

The U-Boat Story

The places and the people

Written by Andy Owen



The Places

Kiel

Kiel was the second most important U-boat construction location in Germany with over 230 U-boats launched, second only to Hamburg.

From March 1865, Kiel was a Prussian port, but later became one of Germany's most important naval ports.

The first German U-boat **SM U-1** was commissioned at Kiel in 1906. The first U-boat flotilla was founded in October 1910 and a year later, saw the introduction of the **Ubootsschule** (U-boat School).



U-8, U-9 and U-11 in October 1935 in Kiel.

In September 1935, the Unterseebootsflottille Weddigen (1st U-boat flotilla) was founded in Kiel. Attached to the U-boat school was the Schulverband der Unterseebootsschule, (training unit of the U-boat school), which contained six U-boats.

The **Unterseebootsschule** and the attached flotilla moved away in May 1937 to Neustadt.

The Unterseebootsflottille Saltzwedel Flotilla (2nd U-boat flotilla) was founded in Kiel in September 1936, but moved, after only a few weeks later, to Wilhelmshaven.



In October 1937, the Unterseebootsflottille Lohs Flotilla (3rd U-boat flotilla) was founded in Kiel. In 1938, three more flotillas were formed in Kiel.

The Unterseebootsflottille Wegener (7th U-boat flotilla) in June, Unterseebootsflottille Hundius (6th U-boat flotilla) followed in October and finally the Unterseebootsflottille Emsmann (5th U-boat flotilla) in December.

Until the start of the war in Kiel, the staff of the FdU were based here.

In January 1940 the organization of the German U-boat force was totally changed and three new front flotillas were developed and two were based in Kiel, the 1st and the 7th (combat) flotillas. Both flotillas moved in 1940 and 1941 to their new bases in France.

The 5th flotilla was re-founded in June 1941 as a training unit - and was based in Kiel until the end of the war. During the war, more than 300 U-boats belonged to the 5th Flotilla.

During the period until the end of the war, only the 5th training flotilla was stationed in Kiel. Many newly completed boats that had finished their training started their first combat patrols from Kiel until the end of the war.

In February 1945, the 19th flotilla was transferred from Pillau to Kiel and surrendered there, three months later.

The U-Boat-Base Kilian in Kiel



The Kilian bunker in June, 1996

The U-boat-base **Kilian** in Kiel was designed as a shelter for new-built U-boats and did its job well with boats suffering little damage.

The docking of boats there was not possible. The ceiling consisted of pre-stressed concrete layers 4.8 m thick, the walls, 3.3 m. There were two boxes each with a length of 150m, with the berths within, over 138m wide on each side.

Kilian was the only base where two boats could be berthed one after the other. At least 12 VIIC U-boats could comfortably fit inside.

The U-boat pen was situated right within the water with hanging steel gates on the harbour side. There was no protection below the surface. On the north-west-corner, a two-storey anti-air-raid-tower with accommodation space, was erected with walls of only 30cm strength.

The base was built without a dry pit - and between the three quays, a wooden construction was laid as a working platform. Construction started in winter 1941/42 and many workers came from surrounding working camps. In addition, prisoners-of-war and deported people from the east were used and these people were not allowed to find shelter in bunkers during air raids.

As a result, their mortality rate was predictably very high.



Kilian bunker in March 1990

In autumn 1942, the first concrete box measuring 42.3 x 8 m was sunk to create a foundation for the two outer and the inner walls.

It was also around then, that the box-section work on the landside was completed.

During summer 1943, the walls were built but the construction of the ceiling took until November 43. On November 13th 1943, Kilian was consecrated - and the first U-boat to enter, was U 1101 six days later.

The ceiling was then 3.5m thick and the walls measured 2.5m. Later, the ceiling was strengthened with 1.3m heavy concrete, which still can be seen on the remaining workbox today.

During the work, 200.000 m³ concrete was used by Dyckerhoff & Widmann AG.

In January 1943, 1,200 men were working in two shifts around the clock, using 1200 m³ concrete per day.

During the air raids on Kiel, Kilian took some hits, which did not cause serious damage.



The Kilian bunker during sandfill in June, 1994

There were no direct attacks either by the RAF or the USAAF on Kilian until the night raids on April 9th and 10th, when the RAF started its 81st attack on Kiel with 359 aircraft.

During these raids, the heavy cruiser **Admiral Scheer** was sunk and **Admiral Hipper** and **Emden** were seriously damaged.

Just 1,000m away, the southern gate of Kilian was destroyed by a bomb, its steel plates still lying on the harbour bottom.

Inside the pen, the small U-4708 was lying close to the larger U-170 due to some testing works. There were 5 workers and 2 crewmembers on board.

U -4708 was damaged by steel plates flying around and sprang a leak. The pressure within the pen caused by the explosion was so intense that the instruments on board U-170 simulated a 40m-dive for some minutes.

All the people in the pen died immediately.

U-4708 was pushed into the air, collided with the pier and sank within a few moments. Six of the men trapped on board managed to get into an air-bubble, three climbed from there into the tower and escaped in a hard struggle against the rising water.

The bodies of the five other crewmen remained on board until today.

The crew of U-170 rescued the survivors.



Kilian bunker in March, 1990

U-170 managed to leave the pen and then started producing electricity for the bombed Howaldtswerke yard, before leaving for Horten, Norway, on April 27th 1945.

The last days of the war saw U-393, U-475, U-2512 and U-1162 in the base, which was by then, standing in an area of total destruction.

The last air raid was at midnight on May 2nd 1945. Two hours later, the U-boat crews were told to head to sea or blow up their ships.

Some hours later, U-475 was scuttled in the harbour, U-393 was attacked off Holnis, two men being killed - and the other ships were scuttled off Flensburg shortly afterwards.

After the war, divers of the Disposal Group inspected the wreck of U-4708, and it was successfully identified as wreck No. 28, new build no. 950. Attempts to raise the wreck with air pressure failed.

On September 1st 1945, the Guardian Division engineers under the leadership of Lt. Col. Blickford started the preparations for blowing up the pen.

It took three weeks to drill 288 holes and inject 0.57 kg explosives into each.

107 bombs with 113 kg explosives were also brought into the building together with other ammunition. The merchant ship Jan Wellem was anchored at a distance of 120 metres, to protect the city from the expected flood wave.

On October 25th, at least twelve three-ton explosives detonated and caused not only the mid-wall and the ceiling to be destroyed, but cut off also the outer walls.

Tons of concrete buried U-4708 and some small craft.

In September 1959, the remaining Southern entrance of Kilian - which until then had still formed a fragmented gate - was blown up by Harry Stallzus. This was because of its lack of stability,

Before this, he had raised a sunken Seehund midget boat in front of the pen, its machine doing further service until the 80's in his own motorboat Hella.

He also raised some steel and other scrap from the bottom.

In 1989, some divers of the German navy inspected the underwater world of Kilian, in order to trace U-4708. But they had serious difficulties getting to the wreck, as it was caught in a tunnel beneath the sunken ceiling and almost completely covered by mud to a depth of 8m.

Another remarkable post-war-event was the sinking of the pirate radio ship Galaxy, better known as the famous Radio London on April 19th 1979, after five years of neglect in the North box.

This ship, during the war, was a US-minelayer of 800 tons, called King, which saw action off Japan.

On August 16th 1986 salvage work started, due to oil spilling out of the rusting hull, but it was not until August 30th that the giant floating-crane Hebelift 3 was able to raise the wreck, which was then scrapped nearby.

In May 1994, several holes in the Kilian were filled with sand to prevent the possible explosion of remaining explosives.

During recent years, there has been intense public and political discussion whether Kilian should be preserved as a war-memorial. But, it now looks like it will be removed to make way for civil harbour expansion plans in the near future.

Today the ruin is characterised by the remaining stumps of the South gate's entrance and some ceiling remains blocking it, as they lean against them.

The North gate was completely destroyed, only the cube of the mentioned anti-air raid tower showing, with a dramatic list half sunken above the surface.

The middle pier is still visible with a height of 4m above the water, the rough surface now being covered by plants. In the rear, some parts of the ceiling remained, resting on the massive walk-system that led crosswise through the pen.

Above this, most of the working box still has its full height, with only one side being cut off. It was not blown up completely, to prevent certain yard-installations from being destroyed too.

A half-sunken barge lying in shallow water is now partially buried in the sand fill, which looks like a little beach in the North box. There are also lots of debris of the Howaldt Yard, which formerly owned the whole area.

At low tide, the high rising parts of the outer walls and the sunken ceiling, can be detected weed-covered. There is no official access to Kilian, but it's possible to reach the ruins by boat or via the surrounding harbour zone and also by some interesting diving.

The area is considered dangerous and is patrolled by the water-police, as there is danger of parts collapsing. This actually happened in 1996.

There is little or no access to Kilian today - Kilian is pretty much gone for good.

In late October 1998, public access was allowed to Kilian, with guides being available (probably only for special occasions). The access was by a circle track around the area.

Between 1999 and 2002 the bunker was demolished to make space for cargo.

The U-Boat-Base and Yard Konrad

The second base to be built in Kiel was Konrad, constructed in a comparatively easy way by housing the existing dry dock III of the Deutsche Werke.

The purpose was to shelter boats during small repairs and its capacity was 5 VIIC U-boats.

This work was done under the leadership of Wayss & Freitag AG and was commenced in April 1943.

The foundations were laid outside the old dock walls to avoid difficulties caused by their weight. Dock III remained flooded so that earth could be removed by ship.

Dock IV right beside, was filled up to provide space for building equipment. In August 1943 the deeply laid foundations were completed, with wall construction starting in December 43, and a three-storey workbox installed down to the bottom of the dock.

Original plans were changed in February 1944, to complete Konrad as a bomb-sheltered yard so that an additional lock had to be built 28m into the existing harbour basin.

This part was erected on sunken concrete-blocks, the first of which was moved into position on February 16th 1944.

On April 19th 1944, the construction of the ceiling commenced.

200 layers were put on the side walls, with a speed of 16 per day - which was about 13 m.

