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WORLDWARRII COMMEMORATION

“THE U-BOAT PERIL:” THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC



THURSDAY, 30 JULY 2020 @ 1900-2000 CDT
VIA TWITCH.TV @HISTORYKID

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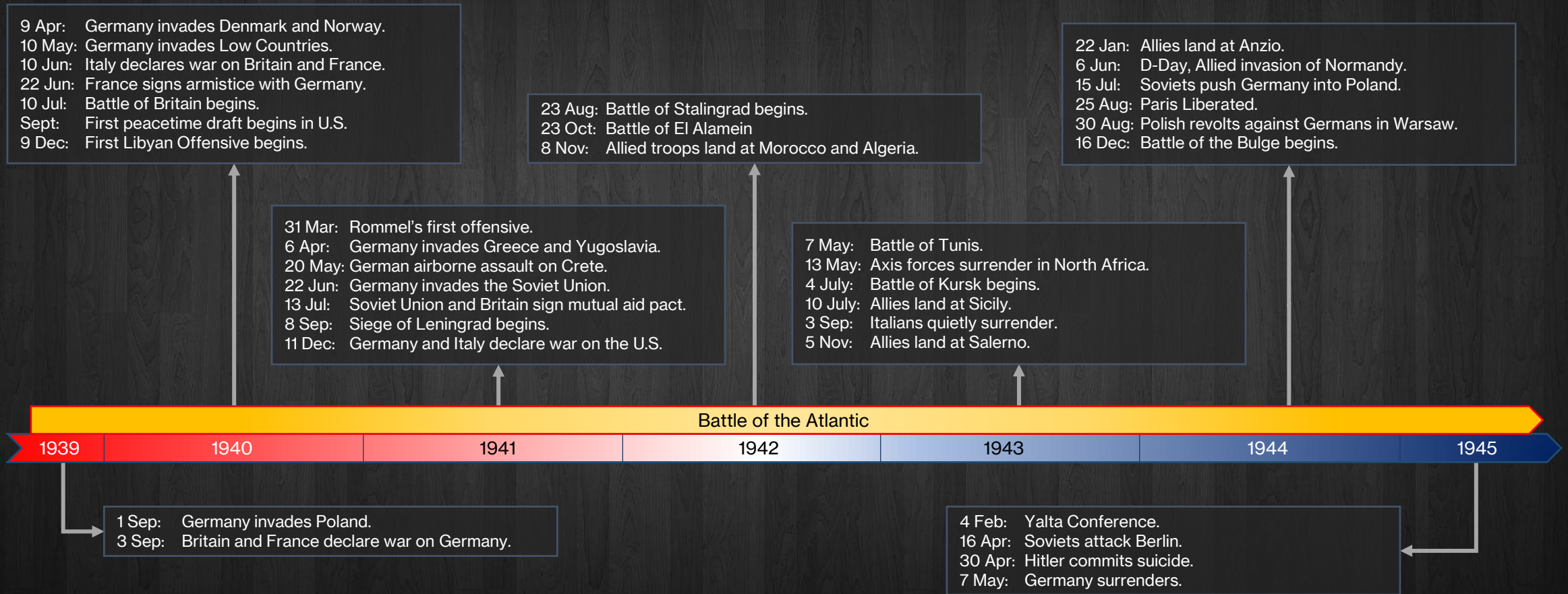
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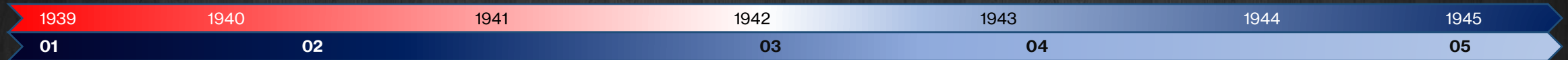
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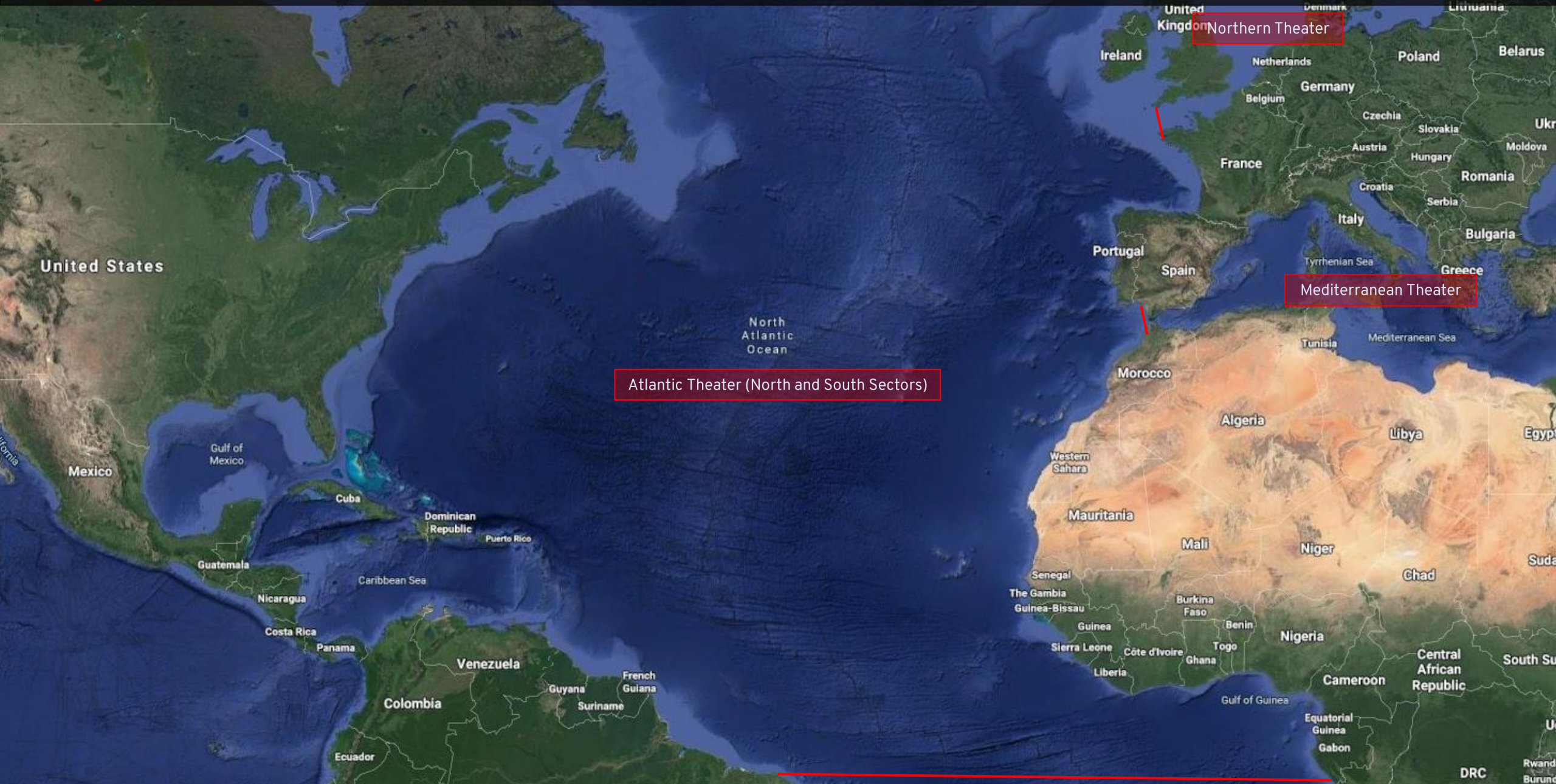
EUROPEAN THEATER TIMELINE



