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The Development of United States Navy Convoy Escort Doctrine and the Implementation of Coastal Convoys in 1942

Ronald J. Sheppard
Old Dominion University

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNITED STATES NAVY CONVOY ESCORT DOCTRINE AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COASTAL CONVOYS IN 1942

by

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B.A. February 1991, University of Manitoba

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNITED STATES NAVY CONVOY ESCORT DOCTRINE AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COASTAL CONVOYS IN 1942.

Ronald J. Sheppard
Old Dominion University, 1998
Director: Dr. Willard C. Frank Jr.

The convoy system, no matter how limited, has proven to be the most effective way of defending merchant shipping against attacks by submarines. Yet after the United States entered the Second World War, the United States Navy (USN) did not implement a comprehensive system of convoys for moving shipping along the East Coast of the United States until August 1942. Due to this lack of convoys during the first eight months of 1942, the losses of allied merchant ships to German submarines were among the highest experienced during the Second World War.

This thesis examines why the USN believed that it lacked the resources to implement a comprehensive system of coastal convoys along the East Coast of the United States until late in the summer of 1942. This study shows that the USN believed that coastal convoys required the same tactical doctrine and resources as North Atlantic convoys. This thesis demonstrates that the USN believed that a convoy's escort force needed the ability to take offensive action against enemy submarines and thus the USN preferred convoys with heavy escorts. Primarily due to its own experiences fighting wolfpacks in the North Atlantic, the USN concluded that weakly escorted convoys were a liability. As a result, the USN did not implement a coastal convoy system in early 1942 because it lacked the resources for offensive convoys. This thesis also shows that the tactical doctrine of the USN on the escort of convoys during the Second World War
developed out of its experiences escorting convoys in the North Atlantic in 1941 and
during the First World War. The majority of the materials used in this study consist of the
Chart Room Dispatches of the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Fleet, the action
reports of Task Force 4 and Task Force 24, the records of Tenth Fleet, the records of the
Anti-Submarine Measures Division, the Records of Commander Destroyers, Atlantic
Fleet, the Admiral King Ernest J. Papers, the Admiral Harold R. Stark Papers, the Admiral
Royal E. Ingersoll Papers, the Papers of Morton L. Deyo, the Command Files of the USN
during the Second World War, the United States Naval Administrative Histories of World
War II, and the Records of the Tenth Fleet. Anti-Submarine Measures Division.

Co-Directors of Advisory committee: Dr. Lorraine M. Lees
Dr. Austin L. Jersild
To my beloved wife Lisa. You taught me to believe that dreams can become realities. You are my inspiration, my hope, my joy, and my life.
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Without the assistance of many people, this thesis would not have been possible. I would like to express my gratitude to the members of my thesis committee. Dr. Lorraine Lees not only provided timely encouragement throughout graduate school, but she also helped me to see how my thesis fit into the broader perspective of American culture. I am also grateful to Dr. Austin L. Jersild for sitting on my committee and for indulging a long-standing interest of mine by supervising my independent study on Russian naval history. I would especially like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Willard C. Frank Jr who acted as my thesis advisor. Not only were my classes and discussions with him some of the best learning experiences I ever had, but his constant encouragement to see "the BIG picture" has helped me see both my thesis and the study of history from outside the box. I am also very grateful to Dr. Marc Milner whose helpful suggestions and prior research led directly to this thesis. Attending graduate school and completing this thesis would have been impossible without the selfless attention to our personal affairs at home by Sharon, Neil, and Thurman Kaus. Their regard to a thousand small details made the time Lisa and I spent in Virginia possible. I would like to thank my parents Ron and Lilly Sheppard. Not only did their interest in world affairs spawn my love of history, but without their belief in what I was pursuing and their very generous moral support and financial assistance, this thesis would never have been completed. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Lisa. She has not only provided an island of sanity in the insane world of graduate school, but Lisa also was a research assistant of incalculable value when vast quantities of archival material had to be reviewed within limited time. Thank-you all.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the first eight months of 1942, the loss of ships to German submarines (U-boats) along the East Coast of the United States were among the most severe losses experienced by the allied merchant fleets during the Second World War. During the worst period from the middle of January to the end of June 1942, 504 merchant ships were sunk by U-boats while sailing independently along the East Coast of the United States. During the same period, only 49 merchant ships sailing as part of convoys were sunk by U-boats. Many of these merchant shipping losses could have been prevented if the United States Navy (USN) had instituted coastal convoys immediately after entering the Second World War. This thesis examines why the USN believed that it lacked the resources to implement a comprehensive system of coastal convoys along the East Coast of the United States until late in the summer of 1942.

This study suggests that USN opinion on convoys, and the kinds and numbers of escort vessels required to protect coastal convoys, were shaped by the experiences of USN forces that escorted convoys in the North Atlantic in 1941 and early 1942. Known initially as the Northeastern Escort Force and later designated the Support Force Atlantic Fleet about March 1941, Task Force 4 was created from elements of the Support Force

The style manual used for this thesis is Kate L. Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* sixth edition.

shortly after the implementation of the United States Navy Hemisphere Defense Plan 4 on 13 September 1941. Task Force 4 was later designated Task Force 24 on 6 March 1942.\(^2\) Commissioned on 15 July 1941, the USN base located at Argentia, Newfoundland, became the primary command for the USN-controlled forces that escorted merchant convoys in the North Atlantic.\(^3\) This thesis demonstrates that the USN believed that a convoy’s escort force needed the ability to take offensive action against wolfpacks of enemy submarines. This thesis also suggests that, in addition to the experiences of USN escort forces based at Argentia, the strategic culture of the USN and its experiences during the First World War also influenced the development of USN convoy and escort doctrines during the Second World War. This study also submits that the leadership of the USN believed that the operational requirements for escorting convoys in the North Atlantic were the same as for convoys operating in coastal waters. In strong contrast to the beliefs of the British Royal Navy (RN), the USN believed that weakly escorted convoys provided less protection to merchant shipping than sailing independently. Since the USN believed that it lacked the escort vessels to institute a comprehensive system of coastal convoys that were of equal strength to the escort forces in the North Atlantic, the


\(^3\)Dziuban, *Military Relations Between the United States and Canada*, 96.
USN believed until the summer of 1942 that it would be unwise to institute coastal convoys and rather to have ships sail independently and unescorted.

The reasons for the failure by the USN to institute a comprehensive system of coastal convoys until August 1942 have been a very controversial subject among historians. One of the foremost to defend USN actions with respect to coastal convoys in 1942 was Admiral Ernest J. King USN. By 13 March 1942, Admiral King was both the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Fleet (COMINCH). After his appointment as CNO in December 1941, Admiral King was the primary planner for USN strategy, and as COMINCH King commanded all of the activities of the USN throughout the Second World War. Appointed to command the Fleet Patrol Force in the Atlantic in December 1940 and later promoted to Commander-in-Chief, United States Atlantic Fleet (CINCLANT) in February 1941, Admiral King was an important figure in USN convoy and antisubmarine warfare (ASW) activities both before and after the official entry of the USN into the Second World War.

In his semi-autobiographical work *Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record* coauthored with Walter Whitehill, King admitted that the USN was unprepared to meet the U-boat onslaught that began off of the United States East Coast in January 1942. According to King and Whitehill, the USN was unable to implement convoys in the Atlantic because there were too few escort vessels. They argued that the reason the USN was short of escort vessels was because President Franklin D. Roosevelt did not want to divert resources from the building of capital ships such as battleships and cruisers to the

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construction of ocean going escort vessels such as destroyers and smaller destroyer escorts. Instead, based on his experiences as Assistant Secretary of the Navy during the First World War, President Roosevelt believed that small patrol craft could be built rapidly for coastal work if enemy submarines entered American waters. King considered the light patrol craft favored by Roosevelt inadequate for even coastal escort duties because of their poor sea keeping qualities and light armament. According to King and Whitehill, the shortage of escort vessels within the USN was made more acute by the demands for destroyers in the Pacific after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Many destroyers were also needed to escort special troop convoys to the United Kingdom early in 1942. According to King and Whitehill, the USN was unable to institute coastal convoys in early 1942 because Roosevelt's bad decisions prior to the war that the USN without enough escort vessels to meet the many demands of the navy.

In his book Master of Sea Power: A Biography of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King,
Thomas B. Buell states that the USN was unable to implement coastal convoys because of prewar naval disarmament treaties, the Great Depression with its financial constraints, and a sense of isolationism within the United States that led to inadequate prewar planning. By drawing extensively on memoirs and interviews, Buell argues that together these factors left the USN without the resources to fight the U-boats in early 1942. In addition, a lack of training and tactical doctrine combined with the poor material condition of many existing escorts. As a result, the Atlantic Fleet was at a low level of readiness in early

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1942. Like King and Whitehill, Buell argues that the many demands for special convoys like troop transports only made the situation worse. Due to the slow production of destroyers and destroyer escorts, King felt the navy lacked the tools it needed to implement coastal convoys. In one memo to Roosevelt, King estimated the navy required up to one thousand destroyer escorts to meet all of its projected requirements. Yet by 30 June 1943, only 25 destroyer escorts had been commissioned and by the war's end only 498 had been built. Buell states that due to the desperate shortage of escort vessels, Admiral Adolphus Andrews, the Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Sea Frontier suggested to King that there was no point in instituting convoys without adequate escorts. According to Buell, Andrews concluded that without more escort vessels merchantmen were safer sailing independently.

Drawing on British and American archival sources, Robert W. Love Jr. states in “The U.S. Navy and Operation Roll of Drums, 1942,” that the USN could not implement coastal convoys because the USN had to assist the RN in preventing the break-out of large German surface units and provide protection for convoys bound for the Soviet

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6Ibid., 282.

7Ibid., 289.

8Ibid., 286.

9The Eastern Sea Frontier was one of several defensive naval districts administered by the USN. It extended north south from the border of Canada to North Carolina and ran two hundred miles out to sea. See Clay Blair, Hitler’s U-boat War: The Hunters, 1939-1942 (New York: Random House, 1996), 461.

