

2001

Dog Boats at War: Royal Navy D Class MTBs and MGBs, 1939–1945,

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Recommended Citation

Schuster, Carl Otis (2001) "Dog Boats at War: Royal Navy D Class MTBs and MGBs, 1939–1945,," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 54 : No. 3 , Article 27.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol54/iss3/27>

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Gardner's second case study covers the period from mid-1942 to mid-1943, the final turning point in the campaign. Once again, he makes a strong argument that factors other than ULTRA were essential for the Allies' success, most importantly the closing of the mid-Atlantic "air gap" and the increasing number and effectiveness of Allied escort vessels. By 1943, Gardner notes, it was more hazardous than ever for the Germans to attack convoys. At the same time, the growing number of U-boats operating in the mid-Atlantic made the evasive routing of convoys extremely difficult for the Allies, even when ULTRA was available on a timely basis.

These case studies cover periods when ULTRA was most valuable because Germany was employing its U-boats in "wolf pack" attacks on convoys. When U-boats operated individually rather than in groups, which was the case for nearly two-thirds of the war, ULTRA's value was much less. Gardner also emphasizes that there were lengthy periods when German signals were being read only after considerable delay. For much of the war, he concludes, ULTRA's principal use was to enable the Allies to build up a general picture of the size and methods of the German U-boat fleet. It seldom had any impact on the Battle of the Atlantic at the operational or tactical levels.

This book deliberately focuses on the turning points of the campaign and the broad relationship of ULTRA to other factors; it does not provide either a blow-by-blow account of the Battle of the Atlantic or a systematic examination of ULTRA's employment by Allied commanders. The period from June 1943 until the end of the war is largely ignored. However, Gardner devotes a considerable portion of this book to background

information about the Battle of the Atlantic, including the importance of economic factors, the role of technology, Germany's own code-breaking activities, and the workings of convoy. This material should be useful for the general reader even if it offers little for the specialist.

Gardner's broad conclusions are carefully reasoned and well balanced. The Battle of the Atlantic would have been a harder and costlier struggle without ULTRA, but the Allied victory cannot be solely attributed to code-breaking successes. *Decoding History* will not be the final word on signals intelligence and the Battle of the Atlantic, but it may put an end to the wildly exaggerated claims that are sometimes made for ULTRA.

CHRISTOPHER BELL
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Reynolds, Leonard C. *Dog Boats at War: Royal Navy D Class MTBs and MGBs, 1939–1945*. Gloucestershire, U.K.: Sutton, 1998. 260pp. \$35

There are few untold stories left from World War II, but the actions of the Royal Navy's Coastal Forces can be described as little known and unappreciated. Serving in small plywood craft much like the more famous American PT boats, the Coastal Forces wreaked havoc with Axis forces in British and foreign waters. Operating from small harbors and primitive forward bases, theirs was a war of small, close-knit crews and close action with the enemy. They did it all, from convoy escort to shipping interdiction, clandestine landings to reconnaissance operations, and finally, distant screening for invasion forces. Coastal Forces were a ubiquitous presence in the

European theater. Wherever there were Axis forces in coastal waters or areas, the Royal Navy dispatched Coastal Forces to counter them. Yet strangely, little has been published about these deadly fast-attack craft and their courageous crews. *Dog Boats at War* redresses some of that shortfall in naval literature.

Written by a wartime motor gunboat commander, Leonard C. Reynolds, this book tells the Coastal Forces' story with an authenticity that can only be produced by one who was there. Reynolds focuses on the actions that took place during his service in 1942–45, and on the class of boat in which he served, the Fairmile D-class motor-torpedo and motor gunboat (MTB and MGB, respectively). The title, *Dog Boats at War*, is derived from the nickname given to the rather blunt-looking Fairmile fast-attack craft.

The Royal Navy entered World War II with two flotillas of underpowered MTBs. They proved woefully inadequate against the German *Schnellbooten* and Italian MAS torpedo boats. The Admiralty tasked Noel Macklin of Fairmile to develop a fast-attack boat to compete with the enemy boats. Macklin's design was ready by March 1941 and was put into production six months later after a rushed but successful testing program. The first boats entered service in the English Channel by early spring 1942. Originally intended as motor gunboats for convoy escort, they were converted to torpedo boats while under construction. Equipped with two twenty-one-inch torpedo tubes instead of a six-pounder cannon, the MTBs proved very effective at intercepting German convoys transiting off the Dutch and French coasts.