In an air raid on the nights of 23rd/ 24th of July, 628 RAF-bombers attacked the shipyard and damaged the building site with 10 bombs.

Work was restarted, but not until August 15th. Then, another attack followed during the night from August 26th to 27th, delaying construction further.

Konrad was finally completed in October 1944.

A direct hit on April 13th, caused only minor damage. In the meantime, the construction of U-boats had begun, with the first equipment installed on October 2nd 1944.

Until spring 1945, sections of XX1 submarines were built - and in March 1945, Seehund midget submarine-construction in three sections was started, but didn't, of course, get too far.

In October 1946, Konrad was blown up by the allies, the debris remaining until the 60's.

For the construction of new, large shipbuilding halls of the Howaldtswerke Kiel AG, the four former docks, having been filled up with sand after the war, like the whole yard-basin, had to be excavated.

During this process, some shattered Seehund-wrecks were found, also the warship Brummer was still lying buried, as it had been sunk in the dock next to Konrad.

Other craft that had been sunk can still be detected in the sand.

Removal work started in October 1961 and lasted until May 1962. Large amounts of explosives were needed to cut the 180.000 m³ into pieces small enough to be handled.

Nothing remains today and there is no access to the whole area as it belongs neither to the Howaldtswerke Deutsche Werft AG nor to the adjacent fitting-out basin of the Navy.

Only a huge area of grass still partially marks the outline of the artificial basin where Konrad was situated.

Just as a final point on Kiel, three of Germany's most notable WW2 ships were built there - **Deutschland in 1931, Gneisenau in 1936 and Prinz Eugen in 1938.**

Valentin Submarine Factory



The **Valentin submarine factory** is a protective shelter on the Weser River in the Bremen suburb of Rekum.

It was built to construct German U-boats during World War II.

It was a massive facility - and it took between 10,000 to 12,000 slave labourers to build it in just 20 months.

The factory was under construction from 1943 to March 1945 using forced labour, but was damaged by air-raids and unfinished by the end of the war.

The Valentin factory was the largest fortified U-boat facility in Germany, and was second only to those built at Brest in France.

There were already three U-boat sites in Germany – Nordsee III on the island of Heligoland, Fink II and Ebe II in the city of Hamburg, and Kilian in the neighbouring city of Kiel. More were under construction, but Bremen was chosen to host two of the biggest –Valentin and Valentin II (which was never started).

The entire project was doomed from the very start, however.

Despite their talent for organization and planning, the Germans really made a mess of the project. Since the Allies had already begun bombing German cities, it was decided that submarines would not be constructed in Valentin.

Type XXI U-boats and would instead be built at other factories then brought to Valentin and assembled there.

The idea behind this complicated scheme was to ensure that no single bombing raid could take out U-boat production.

It was also hoped that the Allies would be kept guessing as to where they were being made and where they were being assembled – bearing in mind that the Germans didn't know that their code had been cracked and that the British were aware of their plans.

As a manufacturing facility, it differed from conventional U-boat pens, which were designed to house and service operational U-boats.

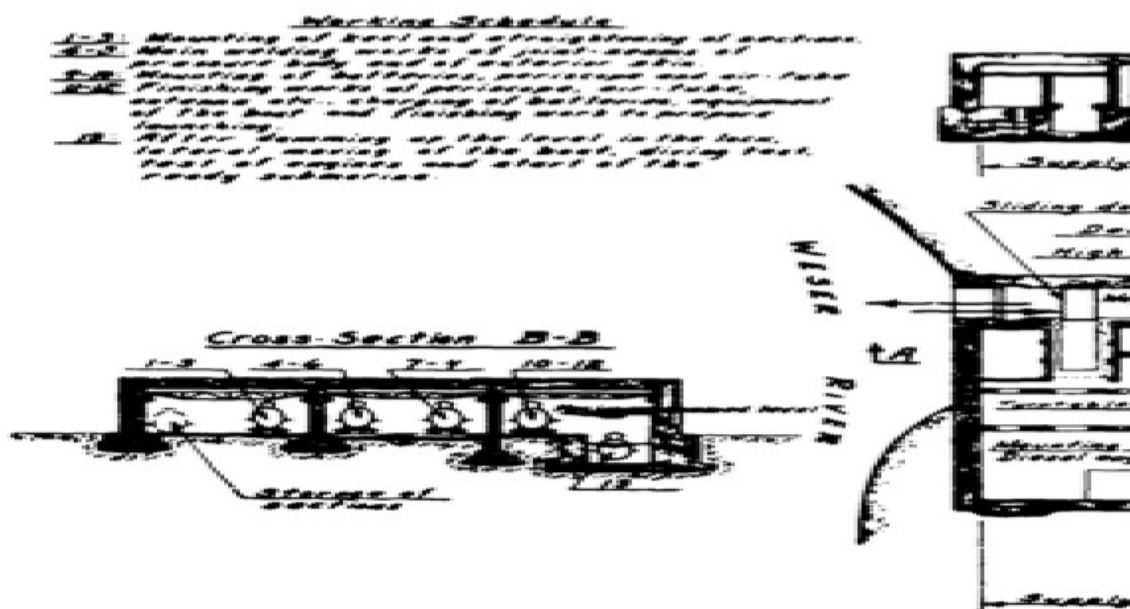


A roof truss of *U-bootbunker Valentin* is lifted into place (1944)

Production of U-boats by German shipyards had been dramatically reduced as a result of bombing by the Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Forces, necessitating the creation of bomb-proof production sites.

Many such sites were in use in 1944, including the U-boat pen *Nordsee III* on the German island of Helgoland, *Fink II* and *Elbe II* in Hamburg and *Kilian* in Kiel.

Other sites in Germany and other occupied countries were under construction or planned. These included *Hornisse* in Bremen, *Elbe XVII* and *Wenzel* in Hamburg, *Wespe* in Wilhelmshaven and *Kasparin* in Kiel.



After completion, the bunker would have had a work-force of around 4,500 slave workers.² Under the management of the Bremer Vulkan shipyard, it would have assembled U-boats.

Each would be built from eight, large, pre-fabricated sections manufactured in other shipyards such as Bremer Vulkan, Deschimag AG Weser with its bunker *Hornisse*, Kriegsmarinewerft Wilhelmshaven with bunker *Wespe* and Deschimag Seebeckwerft in Bremerhaven.

They were to be shipped to *Valentin* on barges.

The bunker was to house 13 assembly bays (called *Taktplatz* in German, or *Takt* for short), each carrying out one part of the assembly process. Two bays, *Takt 9* and *Takt 10*, were underneath box-like structures on the roof that allowed the extra height needed for the installation of periscopes, snorkels and antennas.

The two last bays, *Takt 12* and *Takt 13*, were separated by high walls from the rest of the building and could be closed by water-tight floodgates.

Takt 13, the final bay, was a dry dock with an 8-metre (26 ft) deep pool of water. The two separated bays could be flooded to give a total water depth of about 20 metres from the bottom of *Takt 13*'s dry dock to the water-surface at the building's roof-level.

Takt 13 was to be used for leak-tests of the completed U-boats as well as engine starts and other tests. In addition to the 13 assembly bays, the bunker housed workshops and store-rooms for the prefabricated sections, diesel-engines and batteries, and storage tanks for fuel and lubricants.

The gateway in the western wall could be closed by means of a sliding bomb-proof door which opened to a small canal, a creek and then directly onto the Weser river. Through this, sections of submarine would be delivered by barges and completed submarines could leave.

Operations at *Valentin* were intended to commence by late 1944, but was postponed to mid-1945 due in part to a combination of manpower ,supply shortages and bombing.

It is likely that production would have been limited due to the severe quality control problems experienced with the prefabricated sections.

Albert Speer (the *Reich* armaments minister) had directed that the sections be made by inland companies and then assembled at the shipyards so as to ease production.

However, these companies had little experience in shipbuilding resulting in lengthy re-working to rectify flaws in the sections.

Out of the 118 boats completed, only four were rated fit for combat before the war ended in Europe.

Most of the 10,000–12,000 people who built Valentin were slave workers, who lived in seven camps located between 3 and 8 kilometres from the bunker. Some were housed in the nearby Bremen-Farge concentration camp, the largest subcamp of the Neuengamme concentration camp complex, with 2,092 prisoners as of March 25, 1945.

The camp facility was erected close-by at a large naval fuel oil storage facility; some prisoners were accommodated in an empty underground fuel tank.

Among the labourers were mainly non-German concentration camp inmates (*Fremdarbeiter*) as well as Russian, Polish, and French prisoners of war, but also some German criminals and political prisoners.

The camp was initially run by the SS, but the expansion of the camp network in the area, led to a shortage of personnel. By mid-1944, the camp was commanded by an army captain, Ulrich Wahl, and the prisoners were guarded by a detachment of naval infantry.

Only a handful of SS men remained involved in the running of the camp.

Work on the bunker took place around the clock, with personnel forced to work 12-hour shifts from 7am to 7pm. This resulted in a high death rate amongst the prisoners.

However, the identity of only 553 victims, mostly Frenchmen, has been confirmed.

It's estimated that some 6,000 people died on the project – a figure that doesn't include Russians and Poles since their deaths were not recorded.

To the Nazis, they were sub-human and not worth mentioning. Most fatalities occurred in the iron detachments – among those responsible for moving girders of iron and steel.

A French survivor, Raymond Portefaix, stated that a prisoner's life expectancy fell dramatically on being assigned to one of these detachments.

He described the *Eisenkommandos* as suicide squads.

The prisoners held at the Neuengamme concentration camp and its subcamps were evacuated in April 1945, just before the capture of the area by the British army.

Many were placed on board the SS Cap Arcona. This German ship was heavily laden with around 5,000 concentration-camp prisoners when she was attacked and sunk by the RAF on 3 May 1945.

Only 350 prisoners survived.

The sinking took place just one day before the German surrender at Lüneburg Heath, the unconditional surrender of German forces in the Netherlands and North-West



Friedrich Stein's monument dedicated to those who suffered and died building Valentin, commemorated on 16 September 1983.

