



H-Gram 023: Special World War I Victory Edition

15 November 2018

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The Contribution of the U.S. Navy During World War I

U.S. Navy Personnel Awarded the Medal of Honor During World War I

100th Anniversary of World War I

At 1057:30 on 11 November 1918, Battery 4 of the U.S. Navy Railway Gun Unit fired a 14-inch shell timed to hit a German target over 20 miles away seconds before the cease-fire went into effect at 1100 that same day, thus bringing an end to the bloodiest, costly, and destructive war in human history, to that point. Between the time the Armistice was signed—around 0500 that morning—and when the cease-fire went into effect at 1100, over 3,000 soldiers on both sides were killed and over 8,000 wounded as bitter fighting continued right up until the end. The last soldier to fall in action before the cease-fire was U.S. Army Private Henry Gunther, killed at 1059 while single-handedly charging a German checkpoint despite German efforts to wave him away.



World War I Victory Medal: Obverse and ribbon of the medal awarded to all personnel of the armed forces for honorable service during World War I. Bronze clasps added to the medal's ribbon (bronze stars when worn on a ribbon bar) denoted specific campaigns and actions (80-G-K-13412).

The exact number of people killed and wounded in World War 1 will never be known, particularly those who were killed on the Eastern Front before Czarist Russia collapsed and the Bolshevik government dropped out of the war. Estimates vary widely depending on the source, but somewhere on the order of nine to ten million military personnel died during the war and another seven to eight million civilians perished. France, Germany, Russia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire all lost more than a million soldiers, and the United Kingdom lost almost a

million (more than a million if Commonwealth countries are added). The United States suffered 53,402 combat deaths, the vast majority of them U.S. Army personnel in the final three months of the war; in terms of casualties per month, this was the bloodiest period in U.S. military history. Of the U.S. battle deaths, the U.S. Marine Corps suffered 2,461 killed (and 9,520 wounded) and the U.S. Navy suffered 431 killed in action and 819 wounded in action. The U.S. Coast Guard, which came under the U.S. Navy during the war, lost over 121 men in action, thereby suffering proportionately the greatest loss of any U.S. Service. The U.S. Navy would lose an armored cruiser (to a submarine-laid mine), a destroyer (to a submarine torpedo), and a number of armed transports and smaller vessels to enemy action during the war. Of the 178 German submarines lost during the conflict, only one was confirmed sunk by the U.S. Navy, although numerous others were damaged or, more importantly, driven away from convoys of troops and critical war materiel by U.S. destroyers, submarine chasers, and, late in the war, aircraft.

The most significant contribution of the U.S. Navy during World War I was the escort and transport (with significant British Royal Navy assistance) of two million U.S. soldiers to France, the great majority in the last six months of the war, with almost no loss to German submarines. By July 1918, U.S. troops were arriving in France at a rate of about 10,000 per day, roughly half in U.S. shipping and half in Allied shipping. Although the U.S. Army had significant success on the battlefield (and after four years of war the immense sacrifice of the French and British armies had bled the Germans white), it was the German High Command's realization that there was nothing they could do to stem the tide of an overwhelming number of U.S. troops that caused the Germans to sue for an armistice. In short, the Germans did the math and knew they could not win. Although the German army had been pushed back in 1918, neither it nor the German navy had been decisively defeated yet. This led to a sense amongst German soldiers (including Corporal Adolph Hitler) of being "stabbed in the back" by their own government, which would be the genesis for the events that led to the rise of Nazi Germany and World War II (along with a host of other contributing

factors). (For more on the contribution of the U.S. Navy in World War I, please see attachment H-023-1)

Navy Medals of Honor in World War I

Of 21 Medals of Honor awarded to U.S. Navy personnel during World War One, five were awarded for direct combat against the enemy at sea or the result of combat at sea:

- Gunner's Mate First Class Osmond K. Ingraham, USN, (posthumous) on 15 October 1917 for attempting to jettison depth charges when his ship was hit by a torpedo.
- Ensign Daniel Augustus Joseph Sullivan, USNRF, on 21 May 1918 for securing a live depth charge that had come loose during an attack on a German submarine.
- Lieutenant Edouard Victor Michel Izac, USN, on 21 May 1918, when he was captured by a German submarine and subsequently made multiple escape attempts before succeeding and bringing important intelligence back.
- Ensign Charles Hazeltine Hammann, USNRF, on 21 August 1918 for landing his aircraft at sea to rescue another pilot who had been shot down.
- Lieutenant Commander James Jonas Madison, USNRF, on 4 October 1918 as commanding officer of armed transport USS Ticonderoga, who, despite severe wounds, valiantly fought an hours-long battle with a German submarine before his ship finally sank.

(For more on U.S. Navy personnel who were awarded the Medal of Honor in World War 1 please see attachment H-023-2)

Previous H-grams on World War I

H-Gram 022/H-022-1: The Worst Killer of All: The Spanish Influenza, 1918-19

H-Gram 021/H-021-3: *U.S. Navy in World War I-First Naval Aviation Medal of Honor, First Ace, Railway Artillery, Heaviest Loss, and Only Surface Action, August-October 1918*

H-Gram 020/H-020-4: *The Fog of War: USS AL-2 Versus UB-65, 10 July 1918*

H-Gram 019/H-019-5: *"Black Sunday" and the Battle of Orleans-World War I Comes to American Waters*

H-Gram 018/H-018-4: *Dental Valor*

H-Gram 016/H-016-4: *The Disappearance of USS Cyclops*

H-Gram 013: *The Loss of USS Jacob Jones, 6 December 1917, and H-013-5: U.S. Navy's Battleship Division Nine in European Waters, 7 December 1917*

H-Gram 012: *Meanwhile, Back in World War I (U-58 sinking)*

H-Gram 010/H-010-6: *Attacks on the United States Mainland (German saboteurs)*

H-Gram 008/H-008-1: *100th Anniversary of World War I*

H-Gram 004/H-004-1: *The First Shot/SMS Cormoran II, and H-004-2: "We Are Ready Now, Sir" (Sort of)*

H-Gram 002/H-002-1: *The Zimmerman Telegram: Early Cyber Warfare?*

I tried to get this out by 11 November, the 100th Anniversary of the World War I Armistice, but my day job kept getting in the way!

Back issues of H-grams (enhanced by photos and charts) can be accessed here = [\[https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams.html\]](https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams.html).



World War I victory parade: Sailors march past the reviewing stand in front of the Public Library, New York, 27 December 1918 (NH 2650).

H-023-1: The Contribution of the U.S. Navy During World War I

H-Gram 023, Attachment 1

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

November 2018

At 1057:30 on 11 November 1918, Battery 4 of the U.S. Navy Railway Gun Unit fired a 14-inch shell timed to hit a German target over 20 miles away seconds before the cease-fire went into effect at 1100 that day, thus bringing an end to the most bloody, costly, and destructive war in human history, to that point.

After the Germans reinstituted unrestricted submarine warfare in the spring of 1917, British and Allied ship losses were reaching catastrophic levels—430 merchant ships (about a million tons) were sent

to the bottom in the month of April, the month that the United States entered the war. Yet by the end of 2018, over two million American troops had been transported safely to France with almost no loss to German U-boats. Nothing in the history of the world (to that time) came close to the movement of that many troops across a major body of water in so short of a time. Although nothing can or should diminish the British Royal Navy's predominant role in preventing a victory by the German navy (of 178 German U-boats lost in the war, the U.S. Navy sank only one [confirmed] while 44,000 British sailors perished at sea) the U.S. Navy's contribution came at a particularly perilous and critical time, and made a decisive difference in the transport of so many troops to France without loss. It was the rapid arrival of U.S. troops, along with a collapsing internal situation (caused in significant part by the British naval blockade of Germany) that caused the Germans to sue for an armistice in 1918, ending four years of carnage in Europe and to a lesser extent around the world.

With the surrender of the German High Seas Fleet on 21 November 1918, under the draconian terms

of the armistice, the U.S. Navy became the second most powerful navy in the world. And, since every other major power in the world except the United States had been bankrupted by the war, within a few years after the war, the United States could demand parity in battleship numbers with the United Kingdom in the Washington Naval Treaty, and the British could not afford to do anything but agree. Before the war, the British had maintained an enormously expensive policy that their navy would be at least equal to the size of the next two largest navies in the world. The Germans had engaged in a costly naval arms race with the British, but were unable to catch up (although in qualitative terms, newer German warships were extremely good).