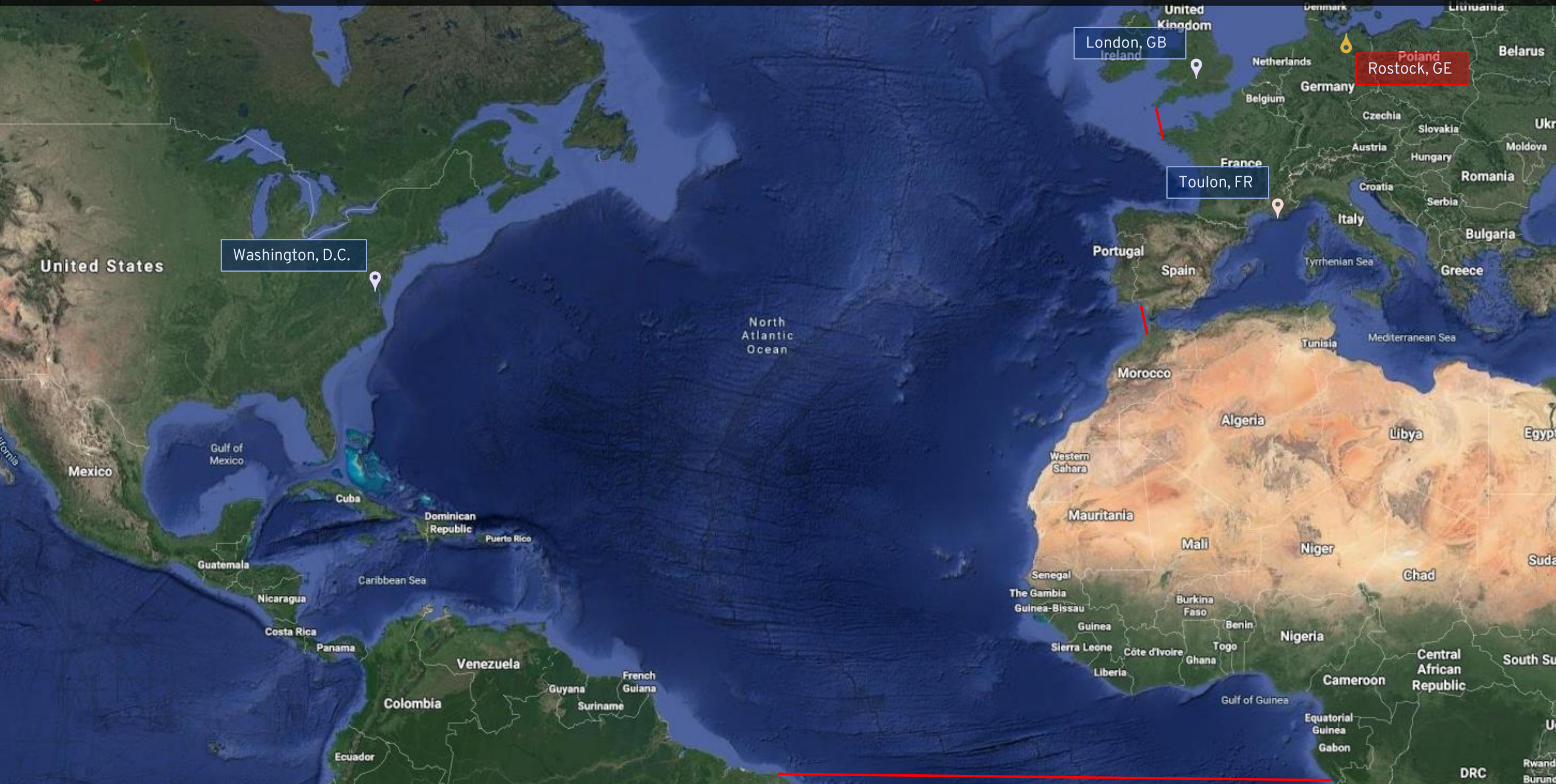


- 1** Roughly September 1939 – May 1940. Early skirmishes between the British and the German's mainly. Some assaults were made on French ships during 1939 and the first month or so of 1940. Germany was largely unable to meet the British on the seas, so they took to the depths to take on the Royal Fleet.
- 2** June 1940 – December 1941. Encompassing the German dubbed "Happy Time", Phase Two of the Battle of the Atlantic is characterized by the massive loss of Allied ships. Italian submarines join German U-boats in their assault operations. The British were consistently losing ships, and the battle was seemingly lopsided.
- 3** January 1942 – February 1943. With the American entrance into the war, the losses of the Allies began to wane. The first several months of this phase are marked by German attacks on U.S. soil by U-boats. Germany's top-water naval fleet is dealt a significant blow early in this phase with the loss of *Bismarck*. The battle is renewed with American production meeting the demands of U.S. ship loss.
- 4** March 1943 – December 1944. Resources being cut off in Germany meant that the Germans were unable to replenish supplies to U-boat crews. The German naval fleet has either been destroyed or partitioned into the North Sea. With the invasion of Normandy, dense minefields, an active American Atlantic Fleet, and fierce fighting in Europe. Germany's grasp on the Atlantic slowly begins to loosen.
- 5** 1945. The last actions within the Battle of the Atlantic running up to 8 May. Allied armies begin seizure of U-boat bases in Germany, ending any chance of a renewed threat. The last U-boat to be sank occurs on 8 May by RAF aircraft. The last attacks by U-boats occurred just hours ahead of the German surrender. *Operation Deadlight* – the scuttling of U-boats – continued until 1946.