The Valentin factory was attacked by the RAF on 27 March 1945.

The attacking force consisted of twenty Avro Lancaster heavy bombers of 617 Squadron which had, after the Dambusters raid, developed precision bombing methods.

Simultaneously, a force of 115 Lancasters bombed the nearby fuel oil storage depot in the village of *Schwanewede*.

The bombers were escorted by ninety RAF North American Mustang fighters of 11 Group.

The Lancasters attacking Valentin each carried a single large earthquake bomb – seven carried the 5 ton 'Tallboy', thirteen carried the 10 ton 'Grand Slam'.

Two 'Grand Slam's hit the target and penetrated about half-way through the 15-foot (4.6 m) thick ferrous concrete roof before exploding.

The explosions blew large holes in the remaining thickness of the roof and brought down around 1,000 tons of debris into the chamber below.

Workers who were inside the bunker at the time survived, as the bombs did not penetrate the roof before detonating. Another bomb caused damage to a nearby electricity plant, workshops and a concrete mixing plant.

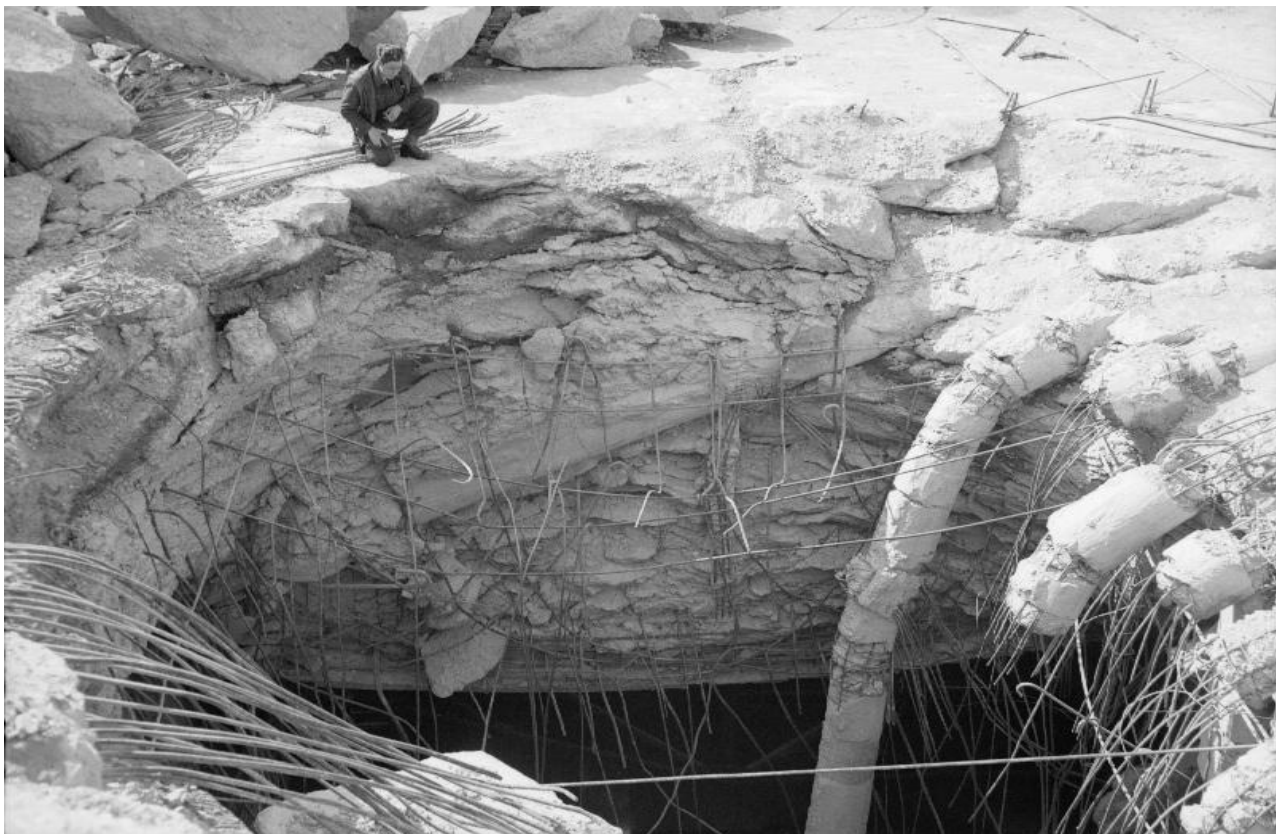
Fortunately for the British, the two bombs struck and penetrated the 4.5-metre (15 ft) thick west section of the roof.

Post-war American analysis suggested the 7-metre (23 ft) thick, east section would have been able to resist even the Grand Slams, although not without significant damage, and it is unlikely that it would have survived repeated hits.

Three days later, on 30 March, the US Eighth Air Force attacked Valentin with Disney bombs. These were large (4,500 lb (2,040 kg)) weapons with hard steel casings, rocket-assisted to increase their penetrating power. Sixty were launched but only one hit the target, causing little damage.

However, considerable damage was done to installations surrounding the bunker.

The factory was abandoned, and four weeks after the bombing, the area was occupied by the British Army's XXX Corps, which captured Bremen after a five-day battle.



Valentin's 15' reinforced ferro-concrete roof damaged by a 22,000-pound M Grand Slam bomb



A 22,000 lb Grand Slam bomb

After the war, when the already installed machine tools had been removed, further bombing of *Valentin* was carried out.

Beginning in March 1946, *Project Ruby* was a joint Anglo-American affair to investigate the use of penetration bombs against heavily protected concrete targets.

The U-boat pen *Nordsee III* and subterranean bunkers on the island of Heligoland were also selected as targets for this testing.

Bombs were carried by Avro Lancasters from No. 15 Squadron RAF and US Boeing B-29 Superfortress and Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress aircraft operating from RAF Marham.

Around 140 sorties were flown, testing a range of different bombs.

Because it seemed impossible to destroy *Valentin* by bombing it, the decision was made to destroy it by blasting. This idea was later abandoned because the blasting would have caused severe damage to the nearby villages of Rekum and Farge including the power-station in Farge.

In 1960 the bunker was taken over by the German Navy, for use as a storage depot.

In 1983, a memorial to the workers who built *Valentin* was erected. It is titled *Vernichtung durch Arbeit* (Extermination through labour), it was by Bremen artist Fritz Stein.

High maintenance costs forced the German Defence Ministry to offer the bunker for sale in 2008. Military use finally came to an end on 31 December 2010.

Its custodianship was passed to a group called *Denkort Bunker Valentin* with the intention of developing it as a museum and a memorial.

Wilhelmshaven

Wilhelmshaven was - and still is - one of the German navy's most important and largest bases.

The shipyard was founded on the site of the Wilhelmshaven Imperial Shipyard , which had been closed down after World War I.

In 1935, the name was changed to *Kriegsmarinewerft Wilhelmshaven* (Wilhelmshaven Naval Shipyard) when the German navy (*Reichsmarine*) was renamed *Kriegsmarine* by the Nazi Third Reich.

Already in 1940, the German navy had plans to build a large U-boat bunker in the harbour, but with the conquest of France in 1940, these plans were changed.

The yard's main activities were in building U-boats and repairing damaged warships. Personnel were often assigned to organising naval facilities in occupied countries, e.g., in the ports of Lorient, Brest and St. Nazaire.

During the war, Wilhelmshaven was bombed several times and the German navy therefore built seven navy protective bunkers T750 to protect their crews. One of the biggest attacks took place in February 1943, when 177 aircraft bombed the large ammunition depot in the southern part of the port.

Much of the ammunition exploded and the explosion destroyed a large part of the yard and the city.

In 1944, the construction of the bunker *wespe* (wasp) started. The *Wespe* bunker was to produce modules for Germans newest U-boat, type XII.

The production of this type of U-boat was unusual. It consisted of nine modules, which were shipped by barges to assembly plants where they were welded together and the U-boat ready-mounted.

One of these assembly plants was just 50 km inside the river Weser, by Farge.

The bunker was never completed and on the 6th May 1945, it was, with the rest of the city, conquered by Polish and Canadian troops.





At the war's end, there were about 17,000 workers.

Polish and British troops reached Wilhelmshaven in May 1945. For a time, the yard refurbished ships to be sent to the Allies as war reparations, but, from 1946, most buildings and equipment were either dismantled or blown up.

Since 1957, part of the site has housed an arsenal for the German Navy (*Deutsche Bundesmarine*).

A massive selection of ships were built at Wilhelmshaven, including some legendary names - **Admiral Scheer in 1931, Admiral Graf Spee in 1936, Scharnhorst in 1939 and Tirpitz in 1941.**

Bremerhaven



The Wilhelm Bauer U-Boot Type XXI U-2540 submarine in Bremerhaven, Germany in 2013.

Bremerhaven was one of the main bases for the German navy.

One of the installations there was a naval school for the training of new recruits. In 1943 the German navy built a total of six protective bunkers to protect their crews in Bremerhaven, known as Navy protective bunker T750.

The base was attacked constantly by the allies.

The most terrible attack occurred in the evening of September 18th 1944, when 206 Lancaster bombers of the Royal Air Force attacked the centre of the town and destroyed it within 20 minutes.

This resulted in 618 dead, 1193 wounded and 30,000 homeless.

2070 buildings had been destroyed, including the historic early 19th century core.

Only very few houses from that era are preserved today.

Towards the end of the war, Bremerhaven was spared the bombing, because the Americans planned to use the port as a future supply base.

All of Wesermünde, including those parts which did not previously belong to Bremerhaven, was a post-war enclave run by the United States within the British zone of northern Germany.

Most of the US military units and their personnel were assigned to the city's Carl Schurz Kaserne. One of the longest based US units at the Kaserne was a US military radio and TV station, an "Amerikanischer Soldatensender", AFN Bremerhaven, which broadcast for 48 years.

In 1993, the Kaserne was vacated by the US military and returned to the German government.

In 1947 the city became part of the federal state Free Hanseatic City of Bremen and was consequently renamed from Wesermünde to Bremerhaven.