In 1914, the U.S. Navy was the third largest in the world, far behind the British, significantly behind the Germans, and only a bit ahead of the French and Russians. The U.S. Navy had come a very long way in a very short period of time since the re-vitalization in the 1890s and the Spanish-American War in 1898, and there had been a battleship-building boom during the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt, although this had slowed under the Taft and first Wilson administrations. However, the pace of technological change at sea was so fast in the first decades of the 20th century that most of the U.S. battleships were already obsolete by 1914. In fact, as impressive as the "Great White Fleet" had been on its around-the-world voyage in 1907–1909, every battleship in that force had already been rendered obsolete by the British introduction of the "all-big-gun" battleship HMS *Dreadnought* at the end of 1906. Actually, the U.S. Navy had conceptualized the all-big-gun battleship idea and designed the U.S. equivalent, *South Carolina* (BB-26), before the British, but delays in funding and restrictions imposed by Congress resulted in an inferior ship that wasn't completed until 1910. The down side of what the British had done, however, was to make most of their own fleet obsolete as well, giving both the Germans and the Americans the opportunity to "start over" in the naval arms race with *Dreadnought* designs of their own.

In 1914, the U.S. Navy had 33 battleships—10 *Dreadnoughts* and 23 obsolete "pre-*Dreadnoughts*." The U.S. Navy also had 37 cruisers, the vast majority

of them already obsolete—although not that old—armored cruisers and protected cruisers. In the rush to build battleships, the U.S. Navy sacrificed light/scout cruisers—that both the British and Germans built in some abundance. The U.S. Navy also had 45 destroyers and 27 obsolete torpedo boats when war broke out in Europe in 1914 as well as 32 submarines suitable for coastal defense. The Navy had grown from about 50,000 men in 1910 to about 66,000 in 1914. During the Roosevelt Administration, the Navy in 1903 had set a goal for 1920 to have 48 battleships in a fleet of 370 ships. Although significant progress had been made, in 1914 the U.S. Navy was still well short of that goal.

While the war in Europe raged, the U.S. Navy continued to grow at a modest pace, until the German's first use of unrestricted submarine warfare and the sinking of the British liner *Lusitania* in 1915 (killing over 120 Americans) jolted the administration of President Woodrow Wilson., who had steadfastly insisted on American neutrality and would campaign in 1916 under the slogan "He kept us out of war." The United States had been upset by the British naval blockade of Germany, which interfered with American commerce, and even more upset when the British just brushed off U.S. diplomatic protests. As the war dragged on and spread, political and Navy leaders in the United States became increasingly concerned that Germany might win, which might result in a British Royal Navy (under the control of, or allied to the Germans) hostile to the United States. Although the Secretary of the Navy steadfastly refused to allow the U.S. Navy to plan for war, deeming that to be provocative, the Wilson administration belatedly reached the conclusion that a much bigger U.S. Navy would be required to deal with the consequences of however the war in Europe would turn out. The result was the Naval Act of 1916, signed into law on 29 August 1916. It had been passed by a recalcitrant Congress only after Wilson campaigned around the country drumming up support for "a Navy Second to None."

The Naval Act of 1916 authorized the construction of 10 battleships, six battle cruisers—of which the United States had none—as well as a proportionate number of scout cruisers, destroyers, and

submarines to be constructed in three years. As impressive as the program was, the reality was that almost none of these ships would be constructed in time before the war ended—and some would never be completed due to post-war treaties. In addition to the building program, the naval act established the Naval Flying Corps, the Naval Reserve Flying Corps, and the U.S. Naval Reserve. It also expanded the staff of the newly established (1915) Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. Secretary of the Navy Daniels would also notice a number of months later that the act did not bar the enlistment of women in the U.S. Navy and would begin doing so in 1917. Although the Navy Nurse Corps had been established in 1908, Navy nurses at that time were civilians employed by the Navy, although they wore a uniform.

When war was declared on 6 April 1917, the U.S. Navy had 14 modern battleships, and would complete two more before the war ended, along with the 23 old pre-*Dreadnought* battleships. However, the United States had built no new cruisers since 1908, so was still limited to 12 armored cruisers, 24 protected cruises, and only three of the newer, more useful, scout cruisers. Destroyer strength in April 1917 was 68; another 46 would be completed before the war ended. Submarine strength was 49, including L-class ocean-going submarines, and another 30 subs would be completed before the end of the war. By the time of the armistice, there would be over 2,000 ships and vessels of all sizes in the U.S. Navy and approaching 600,000 personnel, an astounding growth in such a short time. The growth was also fraught with all kinds of issues, some of which would result after the war in bitter recriminations among some of the key players of the war, particularly Secretary Daniels and Vice Admiral William S. Sims, commander of U.S. naval forces operating in European waters. (Sims would revert to rear admiral when the war ended.)

After the Germans commenced unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917, but before the United States declared war, President Wilson made the sudden decision to arm U.S. merchant ships, resulting in what would be known as the Naval Armed Guard. On 12 March 1917, the first U.S. naval gun crew embarked on SS *Manchurian*. The naval

gun crew on SS *Mongolia* would be the first to fire on a German U-boat after the United States declared war. Arming merchant ships meant that the guns and the crews to man them had to be stripped off active-duty Navy warships, with the older battleships bearing the brunt, and eventually 384 U.S. merchant ships would have Naval Armed Guards, which in a number of cases defended their ship against U-boat attack with great tenacity and valor. Of the merchant ships with Naval Armed Guards, only six would be lost to enemy action.

It quickly became apparent after the United States entered the war that destroyers and other anti-submarine vessels were the key to defeating the U-boats, and were in short supply. Secretary Daniels ordered the halt to battleship construction on 21 July 1917—overriding some heated objections of the Navy General Board—and shifted all resources to the construction of anti-submarine ships and the construction and refurbishment of transports for troops and cargo. By this change, 266 additional destroyers were authorized to be built, although only a few of these would actually be completed before the war ended.

Hundreds of yachts were commandeered (or in many cases volunteered) and armed to serve in a coastal convoy escort role. A number of them deployed to European waters, principally to French ports and Gibraltar. Although the yachts represented a quick fix, the United States also built over 400 of a completely new type of vessel, the “submarine chaser.” These vessels were 70 ton, 110 foot wooden-hulled, gasoline-powered vessels armed with guns and depth charges, crude hydrophones, and sophisticated radio-telephones—for that day. These vessels would operate in groups of three, sometimes four. One would go “dead in the water” to listen and direct the others toward possible contacts with the radio-telephone. Although no submarines were confirmed to have been sunk by submarine chasers, they quickly established a ubiquitous presence due to their sheer numbers that kept submarines away from the near approaches to key ports. The sub chasers were also mostly manned by the new Naval Reserve Force, and in fact, the group that operated out of Corfu, Greece, was involved in the “Battle of Durazzo” (see

H-Gram 022). It was unofficially known as the "Harvard-Yale Unit" as that is where most of the officers came from. During the war, 448 submarine chasers were ordered, and 441 delivered, including 50 to the French navy. Within a few months, 72 would deploy to the European theater—mostly to Plymouth, England, and the Strait of Otranto area in the Mediterranean. Some 235 would reach Europe before the war ended.

Besides destroyers and anti-submarine vessels, it quickly became apparent that neither the U.S. Navy nor Army had any troop transports or cargo ships worthy of the name. Fortunately, (sort of) it would take the U.S. Army almost a year to recruit, mobilize, and train the vast majority of soldiers that would deploy to France. This gave the Navy some time to acquire and commandeered much of the necessary shipping. The effort was greatly aided by the fact that about 104 German merchant ships had been interned in U.S. ports when war broke out in 1914, including about 18 large passenger liners. When the United States entered the war, the German crews of these interned ships did their best to sabotage them, and many required extensive work to make their engineering plants operable. Nevertheless, about half of U.S. Army troops sent to France via the "Atlantic Bridge" were transported on the ex-German passenger liners converted to troop ships. Probably the most famous was the former Hamburg-Amerika Line *Vaterland*, renamed USS *Leviathan* (SP-1326), which carried 10,000 troops at a time. The other half of U.S. troops were transported by British liners—and a few French and Italian ships converted to troopships. Of note, after the war ended, most of the U.S. troops in Europe had to be brought back to the United States on the old battleships and armored cruisers.

As the number of freighters and transports under U.S. Navy control continued to grow, the Naval Overseas Transport Service was established on 9 Jan 1918. At its peak, the service operated 378 ships, controlled a total of 450 ships, and was taking over 100 more when the armistice came. In addition, the United States Shipping Board Emergency Fleet Corporation directed the movement of over 2,000 U.S. civilian merchant ships.