10Buell, Master of Sea Power, 284.

Union. Love blames the shortage of escort vessels on a number of reasons. He points out that during the interwar years, both the United States Navy Department and the British Admiralty did not view submarines as Germany's primary weapon at sea despite the most damaging phase unrestricted U-boat warfare that began in 1917. Instead, both the USN and Admiralty were concerned about the possibility of a resurgent German surface fleet. The First World War invention of an underwater sound ranging device for locating submerged submarines known as asdic in the RN and sonar in the USN also lulled both navies into a sense of false security. Moreover, neither the Admiralty nor the USN envisioned the fall of Norway and France in 1940 or the construction of German U-boat bases in these countries. U-boats no longer had to operate from the Baltic. The bases in France and Norway greatly increased the range of the U-boats and made them a credible threat to merchant shipping in North American waters.

Another reason Love believes the USN paid little attention to the growth of the German U-boat force on the eve of the Second World War was Roosevelt's assurance to Congress that the United States would not participate in another general European war. Consequently, the primary areas of concern for the USN centered on the Japanese in the Pacific and the defense of the Philippines. In addition, Love squarely blames the president's preference for small patrol craft (against King's advice) as another major reason for the lack of suitable oceangoing escort vessels in the USN. Love sums up the situation


12Ibid., 96.

13Ibid., 98.

14Ibid., 96-7.
by stating that, "In no other aspect of American military operations during World War Two did Roosevelt interfere so consistently, and with such disastrous results, as in the Eastern Sea Frontier in early 1942."\(^\text{15}\)

In his article "Ernest Joseph King, 26 March 1942 – 15 December 1945," Love continues by asserting that King was "convinced that inadequately escorted convoys are worse than none' because they would concentrate targets for the U-boats without affording significant protection."\(^\text{16}\) Love agrees with King's rejection of the British position that convoys with even a minimal escort resulted in fewer sinkings than ships that sailed independently. King believed that since coastal traffic had to steam along established routes to avoid navigational hazards, evasive routing as used in the North Atlantic, where U-boats were located by their radio transmissions and then merchant ships were routed away from them, was not possible. Furthermore, King blamed the Army Air Forces for not providing the bombers and aircrews to protect convoyed shipping.\(^\text{17}\) According to Love, King also believed that the short-term losses of merchant ships would reduce imports to Britain less than instituting coastal convoys with so few escort vessels that the convoy cycle would be slowed down significantly.\(^\text{18}\) In the end, Love argues that


King rejected British advice on convoys because King thought that the RN was not equal in quality or capability to its reputation.  

Clay Blair repeats the arguments made by Whitehill, Buell and Love in his book *Hitler's U-boat War*, with some new observations of his own. Blair states that Roosevelt was under the spell of a theory espoused by Jerry Land of the United States Maritime Commission. Land believed the war at sea could be won by producing merchant ships at a rate faster than the Germans could sink them. Preparing countermeasures against submarines therefore, did not need to be a high priority of the USN. Blair also emphasizes that the Army Air Forces and USN had different approaches for countering U-boats. The navy wanted to protect convoys with air cover while it was the army that squandered its resources in hunting for German submarines. Blair also cites the eight-month loss of Ultra intelligence that began in early 1942. The loss of Ultra, the ability to locate U-boats by deciphering encoded German naval messages, meant that American naval forces could not concentrate their meager resources on the U-boats. In the end however, it was simply that there were not enough escort craft to meet the needs of the USN. Blair cites Admiral Andrew's recommendation that "no attempt be made to protect coastwise shipping by a convoy system until an adequate number of suitable escort vessels is available." All of the naval commanders within Andrew's naval district concurred. Andrews also gave a clue as to how many escorts constituted an adequate number. He

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20 Blair, *Hitler's U-boat War*.

21 Ibid., 451.

22 Ibid., 693.
stipulated that to protect the 120 to 130 merchant ships that passed through his naval
district daily, he needed a minimum of 68 escort vessels.\textsuperscript{23} Blair’s discussion of Admiral
Andrew’s views on coastal convoys is significant because it demonstrates that while
Admiral King may have been COMINCH, his concerns about establishing weakly escorted
convoys were a reflection of thinking throughout much of the USN. Although the
bibliography of Hitler’s \textit{U-boat War} is rich with British, American and German archival
sources, the book lacks specific citations within the text so it is impossible to identify the
evidence for Blair’s statements.

The arguments of Whitehill, Buell, Love and Blair all deflect the blame away from
the USN and Admiral King for the unpreparedness of the USN for dealing with the U-boat
onslaught in early 1942. These authors credit the failure to implement coastal convoys to
sources as varied as Roosevelt, the British, the financial constraints of the Great
Depression, the political uncertainties of the interwar years and the Japanese attack on
Pearl Harbor. Despite the verity and depth of arguments by Blair, Buell, Love, King and
Whitehill, one common thread joins them all, that the USN lacked the material resources
to implement coastal convoys in 1942. The arguments of all four authors differ only in
that they give different reasons for the material deficiencies of the USN.

However, not all authors cite the scanty resources available to the USN as the
main reason for their failure to implement coastal convoys. In \textit{War at Sea: A Naval
History of World War II},\textsuperscript{24} Nathan Miller uses British and American archival sources to

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 498.

\textsuperscript{24}Nathan Miller, \textit{War at Sea: A Naval History of World War II} (New York:
Scribner, 1995).
stress that the mistake made by the USN and Admiral King was their fundamental belief that inadequately escorted convoys were worse than none. Miller acknowledges that there was a critical shortage of escort craft because of the loss of reserve destroyers by the USN when Roosevelt made his destroyers for bases deal with the British. Miller also cites escort shortages because Roosevelt gave priority to the construction of landing craft in the early months of the war. However, Miller also contends that in over more than years of fighting, the RN realized that the defense of merchant shipping was the best offense against U-boats. According to Miller, "Numbers had nothing to do with calculating what constituted an effective escort." When faced with even a weakly escorted convoy, the U-boat had to adopt tactics that greatly reduced its effectiveness when attacking.

Dan van der Vat in his book The Atlantic Campaign: World War II’s Great Struggle at Sea was harsher in his criticism of Admiral King than was Miller. However, van der Vat also contends that King did not reject the notion of convoys, but was wrong in believing that a convoy weak in escorts was worse than none. Van der Vat concludes that the USN was offensive-minded and sought to sink U-boats by hunting and patrolling for them when British experience in both World Wars indicated that the surest way to destroy U-boats and protect merchant shipping was to use even weakly escorted convoys.

Van der Vat also contends that the USN was unprepared to meet the threat

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25Ibid., 296.

26Ibid., 297.


28Ibid., 267.
posed by U-boats in 1942 because few within the leadership of the USN thought that U-boats would amount to a serious threat in the Western Atlantic because of the limited number of U-boat attacks that occurred along the America coast during the First World War. While the bibliography of *The Atlantic Campaign* is rich with primary source material from Canada, Germany, Britain, and the United States, he fails to cite his sources in the text.

Relying primarily on printed secondary sources and American archival sources, in their book *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*,

30 Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch insist that the USN did accept the importance of convoys. However, what the USN primarily sought from the RN was technical information. The USN did not learn from the RN how to implement the organizations capable of administering convoys, routing merchant ships, and conducting ASW activities. Neither did the USN coordinate its ASW activities with the other armed services. Cohen and Gooch conclude that while the USN did learn from the British, the USN did not always absorb the right lessons.

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In *Engage the Enemy More Closely: The Royal Navy in the Second World War*,

32 Correlli Barnett states that the USN had no preparations made for instituting a convoy system in early 1942. Instead, the Americans believed that offensive hunting

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29 Ibid., 241.


31 Ibid., 87-90.

groups and patrolling the shipping lanes in search of U-boats were the best ways to counter Germany's submarines. Although citing British archival sources almost exclusively, Barnett states that the USN did not learn from the mistakes of the RN during the First World War when the top leadership of the RN fought the implementation of convoys. Barnett describes Admiral King as obstinate for refusing British advice on convoying and believes that it was only after the loss of many merchant ships along the East Coast and the failure of the policy of hunting U-boats that the USN finally instituted convoys. Like Barnett, John Terraine uses British primary sources in his book *The U-boat Wars, 1916-1945* to contend that not only did the USN not learn from the experiences of the RN, the USN did not learn from their own Admiral William S. Sims, USN, who had been a powerful advocate for convoys during the First World War.

In his book *The War at Sea, 1939-1945*, Peter Padfield adds to the arguments of Barnett and Terraine by asserting that Admiral King placed more emphasis on the situation in the Pacific while neglecting events in the Atlantic. Padfield also criticizes King for not establishing any kind of central command structure or shipping defense system prior to the war. Padfield also viewed the need to protect merchant ships as

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33 Ibid., 441-3.


35 Ibid., 413.


37 Ibid., 223-4.
more vital to the war effort than immediate deliveries of American troops to the United Kingdom. Heavily escorted troop convoys from the United States to the United Kingdom could have waited until effective U-boat countermeasures were in place along the East Coast of the United States.\textsuperscript{38} The War at Sea cites American, British and German archival material.

Stephen W. Roskill in his official history \textit{The War at Sea, 1939-1945},\textsuperscript{39} described the failure of the USN to adopt convoys in a diplomatic manner. Written with full access to documents from the British government and military as well as his own experience, Roskill describes in detail all of the material contributions and information that the RN shared with the USN with respect to convoys and ASW.\textsuperscript{40} While the British understood that the USN was hard-pressed to find ships for convoying, they insisted that a convoy with even a weak escort was better than no convoy at all. The British were stunned to realize that the USN believed the exact opposite.\textsuperscript{41} Roskill does not give a specific reason for USN failure to adopt convoys but instead defers to the conclusions made by Samuel Eliot Morison.

In \textit{The Battle of the Atlantic: September 1939 – May 1943},\textsuperscript{42} Morison concludes that the USN was unprepared materially and mentally for the U-boat assaults in early 1942 and that the lack of preparation was the navy's own fault. While

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 532.

