying Officer M.J. Bélanger from 113 Squadron.³¹⁷ Bélanger conducted three of the last four attacks on U-517. Bélanger was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for that effort.³¹⁸

Seventeen units were acknowledged for their participation in the Battle of the Gulf of St Lawrence. EAC's Twelve Bomber-Reconnaissance squadrons, one Fighter Squadron, and four advanced operational training units/schools were recognized for their participation in this defence. Sadly, none of the non-EAC operational training/schools nor fighter squadron were accorded a similar Battle honour in this effort at the time.³¹⁹

³¹² Byers (ed), A.R. 1986. *The Canadians at War 1939 -45 2nd Ed.*. Reader's Digest Assoc., 215 Redfern, Westmount, Qc. H3Z 2V9 . ISBN- 0-88850-145-5, 129

³¹³ Madigan 2016. *At the Crossroads of Time*, 117

³¹⁴ Madigan 2016. *At the Crossroads of Time*, 117

³¹⁵ Madigan 2016. *At the Crossroads of Time*, 129

³¹⁶ Madigan 2016. *At the Crossroads of Time*, 129

³¹⁷ Madigan 2016. *At the Crossroads of Time*, 129

³¹⁸ Gray, Larry. (2007). *Canadians in the Battle of the Atlantic*. Edmonton, AB: Folklore Publishing, 306–7. ISBN 1-894864-66-2

³¹⁹ Canada, Veterans Affairs Canada.2006. " The Battle of the Gulf of St Lawrence, Royal Canadian Air Force Squadrons/Units that Participated in the Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence." 10 February 2006, last modified: 2006-02-10 Source: <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=history/secondwar/battlegulf/airforce>

Forgotten Lessons Relearned

The use of land based aircraft against submarines was not a new concept during the Second World War. Land based air assets were employed in the maritime patrol role as early as the Great War. The basic lessons learned there was, aircraft proved effective against German U-boats forcing them to remain submerged and exhausting their batteries either while en-route to or in operational areas. U-boats were found to be very vulnerable to air attack, especially when convoys were supported by air support.³²⁰

This was the role and purpose of air power was played out in Eastern Air and Coastal Commands as they served during the Second World War. It wasn't perceived as a glamorous role, but it was a vital one. But it was the job that gave the allies breathing space and the time to survive to build their forces to achieve victory. It all took time. It all could have easily fallen apart at any time. The U-boat was Winston Churchill's greatest fear during the war.³²¹

Chapter 11 A Third Front – 1942 Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy

As German U-boats approached the Gulf of St Lawrence the spring of 1942, their U-boat activity suddenly became a cause for concern amongst many Canadians. It was an event for which we seemed to be grossly unprepared.³²² But it was not just in the Gulf of St Lawrence where they operated in significant numbers or with impunity. They were also found in eh approaches to the Gulf of Maine and Bay of Fundy.

These first accidental actions and successes likely emboldened the enemy to broaden its scope while testing our overall defensive posture. This led them not only to the Gulf of St Lawrence but also in towards the Bay of Fundy as well in 1942.

The pivot point for U-boats was widely evident and known to be centred off Halifax. From there they pivoted to parts north and south in the Atlantic and into the heartland of Canada, the St Lawrence River.³²³ Arguably the Gulf of

Accessed: 20 December 2010

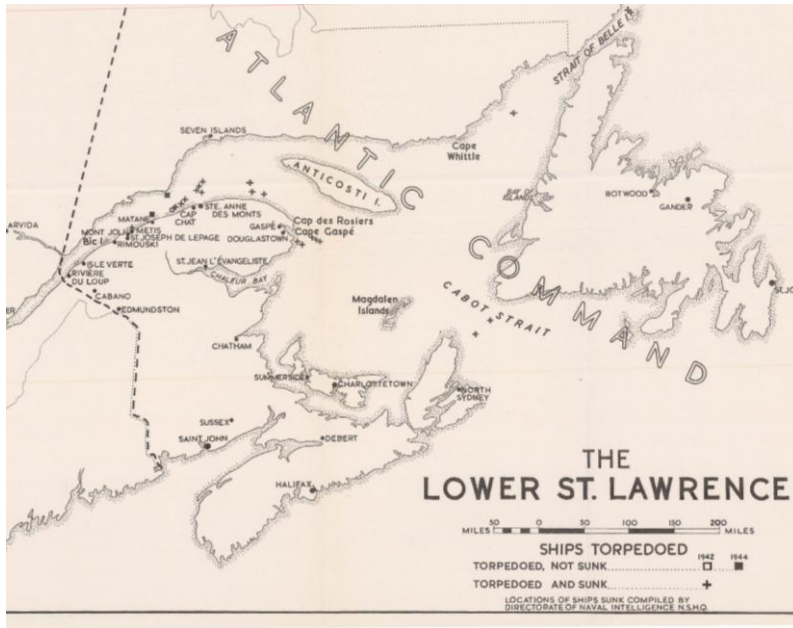
³²⁰ Hannable, William S. 1998. *Research Studies Series, Case Studies In The Use Of Land-Based Aerial Forces in Maritime Operations, 1939-1990*, Air Force History & Museums Program, Washington, D.C. September 1998, . 3-4

³²¹ Churchill 1950. *The Grand Alliance*, 122-123

³²² Mosseray 29 March 2002

³²³ Hopper, Tristin .2013. "Group on mission to prove there is truth in legends that Nazi submarines went far inland from Canadian coast." *National Post*, 19 April 2013. Accessed: 14 June 2015

Maine/Bay of Fundy was another approach to Canadian territory where U-Boats made their presence felt. Thus, there were three obvious areas of operations; the Atlantic with Halifax as a central point, the Gulf of St Lawrence, and the Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy.



Nova Scotia's East Coast, In Gulf of Maine and Bay Of Fundy

Canada's Home War Establishment (HWE) and the Royal Canadian Air Force received reports that German U-boats had entered the Bay of Fundy and Chedabucto Bay in 1942. There were points of concern all along the eastern shore especially at Country Harbour and elsewhere. There was a very real possibility that U-boats were ever present danger in these unguarded and sparsely populated waters.³²⁴

The Kriegsmarine had a limited capability with a few U-boats specifically designed to enter enemy harbours and approaches, to stealthily lay mines or to lay

Source: <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/group-on-mission-to-prove-there-is-truth-in-legends-that-nazi-submarines-went-far-inland-from-canadian-coast>

³²⁴ Files personal conversation – interviews Gina Walsh, Sarah Mason Wilson, 11 October 1990

in attack with torpedoes on enemy shipping.³²⁵ So the threat was very real indeed to the harbour and its facilities at St John New Brunswick!

U-boats were rumoured to be in plain sight along Canada's east coast, and well into the Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy. Some were observed in actual military operations through the public's own eyes and observations.

Facts were often hidden from Canadians as an expedient under the guise of war time censorship. But the presence of the ubiquitous U-boat and its operations, was an extremely hard story to suppress. For example, the *Hamilton Spectator* reported an incident in April 1942 concerning a Lunenburg schooner, one that was also recalled by resident, Marilyn Clair.³²⁶ The *Hamilton Spectator* went on to record several sightings of interest.

But the piece de resistance was the case of an unidentified schooner, that passed closely by a submarine. In this case the schooner's crew were met by the sight of German sailors grouped around the conning tower. These sailors allegedly waved as they sailed by.³²⁷ There had to be something more to these incidents than mere rumour. U-boat activity was very real, and they were unable to remain submerged indefinitely.

³²⁵ CBC News, 2004. "German U-boat found off Nova Scotia." 14 July 2004

Source: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/german-u-boat-found-off-nova-scotia-1.471422>

Accessed: 9 Jun 2015

³²⁶ Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, 35

³²⁷ *Hamilton Spectator*, 1942. "FISHERMEN ASSERT U-BOATS NOW BECOMING COMMON SIGHT.," 1 Apr 1942

<https://collections.museedelhistoire.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5120149>

Accessed: 24 Nov 2021

FISHERMEN ASSERT U-BOATS NOW BECOMING COMMON SIGHT

Reports of Six Separate
Meetings in Atlantic
Are Reported

NO ATTACKS MADE

Halifax, April 1.—(CP)—Fishermen sailing out of some Nova Scotia ports are getting to look on meetings with submarines as just part of the day's work, judging from stories reaching here from the south shore harbours in the last couple of weeks.

According to the accounts, some of which arrive here second or third hand and are difficult to verify, subs have been sighted off the coast by fishing vessels at least six times recently. The stories all agree that the underwater vessels made no attempt to attack the fishermen.

The schooner men generally agree that the subs they saw were enemy craft. Two of them are claimed to have actually hailed schooners, one of them asking for food and having its request turned down.

Here are some of the stories:
1. The crew of the Lunenburg schooner Marilyn Clair were dressing fish one night by the light of a brilliant cluster of electric bulbs on deck when a sub came to the surface nearby and an officer stepped out. He asked in good English the reason for the lights and

and asked in fairly good English for food. After a week on the banks, the ship had only enough for a quick trip back to port, and its crew said there was none to spare. The submarine left without taking further action.

3. The schooner Robertson II, out of Shelburne, reported being trailed for some distance by a submarine, which made no attempt to molest it.

4. The Robertson I, also from Shelburne, sighted one at dusk, but it quickly vanished in the darkness. This schooner's crew also reported seeing last week two flashes of light that they took for a ship torpedoing.

5. A big submarine passed close to another schooner—this one unidentified—and then dived beneath the surface.

6. Another schooner, again un-

Hamilton Spectator, FISHERMEN ASSERT U-BOATS NOW BECOMING COMMON SIGHT, 1 Apr 1942'

having good cause to do so. But never say never. There was always, a possibility, especially that of one boat, U-751 in January 1942.

Kptlt. Gerhard Bigalk (Knights Cross) in command of U-751, a Type VIIC U-boat, surfaced on 31 January, 1942, several miles east off Green Island, Chedabucto Bay. Departing Chedabucto Bay, U-751 attacked the 8096-ton tanker Corilla whose crew spotted the U-boat.

Corilla turned sharply away just as Bigalk fired. Corilla immediately sounded an alarm broadcasting her position on her radio. She also engaged U-751 with her stern mounted gun. Bigalk was greatly impressed with Corilla's accuracy.³²⁸

Corilla escaped U-751's clutches for a short while. At times, Corilla disappeared completely from U-751's view. But later she was re-acquired, and U-751 trailed her unobtrusively for an hour and a half until Corilla finally reached the vicinity of the Country Island Light.

There, U-751 engaged Corilla once more, this time with a triple torpedo salvo from 2500 m. Two shots went wide of the mark. But the centre fired salvo, struck Corilla

There is one unverified claim from Evert Hudson of a U-boat observed in the Country Harbour River and Estuary at some time during the war. That may give some insight on possibly how close their approach was. If not in the river itself, they were certainly awfully close at hand, especially in 1942, proven by enemy action in the immediate vicinity and that supports Evert's claim!

Quite possibly an undocumented U-boat had indeed entered the Country Harbour estuary. Evert described a surfaced U-boat coming up the Harbour, backing around, and then turning out to sea again. Such a drill would have been an extremely dangerous undertaking by any U-boat Commander.

The vessel and crew would have been placed at extreme risk and thus, placed very much in harm's way without

³²⁸ Hadley 1985, 73-75

at a point precisely forward of the bridge, after a run of 140 seconds (2100 m). That torpedo exploded sending a tall blast up the ship's side.



The Nova Scotia Atlas 5th ed. Plate. 52- Z3

Corilla was in deep trouble and once again sounded a distress call. Coming to her aid was a nearby escort heading full speed towards her. U-751 spotted the escort and “outmanoeuvred” it. Still the corvette’s presence preoccupied those on the U-boat’s bridge watch. Suddenly another hazard was sighted, a warning buoy 500 m distant to starboard in 60m of water. U-751 veered off to avoid running on to “the Rocks.”

The “Rocks” was a familiar local feature also known as “The Sunken Rock,” or as “Split Rock”, located 2.3 miles northeast of Country Island. It was a treacherous area surrounded by dangerous shoals, ledges, and banks. In the meantime, Bigalk concluded that he fatally injured Corilla and broke off that engagement.

He departed the area and worked his

way southward. But the hunter had now become the hunted.

After midnight 4 February 1942, U-751 picked up the flashing light of Little Hope Island. This was another boulder-strewn islet, 2 miles east of Joli Point, at the entrance to the small harbour of Port Joli.³²⁹

Here U-751 picked up another target of opportunity, the British Tanker Silveray, that was promptly sunk. Then another target was identified, but U-751’s attack was foiled by an RCAF overflight. U-751 was then pursued relentlessly, often, and deep into the coastal shallows of Canadian waters. As for Corilla, she was saved and lived to fight another day!

It was quite possible, if not probable, that Evert Hudson’s lone undated claim of a U-boat in Country Harbour River was quite possibly, a fact! As U-751 was pursued into Canadian coastal shallows, Kptlt. Gerhard Bigalk may have done the

³²⁹ Hadley 1985, 73-75

unexpected, giving his pursuers the slip by coming up the Country Harbour River. Although we cannot account for all of U-751's movements, the vessel did lay in proximity at Country Island for a time at the very mouth of the Country Harbour River.

Military Commitments

Canada's defence, recruitment, internal security, and organization were based around military districts. Those military districts also held key responsibilities for the defence of strategic vital points, and of strategic economic interest, which were often uniquely protected.

This quick account does not include the tremendous resources required in the Strait of Canso Area, Sydney, the eastern shore, nor all of Cape Breton and the Bay of Fundy. Nor does it include New Brunswick, where Military District 7 was responsible for local defence. Military Districts 6 and 7 shared responsibility for protecting the heart of the Bay of Fundy.³³⁰ All to say, the many demands greatly stretched Canada's resources very thinly with so much area to protect.

We have no clear idea how deep inland the dreaded U-boat ventured. Rumours and anecdotes though, suggest that they did wander far afield, and that is something to be explored. Their presence may be more fully exposed as German archives are translated, researched, and published.³³¹ Regardless, we are able to obtain a select sample from what is publicly available, that indicates how close for one county in Nova Scotia, Guysborough, they did come.

³³⁰ Madigan 2019. Canso Defence Area, 19-22

³³¹ Hopper 2013, Group on a Mission

U-Boat	Date	Rough Location	Source
U-82	28-Jan-42	160 mi SE Cape Sable Is.	Hadley pg. 73
U-751	31-Jan-42	Green Is. GuysCo NS	Hadley pg. 73
U-751	02-Feb-42	Country I. Guys. Co	Hadley pg. 74
U-136	08-Apr-42	Off Light Ship Halifax Harbour	Hadley pg. 256
U-213	14-May-42	St Martins, NB - Lands Abwehr agent Alfred Langbein	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 25 Apr -20 Jun 1942
U-432	17-May-42	South Yarmouth Sunk - Foam 43° 20'N, 63° 08'W - Grid	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 30 Apr -2 Jul 1942
U-432	23-May-42	Off American east coast Zurichmoor at 39° 30'N, 66°	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 30 Apr -2 Jul 1942
U-432	30-May-42	Seal Is. - Yarmouth and Barrington - Sunk Sonia	Hadley, pg.95
U-432	31-May-42	Liverpool Packet 15 miles west of Seal Island, Nova Sc	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 30 Apr -2 Jul 1942
U-553	02-Jun-42	At 40° 14'N, 66° 01'W - Grid CB 1885 South of Yarmouth	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 19 Apr -24 Jun 1942
U-432	03-Jun-42	170 miles east by south of Thatchers Island sunk Aeol	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 30 Apr -2 Jul 1942
U-432	09-Jun-42	south of Cape Sable and damaged Malayan Prince	
U-1231	20-Dec-44	Country I. Guys. Co	Hadley, pg 257
U-806	20-Dec-44	Chebucto Head, Halifax Co.	Hadley, pg 257
U-806	22-Dec-44	Egg Is., Guys Co.	Hadley, pg 259
U-1230	22-Dec-44	Half Is. Pt Guys Co	Hadley, pg 259
U-1231	24-Dec-44	Egg Is/Jeddore Rock, Guys Co	Hadley, pg 259

Selected Sample U-boat Positions 1942-1944

U-boats were primitive machines by today's standards, surfacing frequently to recharge their batteries. They couldn't stay under water for months at a time. They did break down and may have had to surface and withdraw to hidden waters to effect repairs from time to time. A certain vigilance therefore had to be maintained to expect the unexpected. The U-boat war raised officialdom's concern as a consequence.

In the end, ignoring any warning and sighting, even from unqualified witnesses or untrained observers, may have held the potential for dire consequences that may have led to certain disaster too. This was the very real problem. It was dealing with the unknowns, the possibilities, and the potential outcomes, that gravely interfered with our internal freedom of movement and international trade.

PART 3 Eye Witness Accounts

Canadian waters became a hunting ground where U-boats sought their prey all along our shores. Their impacts would be witnessed by many, but nebulous sightings were often doubted by authority. What was often required was clear physical evidence not suspicious nor speculative sighting.

One such occurrence that was far from speculative were the four merchant steamships torpedoed and sunk by German U-boats in the waters off Lance Cove, Bell Island. It was a sombre reminder of the Battle of the Atlantic in which death and destruction was brought to the waters around Newfoundland and Labrador during the Second World War.³³²

Speculative sightings were never enough to convince authorities of the U-boat presence or reality. Such ramblings and sightings were often not considered reliable and ignored as a waste of time and effort.³³³ And so, what was often seen remain anecdotal, the stuff of legend, and tall tales that were never corroborated. Perhaps these are now worthy of some reconsideration in the light of day too.

Chapter 12 - Tall Tales

The lynch pin to Great Britain's early survival during the Second World War was the convoy system in which Canada played an active role. That role brought both aid and succour to Britain and its allies throughout the conflict. It was in this necessity of shipping goods; overseas, that brought the war that much closer to Canadian shores. This became especially evident in 1942 as Canada was forced to deal with Operation Paukenschlag (Drumroll) that began with the slaughter of merchant shipping along the US east coast.³³⁴

Operation Paukenschlag broadened the intensity of the Battle of the Atlantic because of Germany's declaration of war against the United States. That brought the full thrust of U-boat campaigns much closer to our shores from Newfoundland down to the Caribbean. And with that, the war was brought even closer to maritime and eastern Canada. For some, it was to become a personal experience that left an indelible mark that became a source of local legend.

Mr. Michael Campbell, a former high school teacher from Cape Breton, taught at Our Lady's High during the 1960's. He related a story to his English class of a U-boat rounding Cape Breton. That U-boat allegedly moored for a night near his hometown of Glace Bay. It moored near enough off shore that its crew allegedly listened from a safe distance to the music played at a local hall.³³⁵

³³² Roberts, Terry. 2024. "Newfoundland waters were a U-boat hunting ground, and that legacy has not been forgotten." *CBC News*, 9 Nov 2024. [Newfoundland waters were a U-boat hunting ground, and that legacy has not been forgotten | CBC News](#)

³³³ Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, 39

³³⁴ Cook, Tim. 2024. *The Good Allies: How Canada An The United States Fought Together To Defeat Fascism During The Second World War*. Penguin Random House Canada Limited., 225

³³⁵ Thorne, Stephen. 2022. "The War Off Our Shores – How the Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence Transformed the Lives of Newfoundlanders and Quebecers." *Legion Magazine*, September -October 2022, 21

This story seemed fanciful, and perhaps, was too fantastic to be true. But Mr. Campbell's story may have had a kernel of truth to it, for there was one sunken U-boat, U-854, with 40 rescued survivors, and where one had a story to tell. At their interrogation, one survivor disclosed that U-854 had surfaced close to Sydney NS. This crew member alluded that they had gone to the movies in Sydney. And perhaps to prove the point, ticket stubs were found in his pocket!³³⁶

The keepers

The eastern and south shore of Nova Scotia's Atlantic coast, in addition to the Bay of Fundy, proved to be both active and hostile places. So, alert and vigilance was constantly maintained against any possible intruder, especially that of the U-boat threat.

One such observer was Donald Crooks on Country Island, whose post lay several miles off the mouth of Country Harbour River near Guysborough County, Nova Scotia. That post was isolated, lonely, but equipped with the latest innovation to monitor his area.

In March 1943, his station was equipped with a radio telephone manufactured by Halicrafter Radio Corp. His prime contact was the coastal station at Glasgow Head (Canso). Donald's call sign was Hilltop 235. And by all accounts, his post saw considerable action.

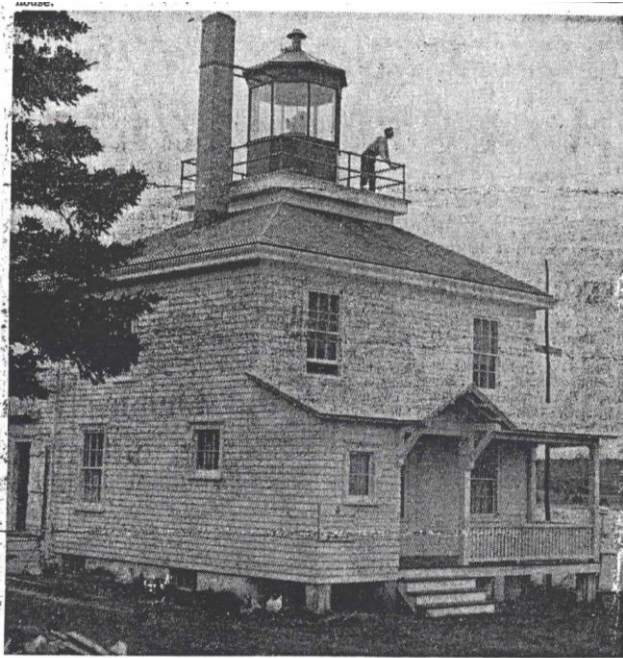
Another RCAF Ground Observers Corps station, again near Country Island, was operated by Ernest Davidson. Davidson operated the Isaac's Harbour Light House Station throughout the Second World War. The lighthouse is located at the very end of Isaac's Harbour overlooking the Bay leading into Country Harbour. Its call sign was PAPA ALPHA 2 0 BLACK.³³⁷

Ernest Davidson's lighthouse was active since 1874. At the time, the station was nothing more than a simple light, a mere lantern in the beginning. The light had improved greatly in the meantime, and by the time Davidson assumed the duties of light house keeping in 1938, it was up to modern standards.