Like the rest of the Navy, the Naval Flying Corps—also known as the U.S. Naval Air Service—experienced explosive growth in only a matter of months. At the start of the war, U.S. naval aviation consisted of 54 training aircraft, 48 officers and 239 enlisted, and one base, at Pensacola. In June 1917, seven U.S. Navy pilots and 122 mechanics (but no planes) arrived in France, under the command of Lieutenant Kenneth Whiting, and were credited with being the first U.S. military unit to arrive in France—although they had to borrow French (and later British and Italian) aircraft to train on. By the time of the armistice, in Europe alone there were 2,500 officers, 22,000 men and over 400 U.S. Navy aircraft, the great majority of which were seaplanes such as the Curtiss HS-1L and later the much bigger Curtiss H-16.

U.S. Navy air operations didn't really begin in earnest until the summer of 1918, by which time six seaplane stations had been established in France, four in Ireland, and two in the Adriatic—in addition to a sizable presence at Killingholme Air Station in England. U.S. Navy seaplanes conducted over 30 attacks on U-boats in the last months of the war, damaging about 12, but with no confirmed sinking. Nevertheless, the key metric was that no convoy with air cover lost ships to U-boat attacks, as the U-boats showed no interest in operating where aircraft were in the vicinity. Very late in the war, the "Northern Bombing Group"—consisting of four U.S. Navy and four U.S. Marine Corps squadrons—was in the process of standing up in order to attack German U-boat bases in Belgium. However, delays in receiving aircraft, coupled a rapid British advance in Belgium in the last month of the war, precluded this group from becoming truly operational.

At the end of the war, and counting bases in the United States, Azores, Canada, and the Panama Canal Zone—the canal had been finished in 1914—U.S. naval aviation included 6,716 officers and 30,693 men. The U.S. Marines had 282 officers and 2,180 men; the combined force included 2,107 aircraft, 15 airships, and 215 balloons. Of the Navy's 1,646 pilots at the end of the war, 1,237 were deployed to Europe along with 891 ground support officers and 21,951 enlisted men.

With the rapid expansion of the Navy, the Naval Armed Guards and Naval Flying Corps, the demand for experienced officers and sailors to man them became acute. Vice Admiral Sims's writings in particular described the constant churn aboard ships operating in the European theater as more junior officers were detached to take command of new ships and units in the United States. The need for sailors to be at sea was so acute, that Secretary Daniels authorized the recruitment and enlistment of women. Recruitment turned out not to be a problem as women readily enlisted in what was known as the Yeoman (F) program, sometimes known as "yeomanettes." Despite the title, the yeoman (F)'s performed far more than just administrative tasks, and many were engaged in highly technical work in such things as communications. One yeoman (F), Agnes Driscoll Myers, worked as a cryptanalyst, and would become the Navy's premier code-breaker—as a civilian working for the Navy after the war, until 1949—breaking Japanese diplomatic codes and teaching the generation of Navy officers (Safford, Rochforte, Layton) who would lead Navy codebreaking and intelligence activity during World War II.

The very first yeoman (F) was Loretta Perfectus Walsh, who would be the first non-nurse enlisted in any U.S. military service, and would become the first woman Navy chief petty officer. About 13,000 women would serve as yeomen (F)'s with the peak at any one time being 11,274. Of note, the women serving as yeoman (F)'s received identical pay with men at the same rank. However, as soon as the war ended, they were all summarily dismissed from the service. A few would come back as WAVES during World War II. The yeoman (F)'s were a component of the newly created U.S. Naval Reserve Force, which grew from 8,000 personnel in 1917 to over 250,000 by the end of the war, making up almost half of the U.S. Navy's force structure. The introduction of women into the Navy and the armed forces would be a significant factor in women obtaining the right to vote via the 19th Amendment to the Constitution in 1920.

One area where the U.S. Navy went backward during the war was in the treatment of African American sailors. From the very beginning of the

U.S. Navy, black sailors made up a significant percentage of the Navy's enlisted force (up to 25 percent at the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813, for example) and served with valor and distinction (eight Medals of Honor to black sailors in the Civil War.) Enlisted crews on Navy ships throughout the 1800s were integrated. This was not because the Navy was a progressive institution, but rather was more due to the extreme difficulty in finding enough sailors willing to man sailing ships. Also, because of the extreme social stratification of the time, sailors and blacks in general were relegated to the bottom rungs, so integration did not disturb the sensibilities of upper-class whites (or officers). As the Navy became more technical in the very late 1800s (and segregation and "Jim Crow" laws became increasingly prevalent ashore), Black sailors were increasingly relegated to non-technical manual labor rates. For example, educational requirements established for sailors to be selected for training for technical rates had the effect of keeping blacks out of those rates because many of them came from areas of the country where educational opportunities for blacks were severely limited or non-existent. This increasing de facto segregation was codified when the Wilson administration was elected in 1912. Although progressive in many other ways, Wilson ordered the segregation of the federal government, and the Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels carried out that policy within the Navy. It would take until World War II for these policies to be reversed.

Significant U.S. Navy Operations and Operational Successes

The U.S. convoy effort was under the command of Rear Admiral Albert Gleaves, commander of the Cruiser and Transport Force. Transatlantic convoys were eventually separated into fast convoys and slower convoy, but in general would be escorted from U.S. ports (mainly New York and Hampton Roads) by anti-submarine vessels. The convoy would typically be accompanied by one or two of the older armored cruisers which were considered capable enough to ward off any potential attacks by German surface raiders, which by 1917 were actually very

rare. Upon approaching the areas of greatest submarine threat, U.S. destroyers from Queenstown, Ireland, or Brest/Saint Nazaire, France, would rendezvous with the convoy and provide escort to British or French ports, where the armed yachts and submarine chasers would provide additional protection in the approaches.

The first U.S. troop convoys arrived in France in June 1917, bringing 14,000 U.S. Marines and elements of the U.S. Army's 1st Division, which proved to be an immense boost to British and French morale. In fact, in 1917 some French troops had mutinied and refused to go on the offensive (which caused many more casualties than being on the defensive) until U.S. troops arrived in sufficient numbers. Although U.S. ground forces were for the most part not committed to battle in great numbers until the late spring of 1918, the Marines were involved in some early battles, which generated enormous publicity as the "first to fight"—to the irritation of senior U.S. Army commanders, who provided troops with heavy weapons to fight alongside the Marines.

The relative priority of escorting troopships versus escorting critical supply transports, led to significant disagreements between Vice Admiral Sims, and CNO William Benson, and Henry T. Mayo, commander of the Atlantic Fleet. The command relationship between Sims and Mayo was never really worked out with clarity during the war; on paper Sims reported to Mayo but in practice Sims generally went straight to Washington. Sims's argument was that the limited numbers of destroyers could best be used to escort the supply ships rather than the troopships. His argument was not as callous as it sounds, in that because of geography, the shipping destined to Great Britain was funneled through relatively restricted waters (making them more vulnerable to submarine attack) whereas the much faster troopships had a broader avenue of approach to the coast of France, which the German submarines—that were also suffering from acute shortage in numbers—would have difficulty covering. Although Sims's approach had logic, Secretary Daniels and CNO Benson understood that in the event a troopship did get torpedoed, losing several thousand soldiers at once would be a public relations disaster, in addition to

an actual disaster. CNO Benson overrode Sims. The U.S. Army, for its part, was grateful that the U.S. Navy chose to prioritize troop lives over "slabs of bacon."

Although the first U.S. destroyers to reach European waters arrived at Queenstown, Ireland, on 4 May 1917 (under Commander Joseph Taussig) and operated out of Queenstown. Eventually, more destroyers would operate from French ports than from Queenstown. Although under overall British command, the rapidly growing destroyer force at Queenstown would be under the direct command of Rear Admiral Joel Pringle, USN. Although Sims resisted the establishment of a separate U.S. naval command in France, the destroyer and armed yacht force operating from French ports was initially placed under the command of Rear Admiral William Fletcher, USN, and then Vice Admiral Henry B. Wilson, USN. By August of 1917, 45 of the Navy's 68 destroyers were deployed to Europe. By August 1918, 24 U.S. destroyers were operating from Queenstown, while 33 destroyers, 16 armed yachts, and nine minesweepers operated from Brest, France. In addition, in August 1917 an additional U.S. force had been stood up at Gibraltar, under the command of Rear Admiral Albert Niblack, USN, consisting of the Navy's only three scout cruisers and five elderly *Bainbridge*-class destroyers from the Philippines via the Suez—having been first deployed there in 1903. One of the destroyers, USS *Decatur* (DD-5), had been run aground in 1908 by Ensign Chester Nimitz, who had been court-martialed, found guilty of negligence, and reprimanded. Two modern destroyers joined the Gibraltar force in 1918. As an aside, as ally of Britain, a Japanese force of one cruiser and eight destroyers operated out of Malta and engaged German and Austro-Hungarian U-boats in the Mediterranean, losing 68 sailors when a Japanese destroyer was torpedoed by an Austrian U-boat—yet the Japanese saved their heavily damaged ship.

