



U-Boat, by [Augusto Ferrer-Dalmau](#), 2002

The First Six Months of WWII on the U.S. East Coast

FDR vs Churchill, Dönitz vs King, King vs The Royal Navy, Enigma vs B-Dienst, CNO vs BdU, Convoy vs Wolfpack, Q-ship vs VIIC, VIIC vs IXC, U-701 vs A-29, Kane vs Degen

The Happy Time – *der Glückliche Zeit*

In the first three weeks 15 U-boats destroyed 35 Allied ships killing 1,219 – The navy did NOTHING...

by

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Operation Drumbeat *Paukenschlag* Jan 13, 1942

These few pages discuss some of the issues of the German U-boats attacking the east coast of America in the first six months of 1942. These few pages mostly come from Ed Offley's book "The Burning Shore" (2014) and some WW2 U-boat documentaries in WWII.

Have listed the references and featured some pages of interest on the U-boat grid, U-boat emblems, a U-boat museum (there are about five *Underseeboots* we can visit and see), one famous U-boat Commander, and some notes on the Iron Cross.

Other than pointing out how poorly the US reacted in this time frame I want to point out the connection with Erich Topp, Horst Degen, and U-155. Degen spent 30 days on war patrol in April 1941 with Erich Topp on Type VIIC U-552. Degen was given command of Type IXC U-701 and was on the first wave in January of 1941 to attack the east coast. These type IX ('nine') boats were the larger long distant boats and the first wave of Operation Drumbeat were all Type IX boats. Topp was also in the first wave but was with the group of Type VIIC U-boats which were not titled Drumbeat but Ziether U-boats (Offley, p. 111). The Ziether Type VII boats did not have the staying power as the Type IX boats and had different follow on operational orders.

Noticed I have featured Erich Topp for a couple of reasons. First of all you will see him in the videos as he lived through the war and died at age 91 in 2005. He commanded U-155 with the Ziether group. He had trained Degen in U-552. Topp sank the first US Naval ship in October of 1941 while commanding U-155. This same U-boat was the last U-boat at sea for the Kriesmarine on May 5, 1945.

Fregattenkapitän Erich Topp in his 10 months (308 days) on patrol in VIIC U-155 had no casualties (see his page). Obviously quite a record for a commander and a German U-boat.

The name of the game is "tonnage."

As mentioned on the title page:

In the first three weeks 15 U-boats destroyed 35 Allied ships killing 1,219 – The navy did NOTHING...

For February 1942 the British Operational Intelligence Centre's (OIC) U-boat Situation Report was able to infer "at least ten U-boats were moving westbound across the North Atlantic to form a third wave of attack off the Newfoundland and US coastlines...but the Americans could still do very little to protect shipping along the eastern seaboard" (Offley, p. 125).

"In February 1942, sixteen U-boats sank thirty-five Allied merchant vessels and one warship" (p. 126).

In March forty-seven merchant ships and two war ships were sunk. The protection of merchant shipping, on average, was only two destroyers. "By the end of March, Admiral Andres and his subordinates in the six naval districts were in a full-fledged panic" (p. 127). Winston Churchill cabled FDR...on March 12 to decry 'the immense sinking' of oil tankers along the American coast and in the Caribbean...his agenda included urging them to create a submarine tracking room...and to personally press Admiral Ernest King to instigate a coastal convoy system.

As the British well knew, convoying ships worked best - indeed, the only "proven way of defending shipping and even mounting successful attacks against U-boats" (p. 129). It was said "...the US Navy wished to learn its own lessons and had plenty of ships with which to do so." At that point a British admiral said "The trouble is...it's not only your bloody ships you are losing...A lot of them are ours!" (p. 129).

Out of the 216 ships sunk between January and mid-April 1942, 98 were with the British Navy. The U.S. had ninety ships sunk during the same period.