THE THEATERS OF OPERATION IN THE ATLANTIC

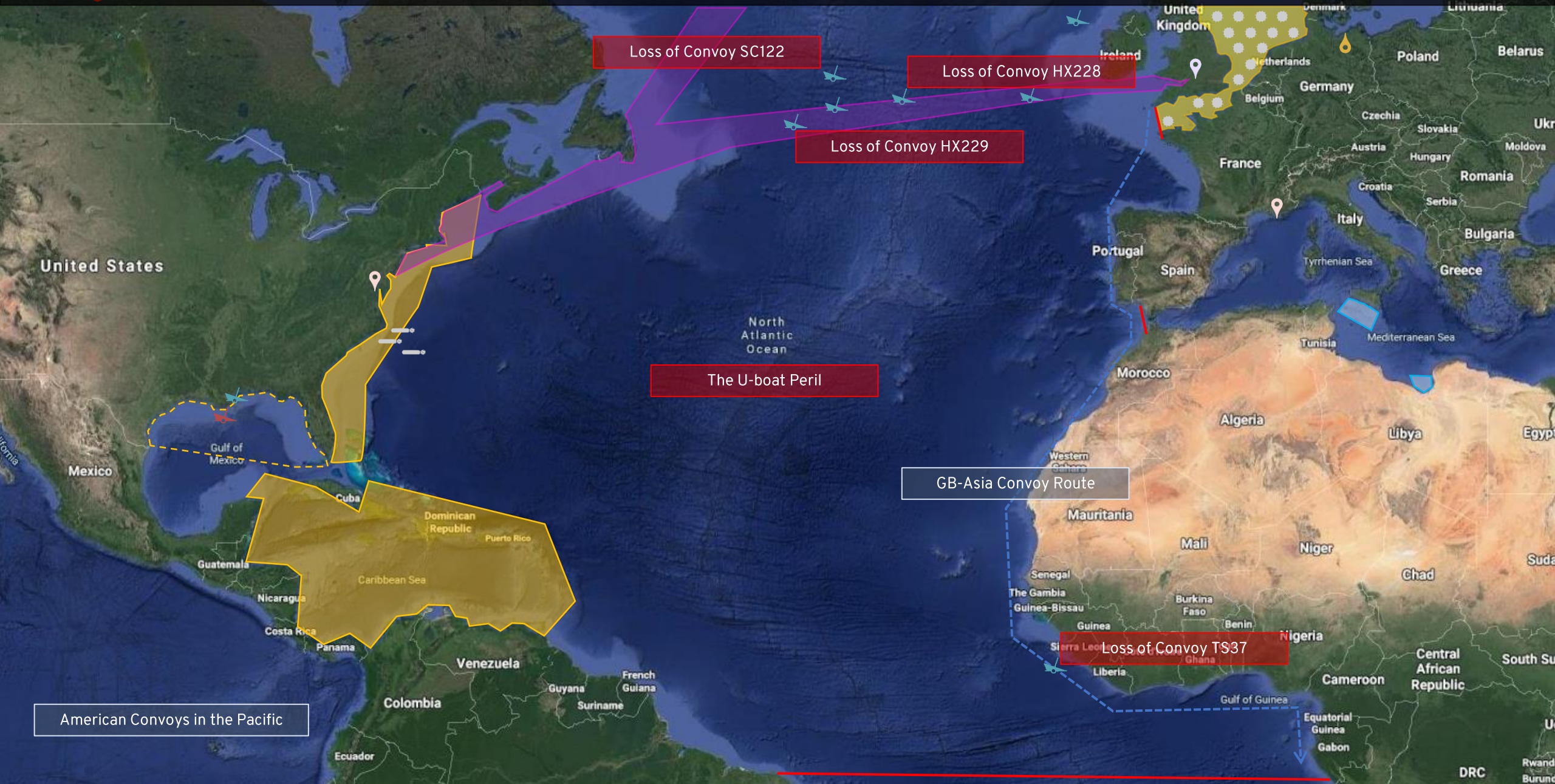


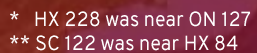
THE ALLIED AND AXIS NAVAL YARDS (ATLANTIC THEATER)





THE ATLANTIC THEATER AT A GLANCE (CONTINUED)





EPIC Submarine BATTLE ROYALE

- U-boats carrying out unrestricted warfare.
 - Redux of their tactics during World War I.
- Shallow waters just as hazardous as deep waters.
 - This was especially true off the coasts of North America and Africa.
- Convoy system only slightly alleviated the hazards.
 - Reduced quantity of men lost, little decrease in materiel loss.
- Various other methods used to combat U-boats.



Allied tanker *Dixie Arrow* after she was struck with a torpedo launched from *U-71* in 1942.



Artist depiction of German U-boat *U-995* underway in the Atlantic.



- Allied supply lines were threatened.
- U-boats ravaging American oil shipping in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Japanese and German U-boat threat in the Pacific.
 - Generally to a lesser extent than the Atlantic.
- There were Allied submarines, but they were few.



British Minelayer *Southern Prince*, of the First Minelaying Squadron.

- Consisted of several minefields across the North Atlantic.
 - More widespread than World War I.
- 90,000+ mines had been laid by the time the plan was cancelled in 1943.
- Proved to provide just as much hazard to Allies as the Axis powers.
- Part of the British blockade of Germany.

- The German naval forces primarily consisted of U-boats.
- The Germans held two battleships as flagships. No carriers.
 - No means to project force on the seas.
 - Battleships have a few spotter planes (6 each).
- Mines that were laid generally did not have any impact on U-boats.
- Most German Navy losses incurred by other ships and aircraft.

Bismarck sank 27 May 1941
Tirpitz sank 12 November 1944

The German Battleship *Bismarck* was one of two battleships in the flagship class of the same name.



- Adopted at the beginning of the war and reintroduced later for U.S.
- Usually consisted of 30 to 70 unarmed ships.
- Most were merchant ships carrying supplies from North America to Britain.
- Armed convoy systems utilized an assortment of escorts (Navy and Air Force)



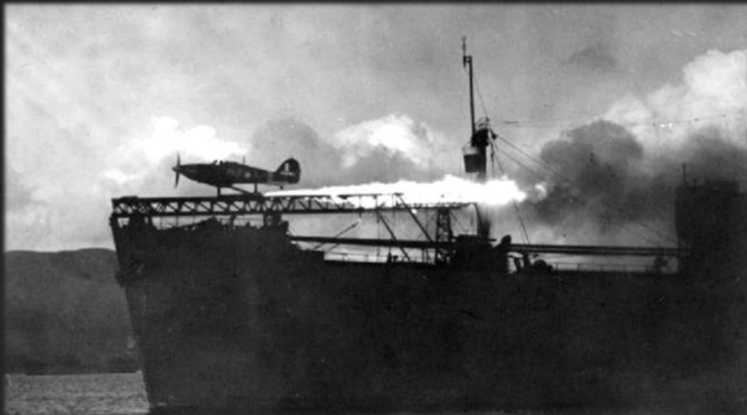
Convoy WS-12 being escorted by a Vought *Vindicator* scout bomber, launched from U.S.S. *Ranger*.



November 1942 UG convoy – the UG route ran from the U.S. to the Mediterranean.