Of the two million U.S. Army troops transported across the Atlantic, only a small number were lost, which was of little consolation to their families. On 5 February 1918, the British troop transport *Tuscania*, under British Royal Navy escort, with 384 British crew and 2,013 U.S. Army troops embarked, was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine *UB-*

77 off the west coast of Scotland. During the four hours it took for the ship to sink, and despite the continued risk from submarine attack, British escorts and lifeboat crews performed heroic service in rescuing the great majority of crew and troops. Nevertheless, 230 were lost, including 201 U.S. troops. At the time, this was by far the largest loss of U.S. military life to that point in the war, sparking outrage among politicians and civilians back in the United States (and triggering even greater censorship back in the United States).

On 31 May 1918, the large and mostly empty troop transport USS *President Lincoln* was torpedoed and sunk by the German's *U-90* while returning from delivering U.S. Army troops to France. Of 715 aboard, including 30 sick and wounded Army personnel, 689 were rescued, including all the Army personnel. One officer, Lieutenant Edouard Izac would be taken prisoner by *U-90* and would later be awarded a Medal of Honor for his multiple escape attempts, the last one successful. (For more details, please see attachment H-023-2.)

On 30 September 1918, the armed transport USS *Ticonderoga* (ID-1958) was torpedoed and sunk by "U-Cruiser" *U-152* while on a return transit from France to the United States, having safely delivered 4,000 U.S. troops to France. *Ticonderoga's* U.S. escort had broken off as she passed out of the area of greatest submarine danger (unfortunately, *U-152* had much greater range and endurance than standard U-boats). Despite valiant resistance, *Ticonderoga* was lost with 112 U.S. Navy sailors and 101 U.S. Army troops, many of them sick and wounded. *Ticonderoga's* commanding officer Lieutenant Commander James Madison would be awarded a Medal of Honor. This was the worst loss of life aboard a U.S. Navy ship as a result of enemy action in World War I. (See more detail in attachment H-023-2.)

However, it turned out that the sea was an even bigger threat to U.S. Army troops than the Germans. On 6 October 1918, in very heavy seas not far from where *Tuscania* had gone down, the British troop transport *Otranto* collided with another troop transport and sank. Over 470 crew and passengers were lost, including one U.S. Army officer and 357

U.S. Army enlisted men, although 300 U.S. troops were saved as a result of heroic rescue efforts.

Besides the actual escort and transport of troops, one of the greatest U.S. Navy contributions to the war was Admiral Sims's action to convince British Prime Minister Lloyd George that the British should institute a convoy system. When Sims first arrived in London shortly after the United States entered the war in April 1917—after the ship he was on had been hit and damaged by a German submarine-laid mine—the new British First Sea Lord Admiral Sir John Jellicoe (formerly in command of the British Grand Fleet at Jutland) revealed the full extent of ship losses due to submarines since the Germans resumed unrestricted submarine warfare earlier in 1917. The magnitude of losses had been a closely guarded secret, and Sims was thoroughly shocked; at that point almost one quarter of ships arriving or leaving the British Isles were being sunk (about 14 per day). Sims quickly recommended the immediate dispatch of as many U.S. destroyers as possible to Britain, and recommended to the British that they institute a convoy system, which they had yet to do. There were a variety of reasons why the British had not done so, but it was apparent that unless they did something radically different they were on the verge of losing the war to German submarines. As the British continued to drag their feet, Sims was able to convince the prime minister that instituting a convoy system would be the best way to defeat the U-boat threat and would be far more effective than trying to hunt them down on the open sea. The prime minister then essentially ordered the Royal Navy to implement a convoy system (it was more complicated than that, but that is the short story).

Partly because of Sims's personal rapport with Jellicoe—they had served together under fire during the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900—the British quickly established a very proactive intelligence sharing relationship with Sims and his eventual staff, including Dudley Knox, future Director of U.S. Naval History until after World War II. At the time, the Office of Naval Intelligence had a very limited ability to perform what would now be termed "operational intelligence." As a result of radio traffic analysis, code-breaking, and fusion of all sources of intelligence, the Royal Navy intelligence

organization ("Room 40") had become very adept at knowing which U-boats were underway and their general operating area—getting locational data good enough to kill the submarines was the problem. The American approach to convoys (and adopted by the British) was to route the convoys to where intelligence indicated the U-boats were not. As a result of this approach, U.S. ships only sank for sure one German submarine (*U-58* by *USS Fanning* (DD-37) and *USS Nicholson* (DD-52) on 17 November 1917—capturing 39 of *U-58*'s 41-man crew. U.S. sailors even jumped into the water to save Germans. The armed yacht *USS Lydonia* (SP-700) may have shared credit with *HMS Basilisk* in sinking *UB-70* off Algiers in the Mediterranean on 8 May 1918. Nevertheless, the U.S. destroyers attacked numerous contacts, damaged quite a few U-boats, and kept many German U-boats from making effective attacks on the convoys. The preponderance of German U-boat losses occurred when, unable to get at the transatlantic convoys, they hunted for targets in close proximity to ports in Britain and France, where the Royal Navy was responsible for the vast majority of sunken U-boats. It should also be noted that the much larger Royal Navy provided the majority of transatlantic convoy escorts as well—about 70 percent, compared to United States' 27 percent, and France's 3 percent—although the U.S. provided a greater percentage of the escorts for troopship convoys.

Although the British basically invented the depth charge—which was the most effective anti-submarine weapon—the United States contributed significantly by improving the hydrostatic detonator, developing the depth charge rack (enabling depth charges to be rolled off the stern, instead of craned off in a net) and developing the "Y-gun," enabling smaller depth charges to be fired abeam and ahead of the ship—reducing the target U-boat's chance of escape. The United States also developed a more advanced radio-telephone—the CW 936—which enhanced convoy and escort coordination. The British had lagged in radio-telephone technology, partly because of their understanding and concern for the German's very effective radio intelligence capability. The British, in turn, helped the United States upgrade what was relatively lax U.S. communications security. Although British

intelligence was ahead of U.S. capability, the Americans had developed advanced "operational analysis" methodologies that capitalized on the British intelligence in determining German operating patterns and the safest routes for Allied convoys to navigate.

Destroyers were the most significant U.S. Navy contribution to the war effort, but U.S. battleships participated as well. In December 1917, four U.S. battleships made a very rough Atlantic crossing and joined the British Grand Fleet in guarding against any forays by the German High Seas Fleet. Under the command of Rear Admiral Hugh Rodman, USN, the U.S. Battleship Division Nine became the 6th Battle Squadron of the British Grand Fleet. The U.S. squadron consisted of the newest coal-burning battleships—the British had plenty of coal but were very short on oil—and included flagship *New York* (BB-34), *Delaware* (BB-28), *Wyoming* (BB-32), and *Florida* (BB-30). *Texas* (BB-35) joined them in February 1918. *USS Arkansas* (BB-33) later relieved *Delaware* in August 1918. The U.S. ships had to rapidly learn British signals and maneuvers, and American gunnery was initially significantly less accurate than that of the British. Outwardly, the two navies got along great, although privately, the commander of the Grand Fleet, Admiral David Beatty, expressed considerable doubt about U.S. capability, viewing the U.S. ships "an incubus" amongst his own.

Except for one quickly aborted foray, for the rest of the war, the German High Seas Fleet never came out to challenge the British Grand Fleet after the Battle of Jutland in May 1916. The closest the U.S. battleships came to engaging the Germans was when the American ships were assigned to cover convoys going from Great Britain to Norway against German surface raiders. A German operation was planned for 24 April 1918, but was cancelled, although the United States had completed an escort operation a week earlier. These U.S. battleships would be present in the Grand Fleet formation (Operation ZZ) that received the surrender of the entire German High Seas Fleet on 21 November 1918.

Because of the recurring threat that German surface raiders could break into the Atlantic, a second group of U.S. battleships, under the command of Rear Admiral Thomas Rogers, arrived in Berehaven, Ireland, in August 1918. Battleship Division Six consisted of the new oil-burners USS *Nevada* (BB-36), USS *Oklahoma* (BB-37), and USS *Utah* (BB-31). Except for one brief sortie in response to a false report of German raider activity, this group remained in Berehaven the whole time, with liberty curtailed due to Irish anti-British sentiment ashore.