\textsuperscript{39}Roskill, \textit{The War at Sea, 1939-1945}, vol. 2, \textit{The Period of Balance}.

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., 98-9.

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., 97.

\textsuperscript{42}Morison, \textit{The Battle of the Atlantic, September 1939–May 1943}.
Morison appreciates that the USN lacked escort vessels in 1942, he believes that the USN underestimated the U-boat threat and that the army, Congress, and Roosevelt cannot be blamed for the lack of vessels or planning for convoys in 1942. Written with full access to all official documents, except those of a confidential nature, Morison’s work affirms that it was the responsibility of the USN, not the government, to provide leadership in naval matters.43

Based on his own experiences during the Second World War, *The Tenth Fleet*, by Ladislas Farago states that the USN placed the Atlantic theater of operations in a position of far less importance than operations in the Pacific.44 To illustrate this point, Farago mentions a quip that circulated within the Navy Department. Of Admiral King it was said, "Old Blowtorch [King] really liked this U-boat business because it took his mind off the war."45 While Farago was favorably disposed toward Admiral King, Farago believes that due to neglect by the USN there were no comprehensive plans or forces designed to counter the U-boats when they struck America in 1942.46

While the arguments of Miller, van der Vat, Cohen and Gooch, Barnett, Terraine, Roskill, Morison, and Farago all differ somewhat, they all stress that the leadership of the USN exercised bad judgement. Although this second group of authors all agree with King and Whitehill, Buell, Blair, and Love that the USN was short of escort vessels in 1942, they all stress that the USN did not use the ships it had

43Ibid., 200-1.


45Ibid., 84.

46Ibid., 72.
efficiently. A misapplication of resources and lack of planning were the primary problems when U-boats attacked East Coast shipping in 1942.

Two other authors who are very critical of the USN are R. A. Bowling and Michael Gannon. Neither author describes the actions of the USN as incompetent due to a lack of planning. Instead, these authors are convinced that the USN was obsessed with offensive warfare and did not like convoys that were purely defensive in nature.

Based on extensive research in British and American archives, R. A. Bowling believes that the failure to implement coastal convoys in early 1942 stemmed from the powerful influence of the offensive-minded theoretician Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, USN.47 In his article "Mahan's Principles and the Battle of the Atlantic,"48 Bowling's argument is that the USN was fixated on the concepts of sea power as conceptualized by Mahan. Large sea battles between fleets of capital ships were what the USN had envisioned during the interwar years and a spirit of offensive-mindedness permeated the navy's top ranks. The protection of merchant shipping and the defense of convoys were considered a mere subsidiary to the real war at sea. Even when submarines were considered, they were thought of as screening elements of the battle fleet and not as commerce raiders. As a result, within the USN little thought was given to protecting merchant shipping. When U-boats appeared off the East Coast of the United States in

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early 1942, the spirit of Mahan prevailed and the limited ASW resources of the USN were expended in hunting for U-boats rather than being concentrated for the passive, unglamorous task of convoying. As for Admiral King, Bowling avows that King was a stubborn Anglophobe who ignored the experience of the RN, was anti-convoy and was obsessed with offensive actions at sea.49 Bowling believes that the only reason King eventually instituted convoys was because of the grim success of German submarines along the United States East Coast during the early months of 1942.50

Michael Gannon delivered a much more detailed and stinging critique of Admiral King and the USN in his book *Operation Drumbeat.*51 Using archival material from Britain, Germany and the United States as well as interviews, Gannon's arguments agree with those cited by Bowling. Gannon argues that the USN was both offensive-minded and that the navy's leaders were fixated on a Jutland style battle between capital ships. Gannon cites Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson as stating that; "With rare exceptions antisubmarine warfare received only the partial attention of the first-rate officers, while actual operations were left to commanders not always chosen from the top drawer."52

Gannon also argues the offensive orientation of the USN and a dislike for the


British by Admiral King led King to ignore advice from the RN on convoys. Rather than learning from the experiences of the RN and RCN, Gannon cites RN intelligence expert Patrick Beesly's experiences with the USN. Beesly stated that the United States Navy Department's attitude to British advice came across as "we've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too, and we don't need a bunch of Limeys to teach us how to run our war." While Gannon's indictment might seem harsh, he cites a conversation between Rodger Winn, one of the top intelligence officers in the RN, and Rear Admiral Richard S. Edwards, USN, Admiral King's Deputy Chief of Staff. Winn expressed his concerns to Edwards about the high rate of sinkings of merchant vessels off the East Coast of the and tried to convince the USN to adopt convoys and the practice of evasive routing. However, Winn was dumbfounded by Edwards's response to the effect that "the Americans wished to learn their own lessons and that they had plenty of ships with which to do so." Gannon insists that Edwards's response to Winn encapsulated Admiral King's general attitude toward advice given by the RN.

Gannon cites further evidence that King was responsible for the lack of suitable escort vessels and not Roosevelt. Using evidence from the Bureau of Ships Gannon demonstrates that Roosevelt had been advocating the construction of destroyer escorts since 1940, but that it was the navy that waffled on the nature of ship construction.


When King finally took measures to institute convoys, Gannon believes that it was only after pressure from Roosevelt and General George C. Marshall forced him to.

The next and final group of authors reviewed in this study includes Marc Milner, George W. Baer, and Donald Macintyre. They all have the common conviction that the USN believed that for coastal convoys to be effective, they needed escort forces of equal strength to those in the North Atlantic. Milner and Baer also both maintain that the USN wanted to use convoys primarily as offensive weapons for destroying U-boats. The research by Montgomery C. Meigs also confirms that Admiral King and the USN wanted to use convoys as offensive weapons for destroying U-boats. Since Meigs confirms this belief made by Milner and Baer, he is included in this latter group.

Based on his experiences during the Second World War, Captain Donald Macintyre, RN, deduced the primary reasons for rejection of coastal convoying in early 1942 by the USN and recorded them in his book *The Battle of the Atlantic*.\(^\text{56}\)

Macintyre was assigned to the USN base at Argentia, Newfoundland, in early 1942, where he was the staff officer who looked after the needs of the RN vessels that were based there.\(^\text{57}\) Macintyre was one of the best ASW officers in the RN and a thorough professional. He saw first hand the activities and capabilities of the USN and RCN.

Macintyre realized that the USN was materially in a bad state in early 1942. The USN lacked ocean going escorts and aircraft for ASW activities. Despite these


facts, Macintyre believed that the USN learned less than what it might have from the years of RN experience escorting convoys in two world wars. A convoy escorted by even one escort vessel would have forced the U-boat to submerge and restricted the U-boat’s ability to attack or use its deck guns. Macintyre also considered the USN hunting operations and patrolling the coastal shipping lanes in early 1942 as useless for destroying U-boats. He strongly disagreed with the belief held by the USN that a weakly escorted convoy was worse than none.58

Macintyre believed that the USN thought that the same strength of escort required for protecting convoys against wolfpacks in the North Atlantic was required for coastal convoys. However, the shallower waters along the coast and the close proximity of air and surface reinforcements to coastal convoys combined to make wolfpack tactics as they occurred in mid-ocean impossible. Admiral King believed that all convoys of between forty and fifty ships required at least five escorts. Macintyre agreed with this assessment for mid-ocean convoys when possible, but not for coastal convoys.59 Macintyre does not ascribe the initiation of convoys to the increased availability of escorts but rather to a change of attitude toward convoys after the failure of offensive patrols by the USN.

Based on years of research in British, American and Canadian archives, Marc Milner has suggested a different reason for why the USN failed to implement coastal convoys in early 1942. He addresses the fundamental issue of why Admiral King and the leadership of the USN believed that a weakly escorted convoy was worse than

58Macintyre, *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 140.

59Ibid., 140-1.
none at all. In his article “The Battle of the Atlantic,” Milner cites the USN Board on the Organization of East Convoys that strongly advised in a report dated from March 1942 against weakly escorted convoys.\(^{60}\) From September 1941, USN units served with the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) escorting convoys to and from the Mid-Ocean Meeting Point (MOMP) south of Iceland. At this time, the RCN was in the midst of rapid wartime expansion. When the USN had the opportunity of escorting convoys in company with the RCN in 1941 and 1942, USN personnel saw the RCN at its worst. Poor training, a lack of modern ASW equipment, and very poor maintenance all combined to make the RCN a substandard force. As a result, the convoys escorted by RCN vessels were often badly mauled by U-boats. Milner believes that after members of the USN saw what happened to the Canadian-escorted convoys, they determined that underprotected convoys were simply large targets. Milner suggests that after the appearance of wolfpacks in the fall of 1940, the only kind of convoy that the leaders of the USN believed was worth having, in either coastal or North Atlantic waters, was one escorted by a large number of destroyers and destroyer escorts.\(^{61}\)

In *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890-1990*,\(^{62}\) George W. Baer seconded Milner’s arguments. Basing his work on that of other authors, Baer states that the USN did not make a distinction between the protection of merchant


\(^{61}\)Ibid.

shipping and ASW designed to destroy U-boats. While the RN would have viewed
the requirements for coastal convoys as having one set of needs, open ocean convoys
as having another set of requirements, and ASW as having a third set of needs, the
USN put all three sets of operational requirements together. As a result, the USN
insisted that convoys have offensive capabilities and saw convoys less as a means for
defending shipping and more as a way of luring U-boats to their destruction.

Based on American archives, one of the most complex examinations on USN
attitudes toward ASW and convoys was written by Montgomery C. Meigs. In his
book *Slide Rules and Submarines*, Meigs supported the notion of offensive action
against U-boats rather than the defense of merchant shipping. However, Meigs points
out that during the interwar years the USN "did not conduct an organized program for
development of weapons and doctrine for antisubmarine warfare." No agency
survived during the interwar years with the mandate and power to carry on
antisubmarine developments. Meigs's earlier research agrees with the research
conducted by the author of this thesis. There appear to be no manuals on ASW or the
escorting of convoys produced for the use of the USN between the end of the First
World War and 1943. It was not until the creation of Tenth Fleet on 20 May 1943

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63 Ibid., 197.