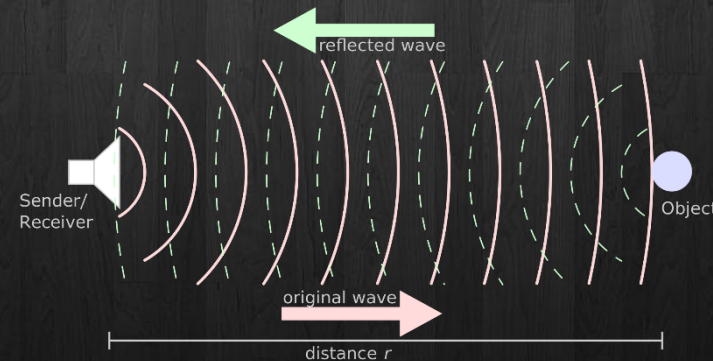
- Surface raiders deterred by presence of battleships.
- U-boats the main concern for Allied shipping.
- By the end of the war, losses for Allied shipping were 3:1 over U-boats.
- U-boat “wolfpack” would sink dozens of ships in the convoy at a time.
 - Wolfpacks were some of the most notorious means of U-boat formations.



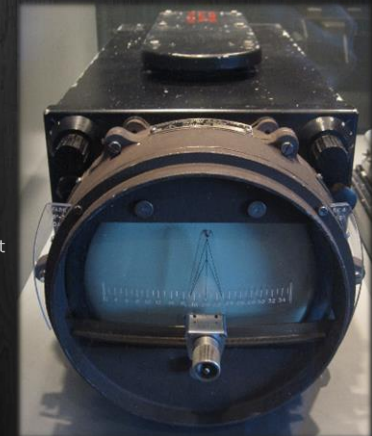
Hawker *Hurricane* is launched from a merchant ship equipped with catapult.

- Various tactics used to curb the U-boat threat.
 - * Raids on U-boat bases
 - * Q-Ships (submarine hunters) in disguise
 - * Increase in aircraft coverage
 - * Improved anti-sub weapons
 - * **Breaking of German cipher**
 - * Equipped merchant ships with catapults (CAM)
 - * Increase in warship escorts
 - * Long-range anti-submarine aircraft patrols
 - * Improvements in SONAR technology
- CAM ships were converted merchant ships equipped with catapults for aircraft.
- Pilots were to ditch the aircraft at the end of their flight.
9 combat launches, 1 pilot lost, 9 German aircraft destroyed.

- Improvements in SONAR and Radar systems.
- Wider equipping of ASDIC displays and SONAR systems by 1941 with most being shipped by 1944.
- The Americans were the last to adopt ASDIC displays.
- German countermeasures were largely unsuccessful.



ASDIC display
c.a. 1944.

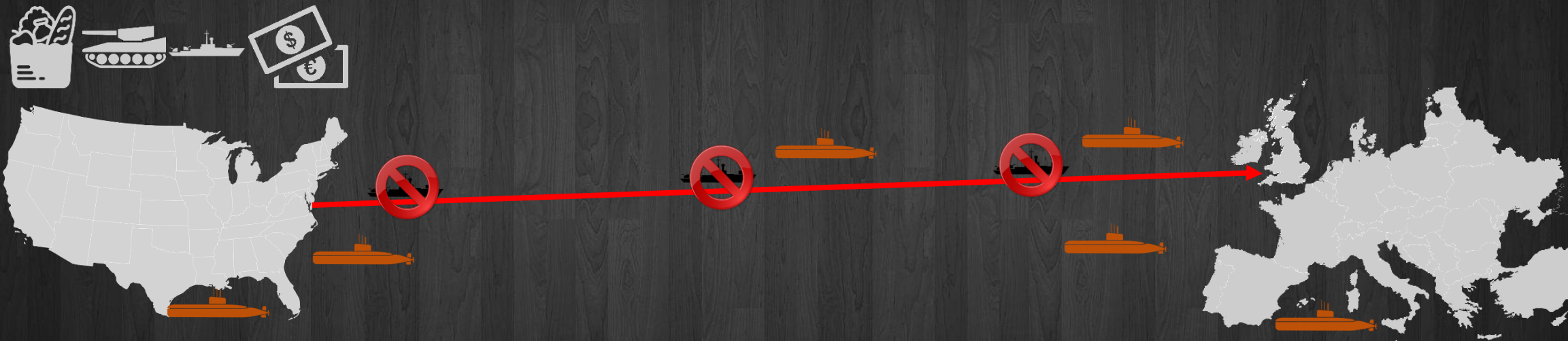


ALLIED SHIPPING CONVOYS STRUCK WHERE U-BOATS WERE SUNK



While the entrance of the U.S. meant a greater wealth of supplies – there's just one small problem:

U-boats...



- It was not until the U.S. production machine was fully operational that convoys were established.
- America used ship building in quantity as a primary deterrent for U-boats.
- The U.S. had no organized response to early U-boat attacks, and generally attempted to cover them up.



The *Pennsylvania Sun* moments after being struck in the Gulf of Mexico.

- U.S. did not initially institute a blackout.
- German Operations *Drumbeat* and *Neuland* were targeting U.S. ships.
- *Drumbeat*: Strike ships and ports on the east coast.
- *Neuland*: Strike ships, ports, and oil facilities in/on the Gulf of Mexico.