Today, Bremerhaven is therefore part of the city-state of Bremen, being to all intents and purposes a state comprising two cities, while also a city in its own right.

This is complicated somewhat by the fact that the city of Bremen has owned the "overseas port" within Bremerhaven since 1927.

To further complicate matters, a treaty between the two cities (as mentioned in Section 8 of Bremerhaven's municipal constitution) makes Bremerhaven responsible for the municipal administration of those parts owned directly by Bremen (known as *stadtbremisch*).

The People



Otto Kretschmer



*Born 1 May 1912 - Heidau, Neisse,
Province of Silesia, Prussia, German
Empire (now Hajduki Nyskie, Nysa
County, Opole Voivodeship, Poland)*

*Died 5 August 1998 (aged 86) - Bavaria,
Germany*

Years of service: 1930-45, 1955-70

*Rank: Reichsmarine (1930-35):
Leutnant zur See Kriegsmarine (1935-45):
Fregattenkapitän Bundesmarine (1955-
70): Flottillenadmiral*

Nickname - Otto der Schweiger (Silent Otto)

*Commands held: U-35, 31 July 1937 - 15 August 1937, U-23, 1 October 1937 - 1
April 1940, U-99, 18 April 1940 - 17 March 1941*

Awards: Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, with Oak Leaves and Swords

Otto Kretschmer was the most successful submarine commander of any navy during the Second World War.

In the first 18 months of the war, he sank 44 ships totalling over 266,000 tons. His reward was celebrity status in Nazi Germany - and he was awarded the coveted Ritterkreuz, the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords.

His U-boat was decorated with a horseshoe symbol on the conning tower and, as with most submariners, he rode his luck at times. In one month in 1941, when three top submarine commanders - all personal friends - were put out of action by the British, his luck finally ran out.

On 17th March 1941, in the North Atlantic, Kretschmer's vessel was caught by HMS Walker and badly damaged. Kretschmer was able to scuttle his submarine and lead most of the crew safely into captivity.

Otto Kretschmer was born in Heidau, Neisse. At the age of seventeen he spent eight months living in England at Exeter, where he learned to speak English fluently.

He joined the Reichsmarine in April 1930.

Kretschmer's first operational experience on a submarine was as a lieutenant on the U-35, a Type VIIA U-boat, in 1937.

He was given a brief, interim, command of U-35 in August 1937 and this appointment coincided with Germany's involvement in the Spanish Civil War.

The boat was ordered to patrol an area off the Spanish coast. U-35 returned to Germany after an uneventful patrol during which no ships were sunk. In September 1937, Kretschmer took command of U-23, a Type IIB coastal U-boat.

The German invasion of Poland found Kretschmer still in command of U-23, and he was soon sent into action along with the rest of the Kriegsmarine's U-boat fleet.

His first war patrols ranged across the North Sea and around the British coast. His initial success came in the Moray Firth where he attacked and sank the Danish 10,517 ton tanker Danmark on 12 January 1940, using torpedoes.

The British admiralty at that time thought that the tanker had struck a mine as they did not suspect there was a U-boat in the area. On 18 February, Kretschmer sank the 1,300 ton British fleet destroyer Daring off the Pentland Firth while she was escorting convoy HN-12 from Norway.

U-boat crews almost always avoided deliberately engaging enemy destroyers, so Daring's destruction was seen as a very skillful attack by both Kretschmer and U-23.

In April 1940, after eight patrols, Kretschmer was transferred to the newly completed Type VII B U-99, and, in a sense, began his legacy.

After two months' training and shakedown manoeuvres in German waters, Kretschmer took the boat into action in June 1940. During U-99's first four patrols, Kretschmer commenced attacking convoys at night on the surface, sinking merchant ships with highly accurate shots, using only one torpedo per target ship.

The quote "one torpedo ... one ship" is attributed to Kretschmer around this time.

His particularly brazen and risky innovation was to execute these night surface attacks inside the massed convoys. Admiral Sir George Creasy considered the manoeuvre so dangerous he thought it had been done by mistake..

His most successful patrol occurred in November and December 1940 when U-99 sank three British armed merchant cruisers - HMS Laurentic (18,724 tons), HMS Patroclus (11,314 tons) and HMS Forfar (16,402 tons). Laurentic and Patroclus were attacked on the night of 3/4 November, after they responded to distress calls from the 5,376 ton British freighter Casanare, which U-99 had mortally wounded about 250 miles west of Ireland.

Forfar was sunk on 2 December while steaming to join up with and escort the outbound convoy OB-251. The three AMC's totalled over 46,000 gross tons.

These three successes earned Kretschmer the number-one spot on the Aces list, and he was never surpassed.

Kretschmer was meticulous in his conduct towards the crews of torpedoed ships.

When attacking lone merchantmen in the days before wolf pack tactics began in earnest, he had been known to hand down bottles of spirits and blankets into lifeboats and give them a course to the nearest land.

On one patrol in September 1940, Kretschmer had also recovered a survivor of another torpedo attack who was alone in the Atlantic on a small raft and took him aboard, transferring him to a lifeboat after his next successful attack.

On his last patrol in March 1941, he sank 10 more ships, but these were to be his last victims. On 17 March 1941, during a counterattack by the British escorts of Convoy HX-112, U-99 was disabled after repeated depth charge attacks by the destroyers Walker and Vanoc.

Kretschmer surfaced and, under fire from the British vessels, scuttled his boat. Three of his men were lost, but Kretschmer and the remainder of U-99's crew were captured.

Kretschmer's usual standards of conduct were evident during the sinking of his boat. He signalled Walker asking for rescue for his men, taking care to ensure as many left the submarine as possible, and assisted some of his crew towards the rescue nets hung from the British destroyer.

Kretschmer's strength was evidently failing in the cold ocean, as his own rescue was at the hands of a British sailor who climbed down the nets and plucked him from the water.

Following his capture, he spent almost seven years as a prisoner of war in the hands of the British at No 1 POW-camp Grizedale Hall and later in Canada. In 1943, the German command tried to rescue him (in Operation Kiebitz) but that daring plan failed. In December 1947, he was allowed to return to Germany.

Like several other surviving German naval veterans, Kretschmer joined West Germany's navy, the Bundesmarine. He joined the newly formed service in 1955 and two years later, was appointed commanding officer of the 1. Geleitgeschwader (1st Escort Squadron).

The following year, he was given the position of commander of the Bundesmarine's Amphibische Streitkräfte ("amphibious forces"). From 1962 he served as a staff officer in NATO before becoming Chief of Staff of the NATO command COMNAVBALTAP at Kiel in May 1965.

He retired in September 1970 as a flotilla admiral.

While on holiday in Bavaria in the summer of 1998, Kretschmer died in an accident during a boating expedition on the Danube to celebrate his 50th wedding anniversary, at the age of 86.

His body was cremated, and his ashes were scattered at sea at the Ostsea.

Engelbert Endrass



Born 2 March 1911, Bamberg

*Died 21 December 1941 (aged 30)
Northeast of Azores*

Rank Kapitänleutnant

Unit 7th U-boat Flotilla

Commands held: U-46, U-567

Awards:

- * *Wehrmacht Long Service Award 4th Class (5 April 1939)*
- * *Spanish Cross (6 June 1939)*
- * *Iron Cross (1939) 2nd Class (25 September 1939) & 1st Class (17 October 1939)*
- * *U-boat War Badge (1939) (19 December 1939); with Diamonds (18 July 1941)*
- * *Italian Croce di Guerra with Swords (1 November 1941)*
- * *Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves*
- * *Knight's Cross on 5 September 1940 as Oberleutnant zur See and commander of U-46*
- * *14th Oak Leaves on 10 June 1941 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-46*

Endrass began his naval career in April 1935.

After some months on the cruiser Deutschland and service on escort ships, he was assigned in October 1937 to the U-boat force.

He joined U-47 in December 1938 as Leutnant zur See. He was first Watch Officer when Günther Prien made his famous Scapa Flow attack and sank the battleship HMS Royal Oak. The famous snorting bull emblem on U-47's conning tower was painted by Endrass before they returned.

Endrass remained on U-47 until December 1939, when he left the U-boat and after some training courses took over command of U-46 in May 1940 from the relatively unsuccessful Herbert Sohler, who had only sunk two ships in five patrols.

Endrass had immediate success and sank five ships, including the British auxiliary cruiser HMS Carinthia.

Endrass's success continued on his second patrol with U-46, sinking five more ships, including another British auxiliary cruiser, HMS Dunvegan Castle although the main periscope was damaged. After returning from this patrol, Endrass received the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.

Five patrols later he received the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross. The presentation was made on 30 June 1941 by Adolf Hitler at the Führer Headquarter Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair) in Rastenburg.

In September 1941 Endrass left U-46, which would become a training vessel, and a month later took over U-567. On his second patrol, he was killed on 21 December 1941 while operating against Convoy HG 76, when U-567 was sunk with all hands by depth charges from the British sloop HMS Deptford and corvette HMS Samphire, northeast of the Azores.

Erich Topp



Born 2nd July 1914,

Died 26th December 2005

Rank Konteradmiral

*Commands held: U-57, U-552,
U-3010, U-2513*

Awards

- * U-boat War Badge (7 November 1939) & with Diamonds (11 April 1942)*
- * War Merit Cross 2nd Class with Swords (30 January 1944) & 1st Class with Swords (1944)*
- * Iron Cross (1939) 2nd Class (1 January 1940) & 1st Class (1 September 1940)*
- * Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords*
- * Knight's Cross on 20 June 1941 as Oberleutnant zur See and commander of U-552*

* *Oak Leaves on 11 April 1942 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-552*
* *Swords on 17 August 1942 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-552*
* *Großes Verdienstkreuz des Verdienstordens der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (19 September 1969)*

Topp is the third most successful of German U-Boat commanders of World War II.

He was a recipient of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords of Nazi Germany.

He sank 35 ships for a total of 197,460 gross register tons (GRT). After the war he served with the Federal German Navy, reaching the rank of Konteradmiral (rear admiral). He later served in NATO.