Davidson assumed his duties one short year prior to the out break of war. Ernest would eventually become the principal observer, assisted by his wife, Beckie, and their children.

³³⁶ Barris, Ted. 2022. *The Battle of the Atlantic-gauntlet to victory*. HarperCollins Publishers Ltd Adelaide Centre, East Tower, 22 Adelaide Street. Toronto, Ontario, Canada. M5H 4E3, 394-395

³³⁷ Norma Cooke, Letter 25 Jan 2017



Isaac's Harbor lighthouse, above, was built in 1929 and just this spring an automatic light was installed. Ernest Davidson, who was keeper for 28 years, is shown atop lighthouse.

Photo Sarah Mason Wilson **Light Keeper Retires**, *Guysborough Journal* (presumably), Friday June 3, 1966

But his children were the key asset. They could run fast, enabling any message to be delivered to the local exchange that much sooner. The light was situated approximately one and a half miles from Isaac's Harbour, at the end of a long rough road entirely bordered with heavy foliage. The road had not been well maintained, and in winter, was left unplowed. In the winter, the children had the better legs to deal with any urgent calls!³³⁸

The Davidsons lived an extra busy life during the war. Ernest was also the local Platoon Commander in the Reserve Army. Beckie recalled with a touch of pride, that their home was used as an

arsenal.³³⁹

There was always the potential that the Davidsons were continually in harms way. That was highlighted one night when the Army issued an alert. An armed raider (German) was to pass by their light that night.

The Davidsons and the community were needless to say, ready, willing, and waiting to do their duty should any enemy make an appearance at the dock. Luckily, the evening passed without incident, but the Davidson family was prepared for the worst. The children were not put to bed, nor could Mrs. Davidson

³³⁸ Wilson, Sarah Mason 1966. "Light Keeper Retires." *Guysborough Journal* (presumably), Friday June 3, 1966

³³⁹ Wilson, 3 June 1966

go herself. They all waited in apprehension that the possibility of a shooting war would erupt around them, something quite unheard of, in the quiet village.³⁴⁰

Others Felt Their Wrath

Lighthouses were dangerous places to be, and living there, posed great risk to life and limb. For example, on 9 October 1942, A U-boat (U-69) commanded by Ulrich Graf fired a volley of torpedoes dispatching the merchant ship *Carolus*. This happened in front of a light house manned by Octave Gendron along the Gaspé Coast at Metis QC.

Octave assumed his lighthouse was under attack, A reasonable assumption for one month earlier, U-69 launched two torpedoes in the direction of land at Saint Avon, QC some 300 kilometres along the peninsula near the St Lawrence River's mouth. These torpedoes slammed into the shoreline, resulting in a blast shattering windows in the local village. Five days later, U-69 took its final toll sinking the ferry Caribou in the Cabot Strait the night of 13-14 October, an event much closer to home to the hearts of Nova Scotians and Newfoundlanders.³⁴¹

The patrol of another U-boat (U-165) is very telling of just how vicious and tragic this campaign truly was. U-165 had been sighted near Matane, by HMCS Raccoon 6 September. In that encounter, U-165 launched two torpedoes towards HMCS Raccoon that crossed its bows at perilously close range. It was a close call, but Raccoon escaped unscathed, but not for long.

Other ships in company with Raccoon assumed it pursued U-165 as they heard what they thought were depth charges dropped. It was later discovered that those sounds were German torpedoes ripping through the converted yacht. HMCS Raccoon and its entire crew of 37 were lost in an instant.³⁴²

Amongst Raccoon's dead was Supply Assistant John Sheflin. Ironically as his ship went down, a train sped through nearby Rivière-la-Madeleine. On that train was his wife Marguerite and his two pre-school children. On a spur-of-the moment decision they moved from Toronto to join family in Eureka, Nova Scotia, so that they could be near him when he took his occasional shore leaves. It would be years

³⁴⁰ Wilson, 3 June 1966

³⁴¹ Thorne, Stephen. 2022. "The War Off Our Shores – How the Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence Transformed the Lives of Newfoundlanders and Quebecers." *Legion Magazine*, September-October 2022, 20-24

³⁴² Veterans Affairs Canada. 2005. *The Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence*. ©Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada. PDF Format. Cat. No. V32-84/2005. ISBN 0-662-69036-2 [The Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence \(veterans.gc.ca\)](https://www.veterans.gc.ca). 14

before his family discovered just how close they were before this terrible tragedy tore them apart forever.³⁴³

A bountiful harvest was reaped by U-boats that awful summer, for 23 ships alone were lost that Summer of '42.³⁴⁴

Stories of U-boats confronting locals

Many U-boat observations were made along the coasts in Maine, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia that year too. On 03 July 1942, the Station Commander at O.T.U. 34 was alerted that two submarines were sighted somewhere one-half mile off shore at Robbinston, Maine by a Shore Watcher. A strike force was requested and sent off from Pennfield, NB.³⁴⁵

Two weeks later O.T.U. 34 received another alert on 18-July-1942. The Controller, at Eastern Air Command (E.A.C.) reported a U-Boat sighting in the Bay Of Fundy. O.T.U. 34 once again was to send a striking craft. That request was refused owing to adverse weather conditions, compounded by the fact that the unit was also experiencing mechanical problems. Several of its Ventura aircraft were grounded.³⁴⁶ So these U-boats, if present, got away unchallenged.

Apart from the prominent case of the spy landing at St Martins, NB on May 14, 1942; Nova Scotia had its own case of a suspected but undocumented landing. Elizabeth Swim then only a youngster of 7-8 years old, recounted a story of the insertion of a spy at Bridgewater on the LaHave River. Elizabeth and her family lived downstream from this point.

Elizabeth recounted that a spy was allegedly landed from a U-boat but was caught somewhere near Harlow's Hill.³⁴⁷ Spies were indeed landed in 1942.³⁴⁸ In fact, Germany landed two spies in Canada that year. One was Werner Alfred Waldemar von Janowski who landed near New Carlisle, QC, on November 9, 1942. Janowski was captured soon after landfall was made.³⁴⁹

³⁴³ Veterans Affairs Canada. 2005. *The Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence*, 14-15

³⁴⁴ Greenfield 2004, 256-257

³⁴⁵ Pennfield Parish Historical Society, post 3 Jul 1942 U-Boat Sightings Bay Of Fundy <https://www.facebook.com/groups/141841559219547/permalink/3945725088831156/>

³⁴⁶ Pennfield Parish Historical Society, post citing, 18 Jul 1942

³⁴⁷ Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, 122-123

³⁴⁸ Hopper, Tristin. 2016. "The world's worst Nazi spy: The German agent caught by Canada in a matter of hours." *National Post*, 21 Apr 2016. Accessed: 9 Dec 2020

Source: [The world's worst Nazi spy: The German agent caught by Canada in a matter of hours | National Post](#)

³⁴⁹ Jakobs, Giselle. 2018. "Book Review - Cargo of Lies: The True Story of a Nazi Double Agent in Canada - Dean Beeby (1995)." 8 Jan 2018. Accessed: 9 Dec 2020.

The other spy was Alfred Langbein (alias Alfred Haskins), who was indeed landed from a U-boat earlier, but at St. Martins, NB in May 1942. Langbein was a man disillusioned with the political situation in Germany. It became his personal mission to escape, rather than spy in Canada. It was his way of escaping the Nazis.

Langbein was more successful in evading capture, quietly making his way first, to Montreal and then, to Ottawa. Langbein lived an unassuming life, attracting no attention. He gave himself up when his money ran out November 1, 1944. He was interned and subsequently repatriated to Germany at war's end.³⁵⁰

But the real significance to Elizabeth's recollection even though there was no documented evidence of a spy landing at Bridgewater, NS was this [QUOTE]

"After the war we were told the U-Boats would come up the mouth of the LaHave River, where I believe, there were many isolated areas where they could surface without being seen."³⁵¹

[END QUOTE]

Given the spate of German activities in our waters in the spring, summer, and fall of 1942, it is quite possible then that many of these sightings actually happened. However, in the reality and exigencies of war, such sightings were likely to be denied by authorities as unreliable or as "never happening" to protect intelligence. A hidden truth was likely kept from the public, to prevent fear and panic under the guise of wartime censorship.

Witness Reliability

There was always skepticism concerning any account of U-boat sightings, especially when rendered by inexperienced citizens. Such witnesses were often considered unreliable.

But it would have been foolish to ignore both warnings and sightings of any enemy encounter though, even if proven to be a false alarm. For whom was more familiar and who had better knowledge of local conditions, traffic, boats, and trappings than

Source: [Book Review - Cargo of Lies: The True Story of a Nazi Double Agent in Canada - Dean Beeby \(1995\)](#)
(josefiakobs.info)

³⁵⁰ Jakobs 2018

³⁵¹ Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, 122-123

the local man, woman, girl or even an inexperienced young boy? That fact was discovered by F/Lt Kelly (RCAF), while employed on Aircraft Detection Corps (ADC) duties.

During 1942, Kelly was stationed in Newfoundland for a time, employed on a task separate from his ADC concerns. He made unofficial contact with Aircraft Detection Corps observers though. Kelly found them to be very enthusiastic about their duty. Kelly was greatly concerned with the seemingly frequent and unfounded reports concerning “submarines.” He had one observer in particular in mind, the keeper at Horse Chops (fog alarm station) Trinity North.³⁵²

Kelly did his due diligence and for seven days checked through the observer’s logbook, questioning his frequent reports on submarines. Kelly was impressed by the answers to his questions. All answers were based on the seagoing experience of the Observer. He gave Kelly a clear perception of what was distinguishable at the varying distances by what was seen and heard.³⁵³

It was the keeper’s observances on the calm clear nights that impressed F/Lt Kelly most. This observer heard heavy diesel engines and also reported radio interference. This interference was believed to be caused by U-boats charging batteries while surfaced. Further, this observer recognized every coastal steamer and schooner on his patch. Most importantly, the man was aware that coastal trade had been reduced to a fraction of what it used to be. So, like a Sherlock Holmes’ deduction, what was left for consideration, however improbable, was likely, probable.³⁵⁴

But there were other potential areas of concern too, particularly the possible incursion of enemy aircraft! In April 1942, the Canso Defence Area received an interesting and provocative report. Some unidentified aircraft led to a report in their records titled, “The Mysterious Appearance of an Unknown Aircraft Louisbourg.”

That report from local school teacher, a Ms. MacDonald, was dated April 22, 1942, and only recorded several days after the fact. She raised an alarm, after observing some unknown aircraft April 15th. But Ms. MacDonald only reported her sighting April 20th. Regardless, her delayed sighting had to be investigated.

Standing orders and threat assessments in the Canso Defence Area highlighted the threat of potential enemy air incursions. So, any suspected sighting of an enemy or unidentified aircraft in the area was a cause for immediate alarm. The conjecture at

³⁵² Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, 39

³⁵³ Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, 39

³⁵⁴ Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, 39

the time, was that enemy aircraft could be launched either from a ship, or submarine.

Ms. MacDonald, when interviewed, could not identify any aircraft from silhouettes presented to her. She insisted though that the aircraft had black cross markings on it. Her fear of an unidentified aircraft was understandable. A deep psychological impression had been made on the Canadian public through propaganda, both ours and theirs.

And then again, Pearl Harbor was still very fresh in everyone's memory. And an air threat was very real. It was one reason why No. 5 Radar Squadron (RCAF) was eventually stationed at Cole Harbour in Guysborough County.

Further afield during the summer of 1942, a U-boat was observed by one excited young man of Natashquan, a small, isolated town on the North Shore of Quebec astride the Gulf of St Lawrence. His alleged U-boat sighting was reported to his local mayor. He in turn tried to illicit some action from RCAF authorities at Mont Joli, the nearest airbase. It finally took intervention from Ottawa to get Mont Joli to despatch an airplane. But by then, it was too late either to locate or to confirm a U-boat sighting after seven hours.³⁵⁵

Local residents recalled that German U-boats were all around the St. Lawrence River, Cabot Strait, and Strait of Belle Isle. Their suspicions and conjectures were confirmed when torpedoes were used to attack shipping and other facilities, for example, in the Strait of Belle Isle, on 27th and 28th August 1942.³⁵⁶

Many recalled that in one day alone five ships were sunk in the Gulf of St Lawrence, so locals were well aware and attuned to the dangers and the importance of rapid reporting.³⁵⁷

This U-boat incident was not a solitary case. Another U-boat was observed surfaced at or near an old lighthouse again, near Natashquan.³⁵⁸ Interestingly this boat was observed for well over an hour while its crew went for a swim. That in of itself seems unbelievable. Any one who has had some experience of swimming those waters, even at the height of summer, will find the experience to be an excruciating one. The extremities turn blue in short order. But perhaps given the desperate conditions in a U-boat, any chance to clean the body; however uncomfortable, may have been a welcomed distraction.

³⁵⁵ Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, 64-65

³⁵⁶ Wikipedia. 2017. "Convoy LN-7." "page was last edited on 29 June 2017, at 11:06 (UTC). Accessed: 1 Feb 2021.

Source: [Convoy LN-7 - Wikipedia](#)

³⁵⁷ Coggon, Watch and Warn. 2004, 64-65

³⁵⁸ Coggon, Watch and Warn. 2004, 64-65

Given the spate of German activities in our waters in the spring, summer, and fall of 1942, it is quite possible then that many of these sightings actually happened.

Still not all observers' reports were believable. There was considerable hysteria and war fever was rampant. Ghosts and phantoms abounded everywhere. Imaginations sometimes ran wild. So, authorities remained skeptical of the observations made by local inhabitants.

In the end, ignoring any warning and sighting, even from unqualified witnesses or untrained observers, may have held the potential for dire consequences quite possibly leading to certain disaster too. This was the very real problem. It was dealing with the unknowns, the possibilities, and the potential outcomes, that gravely interfered with our internal freedom of movement and international trade. But vigilance had to be constant to be effective when on a war footing.

Chapter 13 1943 - A Hiatus Of Sorts

Story of U-262 special operation

U-boat operations in the Gulf of St Lawrence were limited in 1943. There was a hiatus of sorts imposed because of the recognized hazards to life and limb encountered in 1942. U-Boats would not return in quantity until 1944 when significant technological improvements had been made that influenced German tactics and resolve.

Regardless, there are some factual accounts of U-boats present in the Gulf of St Lawrence in 1943. These operations were limited to specific missions. One such mission is found in U-262 in 1943 that gives us an idea of how close they actually came to shore.

U-262 actively patrolled within sight of Tignish PEI for four days in May 1943. U-262's hull was illuminated on several occasions as it was well within the range of the North Point light and the lights of Tignish Harbour.³⁵⁹

U-262 had a specific mission to achieve. It was an unlikely mission given the intensity of anti-submarine action in the Gulf of St Lawrence the year before in 1942. That action dissuaded the Germans from pursuing any largescale operations in the Gulf of St Lawrence in 1943. So, U-262's mission was indeed special.

³⁵⁹ Hadley 1985, 173

U-262 was brought in close proximity to Canadian coastal waters. The Captain's observations while on patrol are telling that supports the anecdotal observations, evidence and stories recorded after the war.

U-262 was on a rescue mission for an organized prison break scheduled for 1943. German Prisoners of War interred at Camp 70 near Ripples at Minto New Brunswick (NB), received coded messages in their personal mail advising that a U-Boat would be waiting for them at North Cape, PEI in early May 1943. The prisoners were ordered to make an escape attempt. The mission was code named "Operation Elster (Magpie)."³⁶⁰

Escapees were to make their way 250 kilometres to Cape Tormentine, NB. There they were to cross the Northumberland Strait, and thence, make their way to their final destination, North Cape, PEI. If all went well, they were to be rescued by the waiting U-262. The mass prison break was planned for April-May 1943.

This bizarre operation was all too surreal, but it happened, nonetheless. There were significant challenges concerning Canadian geography and the scope of the undertaking. But it would have been the supreme propaganda coup had it worked. This fantastic mission proceeded regardless of the consequences.

Two U-boats were tasked for the job. The first U-376, captained by Friederich-Karl Marks. was the primary boat. U-376 sailed April 6, 1943. Each boat contained sealed orders aboard when they departed from La Pallice, France. These orders were to only be opened once directed by radio while at sea.

U-262 was the backup boat should U-376 meet with "misadventure" and would assume the mission upon receipt of a coded message if required to do so. U-262, captained by Heinz Franke, preceded U-376's departure March 27th. But U-262 soon returned to port with technical difficulties. Repair was made to its defective air vent. U-262 set sail once again only on April 7th.³⁶¹

In the meantime, U-376 was reportedly lost in the Bay of Biscay. German Headquarters lost contact with U-376 off the coast of France April 10th. They assumed that U-376 and its crew of 47 were sunk because of the loss of contact. U-376 was never found.

³⁶⁰ MacKay, Mary. 2002. "Tale of two subs.", *The Guardian newspaper*/Charlottetown/Prince Edward Island/Canada, 12 Aug 2002 (in **The Powell & Pressburger Pages**). Accessed: 19 March 2011 .Source: http://www.powell-pressburger.org/Reviews/41_49P/49P_08.html

³⁶¹MacKay, 12 Aug 2002

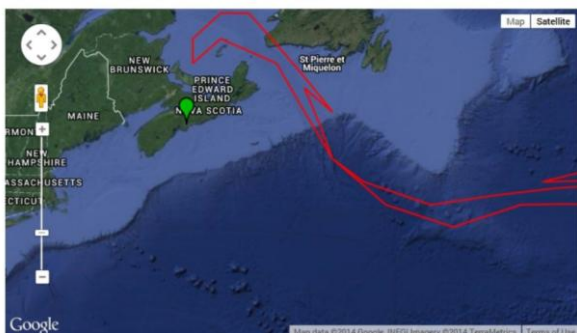
Once determined that U-376 was lost, U-262 was directed to open its sealed orders for “Operation Elster”, receiving the order on April 15th during one of Franke’s regular radio reporting cycles. U-262 made haste toward Canadian waters.³⁶²

Interestingly the Allies were well aware of the German plans. More importantly they regularly tracked German U-boat positions. U-262’s arrival was expected.

U-262 arrived in Canadian waters passing through the narrowest point of the Cabot Strait on 26/27 April.³⁶³ The approach through these waters was harrowing. Surface ice blocked their way. Franke gingerly picked his approach through to North Cape, PEI.

U-262 finally reached its assigned post at North Point Reef, PEI. The boat rested on the bottom in 30m of water, four miles off the Coast on May 2nd. It remained on station at latitude 46.57 longitude 63.15 for a nerve-wracking four days from the 3rd to the 6th of May.³⁶⁴

Daily positions, sinkings and allied attacks during the patrol of U-262



Google maps:

Much to Franke’s surprise, whenever he raised his periscope, he observed a number of “Maryland” aircraft orbiting his position. He was deeply concerned and suspicious by the presence of these aircraft while on station awaiting the escapees.

Franke had no indications of potential aircraft threats in any of his sealed orders or briefings. He correctly assumed that U-262 was under a

³⁶² MacKay, 12 Aug 2002

³⁶³ MacKay, 12 Aug 2002

³⁶⁴ UBoat.net. 2011. “Patrol info for U-262.” © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 20 March 2011. Accessed: 20 March 2011. Source: <http://www.uboat.net/boats/patrols/details.php?boat=262&date=1943-05-11>

, and

Hadley 1985, 174

glide path of a training unit. Franke maintained a tense vigil while waiting for the escapees despite the aircraft and from the threat of exposure overhead!³⁶⁵

Franke finally broke off the engagement according to orders after four days. No escapees were in sight. He moved off North –North-East toward the Magdellan Islands thence southeast once again through the Cabot Strait still wary of air attack. There were a number of tenuous aircraft and coast watcher sightings that may have marked U-262's outward bound journey.³⁶⁶ But none of these resulted in any attack or contact by either RCN or RCAF vessels and aircraft.

Franke reported no air attacks on U-262 throughout this ordeal. But he did encounter naval action whilst on patrol in-bound to its primary mission. U-262 attacked convoy HX 233. Franke was given leave to do so as long as it was outside the primary zone of his main mission.

HX 233 was a target of opportunity. It was on its way overseas and was well outside the prohibited zone. U-262 attacked then reported being fired upon with depth charges and charged at by the attached naval escorts.³⁶⁷ U-262 was very lucky and managed to escape to later pursue its primary mission.

U-262's attack on HX233 certainly alerted Canadian authorities to its presence. Eastern Air Command (EAC) increased efforts in the hunt for an enemy in and around U-262's transit path. An aerial attack was made on one suspicious target on May 16th. But this attack occurred long after U-262 had transited the area.

The credit for this attack is often given to Anson training aircraft stationed at Charlottetown, PEI.³⁶⁸ The attack was likely made by Hudson aircraft from O.T.U. 31 Debert, NS based on official reports of the day for that period.³⁶⁹

But other reports indicated that a Charlottetown-based Anson training aircraft, out of General Reconnaissance Unit 31, also attacked and dropped two depth charges on a stationary submarine at periscope depth. This attack occurred somewhere between the eastern point of P.E.I. and the Magdalene Islands along U-262's exit line.

Given that U-262 did not record any air assaults, we must conclude that such an attack occurred either after U-262 made its escape or against some other target of opportunity. It is alleged that the Charlottetown attack produced some wreckage

³⁶⁵ Hadley 1985, 174

³⁶⁶ Ibid Hadley 1985, 174

³⁶⁷ MacKay, 12 Aug 2002

³⁶⁸ Hadley 1985, 174

³⁶⁹ Canada, National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage, Public Record Office(PRO) File 199/435 – RCAF Attacks on U-Boats, 7 June 1943

and oil slicks. It may well have been that there was another boat on station or in the area of the Gulf at the time.