64 Ibid., 194.

65 Montgomery C. Meigs, *Slide Rules and Submarines: American Scientists and
Subsurface Warfare in World War II* (Washington: National Defense University Press,
1990).

66 Ibid., 9.

67 Ibid., 47.
that Admiral King merged the responsibility for coordinating ASW operations, tactical doctrine, routing, technological development and training under one command.

Meigs also considered Admiral King's style of command important because of the amount of power King had concentrated in his hands as both CNO and COMINCH. Admiral King also commanded Tenth Fleet. According to Meigs, in addition to his official duties, King frequently meddled in areas of responsibility that belonged to his theater commanders. As a result, King's highly centralized style of command destroyed the initiative of his subordinates and left King and his small staff to deal with both strategic planning and operational matters. This situation left the USN unable to react quickly to the different crises it confronted in early 1942.68

The ideas put forward by Milner and Baer are supported by Meigs's claims that King did not have an operational objective for defeating U-boats other than by defending convoys. However, King's desire to use convoys as an offensive weapon against U-boats undermined the role of convoys for promoting the safe and timely arrival of merchant shipping. Since King wanted to use convoys as an offensive weapon against U-boats, he felt that the only option in early 1942 was to "hold and build" until the navy had enough escorts to both protect the convoy and to hunt enemy submarines to destruction after the submarines attacked.69

Within the existing literature there is a hole that this thesis seeks to fill. Of those authors such as King, Buell, Blair and Love, who defend the actions of the USN in 1942, their arguments seldom extend beyond why the USN lacked the resources to

68Ibid., 48.
69Ibid., 49.
institute coastal convoys. Furthermore, they never addressed the issue of USN doctrine on convoys, and how the navy’s perception of doctrine may have affected the implementation of convoys in 1942.

The authors typified by Miller, Terraine, Roskill and Morison agree that there was a lack of planning and a misapplication of available resources. These authors also agree that the USN made a fundamental mistake with its assumption that convoys with weak escorts were worse than no convoys at all. This study agrees that the USN made mistaken assumptions about what constituted an adequately escorted convoy and misapplied its resources. However, what none of these authors addressed is why the USN made the assumptions it did. This thesis also agrees with the belief held by Bowling and Gannon that the USN was offensiveminded and did not see the value of defensive convoying. However, neither Gannon nor Bowling have explored how the offensivemindedness of the USN influenced its doctrine and assumptions on convoys.

While this study disagrees with Meigs’s thesis that the USN was not offensive enough, this study does support Milner’s, Baer’s, and Meigs’s contention that the USN desired to use heavily escorted convoys as the chief method for luring U-boats to their destruction. This study also supports the contention made by Milner, Baer and Macintyre that the early experiences of the USN in the North Atlantic during 1941 and early 1942 shaped the navy’s thinking with respect to what constituted an effective escort force. Finally, this study also agrees with these last three authors belief that the USN did not implement a comprehensive system of coastal convoys immediately in 1942 because it lacked the resources for making coastal escort forces of equal strength as those in North Atlantic.
According to Marc Milner, no scholarly monograph based on a thorough examination of American documents has ever been undertaken on the disastrous USN antisubmarine campaign of early 1942. In this respect, the theories of Baer, Milner and Macintyre are conjecture. It is the object of this thesis to examine why the USN believed that it lacked the resources to implement a comprehensive system of coastal convoys along the East Coast until late in the summer of 1942. To accomplish this objective, it will be necessary to explore the origins of USN doctrine on coastal convoys and why they apparently rejected the experiences of the RN. To clarify why it developed the way it did, USN doctrine on coastal convoys will also be placed in within the navy's strategic culture that had its origin in American diplomatic culture.

The primary sources used in this study include the Chart Room Dispatches of COMINCH, which provide insight into the thinking of the top officers of the USN and help measure the reaction of the USN to fighting U-boats in 1941 and 1942 as well as working with convoys. Examining the records of Tenth Fleet provide views on convoys, ASW and some of the assumptions behind the actions of the USN. Also examined are the Personal Papers of Admiral Ernest J. King, the top officer of the USN during the Second World War and a man deeply connected to the ASW campaign at all levels. The Papers of Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll are also examined since Ingersoll commanded the United States Atlantic Fleet for much of the Second World War. The Papers of Admiral Harold Stark are examined as well since Stark was the CNO during the years leading up to the entrance of the USN into the Second

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World War. By examining Stark’s papers, a clearer picture of from where the USN got its ideas on convoys emerges from the time when the USN began escorting convoys in the fall of 1941. The volume on convoys and routing of the “United States Naval Administrative Histories of World War II” is examined to ascertain the procedures and policies devised by the USN to protect merchant shipping from attacks by submarines. Documents from the United States Submarine/Undersea Warfare Division are also examined in an attempt to understand USN views on ASW during the First World War and up through Second World War. From the Command File World War II “The History of Task Force 24” a number of insights emerge on both from where the USN developed its opinions on convoys and what constituted an adequate escort from the perspective of escort commanders who actually escorted the convoys. Another source of information on the attitudes and early experiences of the USN while escorting convoys in the North Atlantic is provided by the Papers of Morton L. Deyo while he commanded a destroyer division in Iceland in 1941. Deyo played a significant role in formulating USN escort doctrine in 1941. The Files of Tenth Fleet and the Papers of the Submarine Warfare Division are also examined as are a number of Command Files from the Second World War. Together these documents outline the development of ASW activity within the USN. Finally, in order to explore the influence of Task Force 4's and Task Force 24's experiences in the North Atlantic on the development of USN escort doctrines, the Action Reports of those forces will be examined.

In addition to the sources already mentioned, the United States Naval War College at Newport Rhode Island was contacted to see if any useful information on
the Battle of the Atlantic or Ernest J. King was available. According to Evelen Cherpak of the Naval War College, the T. Buell collection and the Walter Whitehill collection were available. However virtually all the materials used by the two biographers of Ernest J. King were photocopies of materials found in Washington, D.C. at the Library of Congress. Evelen Cherpak offered the same reference to locations in Washington, D.C. for all other archival material available at the Naval War College on the subject of the Battle of the Atlantic during the Second World War.

Chapter two outlines and explains the specifics of what the USN believed and eventually adopted as doctrines on the escort of North Atlantic convoys and coastal convoys. Chapter three focuses on the reaction of the USN to convoys and its experience in the North Atlantic in 1941 and early 1942, and chapter also examines how the USN arrived at the doctrines it did with respect to the escort of North Atlantic convoys and coastal convoys. By exploring these issues, a clearer picture emerges of from where the USN developed its doctrine on convoys and why the USN chose not to institute a comprehensive system of coastal convoys along the East Coast of the United States in early 1942.
CHAPTER II

THE UNITED STATES NAVY DOCTRINE ON COASTAL CONVOYS IN 1942

When trying to understand why the USN did not implement a comprehensive system of coastal convoys in January 1942 and why the leaders of the USN believed that a convoy with a weak escort was worse than none, attention must first be paid to the function of convoys within the USN. Members of the RN, RCN, and USN agreed that the safe and timely arrival of merchant shipping was a primary reason for convoys. However, in 1942, the RN and RCN did not consider convoys as offensive weapons tasked to destroy U-boats. By contrast, throughout the Second World War, the USN placed great emphasis on a convoy's ability to take offensive action for hunting and destroying U-boats. The emphasis within the USN on convoys with offensive capabilities was crucial to the refusal by the USN to implement coastal convoys in January 1942.

The views of the RN on convoys had a different emphasis from the views on convoys held by the USN. By 1942, imports to the United Kingdom had been cut from fifty million tons a year to twenty-three million tons.¹ Britain was scarcely able to feed its population and maintain army operations in the field. In April 1941, the Western Approaches Convoy Instructions of the RN stipulated that convoys were a purely defensive formation. An escort vessel's success was not measured by how many U-boat

kills it acquired but by whether the merchant vessels it escorted arrived in port safely.

Within the RN, escort doctrines and ASW doctrine were different from each other.² Although offensive tactics against U-boats by convoy escorts were advocated by brilliant ASW specialists within the RN such as Captain Frederic Walker, the RN and the USN never agreed on the role of convoys in the destruction of U-boats nor about what constituted an adequately escorted convoy. The RN always maintained that a convoy, even one with no escort at all, offered merchant vessels a better chance of avoiding enemy submarines than allowing slow ships to sail independently.³ According to Admiral Karl Doenitz, who commanded Germany’s submarine force during the Second World War and later became the German navy’s Grand Admiral, there were a number of reasons convoys worked so well against submarines. A former U-boat commander during the First World War, Doenitz observed in his memoirs that when convoys were introduced Germany’s submarines were robbed of easy targets by late 1917.⁴ For the most part, submarines operated independently. By grouping merchant ships together, it became much more difficult for U-boats to locate targets. When a U-boat located a convoy it was usually by chance. A single U-boat operating alone was forced to take enormous risks by attacking a convoy, since attacking a convoy virtually always resulted in a counter attack by the convoy’s escorts. Even if the attack was successful and the U-boat survived the counter


attack, all a U-boat could hope to sink were a couple of merchant ships that would amount to but a tiny percentage of the convoy's total.\(^5\) Furthermore, during the First and Second World Wars, once a U-boat had fired its supply of loaded torpedoes, it was without weapons for either attack or defense. The U-boat would have to draw away from the convoy and escape from any pursuers to reload its torpedo tubes. Reloading torpedo tubes was a dirty, noisy, unpleasant process that was time-consuming and could not be preformed while the U-boat was in combat. When reloaded, the submarine would then have to pursue the convoy, locate it, and then hope to gain an advantageous attack position where the whole process for attacking, escaping and reloading would begin again.