Topp was born in Hanover, the son of an engineer, and joined the Reichsmarine in 1934, serving on the light cruiser Karlsruhe in 1937, before transferring to the U-Bootwaffe (submarine fleet) in October 1937. In May 1933, Topp joined the Nazi Party and in 1934 also joined the Allgemeine-SS.

He served as Watch Officer on U-46 under the command of Herbert Sohler and took part in four combat patrols before he was given his first command on U-57 on 5 June 1940. He led U-57 on two missions during which the boat managed to sink six ships. She was sunk after a collision with a Norwegian vessel on 3 September 1940.

Topp survived to take command of U-552, a Type VIIC boat - on 4 December 1940.

With U-552, Der Rote Teufel, he operated mainly against convoys in the North Atlantic, sinking 30 ships and crippling several others on ten patrols. One of his victories during this period was sinking of the destroyer USS Reuben James on 31 October 1941, the first United States Navy warship to be lost in World War 2.

While the destruction of the U.S.S. Reuben James facilitated a worsening of already rapidly deteriorating diplomatic relations between the III Reich and the still nominally neutral United States of America, it was Topp's sinking of the SS David H. Atwater the following year that some historians have claimed casts a shadow on his conduct in action.

When he spotted the coastal steamer David H. Atwater off Chincoteague, Virginia on 3 April 1942, he surfaced U-552, overtook it from astern, and, without offering the Atwater's Captain the chance to surrender, attacked it with his deck gun from 600 yards distance, firing a total of 93 rounds at it, despite receiving no defensive return fire from the unarmed vessel in response.

Atwater was set on fire by the shells and sank, with its crew abandoning ship. The entry from U-552's War Diary, written by Topp after the attack, records: "93 shots 8.8 cm, ran off at high speed, Steamer sinks."

Most of the Atwater's crew perished in the water. Some historians have cited evidence from contemporary records that U-552 may have turned its deck machine-guns upon them while they were defenceless in lifeboats and rafts in the water.

24 of the Atwater's civilian Merchant Marine crew of 27 lost their lives during the attack.

In October 1942 Topp was given command of the 27th U-boat Flotilla, based in Gotenhafen (now Gdynia, Poland), which put him in charge of introducing the new Type XXI Elektro Boot boats to active service.

He wrote the battle manual for the Type XXI, and shortly before the end of the war, he took command of U-2513, on which he surrendered on 8 May 1945, in Horten, Norway. From 20 May to 17 August 1945, Topp was a prisoner of war in Kragerø (Norway).

On 4 June 1946, he started at the Technical University of Hanover, studying architecture, and graduated in 1950 with a degree in engineering. He also served as technical advisor for the 1957 film *Sharks and Little Fish*.

After his re-entry into the Bundesmarine on 3 March 1958 and a briefing at the Naval Staff, he served from 16 August 1958 as Chief of Staff at NATO's Military Committee in Washington D.C. Subsequently he was on 1 October 1963 appointed Chief of Staff in command of the fleet, and served from 1 July 1965 as Deputy Director in the Naval Staff, employed in the Ministry of Defence. Promoted to flotilla admiral on 15 November 1965, he was simultaneously appointed chief of the operations staff of the Navy and Deputy Chief of the Navy. Promoted to Rear Admiral on 21 December 1966, as a tribute to his efforts in rebuilding the navy and the establishment of the transatlantic alliance, on 19 September 1969 he was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. He retired on 31 December 1969.

After retiring from the Bundesmarine, for a few years Topp was a technical advisor to the German shipyard HDW AG. His service as a NATO advisor was loosely portrayed (as "Commodore Wolfgang Schrepke") in the 1965 movie *The Bedford Incident*.

His memoirs "The Odyssey of a U-Boat Commander: The Recollections of Erich Topp" was published in 1992.

When Topp was asked in 1996 by publisher/historian Theodore P. Savas to contribute a Foreword for a collection of essays on German U-boat commanders, he instead submitted a contribution about his close friend Engelbert Endrass, who was lost with his crew and boat U-567 off Gibraltar in late December 1941.

He was interviewed on World War II submarine operations for the *Nova* (TV series) special *Hitler's Lost Sub*, which detailed the efforts of a team of divers, led by John Chatterton and Richie Kohler to identify an unknown German U-Boat wreck 65 miles off the coast of New Jersey; the wreck was identified as U-869.

Topp died on 26 December 2005, in Süßen at the age of 91; he was survived by two sons, Peter Kay (b. 1945) and Michael (b. 1950), and five grandchildren.

As commander of U-57 and U-552, Topp is credited with the sinking of 35 ships for a total of 197,460 gross register tons (GRT), further damaging four ships of 32,317 GRT and sinking one warship, USS *Reuben James*, of 1,190 long tons (1,210 tonnes).

Karl-Friedrich Merten



Born 15 August 1905, Posen, German Empire

*Died: 2 May 1993 (aged 87)
Waldshut-Tiengen, Germany*

Rank Kapitän zur See

Commands held: U-68

Awards

- * *Wehrmacht Long Service Award 4th Class & 3rd Class (2 October 1936)*
- * *Spanish Cross in Bronze (20 April 1938)*
- * *Sudetenland Medal (20 December 1939)*
- * *Iron Cross (1939) 2nd Class (2 October 1939 & 1st Class (30 December 1941)*
- * *U-boat War Badge (1939) (2 August 1941) & with Diamonds (30 January 1943)*
- * *High Seas Fleet Badge (9 October 1942)*
- * *Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves*
- * *Knight's Cross on 13 June 1942 as Korvettenkapitän and commander of U-68*
- * *Oak Leaves on 16 November 1942 as Korvettenkapitän and commander of U-68*
- * *War Merit Cross 1st Class with Swords*
- * *2nd Class (30 January 1944*
- * *1st Class (29 October 1944*

Karl-Friedrich Merten commanded the U-boat U-68 in Nazi Germany's Kriegsmarine during World War II.

He received the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves.

Merten was credited with the sinking of 27 ships for a total of 170,151 gross register tons (GRT) of Allied shipping. Merten joined the Reichsmarine (navy of the Weimar Republic) in 1926. He served on the light cruisers Karlsruhe and Leipzig during the Spanish Civil War patrols.

At the outbreak of World War II, he was stationed on the battleship Schleswig-Holstein, participating in the Battle of Westerplatte and Battle of Hel. Together with the 5. Marineartillerie-Abteilung (5th Naval Artillery Department), German troops landed on the Hel Peninsula. For his actions in these battles he received the Iron Cross 2nd Class on 2 October 1939.

He transferred to the U-boat service in 1940, at first serving as a watch officer on U-38 before taking command of U-68 in early 1941.

Merten volunteered for service with the U-boat arm in 1940. He attended his first U-boat training course with the torpedo school in Flensburg-Mürwik (29 April- 2 June 1940), followed by another course at the communications school, also in Flensburg-Mürwik (3-30 June 1940).

He was then posted to the 1st U-boat Training Division (1 July - 29 September 1940, followed by a U-boat commander's course with the 24th U-boat Flotilla (30 September - 29 November 1940). On 30 November 1940, Merten was transferred to the 2nd U-boat Flotilla, joining the crew of Kapitänleutnant Heinrich Liebe's U-38 as a commander in training and watch officer.

Merten went on one war patrol with U-38 (18 December 1940 - 22 January 1941). [This was Liebe's eighth war patrol as a commander, during which two ships of 16,583 GRT were sunk.

Commanding U-68 on five war patrols, patrolling in the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea and the Indian Ocean, he was awarded Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross on 13 June 1942 and the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross on 16 November 1942. On the second patrol, Merten helped rescue the crews of the auxiliary cruiser Atlantis and the refuelling ship Python, which had been sunk by the Royal Navy.

He was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves on 16 November 1942, the 147th officer or soldier of the Wehrmacht so honoured.

On 30 January 1943, Dönitz awarded Merten the U-boat War Badge with Diamonds (U-Boot-Kriegsabzeichen mit Brillanten). The presentation was made at the Hotel Kaiserhof in Berlin by Großadmiral Erich Raeder after the Oak Leaves presentation in Rastenburg.

On 31 January 1943, Merten, Dönitz and other Kriegsmarine officers traveled to the Wolf's Lair, Hitler's headquarters in Rastenburg, present-day Ketrzyn in Poland, for the Oak Leaves presentation. Following the presentation, Hitler met with Dönitz and VizeadmiralTheodor Krancke in private.

In this meeting, Hitler appointed Dönitz as Oberbefehlshaber der Marine (Commander-in-Chief) of the Kriegsmarine following Raeder's resignation on 30 January 1943. On the return flight to Berlin, Dönitz informed Merten and the other officers present of this change in command.

He surrendered command of U-68 on 18 January 1943 to Oberleutnant Albert Lauzemis. On 1 March 1943, he was given command of the 24th U-boat Flotilla.

On 12 March 1945, the 24th U-boat Flotilla was disbanded and Merten was posted to the Fuehrer Headquarters in Berlin as a liaison officer. There he was put on the staff of Generalleutnant Rudolf Hübner's Fliegendes Sondergericht West (Flying Special Court-Martial West). This unit was created by Hitler in response to the American capture of the Ludendorff Bridge over the Rhine at Remagen.

On 15 April 1945, he was promoted to Kapitän zur See (captain at sea). In late April 1945, Merten and other officers travelled to Upper Bavaria to the so-called Alpine Fortress. There, following the end of World War II in Europe, he was taken prisoner of war. From 25-29 June 1945, he was held in US captivity in Biessenhofen, Bavaria and released on 29 June 1945.

In October 1948, Merten, who at the time lived in Wiesbaden and worked for the Wasserstraßen-Direktion Rheinland-Pfalz (Waterways Directorate Rhineland-Palatinate) salvaging sunken ships, was arrested by the French and accused of allegedly wrongful sinking of the French tanker Frimaire in June 1942. From 6 October 1948 until 8 March 1949, he was held in custody at the Cherche-Midi prison in Paris. The same prison Hermann-Bernhard Ramcke was awaiting his trial. Merten was acquitted on 10 September 1949. The Frimaire, which belonged to the Vichy government, had not been properly marked. Merten, among others, attended Karl Dönitz's funeral on 6 January 1981.