There were 122 U-boats on patrol on May 16, 1943, the majority of which were concentrated in the mid-Atlantic Gap.³⁷⁰ There were two other U-boats on patrol in addition to U-262 who were near or in Canadian waters at the time. These were U-119 and U-161.

U-119 was on a position just off Halifax on May 30th but was somewhere in the mid-Atlantic Gap May 11th. U-161 was just off the US coast May 11th in a position south east of Baltimore.

Then U-161 was just off Yarmouth NS from April 25th to May 2nd 1943 holding a line patrol line from 40.39N/62.30W to 41.33N/64.54W. The timing of all these approaches do not coincide with any Canadian combat reports at all.

Both boats may have been on O.T.U. 31's patrol line at some point during the period. No other records were found to support any other coastal incursions beyond that of U-262 in the Gulf. But then again, records were neither perfect nor were they complete.

Who else may have accompanied U-262 remains a mystery. So, what was observed by the Hudson and Anson aircrews on the 11th and the 16th of May remains a mystery too!

Franke's patrol track lends credence to how close U-boats approached the Atlantic Canadian coast line. A detailed search of available U-boat patrol records proved indeterminate. We may never know who was there, but we do know, the enemy was lurking about.

This period marked a high operational tempo for the U-boat fleet elsewhere and in the Atlantic. The period also marked a personal tragedy felt most deeply by Admiral Dönitz.

On May 19th 1943, U-954 was sighted on the surface in the mid-Atlantic Gap. U-954 was attacked by several units of the Royal Navy. HMS Sennen was first to sight U-954 on the surface.

U-954 was subsequently and vigorously pursued by a consort of four RN naval vessels. The submarine fought gallantly and fired torpedoes prior to crash diving. All torpedoes missed their mark. U-954 was eventually hunted down and sunk by HMS Sennen's hedgehog with all hands that day.

³⁷⁰ U-boat Net, <http://www.uboat.net/boats/patrols/search.php>, Accessed: 7 November 2014

Sadly, Peter Dönitz, youngest son of Admiral Dönitz, serving as watch officer on U-954, was listed amongst the dead.³⁷¹

³⁷¹ U-boat Net: <http://www.uboot.net/allies/warships/ship/101.html>, Accessed: 7 November 2014

Other Special ops Weather Station Kurt – 1943

Kapitänleutnant Peter Schrewe, commander of *U-537*, departed Kiel, Germany on his first combat patrol September 18th, 1943. *U-537* carried aboard specialized weather transmitter WFL-26, codenamed "Kurt", along with meteorologist, Dr. Kurt Sommermeyer, and his assistant, Walter Hildebrant.³⁷²

U-537 faced a difficult passage as it headed in a northerly direction toward the tip of Labrador. Along the way *U-537* encountered heavy seas that caused considerable damage to the boat and the loss of her gun mounting. *U-537* was in a helpless position unable to submerge until repairs effected.³⁷³ But *Kapitänleutnant* Peter Schrewe pressed on with his mission surfaced and open to exposure and attack.³⁷⁴

Installation of what was a secret NAZI weather station began within an hour of dropping anchor upon their arrival October 22nd at Martin Bay in northern Labrador. The location was near Cape Chidley. This landing was the only armed German military operation on land in North America that occurred during the Second World War.³⁷⁵

Very shortly after, with an hour of dropping anchor, a suitable site was located. Dr. Sommermeyer, his assistant, and ten sailors disembarked and began the installation. Vigilance was maintained by armed lookouts posted on nearby high ground. While this installation was ongoing the other crew members set about to repair the submarine's storm damage. It took two days to install the equipment.³⁷⁶

The Germans did their best to camouflage their outpost and to hide its origin. They disguised their presence with empty American cigarette packets. These were left around to deceive anyone who chanced upon the site. One canister holding the equipment was marked and misspelled "*Canadian Meteor Service*". Again, this was an attempt to simulate and disguise the installation as a "*Canadian Weather Service*" endeavour. No such Canadian service existed. They soon departed to

³⁷² Wikipedia. 2024. "Weather Station Kurt." Accessed: 10 May 2024. This page was last edited on 11 April 2024, at 16:02 (UTC). [Weather Station Kurt - Wikipedia](#)

³⁷³ Gallant, Cedric. 2023. "Who really discovered this remote Nazi weather station on the northern tip of Labrador?" *Nanatsiaq News*. May 27, 2023 Source: [Who really discovered this remote Nazi weather station on the northern tip of Labrador? \(nunatsiaq.com\)](#)

³⁷⁴ Wikipedia. 2024. "Weather Station Kurt."

³⁷⁵ Wikipedia. 2024. "Weather Station Kurt."

³⁷⁶ Wikipedia. 2024. "Weather Station Kurt."

proceed with the remainder of their patrol.³⁷⁷ It is alleged that the site was forgotten until its rediscovery in 1977.³⁷⁸

Regardless, their effort was in vain for the weather station only transmitted for a very short time. There it remained for about 40 years until Alec Douglas, a Canadian Armed Forces historian, discovered it on a trip in 1981 and officially documented its existence.³⁷⁹

Peter Johnson, a geomorphologist working on an unrelated project, actually stumbled upon the German weather station in 1977 but did not realize its significance.³⁸⁰ Clues to the station's purpose were confirmed by some archival work conducted by retired Siemens engineer Franz Selinger. Selinger was writing a history of the company, when he discovered in the company's and Sommermeyer's papers of the station's existence.³⁸¹

The evidence around the station suggested that it was an undiscovered event. But there were other clues as well that also suggested it likely was discovered much earlier by the Inuit and that, it was they who quite possibly disabled it back in 1943. A .303 shell casing was found in situ, a caliber employed by many hunters who used Ranger-supplied British Enfield rifles.³⁸²

Douglas observed on his 1981 trip that:³⁸³

[QUOTE]

“Someone had been there before us...Every canister had been opened. Batteries and radio parts seem to have been systematically dismantled [...] the equipment had been deliberately smashed.”

[END QUOTE]

Douglas also observed a circle of stone suggesting some party had camped there previously. While underneath one of the cannisters, he also found a single .303 rifle cartridge bearing the inscription ‘British Dominion.’³⁸⁴

³⁷⁷ Wikipedia. 2024. “Weather Station Kurt.”

³⁷⁸ Wikipedia. 2024. “Weather Station Kurt.”

³⁷⁹ Gallant, Cedric. 2023.

³⁸⁰ Wikipedia. 2024. “Weather Station Kurt.”

³⁸¹ Wikipedia. 2024. “Weather Station Kurt.”

³⁸² Gallant, Cedric. 2023.

³⁸³ Gallant, Cedric. 2023.

³⁸⁴ Gallant, Cedric. 2023.

Much earlier in August 1977, a young 24-year-old Michael Keelan was fishing with his brother-in-law, Paul Jararuse. They were fishing for char near Martin Bay, called Taliarusik Inlet in Inuktitut. They found some debris and the site. Keelan queried what it was. His brother in law Paul Jararuse, said:³⁸⁵

[QUOTE]

“Some of the older elders said, ‘Oh yeah, there was some kind of a weather station there that wasn’t American,’”

[END QUOTE]

Sadly, none of those elders remain to either tell or confirm the story. But one thing was a fact, the Germans selected their site on indigenous fishing grounds upon which they built their station.³⁸⁶ And as a chosen and select fishing ground there is no doubt that the Inuit wandered there. It may be speculation, but also it may well be that the Inuit destroyed this weather station in the first place.³⁸⁷

Picking up the tale from 1943, U-537 then proceeded southward to lay off Newfoundland where it was attacked October 31st by a Hudson Bomber from RCAF 11 Sqn. The Hudson fired eight rockets at the boat, but all missed their mark.³⁸⁸

U-537 moved further south of Newfoundland and lay in a position between Newfoundland and the eastern seaboard of Nova Scotia where it endured two further attacks by aircraft on the 10th and 11th November. U-537 was attacked firstly by a Catalina from RCAF 5 Sqn on November 10th. The Catalina dropped four depth charges on the boat off Cape Race, Newfoundland. That attack was unsuccessful, and the boat escaped unharmed.³⁸⁹

But U-537 was a marked target! A repeat attack occurred one day later by yet another Catalina from the same squadron. This Catalina dropped four depth charges causing some slight damage to the boat. Several ships were alerted to the boats presence and called in to hunt U-537 but failed to locate it. The damaged boat escaped and managed to reach its homeport on December 8, 1943.³⁹⁰

There were no recorded ships lost to U-537 over the course of its short career from January 27, 1943 to November 10, 1944. The Kriegsmarine decided to move it

³⁸⁵ Gallant, Cedric. 2023.

³⁸⁶ Gallant, Cedric. 2023.

³⁸⁷ Gallant, Cedric. 2023.

³⁸⁸ UBoat.net. 2024. “Patrols by U-537.” Accessed 10 May 2024. 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason . [The Type IXC/40 U-boat U-537 - German U-boats of WWII - uboat.net](#)

³⁸⁹ UBoat.net. 2024. “Patrols by U-537.”

³⁹⁰ UBoat.net. 2024. “Patrols by U-537.”

from the Atlantic to the Far East where it met its fate November 11, 1944. It was torpedoed by SS Flounder commanded by Cdr J.E. Stevens in the south Java Sea just east of Soerabaja. All 58 crew were lost.³⁹¹

Part 4 – Pointing To The End

Chapter 14 A crucial year leading to 1944

A return to the St Lawrence began in 1944. But before that, the Kriegsmarine first had a problem to resolve. Before they ever could attempt to enter the Gulf once again, they required the cloak of invisibility; their solution, Schnorkel.

Advancements in the Ally's use of technology, tactics, air power, and their combined employment were the key factors leading to this development and the employment of Schnorkel. It wasn't until these coalesced as a functional U-boat killing machine that made it imperative for the Kriegsmarine to develop a solution.³⁹²

In fact, the development of technology was a war within a war, where one technological advancement of one or the other, forced or demanded change. It became a dance of who reacted the fastest in order to survive. Ironically, Schnorkel had a history preceding the Second World War but, its usefulness and advantages were ignored by the Kriegsmarine until it was needed.

The background behind the events leading to a return 1944.

The intervening years between the Great War and the Second World War, saw individual services carve their own territories in the anticipated demands of future conflicts. This interservice rivalry was advanced by defence budget cuts in the aftermath of the Great War. That decline forced all to rethink their position and needs in order to maintain relevancy often based on the cheapest options. It became planning based on the unknown that in the end forced some trade-offs in capability and jurisdictions.

The Royal Navy, for example, put great faith in the efficacy of ASDIC over air power. In fact, they deemed air power to be superfluous to requirements and “non-essential.” So, they lost any meaningful claim on aircraft or development when their use and value were finally recognized, and when the time came for their wider employment later. Thus, all existing aircraft on the eve of the Second World

³⁹¹ Niestle 2014,128

³⁹² Carey,2019. *Sighted Sub, Sank Same*.17

War were incapable of long range air patrol thereby placing further reliance and faith on the Royal Navy's use of ASDIC.³⁹³

There were impacts elsewhere especially in the employment of technology. It was found that bombs and profiles required to engage an enemy in maritime attack roles posed a greater danger to the pilots and aircraft, rather than to the U-boats themselves. The bombs tended to bounce back due to the low levels used to engage a U-boat this exploding under an aircraft.³⁹⁴

The U-boat war was an example of the impacts of technology and tactics that developed over the course of the conflict. It was a seesaw battle where one gained an advantage only to find it negated by the change and employment of technology or tactics of the other in response to a threat.

For example, the situation early in 1939-1940 was exacerbated by the tactics employed by the Kriegsmarine, who in time tended to engage in groups across convoy lines. When a U-boat contacted a convoy, a message was sent to their headquarters and a coordinated attack was organized. Such efforts had limited success in the first year of the war, but it was refined to greater extent in the later years.³⁹⁵

The Kriegsmarine gained traction from mid-May to December 2nd, 1940. Nearly 300 ships totalling 1.6 million tons were sunk with all their cargo and with a great loss of life. Significantly 18 U-Boats were largely responsible for this carnage with five accounting for a third of this total alone.³⁹⁶

The situation improved for the RN by 1941 taken in the strides dealing with the U-boat threat. The convoys became better protected by naval escorts with the provision of greater air cover. It made it harder for U-boats to penetrate this screen. Also, U-boats were insufficient in number and unable to mount large scale attacks in greater number, especially near the approaches to the United Kingdom.

Donitz was forced for a time into a strategic retreat from the busy northwestern approaches, where the air assets were deployed. Thus, Donitz was pushed out further into the Atlantic where he was able to take advantage of their limited range as convoys were left unprotected and vulnerable in the mid-Atlantic.³⁹⁷

The Kriegsmarine fortunes changed in 1941. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour was both unannounced to and unwelcomed by the Germans; but it opened the

³⁹³ Williams, Andrew. 2003. *The Battle of the Atlantic – Hitler's Gray Wolves of the Sea and the Allies Desperate Struggle to Defeat them*. Basic Books – A member of Perseus Book Group, 61

³⁹⁴ Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 61

³⁹⁵ Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 83

³⁹⁶ Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 103

³⁹⁷ Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 126-127

doors to the U-boat war on the United States. Dönitz decided that this first wave of boats would operate between the St Lawrence River and Cape Hatteras off North Carolina on the eastern seaboard of the United States.³⁹⁸

Operation Drumbeat took a devastating toll on Allied shipping despite the shallow waters off the US coast being less than an ideal hunting ground. This area was also heavily trafficked and a busy sea-lane. But disregarding these factors, Donitz had every reason to suppose that US defences would be weak.³⁹⁹ He was right.

The Type VII boats had a similar successes along Canada's eastern seaboard. But they had a much tougher go. One commander of a U-boat (U-552), recalled⁴⁰⁰

Commented [GM6]: Recheck quote from actual source

[QUOTE]

'We entered these icy waters, and a number of the crew ended up with frozen feet, limbs; we weren't dressed warmly. People were standing on the bridge with icicles hanging off their caps; everything was under ice. The water that came on deck immediately; the temperature was minus 10 degrees; the balance of the boat was threatened, and every two hours we had to dive to melt away this bad time.'

[END QUOTE]

Donitz's sole goal in 1942 was to sink more ships than the allies could build.⁴⁰¹ Operation Drumbeat was a very good start to achieving that end. It was particularly concerning with the great loss of oil tankers off the US coast that had created a energy crisis of sorts resulting in a two million ton shortfall of petroleum products alone. The responsibility for this fiasco was place squarely at the feet of Britain's ally, the USN. The British were not wrong in that assessment. General George Marshall; US army Chief of Staff, wrote to his counterpart in the USN, Admiral King 19 June, in which he put to King:⁴⁰²

[QUOTE]

'The losses by submarines off our Atlantic seaboard and in the Caribbean now threaten our entire war effort.'

³⁹⁸ Beesley, Patrick. Beesley. *Very Special Intelligence – The Story of the Admiralty's Operational Intelligence Centre 1939-1945*. Seaforth Publishing, Pen & Swords Books Ltd, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS, 102-116

³⁹⁹ Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 163-164

⁴⁰⁰ Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 169-170

⁴⁰¹ Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 169-170

⁴⁰² Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 185

[END QUOTE]

This German success couldn't have arrived at a worse time. Donitz judge by the summer of 1942 that his U-boat force had reached a desired target. Donitz was now in command of a 300 U-boat fleet that he had determined was the minimum requirement to bring the allies to its knees and defeat them. It meant that larger packs now could be deployed and scattered across all convoy lines and routes. His search for targets was made easier.⁴⁰³

But with success also brought the seeds of disaster. The fall of France allowed Donitz to base his fleet out of ports in France. Although it gave Donitz the advantage of shorter transit times and greater operational range and time on patrol, its disadvantage lay in the concentration of his fleet as it was concentrated and funnelled through the Bay of Biscay. It was in the Bay that airpower was brought to bear in his fleet's destruction.⁴⁰⁴

The Bay of Biscay was indeed a funnel. It was a confined area of some 400 miles wide. Donitz had no choice but to transit through it with the majority of his operational bases resting in France. U-boats passed coming and going on their way to and from their operational areas. Now the Allies were intent on making any passage as difficult and hazardous as possible.⁴⁰⁵

Donitz missed his great opportunity. Only a handful of well trained U-Boat mariners laid siege to the British Isles at the beginning of the war. Despite their determination, the disproportionate number of ships that the Kriegsmarine sunk had greater effect from their limited number than on patrol.

Regrettably, the impact of the weapon was ignored by the German High Command at the time. Their interest would only come later in the war with greater U-boat numbers built. Thus, their early advantage and opportunity were lost. Donitz was rarely able to muster more than six boats at a time whereas his requirement was 300 to do the task.⁴⁰⁶

Resolving the "Funnel Trap"

A number of factors led to the development of Schnorkel. The congestion and destruction of the U-boat fleet in the Bay of Biscay was one of them. That alone forced a move of Donitz's U-boats into the mid-Atlantic to evade the impacts of

⁴⁰³ Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 189

⁴⁰⁴ Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 193

⁴⁰⁵ Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 193

⁴⁰⁶ Williams 2003 *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 287 & 189

land based aircraft. These air attacks in conjunction coordinated with attacks from naval assets proved a deadly combination. The allies were just beginning to learn, understand, and employ the results of the lessons of these combined operations.⁴⁰⁷

The employment of land based aircraft against submarines was nothing new. Air assets were also employed in the maritime patrol role as early as World War I. The basic lessons learned there was, aircraft proved to be an effective force against German U-boats. It forced them to remain submerged and exhausting their batteries either while en route to or from operational areas. U-boats were found to be very vulnerable to air attack by air escorted convoys.⁴⁰⁸

Yet in 1939, despite the lessons of World War I, most belligerents were ill-prepared to engage submarines by land based aircraft for a number of reasons.⁴⁰⁹ Inter-service rivalry and competition certainly played a role, but adherence to strategic doctrine in that the bomber would always get through, certainly swayed both professional and popular opinion.⁴¹⁰

There was little visible evidence of the efficacy of land based aircraft in the maritime surveillance or anti-submarine role. This discrepancy served to muddy the waters. Given the weight of evidence between 1939 and 1941, the inter-service rivalry for the control of air power, saw strategic bombing dominate the agenda rather than the optimization and efficiency of air power amongst all competing resources. This struggle governed the organizational schemes concomitant with the force of personality at the time.⁴¹¹

The leading champion of U-boat sinkings on the face of events was, indeed, naval action. It was not until 1942 that airpower in total and land based aircraft in particular, started to produce results in quantity that even matched the results from naval action.

The point that is often lost in the discussion though, was that these land based attacks played a vital role. The destruction of a U-Boat may have been the direct object, but the land based aircrafts' importance was often lost in the unseen and

⁴⁰⁷ Carey, 2019. *Sighted Sub, Sank Same*. 17

⁴⁰⁸ Hannable, William S. 1998. "Research Studies Series, Case Studies In The Use Of Land-Based Aerial Forces in Maritime Operations, 1939-1990, Air Force History & Museums Program, Washington, D.C. September 1998.

Accessed: 16 May 2024, [AFD-130916-005.PDF \(defense.gov\)](#), 3-4, and

Baughen, Greg. 2021. *RAF At The Crossroads - Second Front And Strategic Bombing Debate, 1942-1943*. Air World, Pen & Sword Books Ltd Yorkshire – 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S70 2as, England Or Pen And Sword Books Lawrence Rd, Havertown, Pa 19083, USA, 308

⁴⁰⁹ Hannable, 1998 pg. 9

⁴¹⁰ Kemp, Paul. 2004. *Convoy! -Drama in Artic Waters*. Castle Books,,101-102

⁴¹¹ Hannable, 1998, 11 and 14

indirect result.⁴¹² Airpower kept the U-Boat submerged, which was probably its most important service and purpose.

The suppression of U-boat activity and operability were likely the more important and vital objects that contributed to success. It was the limiting of U-boat operations that saved lives and materiel. But maintaining an air umbrella was most likely viewed as the more costly option when compared to strategic bombing in terms of fuel, crew requirements, and aircraft. In the end, it simply did not play to air force doctrine of hitting at enemy morale at a time when the force of personality and public opinion demanded otherwise.⁴¹³

The Allies did employ air raids against ports resulting in some U-boat losses, but this did not occur in great frequency until the latter two years of the war, 1944-1945. These raids contributed little to easing the naval threat or to assuage the loss of merchant shipping from U-boat action on the high seas.

In the end though, it was the presence of aircraft over the high seas that dissuaded U-boat activity and limited its success. And a very important point though is often lost was the majority of U-boat sinkings that resulted from air action between 1939 and 1945 were due largely to land based aircraft (Table 1).⁴¹⁴

⁴¹² Carey 2019. *Sighted Sub, Sank Same*, 31

⁴¹³ Carey 2019. *Sighted Sub, Sank Same*, 31

⁴¹⁴ U-Boat Net, 1995-2011

(Author's Note to Table 1:

This data was adjusted to remove duplication of combined actions for which both the navy and air forced were simultaneously credited for a joint action. Adjustments were also made to exclude scuttling and SOS (in 1944) in order to highlight losses solely due to misadventure or accident while at sea. From 1939-1945.

This is as pure a picture as I can get it within my limited means. There may be slight differences between my data and U-boat net which is largely due to the categorization applied by different observers. It does not materially alter the big picture in the greater scheme of things. For example, U-boat net yielded 37 combined naval-air attacks. I found 27 carrier-borne and 5 land-based or amphibian-based attacks my number rises to 32. My data was manually transcribed from U-boat net records. Any errors or omissions are my own and not the results of others. G.D Madigan 2 Jun 2011.); and

Anon. *The Battle of the Atlantic*, Canadian Naval Review, Vol.1 #1 (Spring 2005), pg. 19

A contrast to this paper highlights the differences resulting from differing categorization, parsing of the data and possibly investigator bias. The big picture remains the same.