This procedure for attacking convoys was very dangerous and debilitating for the crew. Fatigue often forced U-boat commanders to call a halt to their attacks.\(^6\)

U-boats suffered from a number of other limitations while submerged. Submerged U-boats were very slow and practically blind. Using electric motors while submerged, the average U-boat could manage a top speed of about seven knots. Running at full speed while submerged, the U-boat’s batteries would have been exhausted in about an hour. At slower speeds the endurance of most submerged U-boats during the Second World War was between 60 and 80 miles at between four and four and a half knots. Due to its inability to locate targets easily and its slow speed, a submerged U-boat had a greatly reduced fighting potential.

Even on the surface, a U-boat's fighting potential was still fairly limited. The top speed of most U-boats from the First World War until nearly the end of the Second

\(^5\)Ibid.

\(^6\)Ibid.
remained between twelve and seventeen knots. However these speeds could only be maintained for short periods of time since the higher speeds quickly depleted a U-boat’s fuel supply. While U-boats were faster on the surface than almost all merchant ships and some escorts, virtually any destroyer could manage sustained speeds of between twenty-five and thirty knots. Other escorts such as destroyer escorts and frigates could manage sustained speeds of between 20 and 24 knots. It was therefore a simple matter for many escorts to run down and destroy a U-boat especially if a damaged U-boat were unable to submerge. Even escorts like “Flower”-class corvettes that could not outrun a surfaced U-boat were still so menacing that a U-boat never fought one willingly. The presence of even a single escort in a convoy would prevent a U-boat from using its deck guns and force the U-boat to submerge. U-boats could not risk having their internal pressure hull breached since it would be unable to submerge and evade detection. Due to the limitations of U-boats as a weapon system, and their vulnerability to both surface vessels and aircraft, the best target for a U-boat was a merchant ship sailing independently.

During the First World War the RN realized by 1917 that convoys was the best answer to the menace posed by U-boats. A development in both world wars that convoys took advantage of was evasive routing. While the intelligence service of the RN had been decrypting U-boat transmissions since early in the First World War, the Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear-Admiral Sir Reginald Hall, let his department (known as Room 40) develop a chart room where all the known locations of U-boats were posted. By directing convoys around the areas of known U-boat activity, it appeared to the German

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7Blair, Hitler's U-boat War, 21.
submariners as though the oceans were suddenly empty of merchant ships.⁸ Contrary to the belief held by many high-ranking officers within the RN that convoys presented submarines with large targets, due to the vastness of the sea, convoys actually reduced the number of targets available to U-boats in a given area. Moreover, by concentrating anti-submarine escorts around convoys, the escorts had a much better chance of making contact with and destroying U-boats than by hunting and patrolling for them.⁹

The advantages of convoys over independent sailing applied even though evasive routing was not always possible. R.A. Bowling demonstrates through Admiralty statistics that placing ships in convoys decreased the loss rate of merchant vessels significantly. By the end of the First World War, 90 percent of Allied merchant shipping sailed in convoys. According to Admiralty statistics for the month of July 1917, when roughly an equal number of ships were sailing in convoys and independently, no ships were lost while in convoys while 4 percent of those ships sailing independently were lost. In October 1917, the loss rate for ships sailing in convoys amounted to 0.58 percent while ships sailing independently suffered a loss rate of 7.37 percent. This meant that for every ship that was sunk in a convoy, thirteen ships were sunk while sailing independently. In January 1918 the loss rate for ships in convoy rose to 0.70 percent while the loss rate for ships sailing independently dropped to 3.67 percent. This meant that during the month of January, five ships were lost while sailing independently for every one ship lost while in a convoy. For the sixteen-month period between July 1917 and October 1918, the loss rate amounted to 0.48 percent for ships sailing in convoys. During the same period, the loss

⁸van der Vat, *The Atlantic Campaign*, 34.

⁹Terraine, *The U-boat Wars*, 55.
rate for merchant ships that sailed independently amounted to 4.51 percent. These figures translated into an average of one ship lost while in a convoy for every nine ships lost while sailing independently. As for ships sailing in Arctic and British home waters between February 1917 and October 1918, 263 ships were sunk in convoys with a loss rate of 0.31 percent. During the same period, 1,497 ships with a loss rate of 3.1 percent were lost while sailing independently. Ships sailing independently accounted for 85.5 percent of the losses and had an overall loss rate ten times higher than ships that sailed in convoys. The Admiralty's lead one to conclude that convoys always present merchant ships with a better chance of reaching port than ships that sail independently.

Comparing the losses of merchant vessels that sailed independently and those that sailed in convoys along the East Coast of the United States in 1942 offer conclusions similar to the Admiralty statistics from the First World War. During the worst period from the middle of January to the end of June 1942, 504 merchant ships were sunk by U-boats while sailing independently along the East Coast of the United States. During this same period only 49 ships were sunk by U-boats while sailing in convoys. As convoys were instituted along the East Coast of the United States, merchant shipping losses to U-boats decreased from August to December 1942 to 336 vessels lost while sailing independently. Losses of vessels sailing in convoy rose to 190 lost during the same period because a higher percentage of ships were sailing in convoys. Together during the year of 1942, when U-boat operations were concentrated along the East Coast of America, a total

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11 Ibid., 616.
of 804 merchant vessels were sunk while sailing independently while only 239 were sunk while in convoys. According to an operational analysis of all merchant shipping losses in all theaters by the British Admiralty, 63 percent of the ships sunk by U-boats from 1942 to August 1943, were sunk while unescorted and 29 percent were sunk while in convoys. A further eight-percent of vessels sunk were stragglers from convoys.

Tenth Fleet also provides data displaying the apparent effectiveness of convoys for protecting merchant ships over sailing independently. The data exhibits the merchant shipping losses of the Allies in thousands of gross tons worldwide from January 1942 to June 1943. In the Atlantic in January 1942, the tonnage of ships lost while sailing independently was 4.5 times higher than the loss rate of ships sailing in convoys. In March 1942, approximately ten times the tonnage of ships was sunk while sailing independently than were sunk while in convoys. In June 1942 nearly six times the tonnage of ships was sunk while sailing independently compared to ships lost while in convoys.

Of the data provided by Tenth Fleet, only during the five months between January and May 1943 were the losses of ships in convoys higher than those ships that sailed independently. These higher losses of ships in convoys occurred because coastal convoys had been established along the East Coast of America and because Admiral Karl Doenitz had ordered his wolfpacks back into the North Atlantic convoy routes. However, despite the increased losses of ships in convoys, because more ships were in convoys, the loss rate between January and June 1943 declined nearly 50 percent from what the loss rate was.

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during the same period in 1942 when most American coastal traffic sailed independently.\textsuperscript{14} As virtually all statistics from the First and Second World War appear to indicate, the more ships that were in convoys, the lower the rates of loss were.

Despite their experiences during the First World War, the RN was not prepared for a war against U-boats in 1939. Furthermore, Winston Churchill advocated offensive operations such as hunting and patrolling for U-boats early in the war. However, hunting for U-boats failed to either deter U-boat activities or protect merchant shipping. By 26 August 1940 the Commander-in-Chief, Western Approaches (CINCWA), Admiral Martin E. Dunbar-Nasmith, RN, dissolved all of his hunting forces and used all available escorts to protect convoys. Admiral Dunbar-Nasmith also stated that until enough escorts were available to ensure the detection and destruction of any U-boats that might attack a convoy, escorts would be used in a defensive role.\textsuperscript{15} A report from the Admiralty indicated that if a convoy's escort was doubled from six vessels to twelve, doubling the escort more than doubled the number of U-boats sunk per merchant ship sunk. Despite the increased ability to sink U-boats, the Admiralty report does not suggest that weakly escorted convoys provided significantly less protection before a U-boat attack occurred.\textsuperscript{16} Since convoys always provided more protection for shipping than sailing independently, the RN used defensive convoys where thirty vessels were protected with only two

\textsuperscript{14} Graph of “Merchant Ship Losses, Allied and Neutral Nations-All Belligerent Action,” file Merchant Ship Losses-Convoy Operations, Anti-Submarine Measures Division (hereafter ASMD), Records of the Tenth Fleet, RG-38, NACP.


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 476-7.
escorts. In some instances in the Western Approaches to the British Isles, convoys were escorted by as little as a single vintage destroyer or sloop.

The opinion of the RN on the value of even weakly defended convoys contrasted sharply with the view popularly held within the top circles of the USN. In a secret message dated 13 February 1942 from Admiral King in response to a plea by the British Admiralty that the USN institute convoys along the East Coast of the United States, Admiral King stated that: "Continuous consideration [is] being given to convoys in Atlantic Coast Sea Lanes. . . . [I] am sure you appreciate that [the] important factor is that massing ships in convoys is inviting trouble unless and until adequate and suitable escort vessels become available which is not yet." What Admiral King meant when he wrote that there were not enough escorts available for convoying was that there were not enough escorts available to allow for aggressive patrolling around convoys.

The emphasis on aggressive patrolling was the subject of a report dated 3 December 1941 from the office of the commander of Task Force 4 to his entire command on the escort of convoy ON-28. Taking command of Task Force 4 in January 1941, Vice Admiral Arthur Bristol, USN, worked tirelessly to organize his command into an efficient service able to escort convoys from North America to Scotland. Bristol was also responsible for the immense effort it took to expand the naval bases at Newfoundland to accommodate and service his warships. The author of the report on

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17Ibid., 358.

18Ibid., 353.

19COMINCH to Admiralty, 13 Feb. 1942, msg 131200, Atlantic Dispatches, RG 38, NACP.
ON-28 was Bristol's Chief of staff, Captain Louis E. Denfeld, USN. Captain Denfeld, who was promoted to CNO after the war, directed his readers to pay "particular attention... to the manner of employment of escorts in aggressive tactics against shadowing." According to Destroyer Division 60 Commander John B. Heffernan, USN, who later reached the rank of Rear Admiral, wide sweeps by escort craft astern and ahead of convoys before dusk when combined with radical course changes were very effective for shaking off trailing U-boats. Sweeps by destroyers of up to fifteen miles from the convoy were advocated in the direction of suspected U-boat contacts and during daylight a destroyer was placed up to twenty miles in front of convoys. These aggressive sweeps were pursued even when high frequency direction finding gear (HF/DF) was not available for locating targets, and convoys were left with as few as two escorts. These sweeps were considered vital for discouraging attacks by individual U-boats and driving away shadowing submarines. However, their main purpose was to prevent the formation of wolfpacks.