- Encompassed the Second Germany “Happy Time.”
- Oil fields in the Caribbean Sea and Gulf were constantly struck.
- Lack of convoy support or escorts left ships largely unprotected.
- Even after blackouts were instituted, skyglow continued to be an issue.
- U-boat spotters had to deal with poor spotting conditions:
Black U-boat, in black water that is below the bow of the ship and line of sight.

Animated illustration of how skyglow and blackouts function at sea.



- German shipping and commerce just as much at risk.
- Allies had a greater number of surface warships.
- Germany's supply lines were thus limited largely to railway.
- Allies had better shipbuilding capabilities.
 - Like many matters in the war, it ultimately came down to production.



New York port with a compliment of numerous *Victory Ships*. These ships were able to be produced in less than a month.



German battleship *Bismarck* taking fire from British battleship *Rodney*. *Bismarck* would not survive this battle.



- Allied supply lanes ravaged by wolf-packs.
- Quantity of ships in convoys acted as a deterrent.
- Allies had a vast network of resources, and a massive pool.
- “Launch and Forget” methodology.
 - Allies figured they could overwhelm the supply line to offset losses.
 - More ships deterred wolfpacks and increased safety potential.

- Operations to support *Torch* and North Africa.
- Many operations ran to support Malta.
- North African, Sicilian, and Italian Operations contributed to Mediterranean U-boat war.
- The progression of *Torch* wound down U-boat operations.*
- The landings in Italy and Sicily further silenced U-boat operations in the area.
- Increased land support meant better escort quality, including aircraft and scouts.

* *Torch* did not impact U-boat operations that originated in Europe, however.
It also did not account for the assorted Italian operated U-boat in the East Atlantic and Mediterranean.



Major operations in the Mediterranean theater c.a. 1940-1944. Battles covered a much broader area than depicted (Sirte was partially on land), and locations are approximate.

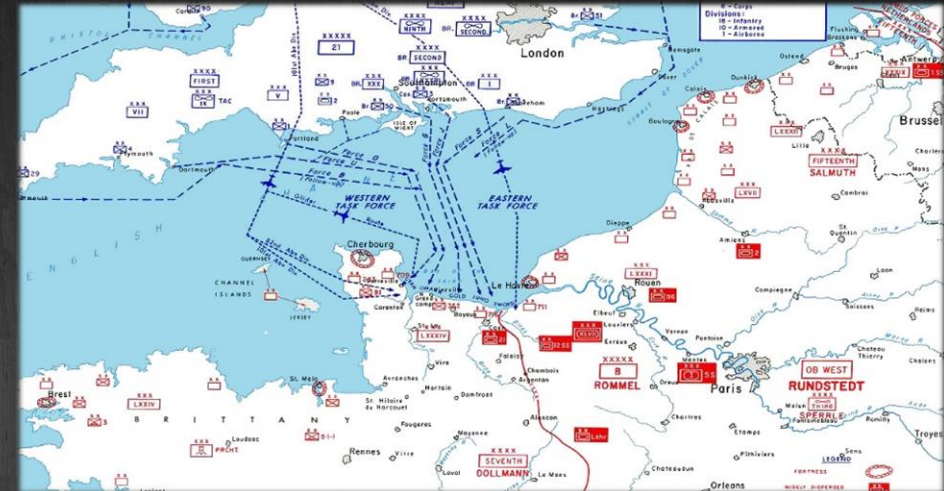


The Mediterranean Theater was therefore limited in its overall contribution to materiel losses.

- U-boat war had been in decline since 1943.
- Increase in Allied patrols, scouts, and spotter aircraft.
- Deception tactics in play.
- Large sum of ships would prove to be too much for the U-boats.
- 2-4 hits scored by Germans on vessels on D-Day.



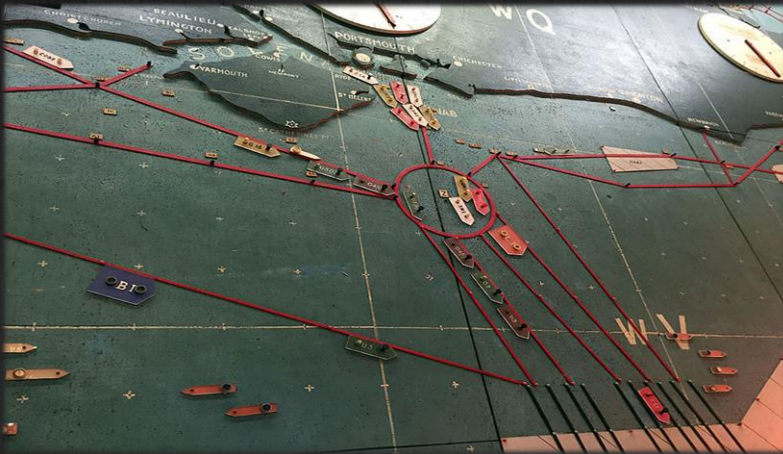
Larger scope of the outer extent of D-Day naval operations.



The OVERLORD campaign plan, including shipping and air routes for D-Day.



- 6,939 vessels from eight Navies participated in the operation.
- Unarmed to Warship ratio was almost 5:1.
- 864 merchant vessels participated.
- After the beaches were cleared, constant stream of shipping.
- Mulberries established immediately due to lack of deep-water ports.



The original D-Day drawing board highlighting the landing operations.