Table 1 – A Comparison of U-Boat Sinking by Air Attack Classification

Comparison of Air Action Class only						
Year	Land Based Aircraft	Amphibious/ marine based A/c	Carrier Base A/C	Specific Known Air Raids		Total
1939	0	0	0	0	✓	0
1940	1	2	1	0	✓	4
1941	1	1	2	0	✓	4
1942	27	8	6	0	✓	41
1943	90	35	25	2	✓	152
1944	34	26	23	17	✓	100
1945	16	3	1	28	✓	48
Total Air Action	169	75	58	47	✓	349
% Total Destroyed Air Action	48%	21%	17%	13%		100%
Total Destroyed	772					

Air attacks accounted for 349 of 772 or 45% of all U-Boat losses between 1939 and 1945. The contribution of land based aircraft is very evident (Table 1). Land based aircraft represented 48% of total destructive losses by all air causes (Table 1). In comparison to cumulative losses from all sources, land based aircraft accounted for 28% of all U-boats destroyed, compared to the lion share of 41% attributed to Naval action (Table 2).

Table 2 tends to indicate and support that the lion's share of U-boat losses from 1939 to 1942 was indeed largely due to naval action. It was only after this point that U-boat losses to aircraft operation saw significant increase.

Table 2 U-Boat Losses 1939-1945 Caused by Allied Action

<u>Actual</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Naval Action</u>	<u>Mines</u>	<u>Carrier Base A/C</u>	<u>Land Based Aircraft</u>	<u>Amphibious/ marine based A/c</u>	<u>Misadventure/Un known Accident/Other</u>	<u>Total Losses</u>
	1939	7	2					9
	1940	13	6	1	1	2	4	24
	1941	27	1	2	1	1	4	35
	1942	36	5	6	27	8	8	86
	1943	81	2	25	92	35	25	243
	1944	101	13	23	51	26	57	249
	1945	53	13	1	44	3	18	126
	Total	318	42	58	216	75	116	772
	% total destroyed	41%	5%	8%	28%	10%	15%	100%

In the arguments over scarce defence economic resources in 1941 though, it was evident that land based aircraft operations against U-Boat activities were discounted. The favour of strategic assets was then directed toward air warfare over the European continent.

These arguments likely delayed the closure of the air gap in the Battle of the Atlantic as the much needed aircraft were deemed more important for the prosecution of the strategic air war in Europe.

Churchill also believed that employment of an air arm in an antisubmarine role was as yet undeveloped in 1941. Subsequently, its value was indeed limited and a waste of resources.⁴¹⁵ He therefore concluded his plans for the three services and set his priorities accordingly that year. Churchill did augment Coastal Command, but the lion's share of incoming air assets still went to Harris's Bomber Command.⁴¹⁶

Yet matters came to a head in 1942 for Canada in particular. A re-organization of land based maritime assets would be necessary to meet the looming U-boat threat in the Gulf of St Lawrence.

The commencement of that battle played an important part in the consideration of the employment of land base aircraft in an anti-submarine role. This consideration would later be of much concern to the German navy at the conclusion of its operations in 1942 in the Gulf of St Lawrence. Constant air surveillance and air attack led the Kriegsmarine to withdraw from this theatre as it was considered too dangerous.⁴¹⁷

Although the German navy lost no U-Boats to air attack in the Gulf of St Lawrence, the persistence of its pursuers and the intensity of their attacks, forced the Germans out of the Gulf to more profitable hunting grounds in the mid-Atlantic. Thus 1942 was a pivotable year. The early U-boats successes reaped a rain of terror as the Allies developed new techniques in seeking out and destroying them from 1942 on.

But it was the lesson of the mid-Atlantic Gap that forced the issue as the Kriegsmarine sought means to greater protection and the cloak of invisibility. The closure of the gap by the employment of long range aircraft and naval assets would seal their fate if nothing was done.

But there were issues within the Allied camp as well. The decision to allocate long range assets to the RAF before Coastal Command and the needs of the Royal Navy seemed reasonable in light of the results achieved to date. In the battle of U-boat

⁴¹⁵ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 147-148

⁴¹⁶ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 112 and Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, 121

⁴¹⁷ Andrews, David. 2008. "The Battle of the Gulf of St Lawrence." Royal Canadian Legion Branch # 98 © 2008 All Rights Reserved, 9. Accessed 2 October 2010. Source: www.kingstonlegion.com/.../Battle%20of%20the%20Gulf%20of%20St%20Lawrence.doc and <http://www.kingstonlegion.com/Poppy/Call%20to%20Remembrance.html>

Andrews cites "His last five U-boats in the theatre had encountered too much opposition and had sunk only five ships. Dönitz believed that such results could not justify a continued presence in Canada's inland waters....Still; a victory of sorts had been won. Ever-improving defences had deterred the U-boats, although it would take a post-war examination of German war records to confirm Donitz's conclusions.

operations, the gathering of that evidence was often difficult and was in large part an intangible which is one reason why the Royal Navy and Coastal Command lost their case.

The empirical evidence available between 1939 and 1941 suggested that it was naval action, not air action that achieved results against the U-boats. There was little evidence supporting the role of air power in the destruction of U-boats during that period. It would be easy for any observer to conclude then, that use of air power in the direct pursuit of U-boats was ineffectual and a misuse of vital and scarce resources. (Table 1).⁴¹⁸

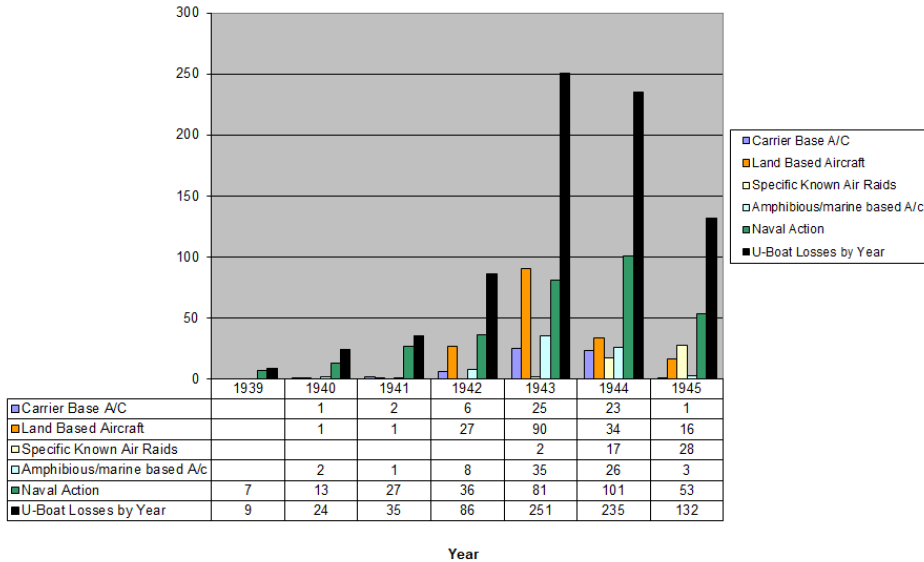
Changing Times

U-Boat destruction and results by air action remained desultory between 1939 and 1941. It was not until 1942 that airpower in total and land based aircraft in particular, started to produce results in quantity that even matched the results from naval action (Figure 1).

Figure 1

⁴¹⁸ U-Boat.Net . 2011. "1995-2011, U-Boat Fates – U-Boat Losses 1939-45." 10 June 2011 Accessed: 10 June 2011
Source: <http://www.uboat.net/fates/losses/cause.htm>
Author's note. The data presented here was manually transcribed was a compilation of data from a review of each U-boat record of loss from 1939-1945. Some variances may be due to a difference in categorization and grouping by different observers. Consequently, any resulting error is strictly my own.

Aircraft to Naval Action Comparison 1939-1945



Paving the way for a return to the St Lawrence in 1944

Not one U-boat was sunk in the Gulf of St Lawrence during that active campaign of 1942. But this did not mean the U-boats were away scot-free! The collective experience of U-boat commanders operating in the Gulf of St Lawrence, left a deep impression on Admiral Dönitz.

Dönitz was so impressed by both the number and intensity of the RCN and RCAF attacks. Even though not one of his submarines was sunk by Canadian pilots or the RCN, the very presence of air cover in conjunction with the RCN was considered a deadly deterrent at the conclusion of that hunting season.

Dönitz refrained from campaigning in the Gulf of St Lawrence in 1943 because of this fear.⁴¹⁹ His U-boats only returned to Canadian waters in 1944 with the introduction of ‘snorkel,’ the technology that afforded protection, to re-charge batteries, while submerged.⁴²⁰ Until then, the threat of air cover in combination

⁴¹⁹ Andrews, David. 2008.

⁴²⁰ Mosseray 29 March 2002

with the RCN, patrolling in confined areas, contributed to keeping the Gulf free of the U-boat scourge.

Unbeknownst to Canada and its allies, a great victory had been won in 1942. The U-boat fleet was denied access to the Gulf of St Lawrence in 1943 because of combined operations of the navy and air power in particular. Many disagree with this conclusion. However, it was a battle that was won in part because of the impacts of land based aircraft, the efforts of Eastern Coastal Command, and its operational training units in particular in combination with the RCN.

In that time, Eastern Coastal Command was largely augmented by aircraft from its O.T.U.s in the heat of this battle. It was the virtual presence of aircraft, whether they were fully operational or under operational training, which kept many a U-boat at bay that remained submerged during the spring-fall 1942 and then on into 1944.

This combination presented Donitz and the Kriegsmarine with a problem that had to be solved before they would attempt to enter the Gulf once again.

The solution

It was the confluence of two objects, naval and air power that required the development of snorkel. The increased attacks on and vulnerability of U-boats between 1942 and 1943, suggested that something had to be done. As seen elsewhere airpower and naval power took a toll on the Kriegsmarine in confined areas particularly in the Bay of Biscay.

The Saint Lawrence was no different. It too was a confined area, an area that Donitz directly avoided in 1943. Secondly events leading up to D-Day in 1944, suggested the need, development, and implementation of snorkel to address the U-boats vulnerabilities. Germany knew the allies were coming that year, which was just a matter of time and place. They required a line of protection and of attack in the English Channel to harry the Allies.⁴²¹

Snorkel was the key to resolve the impacts of the “Funnel Trap” in confined areas and on the open ocean; while transiting, exiting, and hiding in confined areas. A U-boat was now fully capable of remaining submerged while charging its batteries. Thus, this cloak of invisibility protected them from both air and naval attack.

Snorkel also paved the way for another approach and attack in the Saint Lawrence river in 1944, apart from being an essential defensive measure in the Kriegsmarine

⁴²¹ Beesley, Patrick. 2015. *Very Special Intelligence – The Story of the Admiralty’s Operational Intelligence Centre 1939-1945*. Seaforth Publishing, Pen & Swords Books Ltd, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS ,239, 242-243

preparations leading up to D-Day. Snorkel was invaluable to providing the ability to operate diesel engines while remaining submerged, with now unlimited range.⁴²²

They knew that the invasion was coming cross channel. They also knew that they would be awfully exposed and subject to air and naval attack. Snorkel was not a new development. It had been developed previously by the Dutch as early as 1938, but had been avoided and was deferred in implementation by the Germans.⁴²³

When the Germans successfully conquered the Netherlands in 1940, this captured technology was readily available to them as a prize of war. Regrettably, the German Navy paid little attention to this Dutch innovation it became truly evident in 1943. They ignored its use until rate of U-boat losses were becoming intolerably high due to allied successes in 1943 (Figure 1). As a consequence, snorkel fell into favour as the solution chosen by the German high command.⁴²⁴

But snorkel was only taken into service as an afterthought. It was going to be employed on the type 21 and type 23 boats that were designed in 1943.⁴²⁵ Its use was eventually extended and fitted on the type VIIC and the type IX boats as well but was not acted upon until later in the war.⁴²⁶

The first boat actually fitted with this type of technology was U-55. It was experimented during the summer of 1943 in the Baltic Sea. The spread to operational boats did not come until later and into wide spread use until after June of 1944. Approximately half of the boats stationed in France had the snorkel fitted.⁴²⁷

Snorkel was not a perfect system. There were several problems and imperfections. The first was interference with the normal submerged speed of the boat. It turned the U-boat into a slower vessel when deployed. If they boldly advanced speed beyond certain limits, the mast was subject to breakage.

There were also several logistical problems. The use of the mast forced the boats to store garbage internally. That storage filled the boat, further fouling an already chaotic environment. And finally, there was an issue with the air return on the snorkel as it had a tendency in the beginning to suck all the air out from the boat and causing extreme hearing pain that sometimes even damaged ear drums.⁴²⁸

⁴²² U-boat. Net . 2024. "Technologies – The Schnorkel." © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 16 May 2024 [The Schnorchel - Technical pages - German U-boats of WWII - Kriegsmarine - uboat.net](#)

⁴²³ U-boat. Net . 2024. "Technologies – The Schnorkel."

⁴²⁴ U-boat. Net . 2024. "Technologies – The Schnorkel."

⁴²⁵ U-boat. Net . 2024. "Technologies – The Schnorkel."

⁴²⁶ U-boat. Net . 2024. "Technologies – The Schnorkel."

⁴²⁷ U-boat. Net . 2024. "Technologies – The Schnorkel."

⁴²⁸ U-boat. Net . 2024. "Technologies – The Schnorkel."

But it was an experiment finally deployed by the Kriegsmarine in early 1944. Snorkel was first picked up by the British tracking room on February 21, 1944. One particular boat was being tracked and from its daily reports, the problems and procedures with snorkel were enumerated and exposed.⁴²⁹

In early 1944 Germany knew an invasion was imminent. The Allies prepared and designed countermeasures to any German threat and intrusion by U-boats on their invasion fleet. British preparations began with intensive patrols in the southwestern approaches in the English Channel. This involved the transfer of 4 support groups from Plymouth command in the English Channel with six more groups and three escort carriers patrolling the West End of Lands End.⁴³⁰

These preparations resulted in a successful blockade of U-boat activity in the early days of 1944, then leading up to D-Day, that hindered a total of 40 U-boats that operated against the invasion, of which 18 were sunk. Those equipped with snorkel found their range limited by an average speed of 2 knots over the ground they operated. Thus, their penetration was limited, and they were eventually withdrawn from this sensitive area.⁴³¹

The U-boat circumstances would also change as they lost their forward bases in France due to the Allied success. By the end of August 1944 Brest, St Nazaire, and Lorient were evacuated. The assets were moved to La Pallice and Bordeaux. Although Brest, St Nazaire, and Lorient were evacuated, they would remain in German hands but were never used as a base of operations ever again.⁴³²

The RCN's tracking room anticipated a change of tactics by these newly modified snorkel fitted U-Boats. They deduced that a U-boat could now remain 10 days submerged and with that the possibility of operations with coastal areas of England and Land's End could be re-invigorated.

It suggested an alteration the balance of power where the hunted could once again become the hunter.⁴³³ It also portended the extension of operations out into the mid-Atlantic and once again off North American shores, and Canada in particular. That possibility existed now because the U-boat had regained its cloak of invisibility.⁴³⁴ The return to Canadian inland waters was now a possibility, if not just a probability, but an inevitability.

⁴²⁹ Beesley 2015, 239

⁴³⁰ Beesley 2015, 242

⁴³¹ Beesley 2015, 244

⁴³² Beesley 2015, 244-245

⁴³³ Beesley 2015, 244-245

⁴³⁴ Beesley 2015, 246

Chapter 15 - A Return to Canada

Aligning the boats in the Gulf of St Lawrence

1944 turned out to be a critical year for Donitz and the Kriegsmarine. It was clearly evident that the invasion of Europe was imminent. It was also clearly evident that the logistics train to support that invasion was key to Allied success. It was something that he had to deal with and quickly with the resources and technology that he had at hand.

Donitz's principal tool in the coming attack would be the Type IXC U-boat, a platform capable of sustaining long distances, prolonged patrol, and with the installation of schnorkel, new endurance. Those capabilities would become a necessity as he would lose easy access to the Atlantic when French ports were liberated, and he would be forced to withdraw to bases in Norway.

A selection of the operations of several U-boats in and around Canada in 1944 highlight both the highs and lows of the Kriegsmarine at this time in Donitz's attempt to overcome these adversities.

Donitz deduced that the mere presence, suspicion, or sighting of a U-boat was of grave concern to the Canadian Public and that was enough to force a reaction on the part of the Allies, RCN, RCAF and others. Each incident would have to be investigated. Thus, inland convoys were required and implemented, and full scale searches made whether a sighting was actual or not.

This operational strain placed a considerable burden on the RCN and all allied resources toward dealing with it. Donitz strongly felt that he removed the initiative from allied hands by forcing a greater commitment towards defence against the U-boat threat. It was designed to be a severe burden and was the aim of Donitz's policy.⁴³⁵

In a manner it was also a diversion that allowed the concentration of two or three U-Boats near Canada or in the approaches to the Gulf of St Lawrence that was the distraction to the battle in the mid-Atlantic. That too would have to be dealt with. Thus, such a distraction was designed to possibly split allied forces in dealing with threats in the North Atlantic or those near Canada.⁴³⁶ But it would place a considerable burden on his U-Boat fleet physically, mentally and psychologically as they dealt with Donitz's directives.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁵ Hadley 1985, 235

⁴³⁶ Hadley 1985, 236

⁴³⁷ Hadley 1985, 196-197

Germany now was faced with a shrinking U-boat fleet and consequently, diminished resources. Drastic action was not only required but expected from his U-boats when despatched to the North American coast.⁴³⁸ In September 1944 Donitz's plan was implemented.

⁴³⁸ Hadley 1985, 196-197

The plan

During the late summer of 1944, Donitz planned an assault in the Gulf of St Lawrence. It began proper with U-802 entering the Gulf August 27th (Table 1). Five U-boats would venture into the Gulf of St Lawrence, an operation that would finally end, December 10th, with the exit of U-1231.⁴³⁹ Two U-boats, likely a diversionary force, were also dispatched collaterally toward the Gulf of Maine, U-1229 and U-1230, respectively.⁴⁴⁰

Significantly several weeks were spent in the Gulf of St Lawrence by each boat from a low of 17 days for U-1228, to a high of 50 days by U-1223. Table 1 also demonstrates some overlap in the patrol times of each boat within the Gulf. Their presence presented both a great nuisance and difficulty; for all Canadian Forces available were deployed or despatched within the Gulf area.

Table 1 - U-Boats Off Canada and Gulf of St Lawrence - Maine 1944

U-boat hull number	Patrol	Days	Area of operation (general)	Date of entry	Date of exit	Days in Gulf /NS	% Gulf
U-802	16 Jul 1944 - 12 Nov 1944	120	Gulf of St Lawrence	27-Aug-44	27-Sep-44	32	27%
U-541	6 Aug 1944 - 11 Nov 1944	98	Gulf of St Lawrence	02-Sep-44	05-Oct-44	34	35%
U-1223	28 Aug 1944-24 Dec 1944	119	Gulf of St Lawrence	03-Oct-44	21-Nov-44	50	42%
U-1228	12 Oct 1944 -29 Dec 1944	79	Gulf of St Lawrence	14-Nov-44	30-Nov-44	17	22%
U-1231	18 Oct 1944 - 31 Jan 1945	106	Gulf of St Lawrence	20-Nov-44	10-Dec-44	21	20%
U-1229	26 Jul 1944 - 20 Aug 1944	26	Gulf of Maine - sunk enroute				
U-1230	8 Oct 1944 - 13 Feb 1945	129	Gulf of Maine	25-Nov-44	19-Dec-94	25	19%

Each boat was tracked from its home port through to the Gulf from their individual daily position reports that provide a pictorial display relating their daily activities based on their actual logs.⁴⁴¹ The individual translated logs offer a more detailed and precise description of location and conditions under which they all operated. Regrettably, they have not all been translated nor are available for inclusion here. (Table 2).⁴⁴²

⁴³⁹ Greenfield 2004,256-257 Appendix C

⁴⁴⁰ Hadley 1985, 238, 249

⁴⁴¹ UBoat.net. 2024. "The U-Boat Wars 1939-1945 (Kriegsmarine) and 1914-1918 (Kaiserliche Marine) and Allied Warships of WWII." © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 1 May 2024. [The U-boat Wars 1939-1945 \(Kriegsmarine\) and 1914-1918 \(Kaiserliche Marine\) and Allied Warships of WWII - uboat.net](https://uboat.net)

⁴⁴² UBoatarchive.net 2024. "U-806 - 1st War Patrol." (Logs translated by Jerry Mason & Andi Forster.) Accessed: 21 May 2024 [U-boat Archive - U-boat KTB - U-806 1st War Patrol \(uboatarchive.net\)](https://uboatarchive.net)

Table 2 – 1944 Return to St Lawrence

U-boat hull number	Patrol	Days	Area of operation (general)	Date of entry	Date of exit	Days in Gulf /NS	% Gulf
U-802	16 Jul 1944 - 12 Nov 1944	120	Gulf of St Lawrence	27-Aug-44	27-Sep-44	32	27%
U-541	6 Aug 1944- 11 Nov 1944	98	Gulf of St Lawrence	02-Sep-44	05-Oct-44	34	35%
U-1223	28 Aug 1944-24 Dec 1944	119	Gulf of St Lawrence	03-Oct-44	21-Nov-44	50	42%
U-1228	12 Oct 1944 -29 Dec 1944	79	Gulf of St Lawrence	14-Nov-44	30-Nov-44	17	22%
U-1231	18 Oct 1944 - 31 Jan 1945	106	Gulf of St Lawrence	20-Nov-44	10-Dec-44	21	20%
U-1231	Hadley, 257 places U-1231 at Country Island 20 Dec 44						

The general line used to define when a U-boat either entered or left the Gulf are arbitrary points between Cape Breton, Newfoundland and St Pierre Michelin. Thus, there may be some differences between official records and the observations below, but they are important, nonetheless. They at least give an approximate patrol time within the Gulf as well as a measure of the effort and endurance in doing so, either knowingly or unknowingly operating in collaboration with others as was Donitz’s intent. It also provides a measure of the threat and concern to which military and civilian authorities had to face and contend with.