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21Report by John B. Heffernan, "Escort of Convoy ON-63, 6-13 Feb. 1942, TF-2.7 to TF-4.1.1," Action and Operational Reports, RG 38, NACP.

22High frequency direction finding (HF/DF) was developed by the British and used during the First World War.Refined during the Second World War, HF/DF involved locating radio transmission points. It was very useful for locating U-boats so convoys could either evade them or escort vessels could attack the submarines. See Fred B. Wrixon, Codes and Ciphers (New York: Prentice Hall General Reference, 1992), 90-1.

Wolfpack tactics had their origins in concepts developed at the end of the First World War. Throughout most of the First World War, U-boats attacked ships that sailed independently. When the Allies began convoys merchant ships in the latter half of 1917, the German submariners changed their tactics. Whereas previously U-boats attacked while submerged with torpedoes or ambushed their victim by surfacing and sinking their quarry using their deck guns, U-boats started attacking with torpedoes on the surface at night where their low silhouette made them nearly invisible. By using surface attack and their diesel engines for maximum speed, U-boats acted as ocean-going, submersible torpedo boats. Although not fully developed, the concept of wolfpack tactics traces its origins back to the efforts of U-boat commanders to overcome escorted convoys during the last few months of the First World War.\textsuperscript{24}

As a U-boat commander in 1918, Karl Doenitz not only recognized the virtues of attacking at night on the surface, but also of concentrating a force of several submarines against a single convoy. Convoys concentrated both merchant vessels and escorts together which made it difficult for U-boats to attack singly. However, by assaulting a convoy as a group, a combination of darkness and multiple U-boats created confusion within the convoy and among the escorts. Groups of U-boats provided more opportunities for successful attacks and forced the escorts to split their forces. In 1917, Commodore Hermann Bauer, the Officer Commanding U-boats of the German High Seas Fleet, suggested the conversion of one of the large cruiser U-boats into a vessel suitable for a flotilla commander to coordinate by radio the attacks of several U-boats on a single

\textsuperscript{24}Doenitz, \textit{Memoirs}, 4.
convoy. While the ideas of men like Doenitz and Bauer were effective, they came too late during the First World War to change the outcome. During the Second World War Doenitz perfected wolfpack tactics and their success led Doenitz to adopt them as the standard for the U-boat service. By using aircraft and patrolling submarines to scouts, when a convoy was spotted and its position reported to Doenitz at his headquarters, he would direct all available U-boats to intercept the convoy. Wolfpack tactics were first used during the Second World War with great effect in a series of convoy battles between 20 September and 19 October 1940.

As ASW and convoy tactics developed within the USN, they were designed to counter the highly effective wolfpack tactics and focused on the destruction of U-boats. One secret memo issued from CINCLANT, dated 5 April 1942, made it clear that “many hunts after a positive contact have been much too brief. No unsuccessful hunt has been too long.” The memo concluded that “every enemy submarine in being is the probable source of ultimate loss of many thousands of tons of ships. Every sub sunk represents a corresponding saving. In every permissible circumstance positive contact with an [sic] submarine must instantly be seized upon as an opportunity to dog him persistently to death.” This order applied whether the escort vessels doing the hunting were part of a convoy or not. In a memo issued by the office of Commander Destroyer Force Atlantic Fleet, USN escort commanders were informed that the rescue of merchant seamen was secondary since U-boats were believed to remain in the areas where merchant vessels were

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25Terraine, The U-boat Wars, 120.

26Order issued by CINCLANT, 5 Apr. 1942, msg 051742, Atlantic Dispatches, RG 38, NACP.
sunk. Several escort vessels were encouraged to converge for the rescue of survivors. Rescue efforts that could not be conducted quickly were to be abandoned periodically so escorts could make offensive sweeps with sonar in an attempt to locate and attack enemy submarines. If no submarines were contacted rescue efforts could be resumed. The memo concluded with the admonition that "it must be remembered . . . that [the] first and paramount mission is [the] destruction of enemy submarine[s]." Even the rescue of survivors became a tool in the hands of the USN for seeking offensive action against U-boats.²⁷

Nowhere was the importance of sinking enemy submarines better demonstrated than when the commander of the destroyer USS *Simpson* (DD-221) abandoned his search of a suspected U-boat to rejoin the portion of convoy HX-162 sailing for Lock Ewe on the West Coast of Scotland. On 7 April 1942, the *Simpson* was escorting two fully loaded vessels that were only one hundred miles from their destination. According to subsequent reports, sea conditions were excellent for sonar and the commander of the *Simpson* enjoyed an opportunity to attack the submerged submarine with a high probability of success. However, the commander of the *Simpson* abandoned the search after only thirty-five minutes since the *Simpson* was the sole escort for the convoy. Not only did his task force commander, Vice Admiral Richard M. Brainard, USN, criticize the captain of the *Simpson* but Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll, USN, the man who replaced Admiral King as CINCLANT when King was appointed COMINCH, also made a point of criticizing him

²⁷Order issued by the office of Commander Destroyer Force Atlantic Fleet, 2 May 1942, msg 012323, Atlantic Dispatches, RG 38, NACP.
as well.28 Commander Thomas L. Lewis, USN, head of the Anti-Submarine Warfare Unit in Boston,29 wrote that while it was understandable that the Simpson abandoned its hunt for the submarine since the Simpson was the convoy's sole escort, "the value of total destruction of a submarine that has been located and the relationship of its destruction to defense of a specific, as well as future convoys, should always be considered."30 As Lewis's comments indicate, the USN considered the destruction of U-boats more important to the defense of trade than the preservation of individual merchant ships.

In a confidential order issued by Admiral King dated 24 January 1942, he ordered that if contact with a submarine were maintained, it should be hunted until it is destroyed. Even if contact were lost, as many vessels and aircraft as were able were to continue the hunt for suspected submarines for at least eight hours.31 Admiral King reinforced the importance of sinking submarines when he created Tenth Fleet. In a classified letter from

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29 The Atlantic Fleet Anti-Submarine Warfare Unit was commissioned on 2 March 1942 in Boston. The unit was tasked with analyzing combat information from escort forces operating in the North Atlantic as well as to standardizing escort doctrine and providing ASW training. As the ASW effort of the USN expanded, the Boston unit faded until Tenth Fleet assumed control of all ASW activities after its creation in May 1943. See Farago, The Tenth Fleet, 141-3; and Morison, The Battle of the Atlantic, 218-9.


31 Admiral King to all USN coastal frontiers in North America and Hawaii, 24 Jan. 1942, file A2-11 (5) United States Fleet Confidential Circular Letters, Diaries and Dispatches 1941-1944, Commander Destroyers Atlantic Fleet Secret General Administration Files, Records of the Naval Operating Forces, RG 313, NACP.
Admiral King dated 29 July 1943 to the United States Fleet, the first task of Tenth Fleet was listed as the "Destruction of enemy submarines" with the "Protection of Allied Shipping in the Eastern, Gulf, and Caribbean Sea Frontiers" listed as second in importance.32

The determination within the USN to link the escort of convoys directly to the destruction of submarines made many within the USN critical of the RN and RCN vessels and escort doctrines. Many within the USN criticized the corvette, a staple escort vessel used by the RN and RCN during the earlier years of the Second World War. Weighing just more than a thousand tons, corvettes were designed originally as coastal escorts and were only pressed into service as ocean escorts out of necessity. As a result of their original design, the corvettes only had a maximum speed of fourteen knots and a limited fuel supply. Although very uncomfortable, they possessed excellent sea keeping qualities and could maneuver easily in the roughest seas. However, they lacked the speed and endurance required for the offensive sweeps advocated by the USN. Captain Harold C. Fitz, USN, the commander of the force that escorted convoy HX-196, from 2 to 10 July 1942, expressed the problem from the USN viewpoint. Fitz was an important figure since he worked to develop patterns for the disposition of escorts when there were none in the USN, and he later served with Tenth Fleet. The escort force for HX-196 was composed of the United States Coast Guard vessels Campbell, and Spencer and the four corvettes HMCS Bittersweet, Agassiz, Collingwood, and Mayflower. Although no attacks

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on the convoy occurred, Fritz observed that while preventive sweeps were made, the slow speed of the corvettes and “Secretary”-class Coast Guard cutters (the cutters could only manage nineteen knots) meant that the distance of the sweeps was limited. Even steaming at full speed, corvettes and cutters deployed on extended sweeps, could not rejoin the convoy quickly if necessary.  

Vice Admiral Richard Brainard, the man who commanded Task Force 24 after the death of Admiral Bristol from a heart attack on 30 April 1942, stated that at least two destroyers with a long radius should be included in each escort group. Commander Thomas Lewis of the Anti-Submarine Warfare Unit also stated that two long-range destroyers were the minimum for a convoy of forty-three ships like HX-196. In order to provide convoys with a minimum amount of protection and offensive capability, a memo from the office of the commander of Task Force 24 recommended that mixed escort forces of destroyers and corvettes should not be reduced to fewer than five vessels. However, five vessels were considered a weak escort. According to Captain Paul R. Heineman USN, a veteran escort commander from the North Atlantic who later in the war commanded the Anti-Submarine Warfare Unit Atlantic Fleet, a convoy with less than seven escorts was dangerously under strength. Captain Heineman believed that four

33Report by Harold C. Fitz, “Escort of Convoy HX-196, 2-10 July 1942,” TF 24.1.3, Action and Operational Reports, RG 38, NACP.

34R. M. Brainard to COMINCH, 14 July 1942, “Escort of Convoy HX-196, 2-10 July 1942,” TF 24.1.3, Action and Operational Reports, RG 38, NACP.