Notes on the burning shore

“THE SPRING OF 1942 WAS AN UNRELENTING DISASTER FOR THE Anglo-American alliance at sea” ...The new encryption machine “utilized four rotors instead of three to scramble the text,” and “the German code breakers at B-Dienst had significantly broken into Naval Cypher No. 3, gleaning invaluable intelligence on Allied convoy movements” along with “...on February 18, U-boat force Headquarters expanded to the Gulf of Mexico” (p. 124).

The video “U Boat War (2001 documentary) **2of3**: Attack America” in just the first few minutes posits these comments:

1. Three weeks after we declared war on Germany, Dönitz the BdU of U-boats had his first wave of Type IXs heading west. The British were listening to all of the U-boat transmissions and knew the route of each boat. The British told the United States Navy the exact routes. For three weeks after the first merchant ship sinking (again) the German U-boats terrorized the east coastal waters. The navy did nothing.

*Did not use the 21 destroyers King had in reserve for this operation.

*Twenty-five ships were sunk on the initial thrust of **Paukenschlag** with the first five U-boats.

*The night lights in the coastal cities were just ‘dimmed’ thus helping the U-boat commanders to see and sink ships.

*They pressed on to sink 56 ships in the Gulf of Mexico.

*Three months went by and not one U-boat was sunk. The navy did precious little to nothing.

“In what is considered one of the greatest all-time American naval disasters of all time...”

2. The happy times were over in June of '42. This was after about 400 ships were sunk and about 5,000 seamen were killed.

* Admiral King is noted for having problems with British Intelligence, using convoys with escorts, and he did not get along with FDR – or the rest of the armed services early in the war.

* Offley describes rather adequately the pickle the U.S. was in when the war started reflecting most of the push was to defend and fight the Japs rather than support the German war.

* Most of the ships like the aircraft carrier Yorktown were moved to the Pacific.

* Offley describes the initial services fighting for ‘their share’ of bombs, soldiers, airplanes, and ships.

3. Most of the numbers and losses of the east coastal battle field did not come out until after the war...this note is brought out vividly in the 2of3 video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuBDShzoDzk&t=1351s>

* Offley uses two survivors to thread his war book using Harry Kane who was flying his Lockheed A-29, an early type submarine chaser, and Horst Degen who commanded Type VIIC U-701 early in the east coast sinkings. He describes well the meeting of the two after U-701 laid some mines near the mouth of Chesapeake Bay.

* Between the video and the book we have some issues not really talked about during the war. This six months was a disaster – some say as bad as or worse than Pearl Harbor...

