

Dönitz, U-boats, Convoys

The British Version of
His Memoirs from the
Admiralty's Secret
Anti-Submarine
Reports



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Introduction

Karl Dönitz

16 September 1891 – 24 December 1980

Karl Dönitz (U-boat Chief, Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy and finally Hitler's successor) must rank as one of the most misunderstood leaders of the Second World War. There has been a widespread tendency to over-estimate his pre-war powers and, after he had been promoted to Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, to reproach him for not having acted like a rebellious junior officer. At the start of the war, he was at the bottom of a long command chain and in what many people considered to have been an undesirable and unimportant post. As Flag Officer for U-boats (Führer der Unterseeboote), he held the position of Captain and Commodore and was responsible for running a small operational control department. This carried approximately the same authority as a cruiser captain. The real power in submarine command was wielded by the U-boat Division of the Supreme Naval Command in Berlin, with which Dönitz had virtually no contact. The U-boat Division did not seek his opinions and Dönitz did not influence submarine development, construction programmes, training schedules or naval policies. His isolation can be illustrated by the position of the submarine training flotilla, which came under the jurisdiction of the Torpedo Inspectorate and not under the Flag Officer for U-boats. This state of affairs did not change until after the start of the war.

Dönitz's promotion on 30 January 1943 to Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Navy was most extraordinary. Grand Admiral Erich Raeder was 67 years old when he resigned, after having served as Chief of the Navy for just over 14 years. Both his immediate predecessors (Paul Behnke appointed in 1920 and Hans Zenker appointed in 1924) were 54 years old when they took command and remained in the post for four years. In view of Raeder's age and length of service, one might have thought that the Naval Command (or Admiralty) would have had several deputies in the running for this high office. Yet no one was ready to step into Raeder's shoes. He nominated the 58-

year-old Admiral Rolf Carls (Commander-in-Chief of the Naval Group Command North) as his most suitable successor, but also suggested Dönitz to Hitler if the Führer wanted to emphasise the importance of the U-boat war.

Dönitz's appointment was a great personal triumph and a terrific boost to the sagging morale of the U-boat arm, but there were some distinct disadvantages. Dönitz, who had never been trained as a staff officer, was not familiar with the delicate intricacies of the Naval High Command and, in addition, had been incarcerated within the narrow confines of the U-boat operations headquarters for eight years. For the last two he had been in France, a long way from the general naval hubbub, and furthermore he had several major disagreements with the departments he was now to command. To make matters worse, he took over from Raeder at a most difficult stage of the war. All fronts were falling: the battle in the Atlantic had been lost; the Battle of Stalingrad had ended in disaster; the North African campaign was in full retreat and the naval leadership had no alternative other than to become fully involved in political struggles. Despite this, he was one of the few officers who openly opposed Hitler and often put forward alternative proposals when he did not agree with the Führer's directions. On several occasions he even refused to carry out Hitler's orders.

Dönitz was also more than democratic when dealing with the men under him. Commanders and men were allowed to leave their U-boats, without having to give reasons, as soon as replacements were found and more than one commander was relieved of his position because the lower ranks objected to his presence. In May 1943, when the more than forty U-boats were sunk, Dönitz went as far as instructing flotilla commanders to hold a secret ballot among crews. Everybody, including the lowest ranks, should vote whether to give up or continue with the struggle. It was the overwhelming support to continue going to sea that induced him to re-group what remained and to have another fling against powerful opponents.

At the time when Dönitz wrote his memoirs, it was exceedingly difficult to find information about the war at sea. Many German naval records and log-books were captured at the end of the war and immediately classified as 'top secret' by the victorious Allied powers. This ruling was so tight that neither Dönitz, Raeder nor their defence lawyers were allowed access to these vital documents after the start of the Nuremberg Trials. A few senior officers were allowed to view the logs for a period of a few days before the trials started but without knowing the charges which were likely to be made. This cloak of tight secrecy remained until the early 1990s, when the British Admiralty finally returned captured documents to Germany. By that time, American authorities were already more open to scrutiny and the US National Archives had made a good number of German logbooks available on 35mm microfilm. The absurdity of the Admiralty's dogged tightness can

be further illustrated by the fact that copies of a number of the logs in their possession could be viewed in the United States and in German libraries while those in London were still closed to the public.