- German naval force in the area was miniscule at best.
- Approaches to Normandy were mined.
- Around 40 U-boats were in the Normandy area.
 - The sheer number of ships present made the operation unappealing.
- Allies had total air superiority and far too many scouts.
- Of the 100 or so German ships, only four claimed hits.
- Most large Allied ships lost in the operation were from mines or coastal bombardment.
- Bulk of ships lost were small landing craft.
 - Primary cause of loss was underwater obstructions.
- No U-boats engaged the Allied fleet during *Overlord*.

Image of Allied convoy on D-Day. Also note the airborne blimps for recon and communication.



- Included the faster Type XXI and XXIII U-boats.
- Allied Armies closing on U-boat bases reduced U-boat congestion.
- *Black Point* was the last U.S. boat to be struck in U.S. waters.
- Only five ships were sunk by *Elektroboot* U-boats.



U-2540 (as she is today) is the only remaining Type XXI U-boat remaining in functional condition.



Three *Elektroboot* U-boats awaiting scuttling off the coast of North Ireland. (2 others in back)



- The last action in the battle was the sinking of U-320 on 8 May.
- Two Allied minesweepers were torpedoed hours before German Surrender.
- Germany had failed to cut off Allied shipping and supply routes.
- Most U-boats remaining were sunk by the Germans to prevent capture.

- Sole Royal Navy mission was to scuttle surrendered U-boats.
- The U-boat graveyard was to be situated 100 miles north of Ireland.
- British used the U-boats for various purposes within *Deadlight*.
- Some used for target practice from the air and sea.
- Others were used to test new underwater radar systems.



A Polish destroyer tows a German U-boat out to sea for scuttling.



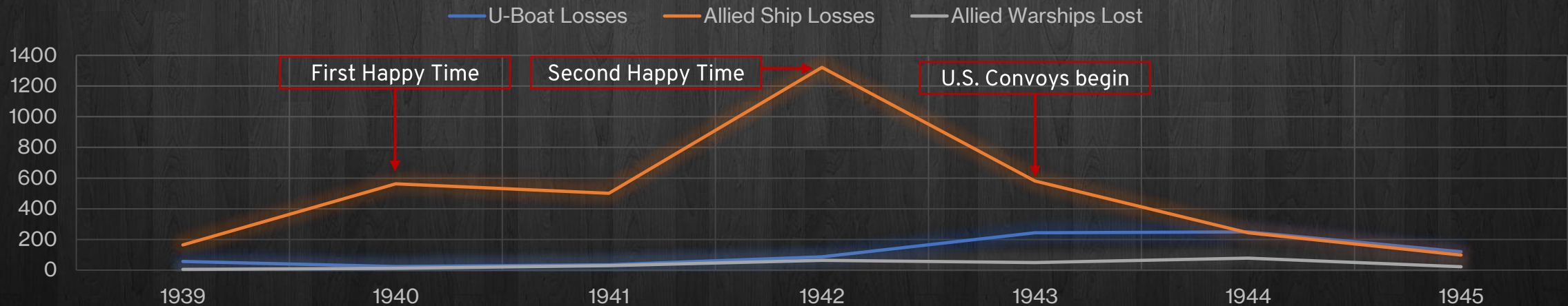
U-boats docked in Northern Ireland await tow in preparation for scuttling.