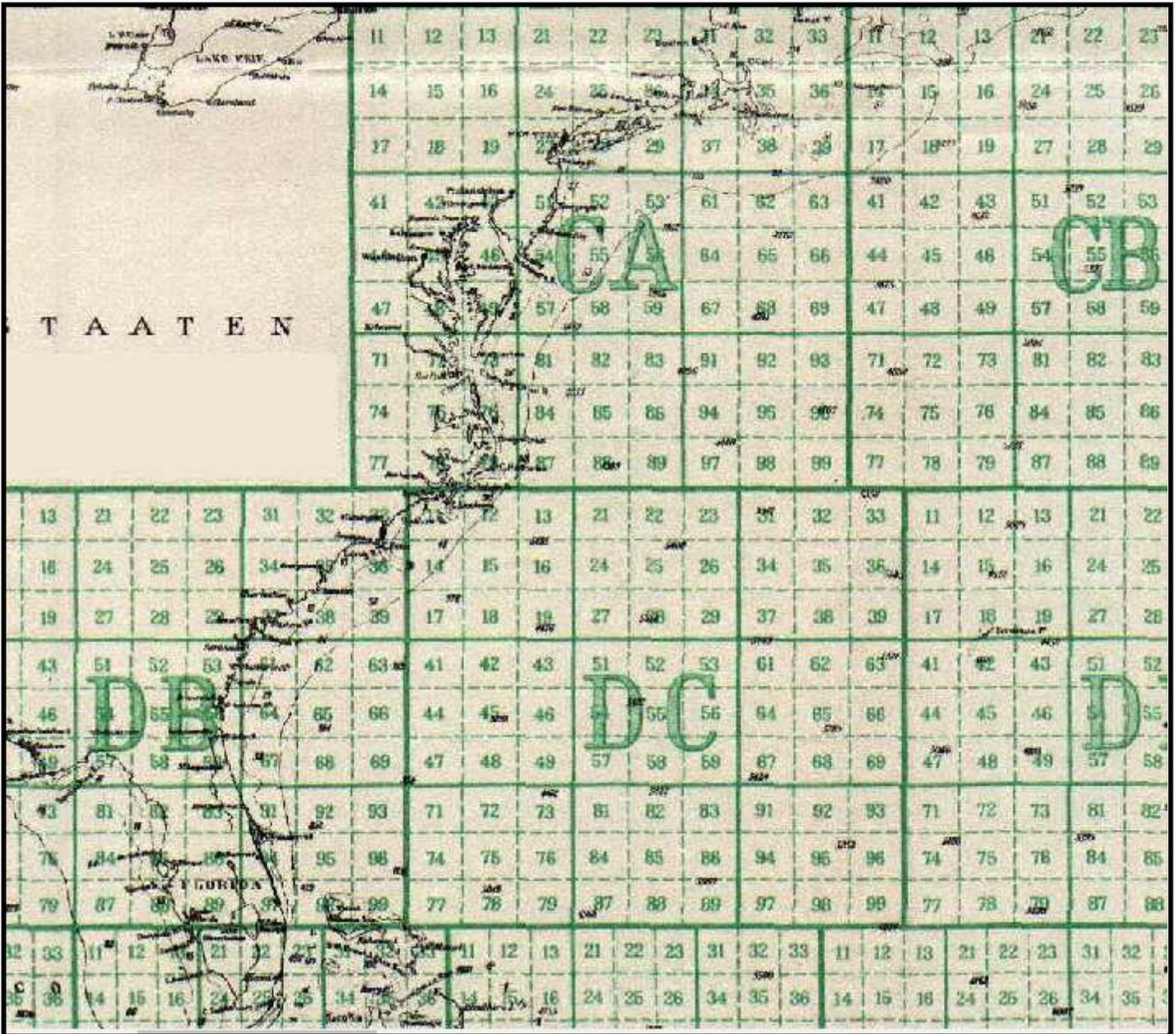
Have added the German U-boat grid system, emblems, metals, museums, references, and one U-boat ace in the following pages noting some of the history for this time in WWII.

You will see some of the numbers of the boats that attacked, made it through the war, and then surrendered when Dönitz ordered the stop on May 5, 1945.

Kriegsmarine Marinequadratkarte

"During World War 2, the German Navy used a special system to define positions on sea. It did not use the normal longitude and latitude system which is used today but its own system - the so called Marinequadratkarte . This was done to cover the real location of a ship and to find an efficient and short way to report positions via radio transmissions."

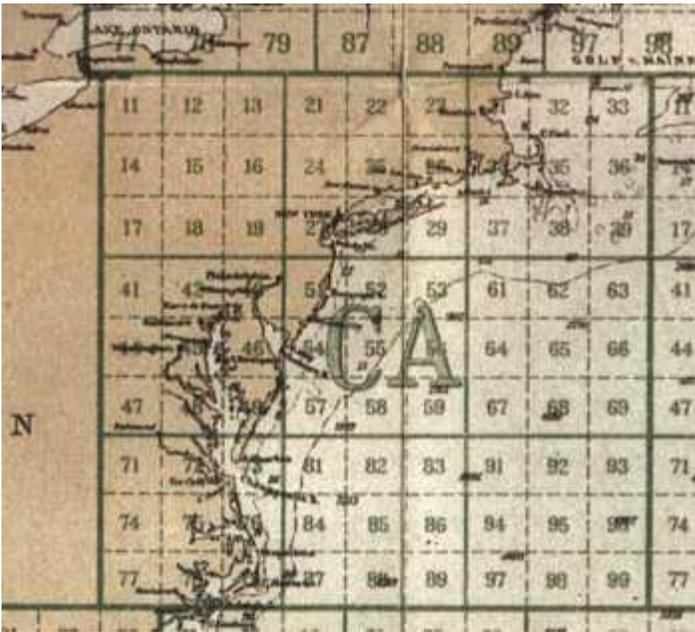
<https://www.german-navy.de/kriegsmarine/articles/feature6.html>