During the war about half-a-dozen or so copies were made of each log for distribution to a variety of departments and this duplication assured that one set of the U-boat Command's war diary remained in Germany, to be used by Dönitz as source for *Ten Years and Twenty Days*. Very few other authors of the period would have access to such valuable records.

Ten Years and Twenty Days was one of the first U-boat books to be published after the war and was written at a time when it was virtually impossible for the average person to find out even the most basic information about U-boats; who commanded which boat, what type any U-boat might have belonged to or any other relevant information. This led to numerous inaccuracies in many books because the majority of historians often had to make calculated guesses as to which piece of highly contradictory information might be correct.

Dönitz had one more significant advantage over other authors of the period. That came in the form of help from his son-in-law, the ex-U-boat commander and staff officer Günter Hessler. Immediately after the end of the war, the Royal Navy commissioned him to write a German account of the U-boat war and this was printed for limited circulation, but remained so highly classified that the majority of historians didn't even know of its existence. This was not released until 1989, when Her Majesty's Stationery Office published all three volumes as one book. Hessler did have some limited access to German papers, but it is unlikely that he saw Allied classified documents. Yet the writing of this account must have generated a considerable volume of useful information for his father-in-law. 'Illegal' carbon copies of this typescript and some of the original Indian ink diagrams were passed on by Hessler, although it is now too difficult to trace the history of this material or determine how much of this had been available for the writing of Dönitz's book.

Over the years reviewers have made the point that Dönitz's *Ten Years and Twenty Days* and Raeder's memoirs are somewhat different to other academic histories, but very few people have explained that considerable volumes of history were not generated until after the end of the war. Several different channels were responsible for creating these post-war additions to history.

First, immediately after the war the Allied forces of occupation introduced massive and highly intensive re-education programmes to make sure that any positive points about the Third Reich were quickly forgotten and that the Allied version of events should be accepted as the only 'true' history of the war. This has resulted in much of what has been written about the Second World War being based on powerful misinformation generated very

cleverly by the Allied propaganda systems rather than on what happened during the conflict. This propaganda has since been embellished with the imagination of historians and further decorated with heavy doses of hindsight to produce many misleading insights. At the same time, events not so palatable for the Allies were suppressed to the point that a number have now been almost forgotten.

Secondly, a number of stories were concocted for war crimes trials, where wrongdoings were brought to the court's attention, without having to be supported by proof. There were cases where people making such claims were not allowed to be cross-examined by defence lawyers and this led to a chain of fantastic stories being made up. It would appear that anyone coming up with fabricated stories of war crimes was rewarded during those incredibly harsh years. Some stories even featured prominently at the Nuremberg Trials and then afterwards formed the basis on which history books were written; although there is no evidence that the events ever happened.

Lastly, people who served the post-war German government created other stories of dreadful happenings to boost their promotion prospects and other people, so-called eyewitnesses, invented their own stories to make themselves more attractive for television interviews or to get their own books into print. Although such stories have been regurgitated by historians, embroidered and often repeated by the media to such an extent that they have become common knowledge, it is possible to prove with naval logs that many events couldn't have taken place.

Dönitz lived long enough to see a number of stunning revelations about the U-boat war being published by his former adversaries, when, long after the war, the British Official Secrets Act allowed people to speak out publicly. The most shattering was that Bletchley Park in England read much of the secret U-boat radio code, something he found difficult to digest. Dönitz was most open-minded, taking considerable trouble to help historians and throughout this remained at the hub of new information as it became available. Yet his book has the terrific advantage that it was written before much of this secret information leaked out and was therefore written with hardly any hindsight and without the many post-war fabrications.