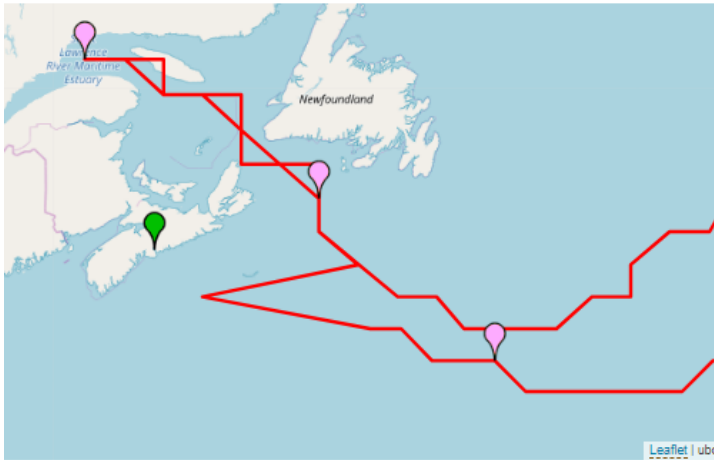
U-802

U-802 departed Lorient France under command of Kapitänleutnant Helmut Schmoeckel July 16th, 1944. U-802 remained on patrol for 120 days when it finally returned to Bergen Norway November 12th. U-802’s daily position reports placed it entering the Gulf August 27th and departing 32 days later, September 27th. Approximately 27% of its time was spent in the Gulf with nothing to show for its efforts.⁴⁴³


⁴⁴³ UBoat.Net . 2024. “Patrol info for U-802” © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 28 May 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-802 from 16 Jul 1944 to 12 Nov 1944 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](https://uboat.net/patrols/german-uboats/802/)

Schmoeckel

Daily positions, sinkings and allied attacks during the patrol of U-802



Legend

 indicates an Allied attack on the boat

Source *U-Boat. Net - Patrol 802*

Despite the poor results from this patrol, the crew of U-802 found it both eventful and perhaps terrifying as they were constantly pursued and under threat. While enroute towards the St Lawrence, U-802 was ambushed at night, by the USS Bogue an escort carrier, an escort within a hunter-killer group on August 19th. U-802 was caught in its sights. Its aircraft were launched and dropped three depth charges around U-802 causing minor damages.



Google Maps U-802 19 Aug 1944 - 41.33,-50.30

At this point in the war the Allies had become very proficient at intelligence gathering and analysis as well as in detecting through direction finding transmissions. These sources were used in coordinating attacks upon U-802.⁴⁴⁴

Despite the innovation of schnorkel, it wasn't enough to overcome Allied dominance; particularly in the confines of the Bay of Biscay and the English Channel. Better results were expected in the Gulf of St Lawrence. But that did not bode well for the Kriegsmarine. Its attempts to dominate the Channel in particular before the invasion, failed miserably. They were held in check despite the innovation of schnorkel.⁴⁴⁵

This plus the fact the majority of his fleet were Type VII boats and with the loss of his access to the Atlantic from the French ports, this placed pressure on Donitz on a number of fronts;

- The Type VIIs would be concentrated in and around Norway near the mid-Atlantic to attack convoys and to guard those approaches from threats emanating from North America and its Allied Forces;⁴⁴⁶
- He would then come to depend on the Type IX boats for the majority of long range action into North America; ⁴⁴⁷
- Finally, he would once again threaten the Canadian -American coastal zones and the St Lawrence River Estuary in particular.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁴ Hadley 1985, 208

⁴⁴⁵ Beesley 2015, 244

⁴⁴⁶ Beesley 2015, 244

⁴⁴⁷ Beesley 2015, 244-246

⁴⁴⁸ Hadley 1985, 224

The Allies had a good idea of Donitz's strategic intent and planned accordingly.⁴⁴⁹ Consequently the Allies were prepared, and U-802 subsequently attacked August 28th SW of St Pierre et Miquelon where the boat was forced to dive because of Allied aircraft,

U-802 suffered no damage.⁴⁵⁰ But it continued on its way into the Gulf where once more it was attacked by an escort group accompanying a convoy after September 14th. The boat fired a T-5 torpedo at a "destroyer" in the St. Lawrence but missed only that brought further misery directed towards it. U-802 escape once more unscathed but not without some battering and harrying first. The boat finally returned safely to Bergen November 12th.⁴⁵¹

U-541

Next on the tail of U-802 into the Gulf of St Lawrence was U-541. The order in which this and the following boats entered was corroborated through recorded history and from available daily position reports.⁴⁵² It provides a broad account and context of what transpired in its 106 days on patrol from August 27th (departing Lorient, France) through December 10th 1944 (returning Flensburg, Germany).

U-541 was another Type IXC unit commanded by a well decorated submariner Kptlt. Kurt Petersen (German Cross in Gold). U-541 entered the Gulf several days after U-802 on September 2nd. Between 2-27 September both boats operated independently for 26 days within the Gulf of St Lawrence.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁹ Beesley 2015, 240-244

⁴⁵⁰ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-802"

⁴⁵¹ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-802"

⁴⁵² Greenfield 2004,258 Appendix D, and

UBoat.net. 2024. "The U-Boat Wars 1939-1945 (Kriegsmarine) and 1914-1918 (Kaiserliche Marine) and Allied Warships of WWII." © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 1 May 2024. [The U-boat Wars 1939-1945 \(Kriegsmarine\) and 1914-1918 \(Kaiserliche Marine\) and Allied Warships of WWII - uboat.net](#)

⁴⁵³ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-541." © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 2 Jun 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-541 from 6 Aug 1944 to 11 Nov 1944 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](#)

Figure 2 U-541 Patrol Line - "A" Globe Sinking Merchant Ship 3 Sep - 1944 Pink Globe Attack on U-541 8 Sep



U-541 was the more successful of the two; sinking the British steamship Livingston (2,140 GRT), September 3rd at 0845hrs, in the mouth of the Gulf of St Lawrence, between Cape Breton and Newfoundland.

Livingston was unescorted at the time when torpedoed northeast of Louisburg, Nova Scotia. Livingston's casualties amounted to 13 crew members and one gunner lost. The master, Reuben Thomas Robinson, and the remaining 12 surviving crew members and one gunner were subsequently picked up by HMCS

Barrie (K 138) under command of T/Lt W.D. Stokvis, (RCNVR) then landed at St. John's.⁴⁵⁴

But U-541's work was just beginning for September 8th; the boat was preparing for another surface attack well within the Gulf. Fortunately, HMCS Norsyd sighted U-541 and opened fire. The U-boat dived to escape and was then hunted relentlessly by the RCN for the next two days by four frigates, a minesweeper and RCAF aircraft. U-541 was fortunate enough to have evaded its pursuers.

U-541 departed the Gulf of St Lawrence September 27th but remained on station near its entrance, patrolling back and forth on the continental shelf from that point, until it finally headed and returned for home October 5th, 1944.

U-1223

The next to enter the fray was U-1223 with its entry into the Gulf October 3rd, 1944. It had a minimal overlap with U-541 from the 3rd to October 5th, 3 days. U-1223 under command of Oblt. Albert Kneip began its patrol August 28th departing Bergen Norway. It returned 119 days later to Kristiansand, Christmas Eve December 24th, 1944.⁴⁵⁵

U-1223 remained in the Gulf for 50 days from October 3rd to November 21st. In that time, it amassed a score of 1 boat sunk and 1 damaged. The ship that met the most misfortune was HMCS Magog.

Magog was attacked At 19.25 hours on October 14th. It had the misfortune of being in the way when U-1223 fired a spread of two Gnat torpedoes at the escorts on the starboard side of convoy ONS-33G. This convoy was 5 miles off Pointe des Monts in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

One of its torpedoes hit HMCS Magog (K 673) under command of Lt L.D. Quick, (RCNR) after running 2 minutes 5 seconds. Magog took that hit in the stern. The other Gnat fortunately detonated in the wake of HMCS Toronto (K 538) commanded by A/LtCdr H.K. Hill, (RCNVR). No damage was done to Hill's vessel.⁴⁵⁶

The worst of it was HMCS Magog lost 65 feet of her stern. The subsequent explosion also came at the cost of three men killed with three injured. The ship remained afloat and initially assisted by HMCS Toronto. Contact was subsequently lost with Magog as Toronto went in pursuit of U-1223. Magog was then taken in tow by HMCS Shawinigan (K 136) under command of T/Lt W.J. Jones, RCNR,

⁴⁵⁴ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-541."

⁴⁵⁵ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1223" © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 28 May 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-1223 from 28 Aug 1944 to 24 Dec 1944 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](#)

⁴⁵⁶ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1223"

that passed her onto the Canadian tug Lord Strathcona where she was towed about 260 miles to Quebec City. The ship was inspected at Quebec and declared a total loss on December 20th. HMCS Magog was finally broken up for scrap at Sorel in 1947.⁴⁵⁷

U-1223 went on to render further havoc when at 22.20 hours on November 2nd, she attacked the unescorted Fort Thompson commanded by Master Lester Saul. Fort Thompson was hit on its starboard side in the #1 hold by one torpedo from U-1223.

Fort Thompson was steaming according to procedure on a zigzag course at 11 knots, when it was hit about 7.5 miles northwest of Matane, PQ. Once Saul knew his ship had been torpedoed he immediately swung to starboard toward shallow water. The lifeboats were readied to be lowered and manned. In the excitement, the port aft boat was freed and lowered too far. It drifted off helplessly with 17 souls aboard. This group was subsequently ordered to steer south. The senior officer aboard was Cadet Crawford who took his charges away safely and eventually made landfall near Matane.⁴⁵⁸

In the meantime, the remaining crew and master totalling, 36 and the ten DEMS gunners remained aboard, sent distress signals. The ship was then anchored in about 10 fathoms of water. It was investigated for damages at about 23.10 hours. To their chagrin the #1 hold and tank were flooded. The bilges in #2 hold were also making water. Lester Saul, the ship's master, took matters in hand and began pumping out the water. Both to their surprise and satisfaction the water level did not raise further.⁴⁵⁹

It was a matter of good fortune that fine weather on the following day, and the fact that the water damage appeared to be under control, a decision was made to return to port under its own power. There was some assistance and help from the Canadian tug Lord Strathcona.

All in all, as a result of a combined effort, Fort Thompson arrived safely in Quebec around noon, November 4th where temporary repairs were made. The ship finally sailed to St. John, New Brunswick for comprehensive repairs from 11th to December 18th, and then returned to service March 1945.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1223"

⁴⁵⁸ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1223"

⁴⁵⁹ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1223"

⁴⁶⁰ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1223"

U-1228

U-1228 departing Bergen, Norway October 12th, 1944, proceeded southward and eastward to North America, where on November 14th, it lay in a position along the entrance to the Gulf of St Lawrence.

U-1228 was there from November 14th to December 4th. It spent 27% of its 79 day patrol there before return to Stavanger Norway, arriving December 29, 1944. By this time, the Kriegsmarine did not have the French ports available to them and now were seeking refuge further afield.

U-1228's patrol on the Gulf of St Lawrence may be described as a voluminous and circular circuit, as it ventured to and from, points within the Cabot Strait. The furthest ventured was to the southern tip of Newfoundland where it sunk HMCS Shawinigan, November 25th that was on patrol between Sydney to Port aux Basques, Newfoundland.⁴⁶¹

HMCS Shawinigan was on a separate and an independent anti-submarine patrol in the Cabot Strait. It was subsequently disengaged from this patrol and ordered to rendezvous with a ship, Burgeo. Burgeo was off Channel Head at 1015 local time the following day on its return journey to Sydney.⁴⁶² Shawinigan never made the appointment and Burgeo proceeded to Sydney unescorted where Shawinigan's loss was finally reported.⁴⁶³

U-1228's foray into the Gulf was limited to the Cabot Strait. He was unable to make any deep penetration because of technical difficulties that were sustained on the inbound voyage. Regardless despite the truncated operational radius, U-1228 success was a limited one. Its only kill, November 25th, regrettably resulted in the loss of HMCS Shawinigan with all hands.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶¹ Morgan & Taylor 2011, 420-421

⁴⁶² Hadley 1985, 246

⁴⁶³ Morgan & Taylor 2011, 420-421

⁴⁶⁴ Morgan & Taylor 2011, 420-421

U-1231

U-1231 began a long extended patrol under command of Kpt. Hermann Lessing in October 1944, that was most desultory. U-1231's efforts resulted in no appreciable damage and, nor did it sink anything over its 106 days on patrol. Yet U-1231 had encountered many difficulties at a time when Allied defences were at their peak, placing considerable emotional and psychological stress upon any U-boat crew, as they were constantly hunted and under threat.⁴⁶⁵

U-1231 (Type IXC) scheduled to begin two war patrols under Lessing, departed Bergen, Norway October 18th. It was scheduled to return to Farsund, Norway, January 31, 1945.⁴⁶⁶ German records show U-1231's patrol to have been a lacklustre effort. Upon returning to Flensburg on February 5th, Lessing was relieved of command of U-1231 and replaced by *Oberleutnant zur See* Helmut Winke.⁴⁶⁷

Winke subsequently took U-1231 out on its second and final war patrol April 27th. It accomplished nothing as the war ended May 7, 1945. Winke then surrendered his boat to the RN at Loch Eriboll, UK on May 14th.

It was in these final days that added pressure came from Kriegsmarine higher headquarters, in which they pressed for a maximum effort. The Kriegsmarine saw a necessity for continued pressure on Allied supply lines.

Meanwhile, the war and the success of the mission had become Donitz's primary concern, the men and boats were considered expendable.⁴⁶⁸ This at a time when Germany was left with a diminished U-boat fleet, with diminished resources despatched to the North American coast, that perhaps explains the feeling of futility and abandonment amongst the remaining crews.⁴⁶⁹

And that was the direction given to U-1231 when on November 20th, it began its foray into the Gulf of St Lawrence. U-1231 patrolled there for 21 days or 20% of its total patrol time before exiting December 10th, 1944.⁴⁷⁰

U-1231 had achieved at least part of its mission though. The mere presence, suspicion, or sighting of a potential U-boat was of grave concern to the Canadian public. Each incident had to be investigated. Thus, inland convoys were required

⁴⁶⁵ Hadley 1985, 197

⁴⁶⁶ UBoat.net. 2024. "Patrol info for U-1231." © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 24 May 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-1231 from 18 Oct 1944 to 31 Jan 1945 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](#)

⁴⁶⁷ Wikipedia. 2024. "German submarine U-1231." Accessed: 22 May 2024. [German submarine U-1231 - Wikipedia](#). This page was last edited on 4 April 2024, at 13:24 (UTC).

⁴⁶⁸ Hadley 1985, 196-197

⁴⁶⁹ Hadley 1985, 196-197

⁴⁷⁰ UBoat.net. 2024. "Patrol info for U-1231."

and implemented. Full scale searches made whether an actual or false sighting made, thus placing a considerable burden on the RCN and allied resources along with it. All this removed the initiative from allied hands that forced a commitment of resources towards defence against the U-boat threat placing a severe burden on them. Thus, the aim of Donitz's policy was achieved by U-1231 despite the lack of success.⁴⁷¹

To that end Donitz had at least three boats within the Gulf of St Lawrence for varying periods in the latter part of 1944. U-1231 entered the Gulf November 20th with U-1223 exiting November 21st providing a two day overlap. Collaterally U-1228 was also present. Then U-1228 exited 30 November 30th. In all, there was an 11 day overlap over these patrols.

In a manner it was a diversion that achieved Donitz's policy that saw the concentration of his remaining resources to considerable effect. Donitz's object was to maintain two or three U-boats near Canada or in the approaches to the Gulf of St Lawrence to distract and possibly reduce allied forces and concentrations in the North Atlantic.⁴⁷² And as such, that policy was achieved.

Chapter 16 The Gulf of Maine and Collateral Operations 1944

Collateral to the Kriegsmarine operations in the Gulf of St Lawrence in 1944, were those also in the Atlantic, off Halifax, and Gulf of Maine and approaches to the Bay of Fundy. But most were specifically oriented astride Halifax on Nova Scotia's east coast.

Halifax was the major choke point for both incoming and outgoing shipping. The approach to its safe harbour, acted as a natural funnel and obvious kill zone for the enemy. It had to be heavily defended and was protected by gun batteries, an army fortress, an air base, anti-submarine netting and gate ways, as well as by active patrolling naval and air assets. Halifax was a beehive of Canadian military activity, and yet the enemy thought it worthwhile nonetheless despite the potential costs and risks to this approach even while laying in wait there.

Donitz with diminishing resources, was now limited by the loss of the French ports following their liberation in 1944. The majority of his fleet, based on the Type VII U-boats, was thus further constrained by range and endurance. Thus, his ability to influence events was greatly impacted by the loss of these forward bases.

⁴⁷¹ Hadley 1985, 235

⁴⁷² Hadley 1985, 236

The patrols and loitered times of the ubiquitous Type VII, that was the bulk of his fleet's strength, was greatly diminished. Thus, the Type IXCs, which had the greater capability, were thrust into the fray and became the mainstay weapon of Donitz's policy in 1944. But their number was significantly fewer than the ubiquitous Type VII boats, so they would have to be employed reasonably well to gain maximum efficiency.

Donitz chose to use is Type IXCs gainfully and dispersed them to raise havoc and concern by concentrating his resources in the Gulf of St Lawrence, off Nova Scotia's east coast, in the Gulf of Maine, and in toward the Bay of Fundy should an opportunity arise. But Halifax was the pivot point upon which his strategy was based.

Donitz deduced that the mere presence, suspicion, or sighting of a U-boat would be of grave concern to the Canadian Public and that was enough to force a reaction on the part of the Allies. He concluded that it placed a considerable burden on the RCN and all allied resources toward dealing with this threat. He strongly felt this removed the initiative from allied hands, thus forcing a greater commitment of resources towards defence against his U-boat threat. It was designed to be a severe burden on them. This was the aim of Donitz's policy.⁴⁷³

In a manner it was also a diversion. Donitz began with the concentration of two or three U-Boats near Canada or in the approaches to the Gulf of St Lawrence that was the distraction to the mid-Atlantic. That too would have to be dealt with. Thus, it was this distraction that he hoped would possibly split allied forces and reduce their strength in dealing between threats in the North Atlantic or those nearest Canada.⁴⁷⁴

And so, the cards were dealt, and the game played there from later in the summer 1944 to early 1945.

Table 1 provides an overall view of the alignment of his resources off Nova Scotia in 1944. Invariably as these patrols either in the Gulf or elsewhere concluded, their approaches often took them towards the shipping lanes off Halifax.

⁴⁷³ Hadley 1985, 235

⁴⁷⁴ Hadley 1985, 236

Table 1 Selected Ships in operations Canada's East Coast 1944 -1945

U-boat	Patrol	Days	Area of operation (general)	Date of entry - NS	Date of exit	Days off NS	% NS	Number of kills	#missed/damaged
U-802	29 Jan 1944- 2 May 1944	95	Atlantic Canada	15-Mar-44	08-Apr-44	25	26%		
U-1222	16 Apr 1944- 11 Jul 1944	87	Atlantic Canada - lost at Sea 11 Jul 1944						
U-233	27 May 1944- 5 Jul 1944	40	Mine layong off Halifax Harbour	05-Jul-44	05-Jul-44	0			
U-802	16 Jul 1944 - 12 Nov 1944	120	Gulf of St Lawrence	27-Aug-44	27-Sep-44	32	27%		
U-541	6 Aug 1944- 11 Nov 1944	98	Gulf of St Lawrence	02-Sep-44	05-Oct-44	34	35%	1	
U-1221	20 Aug 1944 -28 Nov 1944	101	Zig-zagging back forth NS	01-Oct-44	28-Oct-44	28	28%		
U-1223	28 Aug 1944-24 Dec 1944	119	Gulf of St Lawrence	01-Oct-44	21-Nov-44	52	44%	1	1
U-1229	26 Jul 1944 - 20 Aug 1944	26	Gulf of Maine - sunk before getting there			0	0		
U-1230	8 Oct 1944 -13 Feb 1945	129	Gulf of Maine - South of NS	31-Dec-44	14-Jan-45	15	12%	4	1
U-806	30 Oct 1944 - 21 Feb 1945	115	Atlantic Canada	01-Oct-44	21-Nov-44	24	21%		1
U-1232	10 Nov 1944 - 15 Feb 1945	97	Atlantic Canada - Halifax	31-Dec-44	23-Jan-45	24	25%	4	1

Notably, U-802 had two patrols directed toward Canadian waters, the first commencing January 1944 where it spent 25 days in the approaches to Halifax. U-802's second patrol commenced July 1944 that was directed first to the Gulf of St Lawrence, and thence to Nova Scotia for the remainder of its time in Canadian waters (Table 1).

Of the eight boats operating between July 1944 and February 1945, four were directed to Nova Scotia, U-233, U-806, U-1221, U-1232. But U-233 was sunk July 5th and so, never made it to its ordered post off Halifax. Another boat, U-1229 was on a special mission to Maine. It too might have been redirected to Nova Scotia or Halifax, but it was sunk en-route to its destination August 20th 1944. Such was Donitz's order of battle from June to December 1944.

The preceding is not necessarily a complete list of all boats either assigned to or who were in this area. But it renders a useful picture and sketch of what transpired following the cross channel invasion of Europe after June 6th, 1944 as well as the measures taken by the Kriegsmarine to hinder the Allies, which they thought necessary in turning the tide of war, and to forestall disaster. The following sketch begins with the measures taken toward the Gulf of Maine, then followed by those taken off the east Coast of Nova Scotia from July 1944 through to February 1945.