36Memo from Commander TF-24 to Commander in Chief Atlantic Fleet, 16 Mar. 1942, msg 160701, Atlantic Dispatches, RG 38, NACP.
escorts were needed to remain with the convoy at all times, while three fast escorts made offensive sweeps around the convoy in search of U-boats. Fewer than seven escorts meant that offensive sweeps had to be abandoned as the remaining escorts moved into defensive positions around the convoy. Heineman thought it very dangerous to the successful escort of convoys to abandon offensive sweeps.\(^{37}\)

The view held by the USN that a convoy's escort needed to be able both to defend merchant shipping as well as strike back at the attacking U-boats is confirmed in the introduction to the United States Fleet "Notes on Convoy Escort Operations." The documents opening statement reads: "The sailing of ships in convoys has been found to be the most effective means of defense against enemy submarine operations, provided convoys are escorted by an adequate group of anti-submarine ships." A few lines further down, the introduction continues by stating that: "In the event of an attack on a convoy, immediate positive offensive action must be taken by all escorts to destroy enemy forces and to prevent further attacks on the convoy."\(^{38}\) In an undated document entitled "Summary of Extracts From Escort of Convoy Reports and Analyses," the offensive capabilities of convoys was outlined further. The search for an enemy submarine was never to be abandoned readily. Even if between half and two thirds of a convoy's escorts were engaged in a hunt away from their convoy, the summary stated that, "it must again


\(^{38}\)Notes on Convoy Escort Operations" file A10 (2) A/S Publications (Aircraft), Administrative Files, ASMD, RG 38, NACP.
be emphasized that the best protection of convoys is the sinking of submarines.\textsuperscript{39} The desire to use convoys as an offensive weapon against U-boats explains the size and nature they considered as the acceptable minimum for USN escort forces.

Although USN doctrine on convoys was developed through their experiences in the North Atlantic fighting wolfpacks, they applied the same standards for coastal convoys. Rear Admiral Francis S. Low, USN, a former submarine officer who served throughout much of the war as one of Admiral King’s most reliable assistants, was recalled from commanding a cruiser in the Pacific and appointed chief of staff for Tenth Fleet. Low actually ran Tenth Fleet’s operations under the nominal supervision of King until Admiral Low returned to the Pacific for active duty in command of Cruiser Division 16 on 1 January 1945. In a memorandum dated 2 May 1943, Low outlined plans for the formulation of sets of escort and convoy instructions. In his final paragraph, Low concluded by stating that:

\begin{quote}
It is my view that with minor exceptions escort and convoy instructions can be made applicable to all areas. In saying this I recognize that there are certain peculiarities as to coastal work that must be considered. I think it is not too late and that duplication and confusion may be reduced if we . . . [accept] CINCLANT’s draft as generally applicable to all convoys and the inclusion of an appendix of a few pages that will be specifically applicable to coastal convoys.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

As Admiral Low’s memorandum indicates, the USN applied the same operational standard to coastal convoys as it did to North Atlantic Convoys.

\textsuperscript{39} "Summary of Extracts from Escort of Convoy Reports and Analyses," file A10 (2) A/S Publications (Aircraft), Administrative Files, ASMD, RG 38, NACP.

\textsuperscript{40} Memorandum to Chief of Staff Tenth Fleet from F. S. Low, 2 May 1943, file A10 (2) A/S Publications (Aircraft), Administrative Files, ASMD, RG 38, NACP.
A secret dispatch from CINCLANT dated 13 January 1942 outlined the problem of finding enough escort vessels to institute coastal convoys. One conclusion was that there were simply too few vessels of the right type "if coastal escort is of the same strength as ocean escorts."  

Within the USN, Admiral King and most senior officers believed that coastal escort forces needed to be strong enough both to defend convoys and hunt U-boats to destruction. However, in early 1942 there were not enough escort vessels available to create escort groups along the East Coast capable of fulfilling this dual mandate. In addition, the USN did not seem to realize that wolfpacks could not form in coastal areas. More than anything else, airpower determined where U-boats could operate on the surface. In coastal regions, short range land-based aircraft were available to protect convoys where convoys were formed.  

In addition, coastal waterways are much more shallow and fraught with navigational hazards than the open ocean. As a result, U-boats lacked the room to maneuver for the formation of wolfpacks. Throughout the Second World War, U-boats operated singly in the waters along the East Coast of America and no wolfpack operations ever occurred. In fact there were never more than twelve U-boats operating throughout American waters at any time in 1942. This amounted to no more than what the RN had to face in a single wolfpack attack against

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41 Memo from CINCLANT to COMINCH, 13 Jan. 1942, msg 130500, Atlantic Dispatches, NACP.

many North Atlantic convoys in 1941.\textsuperscript{43} Simply put, there never was a need for the powerful escort groups that the USN desired along the coast of America.

The USN doctrines on convoys and in particular coastal convoys mystified members of the RN. According to Captain Donald Macintyre, the RN had informed the USN about the value of defensive convoying and the different requirements for coastal and North Atlantic convoys. Yet the USN rejected RN experience.\textsuperscript{44} The rejection of defensive convoys is even more remarkable since, according to Commander Thomas. Lewis, escort units that made the entire journey across the Atlantic received escort and ASW training at RN naval bases. According to a report by Lewis dated 17 May 1942, the methods and training facilities of the RN greatly impressed USN officers.\textsuperscript{45} Yet the USN never adopted defensive convoying.

As for coastal convoys, the different views between the RN and USN were aptly demonstrated in a report by the captain of the RN escort trawler HMS \textit{St. Zeno}. The \textit{St. Zeno} was working with an American escort group in August 1942 running convoys between Chesapeake and Delaware. Apart from criticizing the lack of discipline of USN escorts, the captain of the \textit{St. Zeno} stated that it was an error in “allowing ships to go unescorted from Key West, and . . . rather than this, available escorts should be halved, and


\textsuperscript{44}Donald Macintyre, \textit{The Naval War Against Hitler}, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 253-62.

\textsuperscript{45}Letter from T. L. Lewis to CINCLANT, 17 May 1942, “Escort of Convoy HX-182, 29 Mar.-8 Apr. 1942,” TF 24.1.4, Action and Operational Reports, RG, 38, NACP.
the job done the whole way.” The comments from the captain of the St. Zeno confirmed the RN philosophy that any convoy, was better than no convoy.

In early 1942 when U-boats were sinking large numbers of unconvoyed merchantmen along the East Coast of the United States, in the waters controlled by the RCN there was a dearth of U-boat activity. When the first U-boats moved west of Cape Race, the small but rapidly expanding of the RCN was far too weak to engage in the kind of offensive convoying advocated by the USN. Instead, the RCN concentrated on defending shipping in the manner advocated by the captain of the St. Zeno. Defensive convoys were established in the waters surrounding Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, and they absorbed every available vessel including Bangor-class minesweepers, patrol craft, and motor launches into escort service. By September 1942, coastal convoys under RCN operational and strategic direction were extended as far east as the edge of the Grand Banks and as far south as New York City. An example of the effectiveness of even weakly escorted convoys for protecting coastal shipping can be found during 1942. That year, only one ship was lost from the understrength RCN escorted convoys operating along the coast of Nova Scotia. The effectiveness of weak coastal convoys is even more graphically demonstrated when one looks at the total number of losses prior to and after defensive convoys were instituted throughout Canadian waters. In January and February 1942 thirty-seven merchant vessels were sunk in Canadian waters. After defensive convoys were put in place, losses declined to only eleven vessels during March and

46Report on Chesapeake/Delaware Convoys by Commanding Officer HMS St. Zeno to Commandant 5th Naval District and British Trawler Officer, 6 Aug. 1942, file, “A14 Convoys, Operations, 1942” Reports, ASMD, RG 38, NACP.

47Milner, “Inshore ASW,” 146.
April. This fact is even more amazing considering that the rapid expansion of the RCN meant that the standards of efficiency on Canadian vessels were very low. The renowned Captain Donald Macintyre referred to RCN escort vessels as "travesties of warships." Nonetheless, the RCN escorts did the job. The coastal convoys escorted by the RCN, with the help of a few aircraft from the Royal Canadian Air Force, convinced the skippers of Doenitz's U-boats to move further south into areas where convoys were largely absent and hunting for allied merchant vessels was much easier.

When discussing the nature of RCN coastal escort forces in early 1942, it must be emphasized that RCN convoys were purely defensive in nature. Any search and destroy activities were left to the RCAF. To show how weak the coastal escort forces available to the RCN were, one only needs to examine the twenty ships available for escort duty with the convoys in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Five Bangor-class mine sweepers, five armed yachts, and ten Fairmile patrol craft were formed into five escort groups. Each escort group was comprised of a minesweeper, a converted yacht and two patrol craft. None of these vessels was designed for escort duty, and in heavy weather only the minesweepers could be counted on to remain with their convoys. Theoretically, this

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49 Milner, "Inshore ASW," 146.


51 Milner, "Inshore ASW," 146.

52 Ibid.
meant a convoy could be reduced to one escort vessel in bad weather.\textsuperscript{53}

One source that illustrates how effective even weakly escorted RCN coastal convoys were is volume eleven of the "United States Naval Administrative Histories of World War II." Compiled in 1946, volume eleven, entitled History of Convoy and Routing, listed the average strengths of escorts for several systems of convoys throughout the war. For example, between 1942 and 1945, the RCN escorted convoys on the XB/BX route between Boston and Halifax. On this route, an average of only 2.9 escort vessels escorted an average of 15 merchantmen. From 1942 until the end of the war, the RCN escorted 383 convoys on this route with a total of 5,649 merchant vessels. Of this number, only five were sunk in convoys with two damaged and two more sunk as stragglers.\textsuperscript{54} By contrast, during the same period on the NK/KN route between New York and Key West, the USN escorted convoys of only 12 ships with an average of 4.2 escorts. Of the 5,009 merchant ships escorted on this route during the war, five were sunk in convoys, one was sunk as a straggler and one was damaged. From 1942 to 1945, on the USN controlled TAG/GAT route between Trinidad, Aruba and Guantanamo, an average of 17 merchant vessels was escorted by an average of 4.4 escorts. Of the 7,519 vessels convoyed on this route during the war, 17 ships were lost while in convoys, one sunk as a straggler and two damaged. Between 1942 and 1945 on the USN controlled GK/KG route between Guantanamo and Key West, an average of 4.4 escort vessels escorted


\textsuperscript{54}History of Convoy and Routing; Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet and Commander, Tenth Fleet, vol. 11, United States Naval Administrative Histories of World War II, Navy Department Library, NHC, Washington, D.C., 61-2.
convoys that averaged only eight merchant ships with no losses during the war. Even though the production of escort vessels expanded during the war, in January 1945, the RCN escorted the twenty merchant vessels of convoy BX-141 between Boston and Halifax with only two minesweepers as escort. From the few examples available to this study, the evidence suggests that the weaker escort forces of the RCN did not provide significantly less protection to shipping than their more powerful USN counterparts.