Karl Dönitz, the U-boat chief and named as successor to Hitler, finally died at the age of 89 on 24 December 1980 and was laid to rest on 6 January 1981 in the Waldfriedhof (Woodland Cemetery) at Aumühle (Bergedorf), close to where he ended his days. He was not given an official state funeral and men from the Federal German armed forces were not allowed to attend in uniform, yet he was honoured by many of his ex-colleagues. Shortly after this, in 1983, more than a hundred prominent Americans of high rank contributed towards the book *Dönitz at Nuremberg: A Re-appraisal* (Institute for Historical Review, Torrance, California; edited by H. K.

Thompson and Henry Strutz), whose dedication states, 'To Karl Dönitz – a naval officer of unexcelled ability and unequalled courage who, in his nation's darkest hour, offered his person and sacrificed his future to save the lives of many thousands of people.' (The figure actually ran into several million rather than many thousands.)

During more than forty years of research I met several men who said that they were no great 'Dönitz fans' but, at the same time, none of them said anything negative about him. Some stated that they didn't particularly like him, but then reeled off a number of personal experiences praising his command. Trying to assess his character today is more than difficult because no one can recreate the thought-patterns of the Dönitz years and no one from the modern generation will ever understand the restraints and the freedoms under which people of those times lived. In any case, Dönitz's character and his private life are hardly significant. What is important is how this one small person managed to keep the world's most powerful navies on the defensive for such an incredibly long period of time and how he managed to fight such a powerful war with what amounted to a relatively small and untrained force of men.

The essence of this is that from a force of 1,171 commissioned U-boats, twenty-five attacked and at least damaged twenty or more ships, thirty-six U-boats attacked between eleven and nineteen ships, seventy U-boats attacked between six and ten ships, and 190 U-boats attacked between one and five ships. This makes a total of 321 U-boats. A few more can be added to allow for calculation errors. Three hundred U-boats were never sent on missions against the enemy because they were used for training, experiments or they were not fully operational before the end of the war. Of the 870 U-boats sent on missions against the enemy, 550 did not sink or damage a target, many never getting close enough to an opponent to launch an attack.

When looking at this from a slightly different angle, by considering ships to have been sunk by men rather than machines, one comes to an even greater contrast. About 2,450 merchant ships were sunk or seriously damaged by U-boats in the Atlantic and this total rises to about 2,775 when other theatres of war are added. Eight hundred of these ships were sunk by thirty commanders. In other words 2 per cent of the U-boat commanders were responsible for sinking almost 30 per cent of the shipping. Eight of these commanders joined the navy before 1927, nineteen joined in the period 1930–4 and three belonged to the 1935 class. Therefore, thirty older men who joined the navy before Hitler came to power made a significant impact by reintroducing submarines and national conscription sank almost 30 per cent of all Allied shipping lost to submarines.

Jak P. Mallmann Showell, Folkestone, 2013

Sources for this Book

The information in this book headed ::Dönitz:: is a résumé from his memoirs *Ten Years and Twenty Days*. This was first published in 1958, two years after he had been released from Spandau Prison.

The heading ::JS: refers to comments from the author/editor, and ::The British Side::, unless otherwise stated, to the secret Monthly Anti-Submarine Reports. Other sources are listed in the Bibliography.

Most of the British information in this book has been extracted from the Monthly Anti-Submarine Reports, released by the Anti-Submarine Warfare Division of the Naval War Staff at the Admiralty. This has the advantage that it was not written for public consumption. Distributed only to leading officers hunting U-boats, it stated very clearly on the front of each copy:

Secret

Attention is called to the penalties attaching to any
infraction of the Official Secrets Acts.

Monthly

Anti-Submarine Reports

Secret

This book is intended for the use of the recipients only,
and for communication to such Officers under them
(not below the rank of Commissioned Officer)
who may be required to be acquainted with its contents in the course
of their duties.

The officers exercising this power will be held responsible that
such information is imparted with due caution and reserve.

Note. – At the discretion of the Commanding Officer, Warrant and
Subordinate

Officers may also be acquainted with the contents of this book.