A major U.S. Navy operation during World War I was the laying of the North Sea Mine Barrage, commencing in July 1918 and continuing until the end of the war, followed by a massive sweep-up operation after the war. Early in the war, the British laid extensive mine fields in the Dover Strait to block German submarines from the English Channel with mixed results. The British also laid mines close to German ports, but these were quickly swept up by the Germans and were ineffective. Although there were proposals for mining the northern entrance to the North Sea, that was considered impractical because the distance (over 250 miles) would require 400,000 or more contact mines. Not until the U.S. invention of the Mark 6 “antennae mine,”—led by Rear Admiral Ralph Earle—did such an immense mining operation become feasible. When the Mark 6 extended 70-foot copper wires were touched by a submarine, the mine would detonate within the lethal range of the mine—making it far more effective than the standard contact mines of the time. The idea quickly developed strong proponents and opponents in both the British and U.S. navies, but ultimately both agreed to do it. The United States actually manufactured over 100,000 mines.

Before the war ended, the British and the Americans laid 70,263 mines between Scotland and Norway across the North Sea. Of these, the United States laid 56,611 in the central 130-mile sector, while the British laid the remainder in the western sector. The neutral Norwegians were eventually convinced to lay mines in the gap on the east in Norwegian waters, but this was not done before the war ended. The commander of the U.S. minelaying force was Rear Admiral Richard Strauss, and his command consisted of two armored cruisers and eight

converted coastal steamers (Minelaying Squadron One, under the command of Captain Richard Belknap) and shore infrastructure. While the operation itself was a monumental feat, the benefits are still debated. At a cost of 40 million dollars (a sizable sum then) only about four German submarines are known to have been sunk by the field and another four probably or possibly sunk. It did have a significant negative effect on the morale of U-boat crews in the last months of the war, although things were generally going badly for the U-boats by then anyway (although not anywhere near as bad as during World War II). I’ve been meaning to write a dedicated article on the mine barrage since last July but keep running out of gas. I’ll use the sweeping operation as an excuse in the coming months to do so.

The U.S. Navy also deployed seven L-class submarines to Ireland to be used in an anti-submarine role. This proved to be great operational experience, albeit dangerous, but ineffective and several submarines were nearly lost to friendly fire. Getting the submarines to Europe and back—along with surrendered German submarines—was an epic tale, that I will cover in a future H-gram. One U.S. submarine, *AL-2*, was initially credited with sinking a U-boat through a bizarre circumstance, but post war records and analysis (and discovery of the sub somewhere else) confirmed that the U-boat was not sunk by the U.S. sub, although damage may have been an unconfirmed factor in her eventual loss. Four smaller K-class submarines operated from the Azores. For more on this, see H-Gram 020.

In a previous H-gram (H-Gram 021), I covered the U.S. Navy’s only surface action of the war, the Second Battle of Durazzo, as part of an Allied action against the Austro-Hungarian-held port of Durazzo, Albania. Twelve U.S. submarine chasers participated and helped damage two Austrian U-boats, but suffered no casualties, despite being hyped in the press as a “suicide mission.”

U.S. Navy Warship Losses in World War I

The first U.S. Navy ship sunk as a result of enemy action in World War I was the armed yacht USS

Alcedo (SP-166) torpedoed and sunk by German submarine *UC-71* on 5 November 1917 while escorting a small convoy along the coast of France. Lookouts on *Alcedo* sighted a surfaced submarine just after midnight, but before *Alcedo* could commence action, *UC-17* fired a single torpedo that hit *Alcedo*, causing her to sink in under eight minutes, with the loss of one officer and 20 enlisted crewmen of her crew of 94. During previous escort operations, *Alcedo* had rescued over 200 survivors from two ships sunk by U-boat attacks.

On 20 November 1917, the destroyer USS *Chauncey* (DD-3) was escorting a convoy 110 nautical miles west of Gibraltar when she was rammed in the darkness by British freighter *SS Rose*. Although not directly the result of enemy action, a key factor in the collision was that both ships were in wartime “darken-ship” condition, showing no lights. Although 70 of her crew survived, 21 crewmen were lost including the commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Walter Reno. *Chauncey* was one of the group of destroyers that deployed to the Philippines in 1903, a major achievement at the time, and remained there until transiting to Gibraltar via Suez in 1917.

On 17 December 1917, USS *Jacob Jones* (DD-61) was torpedoed and sunk by *U-53* while transiting independently from France to Ireland. The ship went down in eight minutes, before a distress call could be sent, and her depth charges detonated, contributing to the heavy loss of life; 66 crewmen were lost and 38 survived. One of the survivors was the executive officer, future Rear Admiral Norman Scott who would be awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor at Guadalcanal. *U-53* surfaced and took aboard two badly injured U.S. sailors (who survived the war as POWs) and radioed the position of the survivors to facilitate rescue—an unusual act of chivalry by that time in the war. *U-53*’s skipper was *Kapitänleutnant* Hans Rose, who was the fifth most successful U-boat skipper of the war, sinking 87 merchant ships in addition to *Jacob Jones*. Before the United States entered the war, Rose and *U-53* had made a surprise port visit into Newport, Rhode Island on 8 October 1916, paying calls ashore on shocked senior U.S. Navy leaders, before leaving

port and sinking several ships right outside U.S. territorial waters. See also H-grams 008 and 012.

Sometime after 4 March 1918, the collier USS *Cyclops* (AC-4) and her entire crew and passengers of 306 disappeared without a trace after leaving Barbados en route to Baltimore. There is no evidence that her loss was the result of any enemy action, although it was speculated at the time. See also H-Gram 016.

On 19 July 1918, the armored cruiser USS *San Diego* (ACR-4) probably struck a mine laid by German submarine *U-156* off Fire Island, New York. *San Diego* had recently arrived from the Pacific, via the new Panama Canal. She was en route New York City to provide escort service for a troop convoy, when she suffered an explosion without warning. Initially thought to be the result of a torpedo attack, no German submarine was in the area at the time (confirmed by post-war records). *U-156* did lay mines in the area, and six mines were subsequently found. *San Diego* took about 20 minutes to sink and only six sailors were lost; however, had the commanding officer delayed giving the abandon ship order a few minutes longer, the loss of life could have been catastrophic as occurred in multiple sinkings of British armored cruisers. *San Diego* was the largest U.S. warship lost in the war. At about the same time, *U-156* sank a tug and barges off Cape Cod, with some of the shells going long and hitting shore. This was the only “attack” on U.S. soil during the war—not counting multiple incidents of sabotage—including major explosions at Mare Island and Black Tom Island in New York harbor. Lessons learned from the sinking of *San Diego* were quickly incorporated into the fleet and were instrumental in preventing the loss of the battleship USS *Minnesota* (BB-22)—when she struck a mine on 29 Sep 1918 laid by *U-117*. *U-156* in turn was sunk by a U.S. mine in the North Sea Mine Barrage while attempting to return to Germany. See also H-grams 010 and 019.

On 26 September 1918, the U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Tampa*, operating under U.S. Navy control, was torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Wales by German submarine *UB-91*, with the loss of all hands, including 111 coastguardsmen, four U.S. Navy

personnel, 11 Royal Navy personnel, and five British civilian dockyard workers. See also H-Gram 021.

In addition to the above, six merchant ships with U.S. Navy armed guards embarked were sunk due to enemy action. In addition, the protected cruiser USS *Milwaukee* (C-21) and the submarine USS *F-1*—formerly *Carp* (SS-20)—were lost in operational accidents stateside during the war.

Conclusion: During World War I, German U-boats sank over 5,200 vessels and came dangerously close to choking off Britain's critical supply of food in the spring of 1917, which could have led to the collapse of the British war effort but for the entrance of the United States into the conflict. Although the phrase "We are ready now," became the catch-phrase of the U.S. Navy during the war, the reality was that the U.S. Navy was far from ready, which led to ugly recriminations after the war. Nevertheless, the U.S. Navy's ability, however ad hoc, to get two million U.S. soldiers safely to France changed the course of the war, and of world history, and we are still living with the consequences today.

Previous H-grams on World War I

H-Gram 022/H-022-1: The Worst Killer of All: The Spanish Influenza, 1918-19

H-Gram 021/H-021-3: U.S. Navy in World War I—First Naval Aviation Medal of Honor, First Ace, Railway Artillery, Heaviest Loss, and Only Surface Action, August–October 1918

H-Gram 020/H-020-4: The Fog of War: USS *AL-2* Versus *UB-65*, 10 July 1918

H-Gram 019/H-019-5: "Black Sunday" and the Battle of Orleans—World War I Comes to American Waters

H-Gram 018/H-018-4: Dental Valor

H-Gram 016/H-016-4: The Disappearance of USS *Cyclops*

H-Gram 013: The Loss of USS *Jacob Jones*, 6 December 1917, and H-013-5: U.S. Navy's Battleship

Division Nine in European Waters, 7 December 1917

H-Gram 012: Meanwhile, Back in World War I (*U-58* sinking)

H-Gram 010/H-010-6: Attacks on the United States Mainland (German saboteurs)

H-Gram 008/H-008-1: 100th Anniversary of World War I

H-Gram 004/H-004-1: The First Shot/SMS *Cormoran* II, and H-004-2: "We Are Ready Now, Sir" (Sort of)

H-Gram 002/H-002-1: The Zimmerman Telegram: Early Cyber Warfare?