"We couldn't have been sunk by a nicer man"

David Almond, survivor of the City of Cairo sinking

On 14 September 1984, a reunion of the survivors of City of Cairo was celebrated aboard HMS Belfast. The re-union was attended by 17 survivors and Merten and commemorated the publication of the book by Ralph Barker "Goodnight, Sorry for Sinking You".

In 1986, Merten and Kurt Baberg published their book Wir U-Bootfahrer sagen: "Nein!" "So war das nicht!" [We U-Boat Sailors say: "No!" "It was not like this!"]. [Note 2] This book criticizes Lothar-Günther Buchheim, especially his work Die U-Boot-Fahrer [U-Boat Sailors], for his anti-Dönitz demeanor.

On 1 January 1969, Merten started working for the Ingenieur Kontor Lübeck (IKL), headed by Ulrich Gabler, as a military-tactical advisor.

He died of cancer on 2 May 1993 in Waldshut-Tiengen.

As commander of U-68, Merten is credited with the sinking of 27 ships for a total of 170,151 gross register tons (GRT).

Günther Prien



Born 16 January 1908, Osterfeld

*Died 7 March 1941 (aged 33)
200 miles south of Iceland*

Rank Korvettenkapitän

Commands held: U-47

(Nickname Der Stier von Scapa Flow)

Awards

- * *Wehrmacht Long Service Award 4th Class (22 January 1937)*
- * *Iron Cross (1939) 2nd Class (25 September 1939) & 1st Class (17 October 1939)*
- * *U-boat War Badge with Diamonds*
- * *Diamond-studded Navy Honour Dagger*
- * *Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves*
- * *Knight's Cross on 18 October 1939 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-47*
- * *5th Oak Leaves on 20 October 1940 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-47*

Günther Prien was a German U-boat commander during World War II. He was the first U-boat commander to receive the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross and the first member of the Kriegsmarine to receive the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves of Nazi Germany. It was Germany's highest military decoration at the time of its presentation to Prien.

Under Prien's command, the submarine U-47 was credited with sinking over 30 Allied ships totalling about 200,000 gross register tons (GRT).

He sank the British battleship HMS Royal Oak at anchor in the Home Fleet's anchorage in Scapa Flow.

World War II commenced during Prien's first patrol in U-47. He departed Kiel on 19 August 1939 for a patrol lasting 28 days. On 5 September, he sank the British SS *Bosnia* of 2,407 gross register tons (GRT), the second ship of the war to be sunk by a U-boat. His boat sank two British vessels, *Rio Claro* of 4,086 GRT on the 6th, and *Gartavon* of 1,777 GRT on the 7th. U-47 returned to Kiel on 15 September having sunk a total tonnage of 8,270 GRT.

Infiltration of Scapa Flow by U-47

On 14 October 1939, Prien's boat penetrated the Royal Navy's primary base, Scapa Flow and sank the battleship *Royal Oak*. He returned to Germany to instant fame.

He was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, personally by Adolf Hitler, the first sailor of the U-boat service and the second member of the Kriegsmarine to receive this award. Prien received the nickname *Der Stier von Scapa Flow* ("The Bull of Scapa Flow"); the emblem of a snorting bull was painted on the conning tower of U-47 and soon became the emblem of the entire 7th U-boat Flotilla.

Two members of the Scapa Flow crew earned the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross during World War II: the chief engineer (Leitender Ingenieur) Johann-Friedrich Wessels and 1st watch officer (I. Wachoffizier) Engelbert Endrass.

Kept secret by the German naval command was the fact that Prien had fired a total of seven torpedoes at his target, of which five failed because of long-standing problems with their depth steering and their magnetic detonator systems. These problems continued to bedevil the German submariners for a long time and particularly during the German invasion of Norway, when the U-boats were unable to keep the Royal Navy at bay.

U-47 under the command of Prien with 1st watch officer (I. WO) Oberleutnant zur See Engelbert Endrass and chief engineer Oberleutnant (Ing.) Johann-Friedrich Wessels left Kiel on 16 November 1939. U-47 attacked a British cruiser on 28

November 1939. Prien had identified the ship to be a London-class cruiser. Prien intended to launch a spread of three torpedoes, but only a single torpedo cleared the tube and detonated in the wake of the cruiser.

When the periscope cleared the surface, Prien observed what he believed major damage to the stern of the cruiser, her starboard torpedo launchers dislodged and an aircraft tilted. U-47 surfaced and tried to pursue the cruiser but was driven off by depth charges dropped from the escort.

It turned out the cruiser was HMS Norfolk, which was slightly damaged by the detonation. The attack was reported in the daily Wehrmachtbericht on 29 November 1939, claiming the destruction of the cruiser. The war diary of the Befehlshaber der U-Boote (BdU) on 17 December 1939 stated that even though a hit was observed the cruiser was not sunk.

Amongst the ships sunk by U-47 was the SS Arandora Star, carrying over 1,200 German and Italian civilian internees and 86 German prisoners of war to captivity in Canada. Over 800 lives were lost.

Following later patrols and raids on Allied merchant shipping, Prien was awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross in 1940.

U-47 went missing on 7 March 1941 while attacking Convoy OB-293. She has generally been thought to have been sunk by the British destroyer HMS Wolverine west of Ireland; the submarine was attacked by Wolverine and HMS Verity, which took turns covering each other's ASDIC blind spots and dropping patterns of depth charges until U-47 rose almost to the surface before sinking and then exploded with an orange flash visible from the surface.

To date, there is no official record of what happened to U-47 or her 45 crewmen, though a variety of possibilities exists, including mines, a mechanical failure, falling victim to her own torpedoes, and possibly a later attack that did not confirm any kills by the corvette team of HMS Camellia and HMS Arbutus.

Prien's death was kept secret until 23 May. [Churchill had personally announced it to the House of Commons, and propaganda broadcasts to Germany had repeatedly taunted listeners with the question "Where is Prien?" until Germany was forced to acknowledge his loss.

Although Prien was at sea for less than two years, his record stands high among the U-boat aces during the Second World War. He spent 238 days at sea and sank 30 enemy vessels for a total tonnage of 193,808 GRT.

Günther Prien had been considered as namesake for the 1967 commissioned guided missile destroyer Lütjens. However the legend surrounding Prien, that he had distanced himself from Nazism and had become an active member of the German resistance and was held captive at the Wehrmachtgefängnis Torgau (Torgau Wehrmacht Prison), turned out to be false. Consequently, the name Lütjens, named after Admiral Günther Lütjens, was chosen instead.

Heinrich Liebe



Born 29 January 1908, Gotha

*Died 27 July 1997 (aged 89)
Eisenach, Germany*

Rank Fregattenkapitän

Commands held U-2, U-38

Awards

- * *Wehrmacht Long Service Award 4th Class (2 October 1936)*
- * *Olympic Games Decoration (20 April 1937)*
- * *Iron Cross (1939) 2nd Class (8 October 1939) & 1st Class (6 April 1940)*
- * *U-boat War Badge (1939) (16 December 1939)*
- * *Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves*
- * *Knight's Cross on 14 August 1940 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-38*
- * *13th Oak Leaves on 10 June 1941 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-38*
- * *Italian War Cross with Swords (2 December 1941)*
- * *War Merit Cross 2nd Class with Swords (3 September 1944)*

Heinrich Liebe (29 January 1908 - 27 July 1997) was a German naval officer during World War II. He served as a U-boatcommander and then in the High Command of the Kriegsmarine. Liebe was credited with sinking of 34 ships for a total of 187,267 gross register tons (GRT).

He was a recipient of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves of Nazi Germany. It was the country's highest military decoration at the time of its presentation to Liebe.

On 1 October 1936, Liebe was promoted to Kapitänleutnant (lieutenant) and assigned commander of U-2, a Type II U-boat attached to the U-Bootschulflottille. On 24 October 1938, Liebe commissioned U-38, a Type IX U-boat assigned to 6th U-boat Flotilla.

U-38 embarked on her first wartime patrol on 19 August 1939 from Wilhelmshaven. Operating off Lisbon, Portugal on the outbreak of war, Liebe managed to sink two British freighters before returning to port on 18 September.

On 2 November, Liebe set sail for Norwegian water on his second patrol.

Liebe's fourth patrol, on 8 April 1940 was also set in Norwegian waters, to support Operation Weserübung, the invasion of Norway. During this patrol, Liebe shared the same negative experience of failed torpedoes as many other u-boat captains operating in the area.

In mid April 1940, Liebe fired on the British heavy cruiser Effingham, but all the torpedoes fired failed to detonate.

U-38 left on her fifth patrol on 6 June 1940, tasked with patrolling the Western Approaches off southern Ireland. Liebe managed to sink six ships during this patrol, and also succeeded in landing a German agent in Ireland on 12 June.

During his sixth patrol, Liebe sank three ships, and were ordered to the new 6th U-boat Flotilla base in Lorient, France. During this patrol, on 14 August, Liebe received the Knight's

On 9 April 1941, Liebe set sail for operations off Freetown, Africa. This was Liebe's ninth and last patrol with U-38, during which he sank eight ships for a total of 47,279 GRT. For these successes, Liebe was awarded the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross on 10 June 1941. On 29 June, U-38 returned to Lorient.

The presentation was made on 30 June 1941 by Hitler at the Fuehrer Headquarter Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair) in Rastenburg (now Ketrzyn in Poland).

On 22 July, Liebe transferred off the U-38, which was put under the command of Heinrich Schuch.

Following his departure from U-38, Liebe was assigned to the staff of Oberkommando der Marine. In August 1944, he was transferred to the staff of the Commander-in-Chief of Submarines (Befehlshaber der Unterseeboote or BdU), Hans-Georg von Friedeburg, during which tenure he was promoted to Fregattenkapitän (frigate captain) on 1 October 1944.