Anti-Submarine Warfare Division of the Naval Staff
The Admiralty, London

Despite the limited circulation, the reports still contain large doses of propaganda, possibly to help keep up morale in difficult times. However, the readers were leading front-line officers and were well aware of what was really going on. This made it difficult to pull the wool over their eyes. So these reports are ideal for reflecting, balancing and supplementing what Dönitz has written. They certainly cannot contain any 'hindsight' or tales made up after the war by zealous historians, 'eyewitnesses' and authors.

Each monthly edition contained short summaries entitled 'The U-boat Offensive' and 'U-boat Countermeasures', which form the basis of this book. This material obviously lacked basic facts from the German side and some of this has been added in square brackets to make reading easier. It is important to remember that the events of one month could often not appear until the edition of the following month or sometimes even one or two months after that.

The problem with using the Monthly Anti-Submarine Reports is that a complete set of bound volumes is so heavy that I could only just lift them as long as they were inside a box so that individual volumes wouldn't fall from my arms. It would appear that these books were recalled by the Admiralty after the war and then pulped before being de-classified. Hardly any copies remain, making access most difficult, yet they make such a vital contribution to history that they must not be overlooked or forgotten. Sadly, we do not know much about the authors, who were probably serving naval officers, and we are most grateful to the British National Archives for permission to use this material in this book.

It is highly unlikely that the authors of these secret Anti-Submarine Reports knew about Special Intelligence and some topics, such as information about British acoustic torpedoes, conspicuous by not being mentioned at all.

Most of the information from the Monthly Anti-Submarine Reports used in this book comes from four volumes reprinted between 2001 and 2003 by the German U-boat Museum (formerly the U-boat Archive) with help from The Royal Navy Submarine Museum (Gosport) and The Bletchley Park Trust (Milton Keynes). The Military Press (www.militarypress.co.uk) published these for limited circulation with permission from Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Copyright for all this material remains with Crown Copyright/Ministry of Defence. The original text was photocopied and then passed through an OCR (Optical Character Recognition) program (Textbridge) and misreadings corrected by the author of this book. This text has been modified slightly by writing ship names in italics, rather than in inverted commas as in the original. Since the original was written exclusively for naval officers, a few extra words have been added to make the understanding of specialised terms easier

for modern, non-naval readers. Much of the technical information has been omitted and this has resulted in a few awkward connections between passages. However, for the most part the text has been left exactly as it was written during the war.

The reason why this highly-significant document has gone unnoticed by so many historians is that the classified copies were recalled by the Admiralty after the war and apparently destroyed. This happened shortly before Commander Richard Compton-Hall was appointed as Director of the Royal Navy's Submarine Museum in Gosport. In those days the museum occupied nothing more than a couple of rooms within the naval base and acted as a 'regimental collection' for HMS *Dolphin*, but it was filled with fascinating relics, papers and books, all interesting enough for the public to be allowed limited access. Shortly after being appointed, Commander Compton-Hall received a reminder from the Admiralty to return the still classified books and since they could not be found, he replied that his predecessor must already have done this. Then, many years later, when the documents had been declassified, they were discovered among a pile of rubbish under the stairs. As a result several copies were put back into what was now becoming a substantial library. I am most grateful to 'Sea-Aitch', Richard Compton-Hall, for lending me a complete set for several months and I must also thank 'Professor' Gus Britton and Margaret Bidmead for helping to unravel much of the technical terms. The original Yearbooks for the German Submarine Museum (In those days still the German U-boat Archive) would not have been produced had it not been for their help. Photographs in this book, unless otherwise indicated, come from the author's collection or the German U-boat Museum in Cuxhaven-Altenbruch and I am most grateful to its founder and director, Horst Bredow, for all the help he has given. This book would never have been started had it not been for his unfailing support. Thanks must also to the staff of the British National Archives in Kew (London) for their help and for permission to reproduce the texts from the secret Anti-Submarine Reports. I am grateful for the help from Bruce Taylor.