"The Großquadrate were subdivided into nine quadrants in a 3-by-3 grid, labeled from 1 to 9. In case of Großquadrat AC, each of those medium squares had an edge size of 162 sea miles... Each of the medium squares was again subdivided into 9 squares. With this, every Großquadrat was subdivided into 81 smaller squares, which were labeled from 11 to 99."

For example going down the coast from BOS or CA 21; NYC or CA 27; DB 37 and Savanna is DB 59.

I cut off the spelling by error but the STAATEN is for The United States or VEREINIGTE STAATEN



York. Segmented view of NYC at CA 27.

Großquadrat CA - The USA West(?)coast in the Area of New



New York Harbor in the Marinequadratkarte

Zoomed view of CA 27. "Again, those small squares were labeled from 11 to 99, a location like "CA2745" would describe such a 6 x 6 sm part of the sea. In this example, those coordinates would point into the middle of New York harbor."



U-110



701



402



85



505, 203*



352



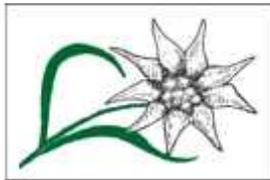
173



128



123**



124



155 ***



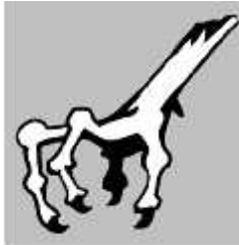
576



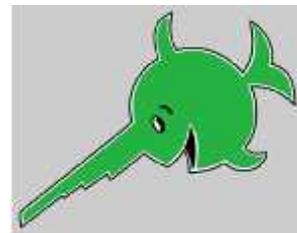
160



552



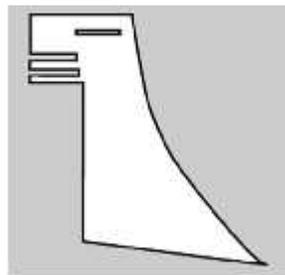
87



96



332



404



587



373

Sample of the U-boats and emblems involved with the six months of destruction on the east coast the first six months of 1942. These emblems are from https://www.uboot.net/special/emblems/listing_boats.html

The U-boat numbers are taken from Ed Offley's book "The Burning Shore" (2014).

*The Olympic Rings were displayed on 23 U-boats of the Kriegsmarine and is from the year of the Berlin Olympics in 1936. <https://www.uboot.net/special/emblems/emblem15.html>

** The crew of the Type IXB U-123 affectionately nicknamed their U-boat *Eins Zwei Drei* (Offley, p. 93).

*** U-155 was in the second wave to attack the east coast under Kptlt. Piening. U-155 was also the last boat "only one ...that was at sea on May 5, 1945" (Offley, p. 247).



For the sailors of all nationalities



who were lost at sea. Unveiled in 136 near Laboe, Germany.

U-995 – a VIIC/41. Became the Norwegian submarine Kaura on 1 Dec, 1952. Stricken in 1965. Returned to Germany where she became a museum ship in Oct 1971 at [Laboe](#), near [Kiel](#), in [Schleswig-Holstein](#), [Germany](#)..



U-995

U-505 – a IXC boat: Captured by the US Navy in 1944. Now in Chicago, USA.

U-534 – a IXC/40 boat: Raised from the Kattegat in 1993. Now in restoration at Birkenhead, England.

U-96 – a VIIC boat: Das Boot Museum at Bavaria Studios.

Some Surrendered boats: [234](#), [873](#), [1228](#), 805 (non-commissioned).



Knights Cross

About 7,318 of these awards were presented to members of all branches. U-boat men received **144** of those.



Knights Cross with Oak Leaves

There were only 853 of those awarded and **29** went to the U-boat force.