Sources include: Numerous documents and *Dictionary of American Fighting Ships* entries published on Naval History and Heritage Command website; *America's Sailors in the Great War; Sea, Skies and Submarines* by Lisle Rose (University of Missouri Press, 2017); *The Victory at Sea* by Rear Admiral William S. Sims, USN (Naval Institute Press, 1984 reprint of 1920 edition); *Information at Sea; Shipboard Command and Control in the U.S. Navy, from Mobile Bay to Okinawa* by Timothy S. Wolters (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); *Learning War: The Evolution of American Fighting Doctrine, 1898-1945* by Trent Hone (Naval Institute Press, 2018); *United States Naval Aviation: 1910-2010* by Mark L. Evans and Roy A. Grossnick (5th Edition, Naval History and Heritage Command); *Sea Power* by E. B. Potter (Prentice-Hall, 1960); *History of the U.S. Navy, Volume One: 1775-1941* by Robert W. Love, Jr. (Stackpole Books, 1992).

H-023-2: U.S. Navy Personnel Awarded the Medal of Honor During World War I

H-Gram 023, [Attachment 2](#)

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

November 2018

Of 21 Medals of Honor awarded to U.S. Navy personnel during World War I, five were awarded for direct combat against the enemy at sea or the result of combat at sea. Six (one posthumous) were awarded to U.S. Navy medical personnel ashore assigned to the U.S. Marines aiding the wounded during combat operations, and ten were awarded for non-combat valor.

During World War I, 21 U.S. Navy personnel were awarded the Medal of Honor. At the time, the Medal



World War I U.S. Navy Medal of Honor ("Tiffany Cross" pattern): An unissued medal from the collections of the Navy Department. Only 21 Navy and 7 Marine Corps personnel received Medals of Honor of this pattern (NH 78213-KN).

of Honor could be awarded for both combat and non-combat heroism. Of the Navy Medal of Honor recipients, five were awarded for direct combat at sea (one posthumous), six were awarded to U.S. Navy medical personnel ashore working with U.S. Marines aiding the wounded during combat operations (one posthumous), and ten were awarded for non-combat valor. At the end of the war, the U.S. Navy created two versions of the Medal of Honor to distinguish between combat and non-combat heroism, retroactive to 6 April 1917 (the U.S. entry into the war). Those who were awarded the Medal of Honor for combat heroism received the new "Tiffany Cross" version of the medal, while those for non-combat valor retained the traditional

design that was created during the Civil War. The Tiffany Cross version was not a popular design as it was considered by many to bear too much of a resemblance to a German Iron Cross.

On 7 August 1942, the Navy and Marine Corps Medal was created (retroactive to the start of World War II) for non-combat acts of great valor, and the Medal of Honor was then exclusively reserved for combat action above and beyond the call of duty. (The Navy Cross was raised above the Distinguished Service Medal in precedence, and reserved for combat valor as well.) Additionally, with each war the criteria for being awarded a Medal of Honor became increasingly stringent. For example, the few days of action during the U.S. Navy's intervention at Vera Cruz, Mexico, in April 1914, 46 U.S. Navy personnel who came under fire, mostly ashore, were awarded the Medal of Honor (these included future admirals Frank Jack Fletcher, Oscar C. Badger, William Moffet, Jonas Ingram, Theodore Wilkinson, as well as Paul Foster).

Medals of Honor (Tiffany Cross) Awarded as a Result of Direct Combat with the Enemy

Gunner's Mate First Class Osmond K. Ingraham, USN, of USS *Cassin* (DD-43) (posthumous), 15 October 1917: USS *Cassin* was in one of the early groups of destroyers to reach Queenstown, Ireland (on 17 May 1917) and quickly commenced search and escort operations. On 15 October 1917, *Cassin* sighted the German submarine *U-61* about 20 nautical miles south of Ireland and gave pursuit. *U-61* fired a torpedo at *Cassin* that would have missed had it not broached twice, veering to the left each time it came out of the water.

Observing the torpedo heading for the port stern, Petty Officer Ingraham ran toward the depth charge racks and attempted to jettison depth charges overboard. He was killed in the explosion of the torpedo, which detonated several depth charges (thus becoming the first U.S. Navy enlisted man killed by enemy action during the war). The torpedo actually struck above the waterline. Somewhat miraculously, no one else aboard was killed and only

nine wounded (the ship's doctor would later die due to effects of exposure). With extensive damage to her stern and her rudder blown off, the circling *Cassin* nevertheless continued to fire on the submarine with her deck guns, hitting the conning tower and driving the submarine under, which then did not press the attack. Guarded overnight by the USS *Porter* (DD-59) and two British sloops, *Cassin* was taken in tow by the British sloop HMS *Snowdrop*. *Cassin* was subsequently repaired and returned to duty in July 1918. Ingraham was credited with preventing much more serious damage or loss of the ship and was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor.

U-56 was a highly successful U-boat, sinking 32 Allied ships and damaging nine more, before going missing in March 1918. One of the damaged ships was the freighter USS *Santee* (converted to a Q-ship—a covertly armed merchant ship), which, after being struck by a torpedo, attempted lure the U-boat to the surface with a “panic party” of crewmen in a lifeboat simulating a disorderly abandon ship in the hope of surprising and engaging the U-boat with guns. The *U-56* didn't fall for it. *Cassin* would be sold for scrap in 1934. The USS *Osmond Ingram* (DD-255) would be commissioned in 1919 (the first U.S. Navy destroyer named for an enlisted man) and, during World War II, as part of the USS *Bogue* (CVE-9) hunter-killer group, she would sink *U-172* with gunfire and be awarded a Presidential Unit Citation, earning six battle stars in the Atlantic and Pacific.

Ensign Daniel Augustus Joseph Sullivan, USNRF, an officer on the armed yacht USS *Christabel* (SP-162), 21 May 1918: Built in Scotland and purchased by the U.S. Navy from private hands and converted to a warship upon the outbreak of World War I, *Christabel* was assigned to convoy escort duty off western France, under the command of Lieutenant Millington B. McComb. Although the smallest U.S. armed yacht serving in France, *Christabel* engaged two German U-boats during her service and was credited with sinking one on 21 May 1918 (however, the submarine was only severely damaged, but was forced to put into a port in neutral Spain where she was interned for the rest of the war). The officer of the deck, Lieutenant Junior Grade Howard Rutherford Shaw, was awarded the Navy Cross for

alertly attempting to ram the submarine and put *Christabel* in a good location for dropping depth charges. However, during the action, explosions from her own depth charges near aboard caused several live depth charges to come loose, and which were rolling about the deck. Ensign Sullivan would be awarded the Medal of Honor for risking his life to secure the loose depth charges, preventing a likely catastrophic explosion, which probably would have sunk the ship.

British code-breaking intelligence would subsequently confirm that the submarine was *UC-56* (a mine-laying submarine) and that she had been interned in Santander, Spain, as a result of serious damage. *UC-56*'s only kill of the war was His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Glenart Castle* on 26 February 1918, with the loss of 162 people, including the captain, eight nurses and 99 patients; only 32 survived. *UC-56* attempted to cover up her actions by shooting survivors in the water. The British would arrest the captain of *UC-56* as he was returning to Germany from Spain and would detain him in the Tower of London as a war criminal until they could find no legal grounds to hold him during the Armistice (an obvious loophole in the document). Ensign Sullivan would go on to serve in destroyers, and then in the U.S. Navy headquarters in London at the end of the war and into 1919. *Christabel* had also previously responded to the explosion of the cargo ship *Florence H* in Quiberon Bay, France, on 17 April 1918. Although the wooden *Christabel* could not enter the burning water, a volunteer crew in a whaleboat did and rescued three survivors. Chief Pharmacist's Mate Louis Zeller would be awarded a Navy Cross for diving into the water to rescue a badly burned survivor.