The "dog boat" was a simple and robust design, but its performance was not

extraordinary. Its 115-foot hull had a blunt semi-hard-chine design and used four Packard 1,250-horsepower engines to achieve a maximum speed of thirty-two knots—some five knots slower than its German or American counterparts. The dog boats were also small in comparison to their opponents but rode better in a seaway. Their superior stability often proved decisive in the rough waters of the English Channel and off the Norwegian coast. In the end, however, it was the crews that made the difference.

It took a special kind of sailor to man a plywood boat filled with five thousand gallons of highly volatile aviation gasoline. The Royal Navy found their early crews among the yachtsmen, racing enthusiasts, and fishermen who populated Britain's coastal towns and villages. These early recruits shaped the force that followed. The dog boats went to war with small crews of thirty to thirty-two men commanded by young Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve officers, many drawn from the Commonwealth. The commanding officers were generally in their twenties, and most had at least two years of experience in fast-attack craft. The crews were also either reservists or "war-time only" ratings. The average age of the crewmen was between eighteen and nineteen, with perhaps one career regular petty officer on board to provide experience. The result was a tightly knit, young, and aggressive crew—ideally suited to the unconventional fighting that characterized warfare in fast-attack craft. Survival depended on the commander's judgment and the crew's teamwork. It was a successful formula that served the boats well from Norway to the eastern Mediterranean.

The Royal Navy's Coastal Forces operated in a style not unlike that of light

forces of the Napoleonic era. Some of the actions described here are worthy of the best adventure fiction. Many boats ran agents, supplies, and weapons to the underground forces resisting Nazi occupation. For example, the 30th MTB Flotilla's boats often hid in caves along the Norwegian fjords or crept along dark "leads," dodging German patrols while seeking contacts and recruits among the occupied population. MTBs carried the kidnapped German general Werner Kreipe off Crete and transported him to Egypt for interrogation. They also played a deadly game of hide and seek with the Axis navies and the Luftwaffe in the Aegean Sea and among Yugoslavia's coastal islands. Wherever they served, the dog boats were the force of choice for engaging the enemy closely—and they paid dearly for it, losing 273 officers and men killed in action.

Some 228 dog boats were built between November 1941 and April 1945. They fought in over three hundred actions, sinking and damaging innumerable Axis vessels while losing some thirty-seven of their own. On the basis of eight years of research in official records and interviewing people involved, Reynolds has compiled as complete and accurate a record of the dog boats' actions as humanly possible. *Dog Boats at War* is a brilliant, if occasionally dry, treatment of an important and all but ignored part of the Royal Navy's history in World War II. It is worth its price, and I hope it will be followed by similar works on the Coastal Forces' other elements.

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Anspacher, William B., et al. *The Legacy of the White Oak Laboratory*. Dahlgren, Va.: Naval Surface Warfare Center, 2000. 503pp. (Available by e-mail at mrsapat@gateway.net or by phone [301] 439-3140). \$42

The Navy has had a remarkable and productive group of in-house research and development laboratories. Sadly, with the drawdowns of the post–Cold War era, many have been closed, among them the “White Oak Laboratory”—the Naval Ordnance Laboratory at White Oak, Maryland. WOL, as it was popularly known, gave the Navy a tremendous legacy of technology, weapons, and people. Fortunately, that legacy has been preserved by William Anspacher, Betty Gay, Donald Marlowe, Paul Morgan, and Samuel Raff in this richly detailed account of the laboratory's history.

First, the required disclaimer: this reviewer spent twenty years of his midcareer with WOL. And good years they were.

The laboratory was built in 1946 in what was then remote suburban Maryland, where ordnance testing would presumably not disturb the neighbors. It was an outgrowth of the Mine Building at the Washington Navy Yard, and mine development was the core of its original work. From it came the Navy's postwar mines: the Mark 50 series, CAPTOR, the submarine-launched mobile mine, and the Destructor series.

In 1948, high-mach-number wind tunnels captured at Peenemunde, Germany, were installed at WOL and became operational. With these, the laboratory began a new line of technological development for the Navy. From those first tunnels grew a series of hypersonic wind tunnels that gave engineers the ability to test re-entry vehicles at speeds up to Mach 14.