The Gulf of Maine

U-1229

The first foray towards the Gulf of Maine began July 13th, 1944, as U-1229 departed Kiel. U-1229 a Type IXC U-boat, under command of KrvKpt.

Armin Zinke was on its first and sadly, final war patrol.⁴⁷⁵ Zinke was tasked with operating against Allied shipping in the North Atlantic and off the coast of Canada. Significantly, his boat also had a special mission. The Abwehr wished to infiltrate the United States with an agent who was also aboard U-1229.⁴⁷⁶

Unfortunately for *U-1229* it was spotted and attacked south of Newfoundland by radar-equipped aircraft from USS *Bogue*. *Bogue*'s attack brought several more aircraft upon the scene and over a two-hour period the boat was sunk, which would be the last victim of this escort carrier-based VC squadron.⁴⁷⁷

But U-1229's precipitous misadventure began well before this attack. The fault lay with its captain, Armin Zinke. Kapitänleutnant Armin Zinke was noted during U-1229's working up period and trials, for drunkenness. Zinke was a morose and uncommunicative man who did not tolerate his officers or men very well. He seldom allowed anyone to address him or question his authority.⁴⁷⁸

Armin Zinke took incredible risks as he often remained surfaced while on patrol. His tactics and ship-handing were questioned by one officer as suicidal to which he was reprimanded for questioning Zinke's authority. As such, Zinke's crew held him in low regard and personally responsible for the boat's demise.⁴⁷⁹

It is difficult to assess Armin Zinke's mental state in the events leading up to U-1229's demise. Perhaps it was all based on a sense of personal fatalism. He was likely well aware of Donitz's primary concern that the men and boats were considered expendable.⁴⁸⁰ This concern was backed up by fact. In the aftermath of the war, of the 40,000 men who served in the U-boat service, only 10,000 survived the war. Many may have considered their service to be a suicide mission and a death sentence.⁴⁸¹

At this stage of the war, allied hunter groups, tactics, and technology were successfully sending U-boats to the bottom or in retreat. Many of their peers lay

⁴⁷⁵ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1229" " © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 23 May 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-1229 from 26 Jul 1944 to 20 Aug 1944 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](https://uboat.net/patrols/german-uboats/1229)

⁴⁷⁶ Wikipedia. 2024. " German submarine u-1229." Accessed 6 Jun 2024. This page was last edited on 4 April 2024, at 13:23 (UTC). [German submarine U-1229 - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_submarine_U-1229)

⁴⁷⁷ Carey 2019. *Sighted Sub, Sank Same*, 181

⁴⁷⁸ Carey 2019. *Sighted Sub, Sank Same*, 181

⁴⁷⁹ Carey 2019. *Sighted Sub, Sank Same*, 181-182

⁴⁸⁰ Hadley 1985, 196-197

⁴⁸¹ Carey 2019. *Sighted Sub, Sank Same*, 192

on the floor of the oceans' depths.⁴⁸² But Donitz placed great trust in Schnorkel to turn the tide and Germany's fortunes.⁴⁸³

So, fate may have played a hand. U-1229 was heavily damaged in the initial air attack and was at the mercy of the Air Group. Attempting to escape under water, U1229 was forced to resurface several times over the course of the battle as poisonous fumes emanated from its damaged battery sections.⁴⁸⁴

There was nothing left for it and the crew abandoned the boat. In the melee, the U-boat was strafed again by several aircraft. This subsequent attack resulted in the deaths of numerous crew members, including the boat's commanding officer, Zinke. Eighteen crew members died but forty-one survivors were later picked up by a US destroyer after seven hours in the water. One of the survivors was the Abwehr German intelligence agent Oskar Mantel.⁴⁸⁵

Oskar Mantel was an interesting character having lived in New York City for 12 years prior to the war. There he worked in the wholesale cosmetics business. He returned to Germany for his own reasons where he trained as a Nazi agent. He was quite good at his job having completed several successful missions.

Upon his rescue from U-1229, a large sum of money was found in Mantel's possession. It is purported that Mantel upon successful insertion into the United States, was to use this money to provide for and support later spy missions. Even at this stage of the war Germany aspired for continuing spy missions, one package known as operation Elster, designed to operate for two or more years.⁴⁸⁶

U-1229 was sent to the bottom 20 August 1944. Its mission to land an agent, Oskar Mantel, in the Gulf of Maine failed. The boat sunk on its way to North America, . rests in the North Atlantic near the south-east of Newfoundland, in position 42.20N, 51.39W. It was finally put to rest by depth charges and rockets from 3 Avenger and 2 Wildcat aircraft (VC-42) from the US escort carrier USS Bogue.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸² Carey 2019. *Sighted Sub, Sank Same*, 191

⁴⁸³ Hamilton, Aaron S. 2020. *TOTAL UNDERSEA WAR – THE EVOLUTIONARY ROLE OF THE SNORKEL IN DÖNITZ'S U-BOAT FLEET, 1944–1945*. First published in Great Britain in 2020 by Seaforth Publishing, A division of Pen & Sword, 47 Church Street, Barnsley S70 2AS, 9

⁴⁸⁴ Wikipedia. 2024. "German submarine u-1229."

⁴⁸⁵ Wikipedia. 2024. "German submarine u-1229."

⁴⁸⁶ Meander Maine 2024. 2024 "Row, Row, Row Your Nazis." Accessed: Jun 2024. Source: [Row, Row, Row Your Nazis - Meander Maine](#)

⁴⁸⁷ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1229" " © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 23 May 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-1229 from 26 Jul 1944 to 20 Aug 1944 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](#)

U-1230

U-1230, a Type IXC U-boat under command of Kpllt Hans Hilbig departing Horten Norway, October 8th, 1944 on its first and only patrol. U-1230 spent 129 days at sea before returning Kristiansand, Norway on 13 February 1945.⁴⁸⁸

U-1230 entered North American waters passing along the southern tip of Nova Scotia November 25th. It too was on a specific mission with its primary goal, again to land German agents in America. The boat did so and landed two German agents at Hancock Point in the Gulf of Maine, USA November 29th. But these agents were quickly captured. Having completed that part of its mission though, U-1230 returned again to resume its patrol in a line from Boston across the Gulf of Maine just south of Nova Scotia.

U-1230 ventured across this boundary and into the inner reaches of the Gulf of Maine, proceeding back and forth from November 25th to December 19th before heading homeward bound sometime late that month. U-1230 then continue its patrol in the Atlantic. Significantly U-1230 only made one attack during this time sinking the Canadian Steamer Cornwallis December 3rd.

Cornwallis itself was one ship with a storied career having been sunk previously in 1942 by U-514. U-514 made a lucky shot whose torpedo apparently passed through a hole in a torpedo net made by a previous shot at Bridgetown, Barbados where Cornwallis lay.

Cornwallis was subsequently hit abreast of #2 hold, causing her to sink in shallow waters. The ship was raised, temporary repairs made, and then towed to Trinidad in December 1942. Final repairs were made after towed to Mobile, arriving on January 24th, 1943. Cornwallis was returned to service August 1943.⁴⁸⁹

Cornwallis would come under the gun once again December 3rd, 1944 when attacked by U-1230. The outcome was not as rosy as its first encounter with the enemy. Cornwallis was unescorted at the time and was attacked at 10.00 hours. U-1230 torpedoed Cornwallis with a Gnat torpedo 10 miles southwest of Mount Desert Rock in the Gulf of Maine. Sadly, its master, Emerson Horace Robinson, 35 crew members, and seven gunners were lost. Only five survived to be saved by the fishing vessel Notre Dame. These survivors were later landed at Rockland, Maine.

⁴⁸⁸ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1230" © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 22 May 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-1230 from 8 Oct 1944 to 13 Feb 1945 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](#)

⁴⁸⁹ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Cornwallis – Canadian Steamship" © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 22 May 2024. [Cornwallis \(Canadian Steam merchant\) - Ships hit by German U-boats during WWII - uboat.net](#)

The Atlantic and Halifax Patrols

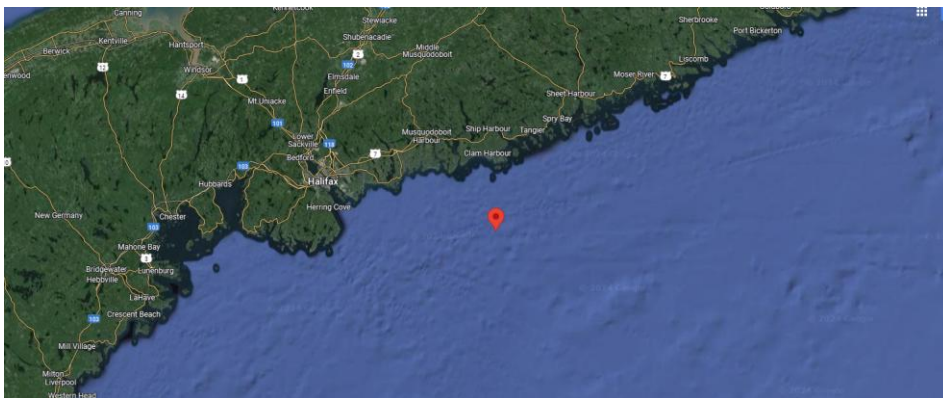
U-802 (earlier patrol 1944)

U-802 is better known for its activities and presence in the Gulf of St Lawrence the late summer and fall of 1944. But 1944 for U-802 begun with a patrol that preceded the operations in the Gulf of St Lawrence. U-802 departed Kiel January 29, 1944 that brought it to the shores of Nova Scotia where it patrolled diligently from March 15th to April 8th for 25 days.⁴⁹⁰

U802 had a relatively successful trip with one kill on this patrol, March 22nd. The steam ship Watuka was its victim and was sunk at 44° 30'N, 62° 51'W - Grid BB 7537 at 09.47 hours. U-802 fired a spread of three torpedoes at overlapping ships in the convoy, SH-125. One shot successfully struck Wakuta. Strikingly, three detonations were heard but only one struck home. The crew of U-802 incorrectly assumed that they had struck three ships weighing 5000 tons each given the dispositions in the convoy.⁴⁹¹

But only Watuka was hit and sank southeast of Halifax, luckily, with only one fatality. The ship's master and 22 others, plus the ships two gunners survived. They were later picked up by HMCS Anticosti (T 274), Lt J.C. Boyd in command.⁴⁹²

Google maps: [44°30'00.0"N 62°51'00.0"W - Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps/@44.5000000,-62.8500000)



⁴⁹⁰ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-802" © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 28 May 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-802 from 29 Jan 1944 to 2 May 1944 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](https://uboat.net/patrols/german-u-boat-u-802-29-jan-1944-to-2-may-1944)

⁴⁹¹ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-802" 29 Jan – 2 May 44

⁴⁹² UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-802" 29 Jan – 2 May 44

U-802 returned to Lorient 95 days later, May 2nd. Kptlt. Helmut Schmoeckel was its commander at this time.⁴⁹³

But U-802's return to France was not without its troubles. On April 28th, several days before it reached Lorient, it was targeted by a British Wellington aircraft out of 612 Sqn RAF/W. The Wellington proceeded to depth charge it in the Bay of Biscay west of Nantes, France. The crew of this aircraft incorrectly assumed that they had sunk a U-boat and were credited with the demise of U-193. In fact, they had attacked U-802 which in the end escaped undamaged.⁴⁹⁴

U-233

The next to enter the fray was U-233 a Type XB under command of KptLt Hans Steen. Steen took his boat to sea May 27, 1944. He had a simple mission, mine the approaches to Halifax Harbour. U-233 never made it and was sunk 40 days later, July 5th.⁴⁹⁵

U-233 met its end south-east of Halifax where it was aggressively attacked, rammed, depth charged, and came under gunfire from US destroyer escorts USS Baker and USS Thomas. It is obvious from the nature of this combined attack that U-233 was either surfaced or forced to surface. U-233 was ultimately caught squarely in the sights of an aggressive force. The cost to U-233 was 32 dead and 29 survivors.⁴⁹⁶

No one expected this result as it left Kiel, Germany on 27th May, for a simple mine-laying patrol outside of Halifax. It was a very capable ship for its type, part of 8 boats of this class. They were laid down as ocean going submersibles and with the capability to deploy to Halifax and beyond with a range of some 18450 nautical miles at 10 knots. They could remain at sea for a very long time.⁴⁹⁷

Significantly these boats designed in 1938, carried 66 SMA mines loaded in 30 mine shafts along the boat. They also were loaded with up to 15 torpedoes. They also had an alternate use as transport boats in which they could carry freight in containers in the mine shafts. Thus, they were quite capable of taking on any formidable foe and of performing other tasks. But they did have one serious

⁴⁹³ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-802" 29 Jan – 2 May 44

⁴⁹⁴ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-802" 29 Jan – 2 May 44

⁴⁹⁵ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-233" " © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 7 Jun 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-233 from 27 May 1944 to 5 Jul 1944 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](#)

⁴⁹⁶ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-233" "

⁴⁹⁷ UBoat.Net . 2024. "U-Boat Types – Type XB." © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 7 Jun 2024. [Type XB Mine-laying boats - U-boat Types - German U-boats of WWII - Kriegsmarine - uboat.net](#)

limitation in attack. This class of U-boat only had two torpedo tubes located at the stern of the boats.⁴⁹⁸

They were the largest German U-boats ever built with a 2710 tons submerged weight when fully loaded. But their size had a downside as they paid a penalty in diving speed and agility.⁴⁹⁹

Six of the 8 boats built were dispatched during the war, five of which were sunk with all hands aboard. Only two Type XBs survived the war. U-233 was one of the six lost, and perhaps the lucky part of its fate was the fact that 29 survivors lived to tell the tale.⁵⁰⁰

U-1221

U-1221 had one war patrol that began at Bergen Norway August 20th , 1944. Their patrol lasted 101 days that ended with its return to Marviken, November 28th. U-1221 was under command of Oblt. Paul Ackermann.⁵⁰¹

U-1221 patrol was based simply along a line in which it sallied back and forth opposite Nova Scotia from which it deviated little.

⁴⁹⁸ UBoat.Net . 2024. "U-Boat Types – Type XB

⁴⁹⁹ UBoat.Net . 2024. "U-Boat Types – Type XB

⁵⁰⁰ UBoat.Net . 2024. "U-Boat Types – Type XB

⁵⁰¹ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1221" © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 7 Jun 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-1221 from 20 Aug 1944 to 28 Nov 1944 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](#)

U-1221's position on 28 Oct 1944

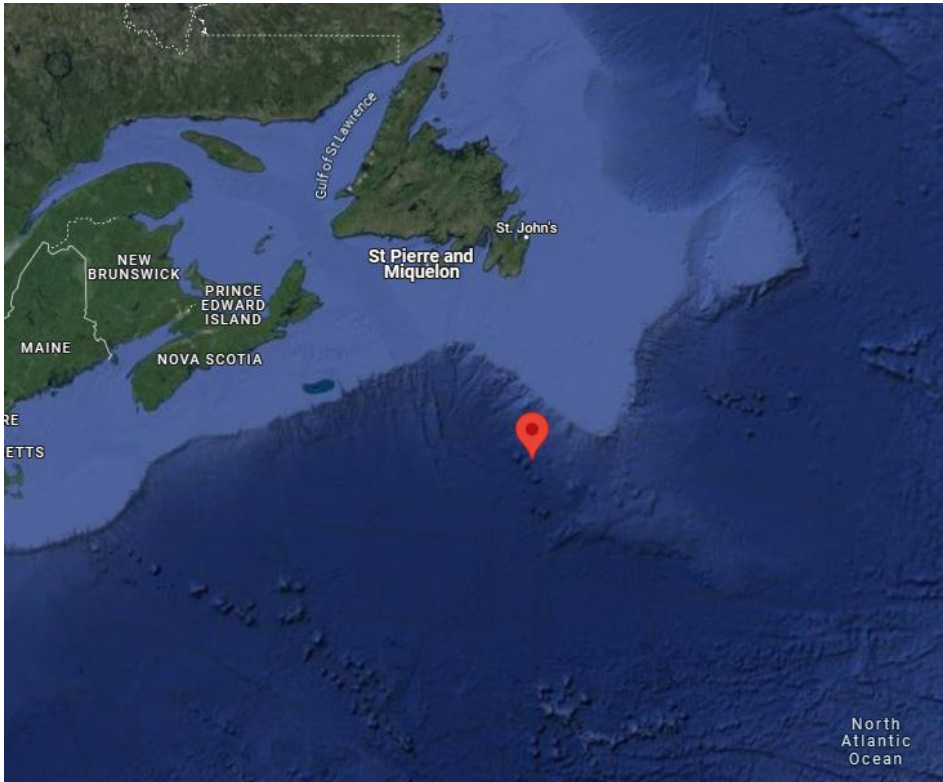


Source Google Maps Accessed : 7 Jun 2024 - [42°16'12.0"N 52°32'24.0"W](#) - [Google Maps](#)

It began with U-1221 entering Canadian waters near Sable Island September 27th. Sable Island was its sallying point as an apex on this patrol, from which it appears that Ackermann exited at that point upon his return to Norway October 28th. Sable Island was his outermost boundary for the Nova Scotia theatre of operations in-between Sable and NS.⁵⁰²

The one significant event of note was the loss of one man overboard on September 25th. The lost man had been under punishment at the time for sleeping while on watch. He was so distressed by this admonition that he apparently jumped overboard committing suicide in the North Atlantic for his infraction.

⁵⁰² UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1221"



Despite its lengthy patrol, U-1221 met with little success and recorded no sinkings along its journey.

U-1229

Five U-boats were dispatched to the Gulf of St Lawrence beginning with U-802, 27 August 1944 and ending 10 December 1944 with the exit of U-1231 from the Gulf.

Two other U-boats, likely a diversionary force, were also dispatched collaterally toward the Gulf of Maine, U-1229 and U-1230, respectively.⁵⁰³ U-1230 with a

⁵⁰³ Hadley 1985, 238, 249

special mission to land spies in the US, would continue its patrol off Canada's east coast.⁵⁰⁴ U-1229 was sunk en-route August 20th.⁵⁰⁵

U1229 never reached Canada whose presence and overlapping patrol times would have assisted Donitz's policy. U-1230 was another matter. It was principally directed to the Gulf of Maine (see previous).

⁵⁰⁴ Hadley 1985,250

⁵⁰⁵ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1229" " © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 23 May 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-1229 from 26 Jul 1944 to 20 Aug 1944 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](https://uboat.net/patrols/german-uboats/1229)

U-806

U-806 was a Type IXC/40 U-boat commanded by Kptlt. Klaus Hornbostel. U-806 began its patrol October 30th, 1944 and ended 115 days later February 21st, 1945. This boat spent the majority of its time off Canada's east coast and Halifax.

U-806 spent 115 days on patrol with an emphasis on Canada's east coast. It neither entered the Gulf of St Lawrence nor the Gulf of Maine at this time. Its destructive power was directed to shipping off Halifax.

On December 10th, U-806 was ordered to proceed to Halifax. Donitz's headquarters assumed the hunting would be better there than in the Atlantic. Donitz assessed the target traffic to be passages of small convoys of at least 3 steamers that put to sea each night in small packets.

While incoming shipping was estimated to be approximately one half of the small convoys entering Halifax from abroad, independent steamers were also exiting Halifax with one warship at that time. The two-way traffic presented an opportunity.

A warship/cruiser was expected to be in a traffic lane running south from the Sambro light ship. The Lighthouse at Egg Island was expected to be operating normally as in peacetime and would be a good navigation beacon. Halifax's defences were assessed as slight and sleepy. Thus, laying in this position afforded U-boats both excellent visual and listening opportunities as well.⁵⁰⁶

U-806 assumed that it would not be operating alone but in tandem with other boats. It had received a cryptic message December 1st while still in the Atlantic to anticipate Marienfeld (U-1228)– Lessing (U-1231 to be near U-860. Each U-boat commander was also instructed that they were free to maneuver according to situation and position their operations in the area off naval square BB 7513. Therefore, the boats were not expected to be alone in the operations area.⁵⁰⁷

The reign of terror truly began 21 December 1944 when the merchant ship Samtucky in convoy HX-327 was torpedoed and damaged. U-806 remained on patrol in the area where on Christmas Eve it torpedoed and sunk HMCS Clayoquot

⁵⁰⁶ UBoatarchive.net 2024. "U-806 - 1st War Patrol." (Logs translated by Jerry Mason & Andi Forster.) Accessed: 21 May 2024 [U-boat Archive - U-boat KTB - U-806 1st War Patrol \(uboatarchive.net\) daily log Daily log 10 12. 44](#)

⁵⁰⁷ UBoatarchive.net 2024. "U-806 - 1st War Patrol." (Logs translated by Jerry Mason & Andi Forster.) Accessed: 21 May 2024 [U-boat Archive - U-boat KTB - U-806 1st War Patrol \(uboatarchive.net\) Daily log 1.12.1944](#)

(J 174) again, just off Halifax December 24th. U-806 was then aggressively pursued by Clayoquot's consorts, but in the end, she managed to elude all attacks and escaped.⁵⁰⁸

U-806's attack provides some interesting details from the RCN's perspective on the events of 21 December in particular:

[QUOTE]

At 1307 21 Dec, U-806 identified a small steamer bearing 130°T but it passed out of sight 10 minutes later. At 1547 warships of significance; Two Flower-Class corvettes bearing 250°R, 340°T and a Corvette I ("silhouettes" Sheet 47 N), were observed zigzagging and disappeared from their view at 1633 hours heading in a southern direction. The boat was finally brought to action stations at 1948 hours. By 2038 Samtucky was attacked and damaged. U-806 noted that it suspected the steamer was only damaged.⁵⁰⁹

[END QUOTE]

U-806 had greater success on December 24th when in sight of the Sambro Lightship. Visibility was poor on this wet and misty day. U-806's log recorded:

[QUOTE]

Corvette that bore 82°T, now bears 150°R, 120°T, target angle 0°, apparently increased speed.