Lieutenant Edouard Victor Michel Izac, USN, (some accounts give his name as Isaacs or Izaacs as he changed his name from Isaacs to Izac in 1925) of transport USS *President Lincoln* (ex-German *President Lincoln*—yes, that was her German name), 31 May 1918: On the morning of 31 May 1918, the large troop transport USS *President Lincoln* (32,500 tons) and three other transports were about 600 miles west of Brest, France, returning to the United States after delivering U.S. Army troops to France. *President Lincoln* made five voyages to

France carrying a combined total of 23,000 troops. The transports were mostly empty on their return voyage, and the escorting destroyers had detached as they had passed out of the area of greatest submarine threat to pick up a convoy heading to France. *President Lincoln* had 715 people on board, mostly crew, but including 30 U.S. Army Officers and men, a number of whom were sick and wounded. Without warning, *President Lincoln* was hit by two torpedoes near the bridge, killing seven immediately, followed by a third torpedo that hit further aft. One of the other transports tried to ram the submarine, unsuccessfully.

The commanding officer, Commander P. W. Foote, USN, gave the order to abandon ship as the *President Lincoln* quickly began to sink. The crews of her four 6-inch guns remained at their posts in hopes the submarine would surface and present a target, but fired in the general direction of where the submarine might be to possibly thwart another attack. An additional three officers and 16 crewmen were lost, some when their raft was pulled down with the ship.

In accordance with standard procedure, the other three transports continued on, lest they become targets themselves, but radioed the position of 689 survivors in lifeboats and rafts. The abandon ship was noteworthy for being one of the most disciplined recorded, executed by a well-trained crew, contributing significantly to the relatively low loss of life. An hour after the sinking, the German submarine *U-90* surfaced and searched the boats and rafts for a senior officer who might provide useful intelligence, ultimately taking aboard Lieutenant Edouard Izac (USNA '15), who had tried to remain inconspicuous. As the *U-90* searched the boats looking for the commanding officer, all officers removed rank insignia, and crewmen in different boats all claimed that the commanding officer had gone down with the ship (he survived in one of the boats).

After the submarine left, all boats and rafts were lashed together in an orderly fashion. During the night, two U.S. destroyers, USS *Warrington* (DD-30) and USS *Smith* (DD-17), rescued all the survivors, a notable feat. With almost 700 survivors on board the

two ships, the destroyers encountered *U-90* (with Izac aboard) the next day and *Smith* attacked with 22 depth charges, narrowly missing the submarine, according to Izac's later report. *President Lincoln* was the largest U.S. Navy ship sunk during the war, with a loss of life (26) that could have been vastly worse were it not for the well-trained and disciplined crew of Commander Foote.

Izac's odyssey had just begun. *U-90* was a very successful U-boat: sinking 30 merchant ships and damaging two more during her seven patrols, she survived the war. Izac learned considerable information of intelligence value during his time on board the submarine before she returned to Germany. The Germans did not know that he was the son of German-speaking immigrants and spoke German. Believing this information was critical, Izac made multiple unsuccessful escape attempts, including jumping from the window of a moving train. On the night of 6-7 October 1918, he escaped from a German prison camp, drawing attention to himself so that others might escape. Nevertheless, he succeeded in reaching neutral Switzerland on 13 October, after swimming the Rhine River, in company with another American who had been shot down while flying with the French air force. Upon reaching London, Izac passed his information to Vice Admiral William Sims, who, with the war almost over, turned out to be not much interested in his report. Izac was awarded the Medal of Honor in November 1920; however, he was forced to leave the service in 1921 due to injuries sustained in his escape attempts.

After retirement Izac went into the newspaper business and politics, serving as a Democratic representative from San Diego, California, to the U.S. Congress from 1937 to 1946. In 1945, Izac was part of a delegation of 11 U.S. senators and congressmen invited by General Dwight D. Eisenhower to inspect the recently liberated Nazi concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dachau. Izac subsequently co-authored the report "Atrocities and Other Conditions in Concentration Camps in Germany," published by the U.S. Congress, which described in great detail Nazi extermination efforts against the Jews. When he died in 1990, Izac was 100 years old. He was the last living recipient of the

Medal of Honor from World War I. He was survived by five children, 19 grandchildren, and 25 great grandchildren. One of his children, Commander Carrol A. Izac, served as a Navy Catholic chaplain from 1972 to 1993 and was serving aboard *USS Abraham Lincoln* at the time of Edouard Izac's death.

Ensign Charles Hazeltine Hammann, USNRF, aircraft pilot, flying from the U.S. Navy seaplane station at Porto Corsini, Italy, 21 August 1918:

Enlisted Pilot Hammann (Naval Aviator No. 1494) would become the first U.S. aviator (of any service) to be awarded the Medal of Honor, for an action that took place on 21 August 1918 off the Austro-Hungarian coast (now Croatia) during which he rescued downed naval aviator Ensign George M. Ludlow (Naval Aviator No.342).

On 21 August 1918, five U.S. Navy Macchi M.5 seaplanes (a small single-seat seaplane fighter built by the Italians) flew their first combat mission, escorting two Italian M.8 seaplane bombers on a leaflet-dropping mission over the heavily defended Austro-Hungarian port and naval base of Pola. Five land-based Austro-Hungarian Albatross fighters and two seaplanes engaged the escorting U.S. aircraft.

During the dogfight near Pola, the M.5 flown by Ensign George Ludlow was hit and so badly damaged that Ludlow had to set down in the Adriatic about three miles off the coast of Pola, where he risked being captured (and the Austrians had threatened to execute any downed aviators flying missions over their territory). As Ludlow took steps to scuttle his aircraft, enlisted pilot Charles Hammann landed his seaplane on the water alongside Ludlow. Although Hammann's seaplane had also been damaged in the dogfight, and was not designed to carry the weight of two people, Hammann brought Ludlow on board as Ludlow's aircraft sank. Barely able to get the plane airborne, Hammann nevertheless succeeded in doing so while avoiding additional searching Austro-Hungarian planes. He made his way back to Porto Corsini, whereupon his plane sank after landing due to the excessive weight. Hammann would be awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions, along with an Italian Medaglia a'Argento al Valore Militare. Ludlow would

receive the Navy Cross. Hammann would also be commissioned an ensign in October 1918, but unfortunately was killed in a crash of an M.5 at Langley, Virginia, on 14 June 1919. (See also H-Gram 021.)

Lieutenant Commander James Jonas Madison, USNRF, commanding officer of the transport USS *Ticonderoga* (ID-1958—ex-German *Camilla Rickmeers*) of the Naval Overseas Transportation Service, 30 September 1918: During *Ticonderoga*'s fourth trip to France, she suffered an engineering casualty on the night of 29-30 September that caused her to fall behind her convoy. At 0545, she spotted the large German "U-cruiser" *U-152* ahead on the surface. As the crew went to battle stations, Lieutenant Commander Madison attempted to ram the *U-152*, missing by a narrow margin. *U-152* opened fire with her two 5.9-inch deck guns, quickly knocking out one of *Ticonderoga*'s two forward guns, hitting the bridge area, severely wounding Madison, and knocking out radio communication. Despite his grave injuries and after having his crew prop him up in a chair, Madison continued to fight and maneuver his ship for over two hours. He maneuvered the ship so her after gun (a 6-incher) could be brought to bear, forcing *U-152* to submerge. However, *U-152* subsequently resurfaced and knocked out *Ticonderoga*'s after gun, poured fire into *Ticonderoga* until she was unable to steer or fight back, and wounded almost everyone on board. *U-152* put holes in all but one of *Ticonderoga*'s life boats and fired a torpedo that hit just behind the ship's engine room, which caused her to begin to sink. (The previous day *U-152* had fought a prolonged gun battle with the oiler USS *George G. Henry*, which got away despite heavy damage; this time *U-152* was taking no chances of losing a kill.)

Eventually, Madison went unconscious due to loss of blood. The ship's crew attempted to abandon ship under a white flag, but the submarine continued firing. Madison was placed into the last lifeboat. *U-152* captured the executive officer, Lieutenant Frank Muller, and Lieutenant Junior Grade Junious Fulcher (who both would survive captivity, and would still be on board *U-152* when she surrendered at the end of the war), but left everyone else adrift. After four

days, the British freighter *Moorish Prince* rescued 22 men still alive in the boat, including Madison. Everyone else on board *Ticonderoga* perished, including 112 U.S. Navy crew and 101 U.S. soldiers, the greatest combat loss of life aboard any U.S. Navy ship in World War I. Madison would subsequently be awarded the Medal of Honor for his gallant and prolonged resistance against the submarine. Although he survived the battle, he lost a leg and would be hospitalized for the rest of his life until he died on Christmas Day in 1922.