Chapter 1

The Start of the War – September 1939 to June 1940

:: Dönitz ::

The signal 'Start hostilities against England immediately' arrived at the U-boat Command in Wilhelmshaven at 13.30 hours on 3 September 1939; a short time after Britain had declared war on Germany. This was followed by a meeting at Neuende Radio Station between Dönitz, Admiral Alfred Saalwächter (Commander of Group Command – West) and Admiral Hermann Boehm (Fleet Commander). Dönitz mentions the seriousness of the situation of having to face a powerful opponent with almost unlimited resources and then he describes the first air attack during the following day; saying a number of aircraft sacrificed themselves without any great gain but the pilots flew low, displaying considerable tenacity and guts.

:: The British Side ::

This first air attack is described exceedingly well by Constance Babington Smith, saying it came about as a result of some fairly good reconnaissance photographs taken by Sidney Cotton a few days before the outbreak of hostilities. Her account about the beginnings of the Royal Air Force's Photo Reconnaissance Unit is interesting and valuable and she wrote that the raid provided dreadful evidence that the British Blenheim aircraft were not capable of bombing in daylight against serious opposition. The Bomber Command War Diaries state that a minimum of three bombs hit *Admiral Scheer* but failed to explode. This pocket battleship was lying in the harbour approaches with much of her machinery dismantled, awaiting a major refit. It would appear that most of the damage was caused by one of the five aircraft to be shot down crashing into the bows of the light cruiser *Emden* and causing the first German casualties of the war. This attack, made by flying over the North Sea because belligerent military aircraft were not allowed to cross the neutral territory of Holland and Belgium, illustrated another incredible weakness in RAF preparation. The attack came in two waves, with the other group dropping bombs on Brunsbüttel at the southern end of the Kiel Canal, but instead of hitting this target some of planes bombed Esbjerg in Denmark, 110 miles to the north, suggesting their navigation was way off beam.

Chapter 2

The First Ten Months

:: JS ::

Dönitz describes the goings-on after the outbreak of the war when U-boats made a considerable effort to obey the Prize Regulations. While writing this, he used the British official history (*The War at Sea* by Stephen Roskill) for reference. This work has the advantage over books published during the war years inasmuch that the author deals with basic facts rather than filling his pages with propaganda.

:: The British Side ::

The U-boat Offensive – November 1939

The degree of intensity of the U-boat campaign at the beginning of October appears to have been dependent on the political situation. As long as the Germans felt there was even a remote chance of their peace proposals being accepted, they avoided hardening British opinion against them by prosecuting the campaign against Allied trade. Consequently, though submarines were still despatched to the Western Approaches, they seem to have been ordered not to attack merchant shipping until they received the signal to do so. In the first eleven days of the month only two British ships, one of them a destroyer, were attacked. On the 12th of October, however, the U-boat campaign flared up again – in the next forty-eight hours six Allied ships were sunk. Thereafter the sinkings settled down to a fairly steady rate.

[JS – It is interesting that ‘peace proposals’ are mentioned because this suggests the general public in Britain was aware of the fact that several peace proposals were under discussion but all these efforts seem to have been lost in time and are now almost totally forgotten. Also note that these reports provide a different view to the one presented by some post-war authors, who mention that the sinking of the first ship of the war, the liner *Athenia* by *U30* under Fritz-Julius Lemp, provided Britain with the indication that Germany had started ‘unrestricted submarine warfare’ right from the beginning.]

Parallel to this campaign at sea another developed on paper, the German Government seeking to justify an intensification of the U-boat campaign. On the 6th October, a German broadcast stated that the British Admiralty had ordered cargo steamers to ram German submarines on sight. This was followed a few days later by the argument that while it was legal to arm merchant ships, should the merchant ships use their guns, they rendered themselves liable to treatment as warships. The German attitude in these respects was not consistent from day to day, but there seems to have been a motive to it, every article in the newspapers being designed as propaganda for unrestricted submarine warfare.

On the 30th October an important article appeared in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the official organ of the National Socialist Party. It stated:

A neutral observer reports that the crews of British passenger steamers are trained to fight submarines by gunfire and aggressive manoeuvres. This procedure constitutes a grave risk to the lives of passengers. German submarines have sunk several British warships camouflaged as merchant ships. The statement of Mr. Churchill, that Britain was not using so-called 'Q ships' is, thus, untrue. Maritime warfare is, therefore, being waged on a reciprocal basis. If Great Britain scraps all rules of international warfare the responsibility for an intensification of commercial warfare at sea must be attributed to Britain.