14.37 Reversal shot from tube V with fixed shooting angle, 150°, depth 4 meters.

14.37 "Quickly go to 50 meters!"

14.38 Hit after 69 seconds.

14.39 At periscope depth.

14.40 Corvette sinks quickly, only superstructure of the aftership just above the water.

A corvette bearing 110°R, 80°T is heading for the comrade who was hit, the other, which was previously in 270°T, shows target angle 180°, high wake.

⁵⁰⁸ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-806." © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 21 May 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-806 from 30 Oct 1944 to 21 Feb 1945 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](#)

⁵⁰⁹ UBoatarchive.net 2024. "U-806 - 1st War Patrol." (Logs translated by Jerry Mason & Andi Forster.) Accessed: 21 May 2024 [U-boat Archive - U-boat KTB - U-806 1st War Patrol \(uboatarchive.net\)](#)

- 14.45 Port foremost steamer (freighter of 6000 GRT) passes on opposite 300 meters to port, shot is no longer possible.
- 14.46 4 depth charges (aircraft bombs) heavy machine gun fire (from a passing steamer or an aircraft).
- 14.46 Shot from tube VI on foremost steamer of the 2nd column (4000 GRT).
Shooting data:
Bow left, target angle at shot not written down
Speed 11 knots
Range = 2500 meters
Depth 6 meters

[END QUOTE]

In just three short minutes HMCS Clayoquot met its end and was sent to the bottom.⁵¹⁰

U-806 remained lurking off Halifax from December 17th, 1944 to January 5th, 1945 when it returned to the mid-Atlantic and then, homeward bound, arriving February 21st at Kristiansand after 115 days at sea.⁵¹¹

U-1222

U-1222 under command of Kptlt. Heinz Bielfeld (German Cross in Gold), began its journey at Marviken, Norway, April 16, 1944. It met its demise 87 days later on July 11th with the loss of all life aboard in the Bay of Biscay. Regardless, U-1222 had a very prolific patrol and was a great threat in and around Nova Scotia and the east Coast of North America.

On May 20th U-1222 was in a position just off the continental shelf poised to enter North America.

⁵¹⁰ UBoatarchive.net 2024. "U-806 - 1st War Patrol." (Logs translated by Jerry Mason & Andi Forster.) Accessed: 21 May 2024 [U-boat Archive - U-boat KTB - U-806 1st War Patrol \(uboatarchive.net\)](https://uboatarchive.net)

⁵¹¹ UBoatarchive.net 2024. "U-806 - 1st War Patrol." (Logs translated by Jerry Mason & Andi Forster.) Accessed: 21 May 2024 [U-boat Archive - U-boat KTB - U-806 1st War Patrol \(uboatarchive.net\)](https://uboatarchive.net)

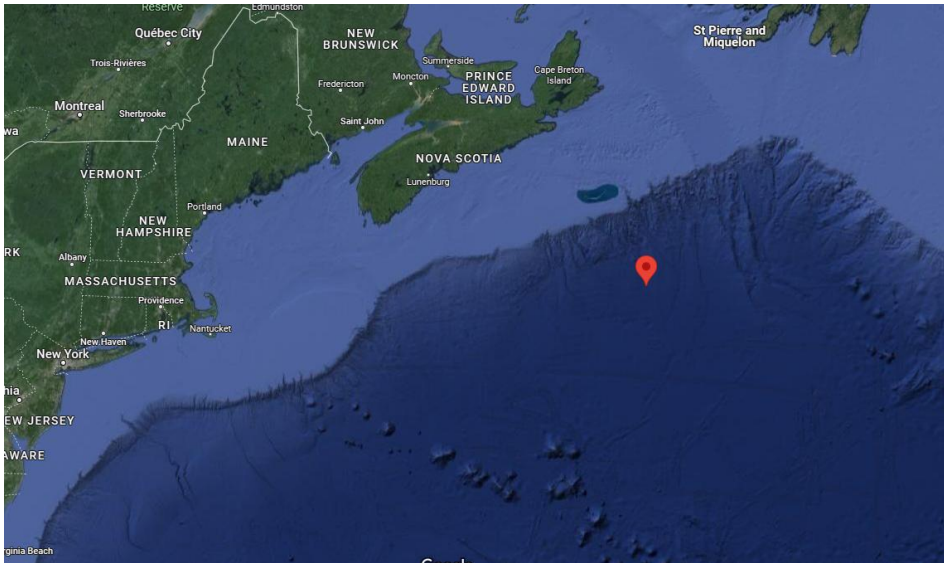
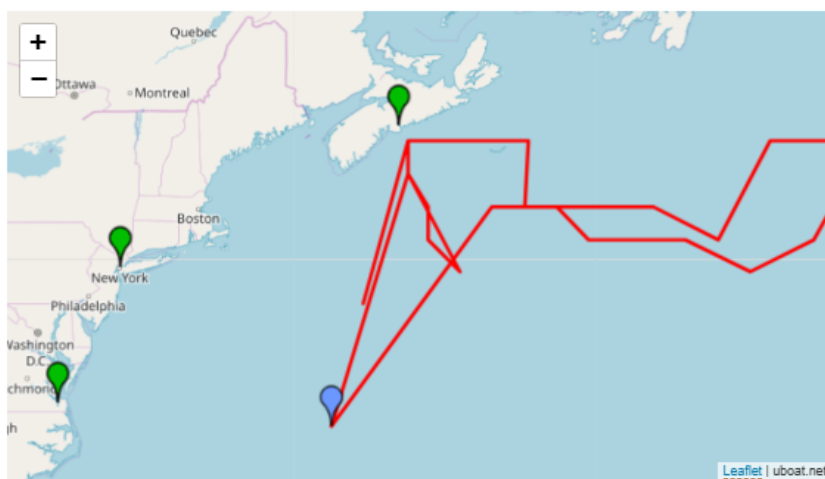


Figure 2 U-1222 21 May 1944 Accessed: 7 Jun 2024 [42°16'12.0"N 58°32'24.0"W - Google Maps](#)

From that point it turned southward and headed to points off the US east Coast.

U-1222's position on 22 May 1944



Legend



Daily position of the U-boat.

The route is shown in a red line. You may have to zoom out to see all data.

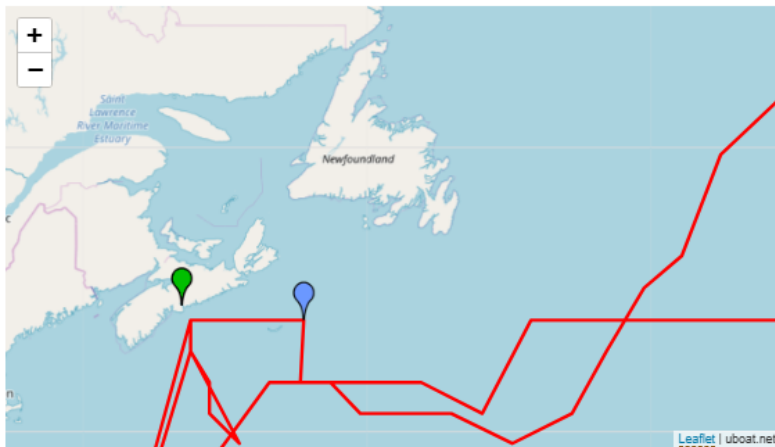
In some cases missing data may make the route appear go overland which U-boats of course never did on patrols.

U-1222 remained at this, the most southerly point of its patrol to date, until May 23rd. It then turn northward and was in position off Halifax May 24th. Here it remained until May 27th and on the 28th, returned south and east and then back toward Halifax May 29th, so by May 31st, it was once again off Halifax Harbour.

The boat remained off Halifax Harbour from 1-4 June. Its daily positions were unknown from 4-7 June but its safe to safe, it was in either near the approaches to Nova Scotia, or in transit, for on the 8th of June its daily position places it on the US east coast in the Atlantic opposite New York.

No data was available for 8-9 June to determine the boats' position or intent, but its was suggestive. The boat was once again in transit on the 11th of June, then found off the approaches to Halifax. It remained there until the 14th of June, and from there, on the 15th, was off the continental shelf, where it remained patrolling from 15-17 June before heading homeward bound June 18th.

U-1222's position on 15 Jun 1944



Legend
Daily position of the U-boat.

The route is shown in a red line. You may have to zoom out to see all data.

U-1222 never made it to its final destination as it was sunk in the Bay of Biscay by a Sunderland Flying boat July 11th, 1944, west of La Rochelle. Its demise was by depth charges from British Sunderland aircraft out of Sqdn 201/P.

U-1222 neither sunk nor damaged any ships on its 98 day journey. It was a very poor return for the effort.

U-1232

U-1232 (Type IXC/40) departed Horten, Norway, November 10th, 1944 under command of Kpt. Kurt Dobratz. U-1232 remained at sea for 97 days returning earlier than planned to Marviken, Norway, February 14th, 1945 for repairs that it sustained on this patrol. Regardless of the considerable damage endured, U-1232 had the most successful patrol amongst its peers for this period.⁵¹²

U-1232's foray began on New Years Eve while approaching Canada and lurking near Sable Island. It did not remain in place but steered itself as it approached and

⁵¹² UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1232" © 1995 - 2024 Guðmundur Helgason. Accessed: 7 Jun 2024. [Patrol of German U-boat U-1232 from 10 Nov 1944 to 14 Feb 1945 - Kriegsmarine U-boat patrols - uboat.net](https://uboat.net/patrols/german-uboats/1232)

headed toward Halifax January 2nd. Horten had nerves of steel as he then loitered in and around Halifax's approaches from the 2nd to the 14th of January.⁵¹³

His presence became evident very shortly after his arrival, when on January 4th, U-1232 attacked and damaged Nipiwan Park (d.) and sunk Polarland out of convoy SH-194. U-1232 managed to evade any attacks on the boat.⁵¹⁴

On January 14th, a subsequent attack was made on three ships out of convoy BX 141 (Boston-Halifax). U-1232 had not moved very far from Halifax as it remained on this station from the 2nd to the 14th of January. But U-1232's luck finally ran out. This time U-1232 was heavily counterattacked by the convoy's escorts, where HMCS Ettrick, a Canadian frigate, managed to ram the boat.⁵¹⁵

HMCS Ettrick caused extensive damage to U-1232's conning tower, periscopes, and radio mast. Despite the heavy damage by this and subsequent heavy depth charging, U-1232 somehow managed to slip away. But the length of its stay in Canadian waters after January 14th is uncertain. U-1232 made a lucky escape. It was forced to return to base, arriving at Marviken, Norway, on February 14th.⁵¹⁶

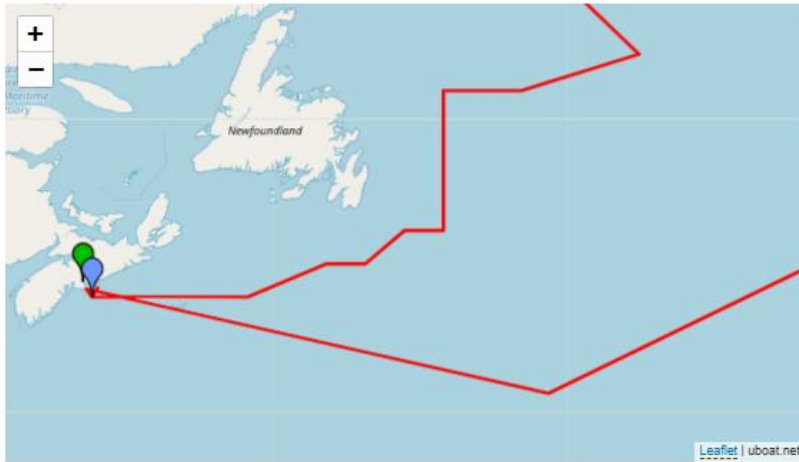
⁵¹³ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1232"

⁵¹⁴ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1232"

⁵¹⁵ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1232"

⁵¹⁶ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1232"

U-1232's position on 8 Jan 1945

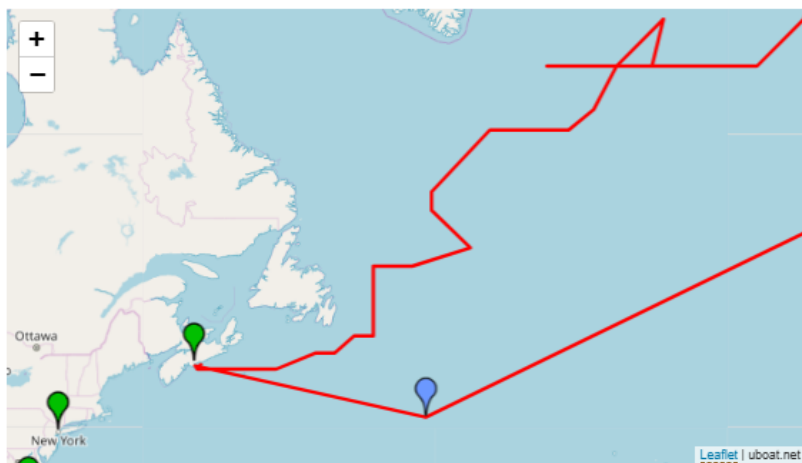


Legend

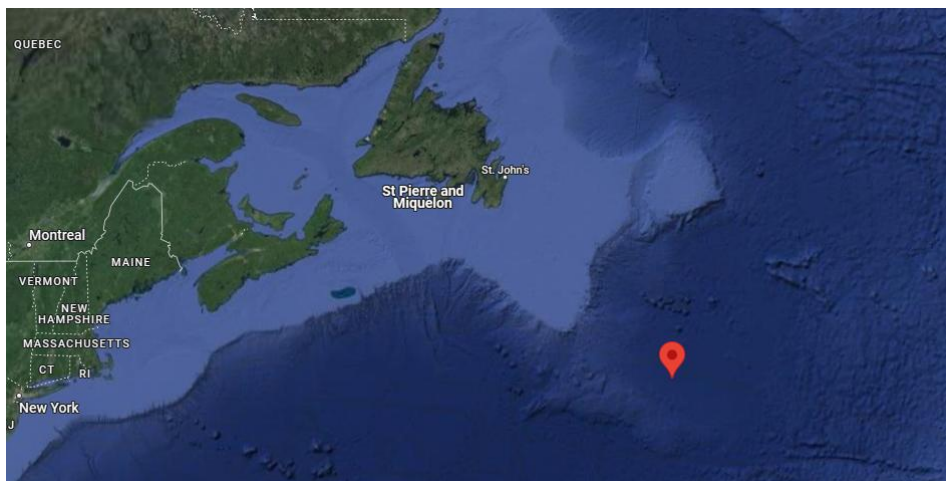
 Daily position of the U-boat.

There are no daily position records available from 15-23 January 1945. U-1232,s position on 23 January 1945 suggested that it had already left Canadian waters but still was not to far off our shore.

U-1232's position on 23 Jan 1945



Legend
Daily position of the U-boat.



U-1232 position 23 Jan 1945 relative to NS . Accessed 10 Jun 2024 [41°19'48.0"N 45°25'12.0"W](#) - Google Maps

U1232 was somewhere in the Atlantic skirting the continental shelf. This meant that either Dobratz had the intestinal fortitude to remain in place for a time or that

his boat was severely damaged and making slow headway home. Either way U-1232 had a very lucky escape.⁵¹⁷

PART 5 – A Final Throe Of The Dice

Chapter 17 1945 – Last action and Losses HMCS Esquimalt

The Promise

Many promises were made over the course of the war, some sincere, others less so. Some were made in the hope for a better future.

One such promise was a posting to HMCS Esquimalt. Esquimalt was heading overseas and to Scotland. It was the promise of a journey that proved too alluring for one young man. Still a journey fraught with danger and despite the risks, it beckoned one sailor to come forward to fill a vacant signal billet aboard HMCS Esquimalt. It was the vacancy and the opportunity, for this sailor's visit to his family's homeland.

A ship also tied the families, friends and loved ones with those serving on it to parts near and far and wide across Canada. These were the bonds that tied so many Canadian families to their ships and to a ship's fate! They were all bonded in the hope and promise of a safe return of their loved ones.

⁵¹⁷ UBoat.Net . 2024. "Patrol info for U-1232"



*Photo courtesy of William R. Henderson
Permission to use "For Prosperity's Sake"*

A fighting ship though was a living entity. It had a life and pulse of its own. Apart from the Captain and XO, the person or trade most likely to have a sense of that pulse was the ship's signaller.

Communications were after all, the ship's lifeblood.⁵¹⁸ That was to be the young Henderson's function aboard HMCS Esquimalt. It was a role of great responsibility, and a position of great trust for the young man of twenty-three.

The signal log held the record of the ship's history so had to be scrupulously accurate and well maintained. The signal log constantly unfolded as it chronicled daily life.

The log detailed and proscribed the lives of its crew; from who was in hospital, to who was released, who was in jail, or who was promoted or posted. Messages were the means of notification detailing who would come and who would go.⁵¹⁹ Communications commanded the ship's fate, where it would fight and possibly die too.

⁵¹⁸ Lawrence, 1979, pg. 189

⁵¹⁹ Lawrence, 1979, pg. 189

The signaller was amongst the first to know all of this and how the ship was performing her duty. Young Henderson was a part of the brotherhood in the fabric of his ship that passed along this lifeblood that made a ship “go”!

Whoever took the posting to Esquimalt, Henderson was questioned by a shipmate before leaving Dundas, “Are you sure?” This posting didn’t seem to be a such good idea to him. In reply, the rating remembered Henderson’s response, “Yes, I’m sure.”

The rating wished his friend well, and said, “Then be sure to drop me a line when you get there,” and “Good luck!”

Esquimalt slipped its moorings the evening of 15 April 1945 and put to sea. Esquimalt moved away out of his sight and left Halifax Harbour in the dark of night. Esquimalt first conducted an anti-submarine patrol in the approaches, and then finally was to rendezvous with its sister ship, HMCS Sarnia later on the sixteenth.⁵²⁰

The Esquimalt was torpedoed and sunk a short time later. Young Henderson soon found himself clinging for his life in a Carley float along with 26 others who managed to survive that day.⁵²¹

Sketch of HMCS Esquimalt

The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) began the war in 1939 with a mere 13 vessels but grew in strength to nearly 400 vessels with 100,000 uniformed men and women by war’s end. A naval building program helped Canada to build the fourth largest navy in the world.⁵²²

HMCS Esquimalt was amongst the many class of ships built in Canadian Shipyards during the Second World War. Canada built corvettes, motor torpedo boats, tenders and other vessels in addition to the minesweepers. Esquimalt was a Bangor Class Minesweeper.⁵²³

⁵²⁰ Howell, Shayla and Tabitha de Bruin. 2014., “Sinking of HMCS Esquimalt.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. October 14, 2014 UPDATED May21, 2024). Accessed: 9 Jan 2017. Source: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sinking-of-hmcs-esquimalt/>

⁵²¹ An Ancestry.com community, Halifax Herald, Dyan Matheson, **Esquimalt Casualties**, 8 May 1945

⁵²² Canada, Royal Canadian Navy, **History of the Battle of the Atlantic**, 2015-06-01
Source: <http://www.navy-marine.forces.gc.ca/en/navy-life/history-view.page?doc=history-of-the-battle-of-the-atlantic/hujqx8pp>

⁵²³ A Royal Canadian Navy Historical Project. 2017. “For Posterity’s Sake, *Ship Index*.” 2002-2016. Accessed: 10 Jan 2017. <http://forposterityssake.ca/RCN-SHIP-INDEX.htm>



HMCS Esquimalt J272

Source: *For Posterity's Sake website, HMCS ESQUIMALT J272, Copyright unknown*

Esquimalt operated primarily as an anti-submarine escort although it was designed as a minesweeper. Esquimalt mounted a capable defence, armed with a 12-pounder gun, a 2-pounder, two 20 millimetre Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns, and she carried seventy depth charges.⁵²⁴ HMCS Esquimalt truly was a formidable weapon of war.

HMCS Esquimalt spent a great deal of time at sea while on active service. Lt. Gordon Ball, RCNVR, of Toronto recounted some of the ship's history at a Toronto Bond Rally on 11 May 1945.

(Ball) "I would like to tell you of one little escapade off Newfoundland. We had already had a submarine report, and it was time for me to go off watch. I tried to get some sleep, but at 2 o'clock the action bell rang through the ship, and in 1 minute 30 seconds every man was at his post."

⁵²⁴ For Posterity's Sake, *HMCS ESQUIMALT J272*

“The fog had closed in as the submarine surfaced 500 yards off our stern, but we could not see a single thing. It was like being trapped in a dark room with a murderer. He can't see you, and you can't see him, and neither of you can do a thing. There was a heavy sea running, and after half an hour everyone's nerves were quite on edge.”⁵²⁵

HMCS Esquimalt engaged that submarine. Ball said, “it was presumed sunk as there was no further activity in the area following HMCS Esquimalt’s attack.”

Ball’s observations paints HMCS Esquimalt as a hardworking ship that was dispatched to dangerous areas, areas perhaps where minesweepers should not have been deployed but were deployed out of sheer necessity:

“Another time we were up in the Arctic circle and were blocked in by ice floes for 14 days. We could not move either forward or backward and had to sit there and stand watch for the entire two weeks. You get to know your shipmates pretty well in that time.”⁵²⁶

No matter the punishment, HMCS Esquimalt served her crew well and always brought them home safely. There was a price to pay for all this punishment though.