After the war Liebe returned to his hometown in the Soviet sector to live with his parents. Since he refused to train Soviet submariners, he felt that was to blame for his being held to menial occupations.

He died in July 1997 and is buried in Eisenach, Germany.

Heinrich Bleichrodt



*Born 21 October 1909, Berga,
Kyffhäuser*

Died 9 January 1977 (aged 67), Munich

Rank Korvettenkapitän

Commands held: U-48, U-67, U-109

Awards

- * *Iron Cross (1939)*
- * *2nd Class (25 July 1940)*
- * *1st Class (25 September 1940)*
- * *U-boat War Badge with Diamonds (1939)*
- * *U-boat War Badge (24 September 1940)*
- * *U-boat War Badge with Diamonds (September 1942)*
- * *Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves*
- * *Knight's Cross on 24 October 1940 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-48*
- * *125th Oak Leaves on 23 September 1942 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-109*
- * *Croce di Guerra Italiana al Valore Militare (1 November 1941)*
- * *War Merit Cross 2nd Class with Swords (1 January 1945)*

Heinrich Bleichrodt (21 October 1909 - 9 January 1977) was one of the most successful German U-boat commanders of the Second World War. From October 1939 until retiring from front line service in December 1943, he was credited with sinking 25 ships for a total of 152,320 gross register tons (GRT).

For this he received the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves, among other commendations. He earned the nickname "Ajax" during his time with the U-boats.

After training, Bleichrodt spent a period aboard the small training boat U-8 followed by a single patrol with later Knight's Cross winner Kapitänleutnant Wilhelm Rollmann aboard U-34 during June and July 1940. This was a highly successful cruise, sinking eight ships for a total of 22,434 GRT, with Bleichrodt receiving the Iron Cross 2nd Class on 25 July.

He was then given command of his own U-boat, U-48 on 4 September 1940. He began his first war patrol aboard her on 8 September, going on to sink eight ships for a total of 36,189 tons.

On 15 September he sank HMS Dundee.

He went on to torpedo and sink SS City of Benares on 18 September before returning to port on 25 September. Unknown to Bleichrodt, there were 90 children on board the liner being evacuated to Canada under the Children's Overseas Reception Board's initiative in order to escape the effects of the Blitz.

258 people, including 77 of the evacuees, died in the disaster. The sinking was controversial, but the ship was not marked as being an evacuation transport, and it is unlikely that Bleichrodt would have been aware that children were amongst the passengers.

He was also limited in what aid he could have provided even if he had been aware. He had been awarded the U-boat War Badge 1939 on 24 September, and on his arrival in port on 25 September he received the Iron Cross 1st Class.

He put to sea again on 5 October and undertook another highly successful patrol, sinking eight ships, including three merchantmen from the ill-fated convoys SC-7 and HX-79.

He returned to Kiel on 27 October having sunk 43,106 tons of shipping. Three days before returning, U-48 was radioed and Bleichrodt was informed that he was to be awarded the Knight's Cross.

Bleichrodt refused to wear it until his IWO Oberleutnant zur See Reinhard 'Teddy' Suhren was also awarded one. Bleichrodt pointed out that Suhren had overseen all surface shooting on previous missions and was also entitled. Suhren duly received the Knight's Cross in November that year.

Bleichrodt left U-48 on 16 December 1940 and briefly took command of U-67 on 22 January 1941 until 4 June 1941. He did not carry out any war cruises before being moved to take command of U-109 on 5 June 1941.

He carried out six patrols with her, not achieving the same degree of success he had had with U-48, but still sinking 13 ships for a total of some 80,000 tons.

He received the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross on 23 September 1942, followed by the U-boat War Badge with Diamonds in October. He was promoted to Korvettenkapitän on 1 November 1943.

Bleichrodt appears to have suffered a breakdown whilst at sea on 26 December 1943. He radioed U-boat headquarters to request an immediate return to port, but this was initially denied.

On 31 December Bleichrodt insisted that he return, and handed command to his IWO, who brought U-109 back to Saint Nazaire.

He was transferred to a training job with the 27th U-boat Flotilla, spending five months there followed by a year in the 2nd ULD (U-boat training division) as tactical instructor for the officers. He received a final promotion to Korvettenkapitän (corvette captain) on 1 November 1943, and in July 1944 he was appointed as Chief of the 22nd U-boat Flotilla, a post he held until the end of the war.

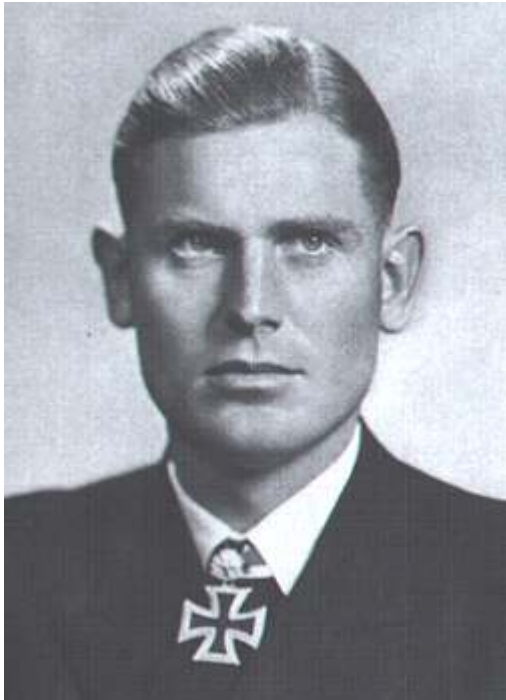
After the war, Bleichrodt was held by the Allies on war crimes charges pertaining to the sinking of the City of Benares.

Bleichrodt was accused of sinking the ship with the full knowledge that it had been transporting evacuees. He reaffirmed the German position that there was no way that he or the crew of the submarine could have known who was on board.

It was upheld and he was acquitted.

However, Bleichrodt refused to apologise to the survivors, despite several crew members of U-48, including the radio operator, expressing their shock and regret once the facts became known.

Joachim Schepke



Born 8 March 1912, Flensburg

*Died 17 March 1941 (aged 29)
SE of Iceland 61°N 12°W*

Rank Kapitänleutnant

Commands held: U-3, U-19, U-100

Awards

- * *Iron Cross (1939)*
- * *2nd Class (1 June 1939)*
- * *1st Class (27 February 1940)*
- * *U-Boat War Badge (1939) (3 January 1940 - 30 April 1940)*
- * *Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves*
- * *Knight's Cross on 24 September 1940 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-100*
- * *7th Oak Leaves on 1 December 1940 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-100*

Joachim Schepke (8 March 1912 - 17 March 1941) was a German U-boat commander during World War II. He was the seventh recipient of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves. It was Germany's highest military decoration at the time of its presentation to Joachim Schepke.

Schepke is credited with the sinking of 36 Allied ships. During his career, he gained notoriety among fellow U-boat commanders for exaggerating the tonnage of ships sunk.

Schepke was the son of a naval officer, and he joined the Reichsmarine in 1930. In 1934 he was assigned to the newly created U-boat arm, and in 1938 he commanded U-3. At the outbreak of World War II he took U3 to war against Allied shipping.

After a short stint commanding U-19 and serving in a staff position Schepke received the command of U-100, a Type VIIb boat. After 5 patrols in U-100 she was heavily damaged on 17 March 1941 by depth charges from HMS Walker and Vanoc while executing an attack on Convoy HX-112. U-100 was forced to surface and was detected on radar and consequently rammed by Vanoc. Schepke and 37 crew members perished in the ocean; six crew members were rescued.

Schepke was last reported on the bridge of U-100. When Vanoc rammed his boat, he was crushed into his own periscope standards, and he went down with his boat.

Schepke claimed to have sunk 37 ships, for a total of 213,310 gross register tons (GRT), and damaged 4 more. If true, this would have made him the third skipper to have sunk over 200,000 tons.

While he did positively sink 34 ships, he was known to Admiral Dönitz and throughout the fleet to exaggerate his tonnage claims; fellow U-boat men came to use the expression "Schepke tonnage" to reference them. Nonetheless, with 34 ships Schepke ranked first in number of ships sunk, and was recommended by Dönitz for Knight's cross with Oak Leaves for this achievement.

Schepke, Günther Prien and Otto Kretschmer were friendly rivals in the U-boat service, and were the most famous U-boat commanders in the early years of the war, where all except Kretschmer eventually met their ends.

Schepke was the favourite of these three, because in contrast to Kretschmer he was a convinced Nazi.

He wrote and illustrated the book "U-Boot Fahrer von Heute" (U-Boat Men of today) in 1940 (Berlin, Deutscher Verlag 1940). In February 1941 he made a speech in the Berlin Sportpalast for thousands of Berlin schoolchildren about the U-boat war. Before and after his death the German propaganda ministry held him as an example for German youth to follow.

Fritz Frauenheim



Born 9th March 1912

Died 28th September 1969, Hamburg

Rank Fregattenkapitan

Commands held: U-21, U-101

Awards

- * Wehrmacht Long Service Award 4th Class (2 October 1936)
- * Spanish Cross in Bronze (6 June 1939)
- * Iron Cross (1939)
- * 2nd Class (2 October 1939)
- * 1st Class (7 November 1939)
- * Sudetenland Medal (20 December 1938)
- * Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross on 29 August 1940 as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U-101
- * Knight's Cross of the Order of the Roman Eagle with Swords (18 June 1943)
- * German Cross in Gold on 23 November 1944 as Korvettenkapitän with the Admiral of the Kleinkampfverbände
- * Mentioned twice in the Wehrmachtbericht (17 June 1940 and 19 October 1940)

Frauenheim was transferred to the U-boat force in January 1936 and rose quickly through the ranks - and on 1 April 1939 he was promoted to Kapitänleutnant.

He appears to have spent time with the German forces supporting the Spanish Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War, as he was awarded the Spanish Cross on 6 June 1939.

Frauenheim had been made watch officer on U-25 in 1938, eventually spending over a year in this role, until October 1939. He was appointed to command U-21 on 1 October 1937, eventually carrying out five patrols, eventually sinking four merchant ships. He also laid mines, one of which damaged HMS Belfast on 21 November, putting her out of action for nearly three years.