Whilst the attitude of the German press is not as yet entirely reflected in the behaviour of individual U-boat Captains, there have been indications that the earlier acts of courtesy have become more rare. There has also been less regard for the safety of crews of ships sunk.

U-boat activities took place in four areas:

- (1) Off the east coast of England, largely in the Humber district, where it appears likely that the casualties were mainly due to mines. Most of the victims in this area were neutrals and no ships in convoy were either sunk or damaged. Attempts have been made to clear these mines, but so far without success. It is suspected that they are magnetic.
- (2) In the Western Approaches; U-boats worked farther out than they did in September, i.e., beyond the points of dispersal of convoys for Africa and America, 200 miles WSW of the Fastnet. The activity in this area was confined to four days in the middle of the month during which four British and three French ships were sunk.
- (3) At least two submarines were operating about 150 miles NW of Cape Finisterre, and on the 17th October three ships of an

unescorted convoy were sunk and several others were attacked.

- (4) In the Approaches to the Straits of Gibraltar, one U-boat claimed three victims on the 24th October. All the ships were British.

In addition to these known operations rumours persisted throughout the month that submarines were working in the Atlantic in the neighbourhood of the Azores and also of the North and South American coast, but no ships were attacked and it seems probable that the reports were groundless.

The majority of U-boats seem to have proceeded to their operational areas round the north of Scotland. The outward-bound submarines appeared to be passing through the Fair Island Channel, and the homeward-bound ones round Muckle Flugga, often a long way out. [Muckle Flugga is the northern tip of the Shetland Islands.]

Some U-boats, however, certainly tried to pass through the Dover Barrage and at least three were mined in the attempt. If the Dover Barrage continues to be so effective, it means that the small 'Nordsee Enten' ['North Sea Ducks', 250/300-ton boats] can only operate in the North Sea and not in the Channel, because their endurance is believed to be too small for them to be able to proceed North about.

The whole statement must be accepted with reserve, as little reliable information is available.

Throughout the month of November the main effort of the German High Command seems to have been centred upon a mine-laying campaign on the East coast, particularly in the Thames estuary. It is impossible, however, to be certain that ships reported as having been mined were, in fact, not sunk by torpedoes, or to establish whether the mines themselves were laid by aircraft, surface ships or submarines, but there are indications that U-boats laid lines of mines across the fairways off the East Coast. [Both U-boats and small surface vessels undertook mining operations close to British harbours during the first winter of the war.]

In the Western Approaches it appears that an average of only two or three U-boats were operating during the month. This small number may have been due to a temporary shortage having been produced by the destruction of a considerable proportion of the German ocean-going U-boats.

[U-boats lost so far were:

<i>U39</i> IXA	(Kptlt. Gerhard Glattes)
<i>U27</i> VIIA	(Kptlt. Johannes Franz)
<i>U40</i> IXA	(Kptlt. Wolfgang Barten)
<i>U42</i> IXA	(Kptlt. Rolf Dau)
<i>U45</i> VIIB	(Kptlt. Alexander Gelhaar)
<i>U16</i> IIB	(Kptlt. Horst Wellner)

U35 VIIA (Kptlt. Werner Lott)
U36 VIIA (Kptlt. Wilhelm Fröhlich)

IXAs were large, ocean-going types, VIIAs medium sea-going types and IIBs small coastal boats.]

On our western and southern coasts there was some activity off the entrances to harbours. It seems possible that here also the enemy were laying mines or trying to emulate what Kapitänleutnant Prien did at Scapa Flow, for on one occasion our motor anti-submarine boats attacked two contacts in the Firth of Clyde and another U-boat was detected attempting to penetrate deep into the Bristol Channel. [There were numerous mining operations by U-boats and small surface craft such as destroyers throughout the dark winter nights.]