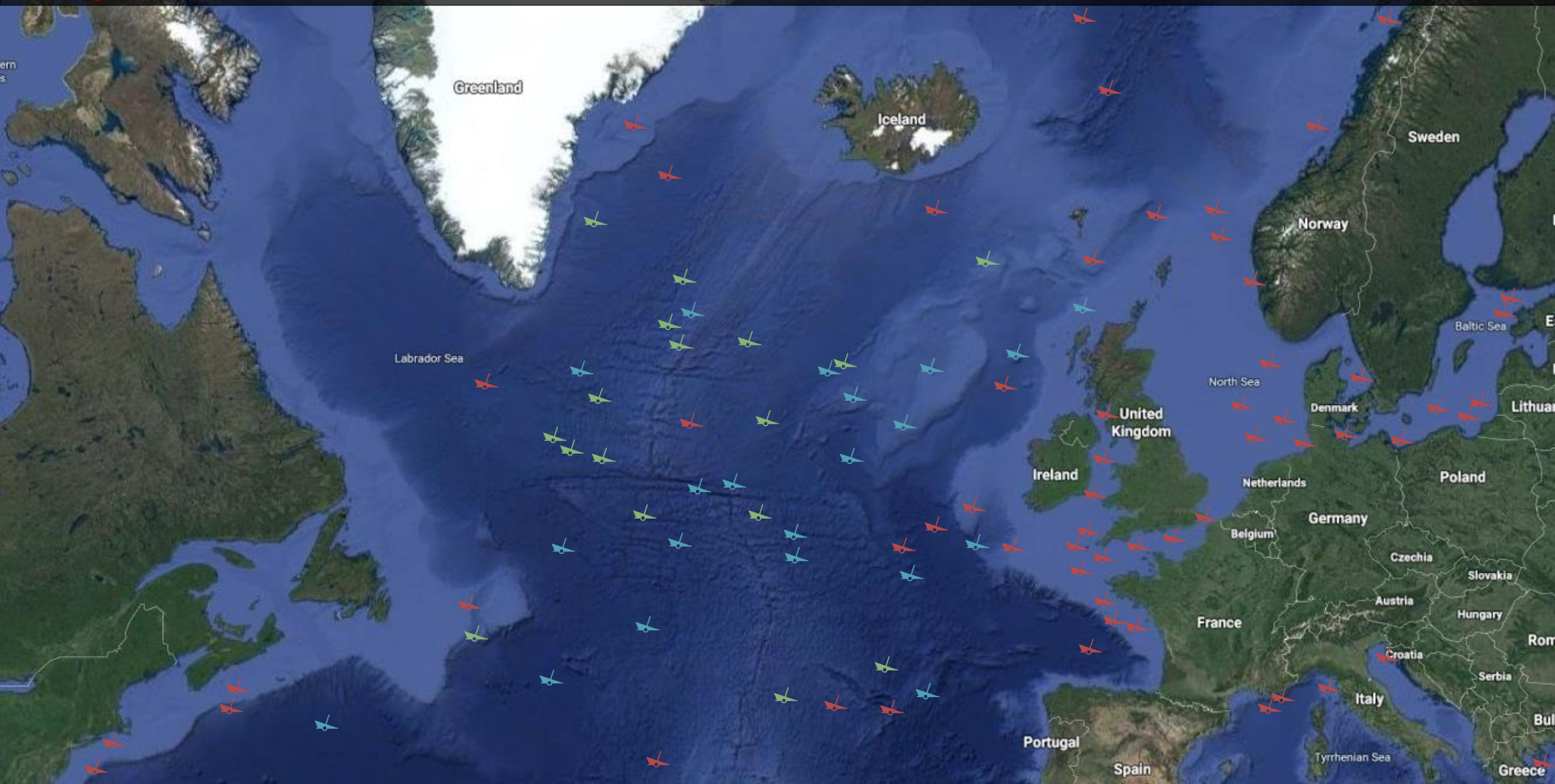
- Many were already in poor condition from dry-docking.
 - German high-command had already been destroying U-boats in 1945.
- 116 were officially scuttled as part of the operation.
- 56 of those sank while being towed to the target area.
- At least ten U-boats were omitted from the *Deadlight* program.
 - Mostly for research and isolated preservation.

	 U-Boat Losses	 Allied Ships Lost	Warships Lost			
1939:	57	165	5	Allied Tonnage Lost:	~14.5M	
1940:	24	563	12	Total U-Boat Losses:	816	Scuttled: 216
1941:	35	501	30	Total Shipping Losses:	3,474	
1942:	87	1,322	64	Total Warships Lost:	262	
1943:	244	582	50	Casualties:	 72,200	 30,500
1944:	249	243	79			
1945:	120	98	22			

Wartime Relationship



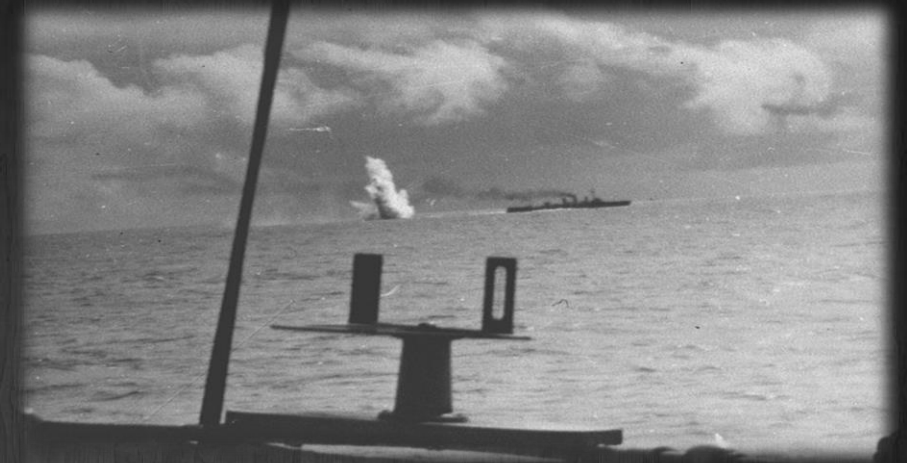
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- Bulk of the battle's took place in the middle of nowhere.
- There were no islands for ground battles.
- A battle for shipping lanes and access to resources.
- Many contingency operations were simply “winging it.”



British sailors hoist the *White Ensign* over captured U-boat U-190 in 1945.



Brazilian Navy launching depth charges to defend a convoy in the South Atlantic theater.



- Highlighted the usefulness of submarines in naval warfare.
- Highlighted the need for anti-submarine plans and weapons.
- Was the costliest battle in World War II.
- Outcome is controversial in some history circles.

WEBSITES

<https://www.uboot.net>

Collaborative website that focuses exclusively on U-boat operations (1914-1946)

<http://www.naval-history.net/WW2aBritishLosses10tables.htm>

Information on British shipping and losses (1939-1945)

FURTHER READING

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ON “THE HAVOC”

***A Battle for Supplies: The Battle of the Atlantic*, 9 July 2019**

<https://www.melodichavoc.com/history/a-battle-for-supplies-the-battle-of-the-atlantic/>



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