The Net-class boom defence vessel Bayonet was sunk by one of U-21's mines on 21 December.

Frauenheim left U-21 on 6 January 1940, taking over command of the newly built U-101 on 11 March 1940. He commissioned the boat and took her on four successful patrols. He sank a total of 12 ships, including three sunk and one damaged from convoy SC-7. He left U-101 on 18 November 1940 and became a teacher in the 2nd ULD.

He went on to hold a number of staff positions, before taking command of 23rd U-boat Flotilla in the Mediterranean in September 1941. In 1942 he moved to command 29th U-boat Flotilla. On 1 March 1943 he was promoted to Korvettenkapitän.

In February 1944, Frauenheim joined the staff of the Admiral der Kleinkampfverbände (Admiral of Small Battle Units), where he remained for the rest of the war. He was again promoted, this time to Fregattenkapitän on 1 December 1944.

After the end of the war Frauenheim spent eight months in Allied captivity before being released.

Frauenheim for almost 20 years until his death worked at the Mobil Oil AG in the Federal Republic of Germany. His last position was a member of the board and head of the department of Marine Transportation and Pipelines.

He died in Hamburg on 28 September 1969, aged 57.

As commander of U-21 and U-101 Fritz Frauenheim is credited with the sinking of 18 ships for a total of 78,248 gross register tons (GRT), further damaging one ship of 4,166 GRT, sinking one auxiliary warship of 605 GRT, and damaging one warship of 11,500 long tons (11,700 tonnes).

Herbert Schultze



Born 24 July 1909, Kiel

Died 3 June 1987 (aged 77), London

*Rank Leutnant zur See (Reichsmarine),
Korvettenkapitän (Kriegsmarine),
Kapitän zur See (Bundesmarine)
Unit U-Bootschulflottille, 7th U-boat
Flotilla*

*Commands held: U-231 U-48, 22 April 1939
- 20 May 1940 (five patrols)
U-48, 17 December 1940 - 27 July 1941 (three
patrols), 3rd U-boat Flotilla*

** U-boat War Badge (1939) (25 October*

1939)

** with Diamonds (15 July 1941)*

** Mentioned three times in the Wehrmachtbericht (26 February 1940, 2 April 1941 and 12 June 1941)*

Herbert Emil Schultze commanded U-48 for eight patrols during the early part of the war, sinking 169,709 gross register tons (GRT) of shipping, the eighth most of any Kriegsmarine submarine commander.

In May 1937, now an Oberleutnant zur See, Schultze transferred to the U-boat force, taking command of the Type IIA U-boat U-2 on 31 January 1938. U-2 was assigned to the U-Bootschulflottille (U-boat school flotilla); he spent the next year and a half training with the sub.

On 22 April 1939 Schultze commissioned U-48, a Type VIIB U-boat. U-48 was later to become the most successful submarine of the war. She was assigned to the 7th U-boat Flotilla, and spent the next four months in training.

On 1 June 1939 Schultze was promoted to Kapitänleutnant.

Soon after the war started on 1 September 1939 Schultze took U-48 out on her first patrol. On 11 September 1939 he sank the British freighter *Firby*. After the sinking he sent the plain language radio message "cq - cq- cq - transmit to Mr. Churchill. I have sunk the British steamer "Firby". Posit 59.40 North and 13.50 West. Save the crew, if you please. German submarine." He sank two more ships for 14,777 GRT during the first patrol.

After returning to base, Schultze gave an interview to William L. Shirer, an American reporter, on 29 September 1939. During the interview it was established

that Schultze had sunk another British ship, the Royal Sceptre and like the sinking of the Firby, had arranged for the crew to be rescued by another Allied ship. The interview was recorded and broadcast both in the United States and Great Britain.

Schultze left for four more successful patrols. On 1 March 1940 he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross for his successes. On 20 May 1940 Schultze handed command of U-48 over to Hans Rudolf Rösing due to illness stemming from a stomach and kidney disorder.

Schultze spent five months in hospital recuperating. From October 1940 , Schultze took up duties as Second in Command of the 7th U-boat Flotilla, now based at St. Nazaire, in occupied France.

On 17 December 1940 Schultze resumed command of U-48, relieving Heinrich Bleichrodt. He commanded the U-boat on three more patrols, and continued sinking enemy shipping at a great rate. He was awarded the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross on 12 June 1941.

The presentation was made on 30 June 1941 by Hitler at the FührerHeadquarter Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair) in Rastenburg (now Ketrzyn in Poland).

He served in this capacity until March 1942, when he was assigned to the staff of Marinegruppe Nord as Admiral Staff Officer for U-boats. He was assigned to the staff of Admiral Karl Dönitz in December 1942. On 1 April 1943 he was promoted to Korvettenkapitän. In March 1944 he was assigned as commander of Department II, Marineschule Mürwik, where he served to the end of the war.

In August 1945 he was employed by the Allies as commander of the Naval Academy at Mürwik near Flensburg and the Heinz Krey-bearing.

In November 1945, now a civilian, he took the job of manager of the naval facilities in Flensburg-Mürwik until October 1946. In 1956 Schultze joined the Bundesmarine of West Germany and served in a string of staff positions. He became commander of the 3rd Ship home department, he served as Staff Officer Personnel (A1) on the command staff of the naval base, was commander of convoy ships, teaching group leaders at the Naval Academy and head of the volunteer adoption headquarters of the Navy until his retirement on 30 September 1968 with the rank of Kapitän zur See.

Schultze died on 3 June 1987 in London.

Wolfgang Lüth



Born 15th October 1913, Riga, Latvia

*Died 14th May 1945, Flensburg-Mürwik,
Germany*

Rank Kapitän zur See

*Commands held: U-13, U-9, U-138,
U-43, U-181*

Awards:

- * *Spanish Cross in Bronze without Swords*
- * *Iron Cross 2nd Class*
- * *U-boat War Badge 1939*
- * *Iron Cross 1st Class*
- * *Knights Cross*
- * *Italienisches Kriegskreuz mit Schwertern "Croce di Guerra Italiana al valor militar"*
- * *Knights Cross with Oak Leaves*
- * *U-boat War Badge with Diamonds*
- * *Knights Cross with Oak Leaves and Crossed Swords*
- * *Knights Cross with Oak Leaves, Crossed Swords and Diamonds*
- * *Ehrenzeichen für Verdienste im Volkstumskampf*
- * *U-boat Front Clasp*

Wolfgang Luth was the second most successful German U-boat ace of World War II.

His career record of 46 merchant ships plus the French submarine Doris sunk during 15 war patrols, with a total displacement of 225,204 gross register tons (GRT), was second only to that of Korvettenkapitän (Lieutenant Commander) Otto Kretschmer, whose 47 sinkings totaled 273.043 GRT.^[2]

After a year on the light cruiser Königsberg he transferred to the U-boat force in February 1937. In July 1937 he became II WO (2nd Watch Officer) on U-27 and made one patrol in Spanish waters during the Spanish Civil War. In October 1937 he became I WO on U-38 under Kptlt. Heinrich Liebe and was on patrol in September 1939 when the war began.

After a short time on a school boat he took over the small type IIB U-boat U-9. During six patrols on this boat he achieved his first successes, most notably the sinking of the French submarine Doris in May 1940.

A month later Oberleutnant Lüth commissioned the type IID U-boat U-138.

During the night of 20/21 September 1940, on his first patrol in the new boat, he sank four ships with a total of 34,633 tons - a great coup for a small coastal type U-boat.

In October 1940, after returning from his second patrol, on which he sank one ship and damaged another, he received the Knights Cross, the only commander of a coastal type U-boat to win that decoration.

He left U-138 that month to take over the large type IX U-boat U-43. During five patrols on this boat he sank 12 ships with a total of 68,077 tons. He left U-43 in April 1942 and in May 1942 commissioned the type IXD2 U-181.

In September 1942 Kptlt. Lüth left Kiel for his first patrol in this boat. The operational area included the Indian Ocean as well as South African waters. He reached Capetown, South Africa at the end of October, and during the next two weeks sank four ships with a total of 21,987 tons. On 16 November he received a radio message announcing he had received the Oak Leaves to his Knights Cross.

Before returning to base he sank eight more ships in the following two weeks, totalling 36,394 tons, arriving at Bordeaux in January 1943.

In March 1943 Kptlt. Lüth left Bordeaux for another patrol in African waters and the Indian Ocean. This patrol, under difficult conditions, was also very successful, with ten ships sunk totalling 45,331 tons.

During this patrol Lüth became the first U-boat officer to receive the Knights Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds.

This patrol was also outstanding because it was the second longest patrol of the war, lasting 205 days, second only to Kentrat's incredible 225 days on U-196.

To maintain morale during this patrol Lüth pioneered various ideas, such as publishing a ship's newspaper, holding contests of various types, and other activities designed to keep the crew mentally and physically fit.



Kpt. zur See Lüth in January 1945

In January 1944, after more than five years of uninterrupted duty on U-boats, the highly decorated Korvettenkapitän Lüth took command of the 22nd (Training) Flotilla that trained future U-boat captains.

In July 1944 he took command of I. Abteilung (1st section) at the Marineschule Flensburg-Mürwik (Naval academy), where future Kriegsmarine officers were instructed, and in September 1944 became the youngest ever commander of the Marineschule.

Only a few days after the war ended, he died in a tragic accident. On 13 May 1945 Kapitän zur See Wolfgang Lüth was shot by a sentry at the Marineschule when he failed to identify himself or give the password. The unlucky shot,

fired by the sentry at a target he could not even see in the darkness, struck Lüth in the head, killing him instantly.

Lüth was one of the most controversial of all U-boat commanders, first and foremost because he publicly advertised his firm belief in the tenets of Nazism. But other aspects of his personality, and even his successes, have also found their detractors.

Although he sank a huge tonnage of vessels, his successes occurred mostly in African waters and in the Indian Ocean, areas that offered relatively easy pickings with light defences compared to the North Atlantic.