Knights Cross with Oak Leaves and Crossed Swords

Introduced on July 15, 1941 this award was meant for recipients of the Oak leaves who showed further acts of courage. A pair of crossed swords at 40 degrees was added. Only 150 were awarded. **Five** to the U-boat force.



Knights Cross with Oak Leaves, Crossed Swords and Diamonds

Introduced at the same time as the Oak Leaves and Crossed Swords and again presented for yet further acts of bravery. Only 27 received this award, **2** of which went to the Kriegsmarine and both to U-boat commanders.

Top U-boat Aces

(see U-boat site for the extended information on these Aces.)



Erich Topp Fregattenkapitän (Captain-Junior Grade)

Konteradmiral Erich Topp retired in December 1969

Born 2 Jul 1914 Died 26 Dec 2005 (91) Suessen, Germany

Successes

35 ships sunk, total tonnage 197,460 GRT

1 warship sunk, total tonnage 1,190 tons

4 ships damaged, total tonnage 32,317 GRT

Commands

U-57 5 Jun 1940 2 patrols (44 days)

U-552¹ <https://www.uboot.net/boats/u552.htm> U-552 was Dec 1940 8 Sep

1942 10 patrols (308 days)

Decoration (his final)

17 Aug 1942 Knights Cross with Oak Leaves and Crossed Swords



¹ The first US Navy ship lost in the Atlantic

On 31 October 1941 U-552 was hunting the eastbound convoy HX 156, and at roughly 0525 hrs torpedoed one of the escorts. The ship's magazine exploded and the ship sank rapidly, with 100 from the crew of 144 going down with her. She was the destroyer USS Reuben James, and was the first US Navy ship lost in hostile action in WWII.

This occurred nearly six weeks before war was declared between Germany and the United States, although US Navy ships had been escorting convoys and attacking U-boats for months before that. Men lost from U-boats unlike many other U-boats, which during their service lost men due to accidents and various other causes, U-552 did not suffer any casualties (we know of) until the time of her loss.

See 1of 3 documentary of Erich Topp at 47:23. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLDs1rhZOaw>

“Alexa” first pointed out this documentary on *Underseaboats* of the *Kriegsmarine*:

U Boat War Documentary on the Submarine Battle of World War 2

U-Boat https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_KcQ9qYICo (2:34:02 – this is a combined series.)

These are the three separate videos:

U Boat War (2001 documentary) 1of3: Sea Wolves

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLDs1rhZOaw> (52:21)

U Boat War (2001 documentary) 2of3: Attack America

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuBDShzoDzk&t=1351s> (52:29)

U Boat War (2001 documentary) 3of3: Iron Coffins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8We0LWortx8> (52:07)

The follow on research/reading for this paper is from a remarkably written book:

Ed Offley (2014). *The burning shore*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

A follow-along book with the code name of “Operation Pastorius” as discussed in chapter 9 by Offley is:

Michael Dobbs (2004). *Saboteurs: The Nazi raid on America*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Herbert A. Werner (1969). *Iron coffins: A personal account of the German U-boats*. New York: Da Capo Press.



Subs were on the run, and the Merchant Marine could sail with less worry. Still, the Merchant Marine lost between 9,000 and 12,000 sailors during the war, depending on whose numbers you use. The [National World War Two museum puts the number of dead and presumed dead at 11,324, a loss rate of almost 4 percent](#). Meanwhile, the Marines took losses of almost 3.7 percent with 24,500 killed out of 669,000 people who served throughout the war.

<https://www.wearethemighty.com/mighty-history/merchant-marine-worst-losses-wwii/>

U-boats surrendering in 1945 – <https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/the-sensational-surrender-of-four-nazi-u-boats-at-the-portsmouth-naval-shipyard/>

During the war the U-boats sank about 2,779 ships (2,882 – Werner).

On the German side roughly 30,000 men perished in U-boats from an enlistment of 39,000. Five thousand were POWs (U-boat.com and Werner).

Only 842 U-boats saw battle and 781 were lost for a 93 % loss rate (Werner).