There were also apparently two U-boats on patrol between the Bay of Biscay and the Straits of Gibraltar at the beginning of the month. Four neutral ships were stopped and their papers were examined. One of the U-boats responsible was described as displaying the skull-and-crossbones on its conning tower. It is possible that the French destroyer *Siroco* accounted for both these boats. [They were not sunk.]

At the end of the month, when the German High Command realised that the presence of pocket battleship *Deutschland* would probably bring our heavy ships into the Northern Approaches, a patrol line of U-boats seems to have been placed between the Shetlands and the Norwegian coast. It was one of these U-boats [*U47* under Kptlt. Günther Prien], which unsuccessfully attacked HMS *Norfolk* on the 28th November, and another [*U35*, Kptlt. Werner Lott] was destroyed by the *Kingston* and *Kashmir* on the following day.

Further reports of U-boat activities much farther afield, in the Canaries and in the West Indies, are being continually received. Since no attacks have taken place south of the Straits of Gibraltar, these reports are in all probability false.

There is evidence that the Germans use the Fair Island Channel when outward bound; the interrogation of survivors of *U35* tends to confirm this.

It is very difficult to make any estimate of the total number of U-boats sunk, but it is noteworthy that two of the survivors of *U35* stated that, in their opinion, the U-boats could not be considered as a decisive weapon.

German U-boats are no longer divided into flotillas, but grouped as the strategical situation demands. [U-boat flotillas became administrative units, responsible for looking after men in port and equipping boats for their next operational voyage. The flotilla commanders' operational control was limited to their immediate coastal waters and U-boats at sea were controlled by radio from the U-boat Command, headed by Dönitz.]

U-boat Tactics: Information from Survivors of U35

[U35 under Kapitänleutnant Werner Lott was sunk on 29 November 1939. The previous seven sinkings had yielded no more than about three survivors, while the entire crew of U35 was saved. Lott became one of the few Germans to have been imprisoned in the Tower of London for some time.]

The officers of U35 all said that it was found necessary to dive continually in order to avoid being sighted and reported by aircraft. They also said that aircraft made it impossible to send a prize crew on board a neutral vessel and to obtain fresh provisions, unless they went alongside the ship or compelled the crew to bring supplies in their own boat. They added that they did not fear bombing from aircraft very much, as it was usually possible to dive to a safe depth before the aeroplanes could attack. They thought there is always a danger, however, in low visibility, and more especially when the sky is half covered with clouds, as it is then that aeroplanes may surprise them.

U-boats have standing instructions to dive on sighting aircraft, as firing recognition signals takes far too long. Six men are apparently kept on the bridge as aircraft lookouts. The Captain of U35 said he thought that, if they were sighted by a merchant vessel, aircraft would probably be on the spot in twenty minutes.

A submarine sighted by a U-boat while in her operational area is not attacked, unless she is definitely proved by her silhouette to be hostile.

When attacked, U-boats go to 70 metres (230 feet) if it is not possible to bottom. It is noteworthy that depth charges, which exploded below U35, were much more feared than those which exploded above. The Germans know, however, that our depth charges can be set to 500 feet, which is greater than any depth to which their U-boats can go.

The Captain of U35 stated that he had learnt to distinguish between destroyers sweeping with Asdics and destroyers in contact. In his experience the destroyers usually lost contact after firing depth charges. He said he would have been unable to attack the destroyers, which hunted him because they always remained bows on.

This officer also stated that if a single British destroyer were picking up the survivors of a U-boat she had sunk, a second U-boat in the vicinity would probably not attack the destroyer, if it was obvious that rescue work was going on; but, if the second U-boat could not see why the destroyer had stopped, because of the range or the visibility, an attempt to torpedo the destroyer would certainly be made. He added that his advice to an unaccompanied destroyer in these circumstances, would be to steam round two or three times to make sure that there was not a second U-boat about and only then to stop and pick up the survivors of the first U-boat. Note that the Admiralty has definite indications that two

U-boats are unlikely to be so close that such an attack is possible.