HMCS Esquimalt was chronically plagued by many mechanical problems. She was constantly under repair for one thing and/or another, undergoing extensive refits, and went into refit in Halifax, March 1943. But she was still beset by continuing problems, and brought back in, spending most of May 1943 under repair.⁵²⁷

Once fully repaired, HMCS Esquimalt was re-assigned but this time to the Newfoundland Force. She served there until September 1944 when she was subsequently transferred back to Halifax to serve in its “Local Defence Force”. And before she could do so, HMCS Esquimalt underwent another three-month refit upon reaching Halifax Harbour that September.⁵²⁸

Esquimalt’s commanding officer was replaced during this time. Lt Robert Cunningham MacMillan, DSC, RCNVR assumed command on 02 February 1945

⁵²⁵ Anon. 1945. “Esquimalt Officer tells of Heroism when vessel sunk.” *Globe and Mail*, 12 May 1945; Canada, Canadian War Museum Archives, 149, War, European, 1939, Canada, Navy, Minesweeper, Esquimalt. Accessed: 11 Jan 2017. Source: <http://collections.civilisations.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5057698>

⁵²⁶ Anon. Esquimalt Officer tells of Heroism when vessel sunk, 12 May 1945

⁵²⁷ For Posterity's Sake, *HMCS ESQUIMALT J272*

⁵²⁸ For Posterity's Sake, *HMCS ESQUIMALT J272*

as part of a routine transfer. MacMillan would be Esquimalt's last commanding officer.

MacMillan was a very distinguished and an experienced officer. But disaster befell him and Esquimalt on 16 April 1945. MacMillan's command was torpedoed and sunk beneath him. U-190, Esquimalt's adversary, lay a mere five miles off Chebucto Head, near Halifax when this happened. Forty-Four of Esquimalt's crew were doomed to die that day.⁵²⁹

The Adversary U-190

There was a new U-boat threat that came with a change of tactics that was very dangerous to Allied vessels in 1945. The U-boat now had a new technical advantage of Schnorchel, which cloaked its operations.

Schnorchel, equipped with an air pipe to the surface, allowed U-boats to operate stealthily while running sub-surfaced when charging the boat's batteries. Schnorchel thus reduced a U-boat's target profile to the area of the surfaced air pipe. A U-boat with this modification proved very hard and difficult to spot.

Esquimalt's adversary, U-190, was commanded by Oblt. Hans-Erwin Reith. U-190 was one of the eighty-seven Type IXC/40 then in service, April 1945.



Courtesy of Wikipedia – U-190 June 1945⁵³⁰

Fitted with the Schnorchel underwater-breathing apparatus, U-190 had a range of 13,850 miles while cruising at 10 knots. U-190 too was equipped with a formidable array of 22 torpedoes, four loaded in the bow and two loaded in the stern tubes.⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ For Posterity's Sake, *HMCS ESQUIMALT J272*

⁵³⁰ Wikipedia, 2017. "U-190 June 1945." Accessed: 17 Jan 2017. Last edited 20 May 2024.

Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_submarine_U-190

⁵³¹ Wikipedia, U-190

U-190 conducted only six active service patrols. It was employed as a training vessel for most of the war. Its limited successes included one ship of 7015 GRT and a warship of 590 tons. The latter warship was to be, unfortunately, HMCS Esquimalt on 16 April 1945.⁵³²

In early April 1945, Reith lay somewhere in wait just off Nova Scotia. Reith sighted two merchant ships on April 12th and attacked both with torpedoes. His attacks failed but U-190's presence from then on was known to all. Reith moved ever closer to Halifax during the night of 15/16 April for better opportunities.⁵³³

Just as U-190 made its moved towards Halifax, the hands of fate brought HMCS Esquimalt into U-190's sights.

Aboard HMCS Esquimalt and the Encounter with U-190

Esquimalt was conducting a routine anti-submarine patrol in consort with HMCS Sarnia the evening of 15/16 April 1945. Their plan was simple. Both were to carry out a sweep, then rendezvous off Chebucto Head at Buoy "C" the following morning.⁵³⁴ HMCS Esquimalt never made that rendezvous.

HMCS Esquimalt's routine patrol the night of 15-16 April began quietly enough. Towards dawn at 0600hrs, Lt John Smart, officer of the watch ordered the depth charge crew to stations. Lt Smart did not bring the ship to general action stations at the change of the watch.

Lt Smart was simply following routine procedures at the changing of a watch. Nothing untoward was expected or in the offing at that time. It had been a quiet, uneventful night.

The sea was calm, and all eyes were directed to the light ship off the Harbour only some three miles way. The depth charge crew was stood down from action stations ten minutes later at 0610hrs. The old watch was finally relieved, and the new watch undertaken without incident.⁵³⁵

⁵³² Wikipedia, U-190

⁵³³ Fisher, Robert C. 1997. "Within Sight of Shore: The Sinking of HMCS Esquimalt, 16 April 1945." *FamilyHeritage.ca*. Accessed: 2 Jan 2017. Source: <http://familyheritage.ca/Articles/esquimalt1.html>

⁵³⁴ Fisher, 1997

⁵³⁵ Fisher, 1997

Those aboard Esquimalt were unaware of the looming presence of U-190 or the menace that lay immediately beneath them. But U-190 was very much aware of Esquimalt's presence. Esquimalt pinged its sonar as it patrolled all about the approaches that night.

Those aboard U-190 listened intently as the Esquimalt appeared to be drawing ever so nearer, circling, and then pausing overhead. It seemed an eternity. HMCS Esquimalt circled overhead U-boat for 10 long minutes. No attack followed.

Reith took U-190 up to periscope depth for a quick look around after a while. HMCS Esquimalt was seen off in the distance at a range of 1000-2000 meters, moving away from him. Esquimalt was too close for comfort. But when the Esquimalt suddenly reversed course, and rapidly made for U-190's position, Reith assumed that he was under attack. Reith launched an acoustic homing torpedo towards the approaching Esquimalt from his stern tube.

All hell summarily broke loose. U-190's torpedo ripped into the Esquimalt's hull on its starboard side at approximately 0630 hrs. Water flooded in, the ship was settling and rapidly sinking. Esquimalt listed to starboard, then its emergency lights suddenly failed.

MacMillan, HMCS Esquimalt's commanding officer, emerged from below, his situation was clear. MacMillan had little choice but to give an order to abandon ship. His signalman was stunned by the explosion. No distress signals were sent and, more importantly, no other crew member had the presence of mind to launch any distress flares to draw the nearby light ship's attention to Esquimalt's immediate plight.

The ship sunk so rapidly that the lifeboats became trapped in their davits. Only four Carley floats were successfully deployed. The surviving crew plunged into the icy April waters with little clothing on them and made their way in the frigid waters towards the safety of the Carley floats. It was their only hope of survival.⁵³⁶

Chaos in the aftermath

Terry Manuel remembered that change of the watch. Terry was 20 years old and the Ship's writer. He was just released from duty at approximately 0610 hrs. He was on the dark-watch and slipped below to his berth in the Chief and PO's mess

⁵³⁶ Fisher, 1997

for a much-needed rest. Terry stripped off before going to ground and was fixing his lifejacket to use as a pillow.⁵³⁷

As soon as Terry's head hit the pillow, he heard a large crash. He assumed it was just the minesweeping gear shifting about up on deck. But the ship shook violently, listed and began to keel over toward the portside.⁵³⁸

Terry immediately jumped from his bunk and made his way up an emergency hatch. But that way was blocked, the hatch wouldn't budge. The plates of the ship's deck buckled over the hatch sealing Terry and others in. It was a desperate situation.

Terry literally fell back down into the communications mess. He struggled up another escape hatchway towards another companionway. This one was free from obstruction. Finally, there was hope of escape! But once more Terry was thrown back down into his sinking ship.⁵³⁹

The situation was total chaos. Men desperately struggled trying to get out. Just as Terry climbed up the hatch almost to the safety of the free companionway, Petty Officer Carl Jacques of Nova Scotia came up and vaulted over his shoulder. The force of Jacques' vault pushed Terry backwards. He tumbled back down into the mess that now was quickly filling with the sea.

Terry finally managed to escape, but as he did, the ship rolled and sank beneath him.⁵⁴⁰ He was thrown violently into the water by the force of the rolling ship. He and another sailor swam for it. They both managed to find a single floating lifejacket. There they clung desperately until it too became so water logged, it began to sink, taking both beneath the waves with it.

Terry estimated that it was just a mere four short minutes before the lifejacket gave out. Terry clung to his companion. Carl Jacques saw their imminent peril. Jacques dove into the water, dragged them and placed them aboard the Carley float.⁵⁴¹ Carl Jacques saved Terry's life that day.

⁵³⁷ Greenfield 2004, 238-239

⁵³⁸ Greenfield 2004, 238-239

⁵³⁹ Greenfield 2004, 238-239

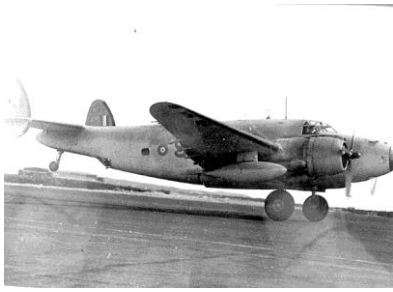
⁵⁴⁰ Greenfield 2004, 238-239

⁵⁴¹ Greenfield 2004, 238-239

Terry's Carley float carried 18 other survivors. It was going to be a long day. Sadly 10 minutes later, Carl Jacques succumbed to the cold of the frigid waters. Jacques' self-sacrifice and bravery saved Terry.⁵⁴²

Terry remembered "There were 18 of us in and around the float in terribly cold water. It didn't take long for the water chilled by the ice currents that came down from the Arctic, to take its toll. One by one, men around me died and floated off. Carl Jacques was one of them."⁵⁴³

Terry recalled two overflights of passing RCAF aircraft. The first overflight occurred only an hour after Esquimalt sunk at around 0700hrs. Esquimalt's surviving men waved frantically for help. The overflying aircraft ignored the desperate men. The aircrew assumed the waving men to be simply fisherman who routinely waved as they flew by while on patrol.⁵⁴⁴



*Ventura Bomber – type flown at Dartmouth NS
Venturas from 145 BR Squadron flew Harbour Entrance Patrols off the Halifax harbour⁵⁴⁵
DND Historic photograph, Lockheed Ventura*

Rescue appeared to be at hand once more at approximately 0800 hours. The group sighted a minesweeper off in the distance. It came close and was almost within shouting distance. Once again, the men tried vainly, in utter desperation, to attract the attention of this passing ship. But the ship and the hope of their rescue, simply turned away, not spotting the now desperate men.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴² Greenfield 2004, 238-239

⁵⁴³ Greenfield 2004, 238-239

⁵⁴⁴ Greenfield 2004, 239

⁵⁴⁵ Shearwater Aviation Museum webpage. 2017. "Aircraft History, Lockheed Ventura." Accessed: 16 Jan 2017

<http://shearwateraviationmuseum.ns.ca/aircraft/ventura.htm>

⁵⁴⁶ Greenfield 2004, 239

More died while waiting. Finally, seven hours later, Esquimalt was spotted by a second plane. HMCS Sarnia arrived on the scene soon after and began the grim task of retrieving the dead and Esquimalt's remaining 27 survivors.⁵⁴⁷

It was an agonizing day, a living hell. Much suffering occurred, men died slowly and in agony. Rescue was often seen and then lost. It was frustrating, rescue was always so close by!

HMCS Sarnia was only just a few miles way patrolling and prowling about the East Halifax lightship. But the Sarnia was unaware of Esquimalt's plight. How could Sarnia know? No distress signal had been sent, nor was any flare raised by the Esquimalt in the aftermath of its torpedoing.⁵⁴⁸

The authorities knew that something was amiss though. No one ashore informed Sarnia of the fact that Esquimalt had not been heard from, that she was unaccounted for, and that she was likely missing as one reporting deadline passed after another.⁵⁴⁹

In the six to seven hours of this misery, a few survivors sensed their lives ebbing away. Some left messages of farewell with comrades for family or a sweetheart. Remembered amongst those who left such messages were Seaman Don White of Peterborough, Ontario and Huntly Fanning of Drumhead, Nova Scotia.⁵⁵⁰

The pain of the cold waters proved to be too excruciating. Delirium drove others into the sea. A tenacious few grimly clung to life and did so for as long as their hearts could hold out. These were the few finally rescued by the Sarnia, where it was said, "the dead outnumbered the living."⁵⁵¹

HMCS Sarnia's Story

HMCS Sarnia and Esquimalt were sister ships. Fittingly, Sarnia came to Esquimalt's rescue on April 16th. Both had been assigned to conduct a radar sweep ahead of a convoy leaving from Halifax later that day.⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁷ Greenfield 2004, 239

⁵⁴⁸ Lamb, James B. 1986. *On the Triangle Run*. MacMillan Of Canada, 221

⁵⁴⁹ Egan, Phil. 2016. "Sister ships in peril on a cold, gray sea." *The Sarnia Journal*, 11 April 2016. Accessed: 15 Jan 2015. Source: <http://thesarniajournal.ca/sister-ships-in-peril-on-a-cold-gray-sea/>

⁵⁵⁰ Stokes, 2022222

⁵⁵¹ Lamb 1986, 222

⁵⁵² Egan, 11 April 2016

The two ships were scheduled to rendezvous at sea at 8 a.m. once the sweep was done. Both ships were aware that there were at least two German submarines lurking in the area.⁵⁵³

HMCS Esquimalt failed to rendezvous as scheduled. Sarnia became concerned and vainly tried to reach Esquimalt by radio. But Esquimalt had already sunk by 6:30 am.

Failing radio contact, Sarnia initiated a search on its own, but those efforts were twice delayed. Sarnia detected the presence of U-boats. Sarnia pursued those contacts as its first duty. It attacked the contacts with depth charges but to no avail.⁵⁵⁴

This may explain why the Esquimalt's survivors twice saw a ship turning away. By now Esquimalt's survivors had been in the water for over six hours. Sixteen men succumbed to hypothermia and exposure during this time.⁵⁵⁵

At long last Esquimalt's survivors were finally spotted. Sarnia approached and came to a full stop leaving Sarnia completely defenseless and exposed to submarine attack. Sarnia rescued twenty-seven Canadian sailors and reclaimed some bodies floating there in the sea.⁵⁵⁶

John Stokes, a stoker petty officer aboard Sarnia, remembered the plan to rendezvous and the events leading to the rescue. Sarnia was to meet with Esquimalt at a certain time and in an area on the ocean just outside of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Sarnia was in position at the assigned time and location, but the Esquimalt failed to show up.⁵⁵⁷

Sarnia patrolled around a while longer, then its captain decided to take a wider berth to see if Esquimalt could be located. Sarnia was not far away from the Halifax [East] Light Vessel at the time.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵³ Egan, 11 April 2016

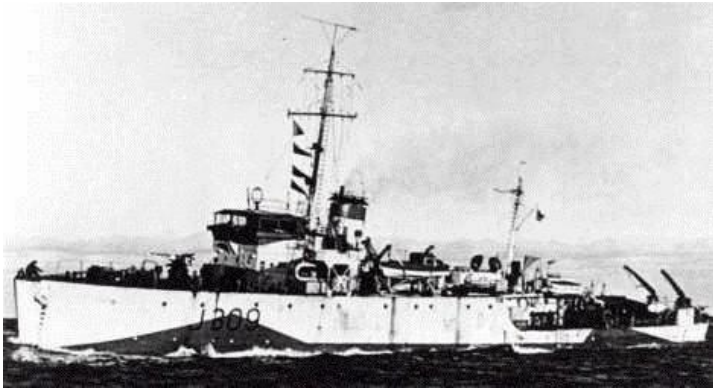
⁵⁵⁴ Egan, 11 April 2016

⁵⁵⁵ Egan, 11 April 2016

⁵⁵⁶ Egan, 11 April 2016

⁵⁵⁷ Stokes, John. 2022. " *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. Article published August 03, 2022; Last Edited August 03, 2022. Accessed: 20 Jun 2024. Source: [John Stokes | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

⁵⁵⁸ Stokes, 2022



With permission For Posterity's Sake, HMCS Sarnia J309

Sarnia finally received notification of Esquimalt's plight and its precise location. Sarnia immediately went to the rescue, finding the Carley floats with Esquimalt's remaining survivors on them.

Sarnia's lifeboat crews were dispatched and approached the Carley floats independently from the ship. John Stokes remained aboard the Sarnia and observed two Carley floats tied together with a group of survivors.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁹ Stokes, 2022



Source: *Story and/or images courtesy of John Stokes. The Memory Project. Historica Canada.*

Sarnia pulled alongside and lowered scramble nets over the side. Stokes and another sailor went down and grabbed a hold of the tied Carley floats.⁵⁶⁰

Stokes saw “There were some dead laying in the bottom of the Carley float, some were alive.” He was both shocked and surprised for there amongst the living was his childhood friend, Fred Mimee.

Stokes: “I recognized him right away and, of course, he would be the first one I passed up on deck.”⁵⁶¹

John Stokes turned to Fred and said “What the hell. Fine time to go swimming, at a time like this... can’t you pick a better day?” Fred started to laugh. It was a sure sign that Fred was alive and going to live.⁵⁶²

John Stokes and the crew of Sarnia brought Fred and other survivors up off the Carley floats to the waiting deck and the welcomed sanctuary of HMCS Sarnia. The need for their immediate care was obvious. “There wasn’t time to count the

⁵⁶⁰ Stokes, 2022

⁵⁶¹ Stokes, 2022

⁵⁶² Stokes, 2022

living from the dead, you don't start counting who were there and who was not there." ⁵⁶³

Sarnia was soon underway taking Esquimalt's survivors to the safety of Halifax Harbour. They were met there by ambulances. Esquimalt's survivors were taken off the ship and moved quickly to hospital.

Esquimalt's survivors were confined to a separate ward, far away from prying eyes and public view. No visitors were allowed. The surviving crew was now held incommunicado for reasons unknown. ⁵⁶⁴ But this effort failed.

Stokes went up to the hospital the following day to see Fred. Esquimalt's survivor had lost everything. Stokes wanted to bring his old friend Fred some creature comforts from Sarnia's canteen to brighten his day.

At first, Stokes was barred from visiting. The head nurse said "No one was allowed in." But John Stokes persisted. He finally told her the facts "Fred and I went to school together. In fact, we grew up as kids, joined the navy together!" So, she finally relented and let John in. ⁵⁶⁵

As John sat there talking to Fred, naval photographers quite suddenly arrived. They questioned Stokes about how he got in and if he had permission to be there. The cat was now out of the bag when they found out the full extent of John and Fred's story.

It proved irresistible. The naval photographers found their story was pure gold! They simply took a picture of John and Fred sitting on the bed. The story of their incredible tale and adventure was published in the press, and so, the Esquimalt's loss was brought to the public's attention. ⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶³ Stokes, 2022

⁵⁶⁴ Stokes, 2022

⁵⁶⁵ Stokes, 2022

⁵⁶⁶ Stokes, 2022



Source: Story and/or images courtesy of John Stokes. The Memory Project. *Historica*

Epilogue

Joseph B. Lamb wrote “On the Triangle Run” in which he expressed the deep anger felt through out the East Coast naval establishment following HMCS Esquimalt’s loss:

[QUOTE]

“It seemed so stupid, so unnecessary; with Germany’s surrender, obviously only hours away and with everyone at sea anxious just to survive, the wiping out of forty-four young lives in the very moment of final victory was almost too cruel to bear.”⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁷ Lamb 1986, 221

[END QUOTE]

The war in April 1945 was in its final days. But Victory was neither hours away, nor was it ever assured.

There was yet much more fighting and dying to come following April 16, 1945. A final reckoning had yet to be presented or put paid as “FINAL”. The war at that point still was very much an open account.

Surrender and victory in Europe finally came three weeks later. Until then, both Esquimalt and U-190 were fair game. It was all a question who would be left standing and accounted amongst the living and the dead at the war’s end.

Esquimalt’s tragic loss was truly felt throughout Canada. Esquimalt’s story was not just about tragedy, but it was also one of boundless courage, willingness to sacrifice, devotion to friends and of valour too.

The loss of HMCS Esquimalt might have been the final coda for Canada’s war but its loss came with a symphony of death marking the Battle of the Atlantic. A great toll was taken by many Canadian families. The U-boat was indeed Churchill’s greatest fear during the war.

The grim reaper took the lives of young sons and daughters of those great and small amongst many Canadian families who saw their young sons and daughters come to do their duty.

The Battle in the Gulf of St Lawrence was such a duty in 1942. That phase ended with the closure of the Gulf and the shipping season that year. That end was brought forward and advanced as the British Admiralty requested the RCN’s support for Operation Torch (Oran) in November 1942.

The RCN stripped its resources and provided 17 corvettes at the expense of the security of its Gulf and coastal convoys. At this point, the Gulf of St Lawrence had been closed by September 9th by Cabinet order in any case.⁵⁶⁸

The RCN in particular made a huge sacrifice by dispatching those 17 precious corvettes in aid of Operation Torch, knowing that it would leave us either defenceless or short on the Homefront.⁵⁶⁹ But this was done willingly in the high

⁵⁶⁸ Hadley 1985, 38

⁵⁶⁹ Cook 2024, 245

stakes of war. This and other decisions made throughout the bore tremendous costs that were felt here, on the Homefront as well.

Perhaps it is here, in these sacrifices, that marks Canada's greatest contribution. It was this relatively small country in the Second World War, who sent its sons and daughters into the maw of war to fight for our freedom; from points as far as Hong Kong-Singapore, Northwest Europe, Italy and to the Battle of the Atlantic much closer to home. Their individual sacrifices and service impacted all communities great and small, and sometimes, it left great holes in our lives.

A small country of 13 million mobilized 1.1 million of its sons and daughters to serve in its armed forces. These young men and women served in all theatres of war where, 45000 were killed and 55000 wounded.⁵⁷⁰ They came from all parts of Canada.

Canada suffered disproportionately in relation to its small size making those sacrifices truly great. We see that in the faces of our surviving Second World War veterans whose service is marked by the medals upon their chest. And that is especially true in the Maritimes, especially along the eastern shores of Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada where the war was largely fought. It is something that we should pause to remember and be truly proud of.

⁵⁷⁰ Cook 2024, 465-467