(Of note, Lieutenant Commander Madison's Medal of Honor citation states that 31 were rescued of 236 on board, which differs from other official records. The oiler USS *George G. Henry* would pass into commercial service after the war as the SS *George G. Henry*, when she would find herself in Subic Bay. She escaped being hit by bombs during the Japanese raid on Cavite on 10 December 1941 before escaping to Australia, where she would be taken over by the U.S. Navy, renamed USS *Victoria* (AO-46) and earn four battle stars during World War II. During the action with *U-152*, one of her crew would be awarded a Distinguished Service Medal and two would receive the Navy Cross for keeping the tanker's engines running despite being surrounded by fire, which was the key to the tanker's escape. *U-152* would be surrendered to the British, who would deliberately sink her in 1922.)

Medals of Honor (Tiffany Cross) Awarded for Supporting U.S. Marines in Combat Ashore

23 April 1918—Lieutenant Commander (Dental Corps) Alexander Gordon Lyle, USN. While serving with the 5th Regiment, U.S. Marine Corps, on the French Front, he exposed himself to heavy shellfire to assist Corporal Thomas Regan, rendering effective surgical aid while under bombardment, saving Regan's life (see also H-Gram 018).

6 June 1918—Lieutenant Junior Grade (Dental Corps) Weedon E. Osborne, USN (posthumous). While serving with the 6th Regiment, U.S. Marines, during the advance on the town of Bouresche, France, at the southern end of Belleau Wood, he

was credited rescuing Marines while under heavy fire, before he was killed while carrying a wounded officer to a place of safety (see also H-Gram 018).

11 June 1918—Lieutenant (Medical Corps) Orlando Henderson Petty, USNRF. While serving with the 5th Marine Regiment during the Marines' attack in Belleau Wood, near the town of Lucy, rendered effective aid to wounded Marines while under heavy shellfire and gas attack. When an exploding gas shell tore a hole in his gas mask, he discarded the mask and continued to render aid, until his aid station was hit and demolished. He then carried a wounded officer to a place of safety.

19 July 1918—Lieutenant (Medical Corps) Joel Thompson Boone, USN. While serving with the 6th Marine Regiment near the town of Vierzy, France, he repeatedly went into an open field under heavy fire and gas attack, to aid wounded Marines. When his medical supplies were exhausted he went back for more and then returned to the field to administer aid, and did so yet again later in the day.

19 July and 5 October 1918—Pharmacist's Mate First Class John Henry Balch, USN. While serving with the 6th Marine Regiment near Vierzy, France, on 19 July 1918, for 16 hours during the day and into the night he repeatedly exposed himself to machine gun and shell fire to give aid to the wounded, and did the same at Somme-Py, France, on 5 October 1918.

15 September 1918—Hospital Apprentice First Class David E. Hayden, USN. While serving with the 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, near Thiaucourt, France, he ran to the aid of Corporal Creed in an open field swept by machine-gun fire, finding the corporal so badly wounded that he had to dress the wounds in the open under intense fire before carrying the mortally wounded man to safety.

Medals of Honor Awarded for Non-Combat Heroic Acts

23 July 1917—Commander Willis Winter Bradley, Jr., USN. While serving aboard the armored cruiser USS *Pittsburgh* (ACR-4) in the South Atlantic when

an accidental explosion occurred while loading saluting cartridge cases in an after casemate. Blown to the deck by the explosion and rendered temporarily unconscious, he came to and crawled into the casemate to put out the fires burning in close proximity to a large amount of powder, preventing additional explosions that could have resulted in the loss of the ship.

23 July 1917—Seaman Ora Graves, USN. While serving aboard the armored cruiser USS *Pittsburgh*, in the South Atlantic, narrowly avoided being killed when a 3-inch saluting cartridge accidentally exploded, killing another sailor. Despite being blown to the deck, he recovered and put out burning waste scattered about the deck, knowing he was in close proximity to a large powder store. This was the same incident that involved Commander Bradley (above).

17 September 1917—Shipfitter First Class Patrick McGunigal, USN. While assigned to the armored cruiser USS *Huntington* (ACR-5) escorting a trans-Atlantic convoy when the launch of a manned kite balloon went awry. A sudden temperature change caused the balloon to rapidly descend from 400 ft. to 200 ft., where it encountered a squall. When the balloon was hauled to the ship, the basket was trailing underwater with the observer, Lieutenant Junior Grade H. W. Hoyt still in it submerged. McGunigal climbed down ropes to the basket and was able to free Hoyt, dragging him clear, putting a bowline around him enabling Hoyt to be pulled up to the deck, before the line was passed to McGunigal and he was pulled to safety.

5 November 1917—Seaman Tedford H. Cann, USN. While assigned to the armed yacht USS *May* (SP-164) operating out of New London, Connecticut, when he risked his life to go into a flooded compartment to stop a serious leak, preventing the ship from sinking.

17 December 1917—Chief Boatswain's Mate John MacKenzie, USN. While assigned to the armed yacht USS *Remlik* (SP-157) in a heavy gale when a depth charge box was washed away, leaving a depth charge rolling about the deck. On his own initiative, MacKenzie sat on the depth charge to keep it from

rolling until the ship could be brought into the sea and the depth charge could be secured, thereby preventing potential catastrophic damage and loss of the ship. Earlier in the day, *Remlik* had tried unsuccessfully to attack a German submarine, which was thwarted by the heavy seas.

17 April 1918–Ship’s Cook First Class Jesse Whitfield Covington, USN, and Quartermaster Frank Monroe Upton, USN. While assigned to the destroyer USS *Stewart* (DD-13) in Quiberon Bay, France, when the American freighter *Florence H.*, with a cargo of ammunition and steel, spontaneously exploded. *Stewart* closed in to the flaming water to rescue survivors, finding numerous floating powder cases that were frequently exploding. Despite danger from the floating powder boxes, Covington dove into the water to rescue a badly injured survivor. *Stewart* saved nine of the 34 survivors (many badly burned) of the 75-man crew of *Florence H.*, and was commended by the Secretary of the Navy. Both Covington and Upton were awarded the Medal of Honor, while the *Stewart*’s commanding officer, Lieutenant H. S. Haislip, was awarded the French Croix de Guerre.

25 September 1918–Chief Machinist’s Mate Francis Edward Ormsbee, Jr., USN. While assigned to Pensacola Naval Air Station, observed another aircraft crash in the water. Ormsbee’s pilot landed their aircraft and Ormsbee dove in the water, swam to the crashed aircraft, and was able to partially extract the gunner and hold his head above water until a speedboat arrived, saving his life. Ormsbee then repeatedly dived in a vain attempt to rescue the pilot, cutting his hands in the process.

9 October 1918–Chief Gunner’s Mate Oscar Schmidt, Jr., USN. While assigned to the tanker USS *Chestnut Hill* (ID-2526) in the mid-Atlantic escorting and refueling a group of submarine chasers, when submarine chaser No. 219 suffered a gasoline explosion and fire that killed four crewmen and injured eight more, causing the sub chaser to sink. Seeing a crewman whose legs were partly blown off, hanging from a line on 219’s bow, Schmidt jumped in the water, climbed aboard the 219 and carried the man from the bow to the stern of 219, where he could be brought aboard

Chestnut Hill. He attempted to go forward to rescue another man, but flames amidships prevented it. However, when that man fell overboard, Schmidt was able to grab him and bring him aboard.

1 November 1918–Boatswain’s Mate Second Class John Otto Siegel, USN. While assigned to the yard tug USS *Mowhawk* (YT-17), when the schooner *Hjeltenaes* caught fire. Siegel went aboard the burning vessel and rescued two crewmen from the flames in the crew’s quarters. He went back into the fire to rescue a third crewman when he became trapped by a burst steam pipe and was overcome. Siegel was in turn rescued by some of *Mohawk*’s crew.

Sources include: Numerous documents and *Dictionary of American Fighting Ships* entries published on Naval History and Heritage Command website; *America’s Sailors in the Great War: Sea, Skies and Submarines* by Lisle Rose (University of Missouri Press, 2017); *The Victory at Sea* by Rear Admiral William S. Sims, USN (Naval Institute Press, 1984 reprint of 1920 edition); *Information at Sea: Shipboard Command and Control in the U.S. Navy, from Mobile Bay to Okinawa* by Timothy S. Wolters (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); *Learning War: The Evolution of American Fighting Doctrine, 1898–1945* by Trent Hone (Naval Institute Press, 2018); *United States Naval Aviation: 1910–2010* by Mark L. Evans and Roy A. Grossnick (5th Edition, Naval History and Heritage Command); *Sea Power* by E. B. Potter (Prentice-Hall, 1960); *History of the U.S. Navy, Volume One: 1775–1941* by Robert W. Love, Jr, (Stackpole Books, 1992).