The U-boat Offensive – March 1940

There was a marked lull in U-boat activity throughout the whole month, such activity as occurred being concentrated around the Shetlands and Orkneys in the last ten days of March. The most striking feature was the absence of all enemy submarines in the Atlantic waters after about the 12th. This disappearance of U-boats, although no doubt temporary, was certainly complete.

In the first week of the month two British ships were sunk off north Cornwall, a vicinity in which torpedoing had not previously occurred; this attack and other evidence indicated that one or even two U-boats may have been to the southward of Ireland in the beginning of the month.

In the Western Approaches proper, the only casualty was the sinking of the Dutch *Eulota* [by *U28*, Kptlt. Günter Kuhnke] on the 11th of March; it is believed that after this date all U-boats westward of the British Isles were recalled.

Only one U-boat appears to have passed through the English Channel during the month, and it is probable that her passage was made during the final week. This U-boat may have been the subject of a severe attack carried out by two trawlers off Bull Point but there is no evidence of its destruction.

During the last ten days nine unescorted neutrals and one British tanker were lost. Four Danes were torpedoed in the Moray Firth, two Danes torpedoed west of the Shetlands, one Dane and one Norwegian were torpedoed north-west of the Sule Skerry. The British tanker and a Norwegian vessel were torpedoed east of the Orkneys. In only one instance was any warning given by the U-boat.

A patrol of small U-boats was probably maintained in the Skagerrak during the latter part of the month, following the success achieved by British submarines on contraband control in that area.

U21 [Kptlt. Wolf-Harro Stiebler] went aground on the southern coast of Norway on the 26th of March, and was interned.

In the face of the declaration of unrestricted warfare on the 18th February 1940, an increase in sinkings during March was to be expected, but this did not occur.

In reply to a protest, the German Government stated they were entitled to attack all Neutral Shipping that –

- (1) Sailed in Allied convoys.
- (2) Are without ordinary lights or nationality marks.
- (3) Use their wireless to give military information.

- (4) Refuse to stop when called upon to do so.

All the Danish ships sunk during the month were attacked without warning and in complete disregard of the above declaration.

The U-boat Offensive – April 1940

Early in the month every available U-boat left Germany to take up patrol positions for the operations against Norway, which were then imminent. The small U-boats were disposed between Norway and the Orkneys and Shetlands, with the exception of two stationed to the eastward of North Rona. The larger boats occupied positions north-east of Shetlands and off the Norwegian coast, extending as far north as Lofoten Islands, Vest Fiord and Vaags Fiord.

The number of U-boats off Norway was at its maximum in the second week and thereafter dwindled. There were at the beginning of the month eleven U-boats in German bases, which, as they became available for service, probably relieved other boats during the month.

One U-boat is known to have been sunk in the Norwegian operations and two or three more may have been sunk or damaged.

The U-boat Offensive – June 1940

The recrudescence of U-boat activity, which commenced about 20th May continued throughout the month of June. The tonnage lost during the month reached the highest point since the war began, namely, 260,479.

In the North Sea there was very little activity, and only one ship, the *Astronomer* was sunk [by U58, Kptlt. Herbert Kuppisch]: this vessel was torpedoed in the Moray Firth on the 1st of June, and was not a victim of sabotage as was at first suspected.

The area of greatest activity has been that enclosed by the parallels of 45°N and 51°N and the meridians of 8°W and 15°W, but on the 11th, a U-boat operating somewhat farther south distinguished itself by stopping and threatening the United States Liner *Washington*. On the 21st and 25th, ships were sunk as far south as the latitude of Lisbon and Cape St. Vincent respectively. On two occasions also, a U-boat appeared further West, as far out as 17°–18°W.

A further feature, peculiar to this month, was that of evacuation from West France, U-boats worked close in to the coast in the Bay of Biscay.

During the month, the German 'Ace' Kapitänleutnant Günther Prien [U47] cruised to the southern Western Approaches. Leaving Germany on 10th he went as far south as 45°N, followed a convoy north-eastward towards Ushant and returned northabout to claim a record tonnage of 66,587. The ten ships sunk by this U-boat included the *Arandora Star*,