Another excellent example of the divergent views over what constituted an adequate escort can be found in a series of messages between Canada’s National Security Headquarters in Ottawa and COMINCH dated May 1942. Not all of the merchant vessels that sailed with a convoy traveled all the way to the convoy’s final destination. Individual merchant vessels or groups of vessels would leave the convoy and head for their destinations as the convoy passed their port. During the winter of 1941 and 1942, the RCN established the Western Local Escort Force to provide some convoy protection to vessels moving from Cape Cod to about 45 degrees east of Newfoundland. As convoys arrived in North American waters and began their final run to the ports along the East Coast, the RCN was confronted with a problem. Since the RCN was short of escort craft, it could only provide a maximum of four destroyers, corvettes, or a mixture of both to each escort group. The question National Security Headquarters wanted answered by COMINCH was how to disperse convoys arriving from mid-ocean so the ships could make it to their various ports safely under escort. National Security Headquarters

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55 Ibid., 54-7.

56 Hadley, U-Boats Against Canada, 279.

57 Dziuban, Military Relations Between the United States and Canada, 246.
provided four suggestions of which two involved dividing the escort forces. In the one instance the main escort force was reduced by one vessel. In another instance the escort force was cut in half.\textsuperscript{58} The response from the USN to the query from National Security Headquarters originated from Task Force 24. It stated that the local escort of four vessels was already inadequate "even without further reduction." The dispatch then recommended one of the Canadian proposals that kept the convoy’s escort force intact "until such time as increased escort strength will ensure adequate protection under alternate proposals."\textsuperscript{59} While the RCN followed the RN pattern and was willing to operate segments of coastal convoys with as few as two escorts, the USN considered the units inadequate even when they were at full strength by RCN standards.

The value of defensive convoys was provided unintentionally by the Germans themselves provided through Vichy French Naval Intelligence. A secret dispatch dated 23 April 1942 from "a reliable official source" that included information about U-boat operations and bases, stated that the Germans considered their U-boat losses off the United States East Coast as far lighter than they expected. More significantly, the dispatch stated that the Germans found "that the English convoy system provided effective protection against submarines."\textsuperscript{60} Apparently even the Germans thought that the weakly defended convoys then in use by the RN were effective at countering U-boat activities.

\textsuperscript{58} Memo from National Security Headquarters to COMINCH, 19 May 1942, msg 2251Z/18, Atlantic Dispatches, RG 38, NACP.

\textsuperscript{59} Memo from CTF 24 to CINCLANT, 20 May 1942, msg 200159, Atlantic Dispatches, RG 38, NACP.

\textsuperscript{60} Memo from ALUSNA VICHY to OPNAV, 23 Apr. 1942, msg 221635, Atlantic Dispatches, RG 38, NACP.
The divergent views between the RN and USN on offensive/defensive convoys versus convoys that were purely defensive in nature were discussed in a series of messages between RN and USN staffs. In a series of secret dispatches in September 1942 from Task Force 24 commanded by Admiral Richard Brainard, to CINCWA, Admiral Sir Percy Noble, made it clear that Brainard considered offensive sweeps by escorts as vital for the protection of a convoy. On the other hand, his RN counterpart believed that such sweeps would draw escorts away for extended periods and leave the convoy vulnerable to attack. CINCWA believed that a compromise between preventing U-boat attacks through aggressive sweeps and being able to mount a successful counterattack by keeping an adequate number of escorts with the convoy had to be reached. When a set of guidelines was issued for use by the forces under Task Force 24's command, the number of vessels sent on offensive sweeps was limited. However, the destruction of enemy forces remained equally important to the safe and timely arrival of the convoy.\(^{61}\)

The belief within the USN that destroying enemy submarines was more important than delivering merchant shipping is illustrated later in the war in a memorandum to Admiral Francis Low dated 24 December 1943 from Captain Kenneth Knowles, USN, as quoted in William T. Y'Blood's book *Hunter-Killer*. Captain Knowles commanded the Combat Intelligence Division of Tenth Fleet where he ran an operation similar to the Submarine Tracking Room of the British Operational Intelligence Centre.\(^{62}\) In his

\(^{61}\)CTF-24 to CINCWA, 21 Sept. 1942, msg 202135, Atlantic Dispatches; and CINCWA to COMTASKFORCE 24, 23 Sept. 1942, msg 1854/22, Atlantic Dispatches; and CINCWA to unspecified, 24 Sept. 1942, 1903Z/22 Atlantic Dispatches, RG 38, NACP.

memorandum to Admiral Low, Knowles outlined the different attitudes toward the employment of the new escort aircraft carriers in the RN and USN. Captain Knowles stated that “While the British recently have professed their desire to go on the offensive against the U-boat, an objective analysis of their operations . . . fails to disclose any marked change from their tradition “divert-and-avoid” methods. On the contrary there appears to be a decided reluctance on the part of the British to go out of their way to engage the enemy offensively except in the Bay [of Biscay] where no convoys are involved” [emphasis in original]. The conclusion of Captain Knowles’s memorandum is especially significant. “In operations involving convoys the British continue to divert both the convoy and its supporting CVE, (Escort Aircraft Carrier) permitting the latter to attack only when the U-boats threaten the convoy.”63 Coming from the center of Tenth Fleet, the memorandum from Captain Knowles expresses the emphasis of the USN on the destruction of U-boats while the RN focused its efforts on defending convoys.

Captain Donald Macintyre believed that in early 1942 the USN did have enough naval escort vessels and civilian vessels pressed into service to form coastal convoys that were defensive in nature. Macintyre explained that when Great Britain entered the war in 1939, the RN had only 112 surface vessels and forty-five aircraft with which to oppose eighteen U-boats. By contrast, the USN had 173 surface craft and 268 aircraft with which to counter the five U-boats that began operations along the East Coast of the United States in January 1942. By May, when the USN began instituting a comprehensive system of coastal convoys, an average of five escorts escorted 21 ships, and the number of escort forces available had reached 197 surface vessels and 643 aircraft. Macintyre concluded;

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63 Ibid., 286.
"Thus, if Admiral King's contention that convoy could not be instituted in January 1942 on account of shortage of escorts is to be accepted, it appears that the addition of 24 escort vessels was sufficient completely to reverse the situation and put ships into convoy with a comparatively lavish escort.""64

Whether or not Macintyre’s assessment on the disposition of USN forces was correct, Canadian coastal convoys were successful at a time when the RCN was as short of ships as the USN for meeting its operational requirements. Moreover the success of the RCN proved the fundamental truth that any convoy, no matter how weak in escorts, was better than no convoy at all. When the USN failed to make a distinction between the operational requirements for escorting coastal convoys and escorting convoys in the North Atlantic, and then stipulated that the primary mission for escort forces was hunting and destroying enemy submarines, the consequences for merchant vessels traveling independently along the East Coast of America in 1942 were dire. Believing that they needed many more escorts than they had available to inaugurate effective coastal convoys, in early 1942 the USN failed to use its limited number of escorts for defensive convoying.

In the face of all the evidence provided by the RN and RCN, the question must be raised of why did the USN cling to its emphasis on convoys with offensive capabilities when defensive convoys could have saved the allies enormous losses. Also the question arises of why the USN considered a weakly escorted convoy worse than none. The next chapter will attempt to answer these questions.

64Macintyre, The Battle of the Atlantic, 142.
CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNITED STATES NAVY
DOCTRINE ON COASTAL CONVOYS IN 1942

In order to understand why the USN believed that it lacked a sufficient number of
escort vessels for implementing coastal convoys in early 1942, particular attention must be
paid to from where the USN derived its doctrines on convoys. A number of factors
combined to convince the top admirals of the USN that a convoy weak in escorts was
worse than none. The most significant factor that influenced USN doctrines on the
viability of convoys and the proper methods for escorting them were the previous
experiences of the USN with convoys. Wolfpack tactics, a lack of planning prior to the
Second World War, and the strategic culture of the navy left the USN improvising its
doctrines on convoys, escort forces, and ASW during the winter of 1941 and 1942.

While the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor has remained a potent symbol signifying
the official entry of the United States into the Second World War, the USN had been
fighting a bitter campaign against U-boats in the North Atlantic months before
7 December 1941. USN involvement in the Battle of the Atlantic began slowly. After the
beginning of hostilities in Europe in 1939, President Roosevelt ordered the USN to
organize a Neutrality Patrol on 5 September. The patrol was to prevent belligerent forces
from conducting military operations within 300 miles of the East Coast of the Americas.
After the fall of France in June 1940, the Germans built U-boat bases on the West Coast
of France at Brest, Saint.-Nazaire, Lorient, and La Pallice. With bases in France, German
U-boats struck at British merchant shipping further into the Atlantic and Britain with its Commonwealth found themselves without allies. The RN in particular was overextended with worldwide commitments and Great Britain was nearly bankrupt. With Great Britain's survival in question, President Roosevelt realized that the USN was not large or powerful enough to protect the United States if Britain fell and the United States would face alone the dual threat posed by the Japanese in the Pacific and the Germans in the Atlantic. From June 1940 to March 1941, Roosevelt determined to assist Britain in all ways "short of war." As part of Roosevelt's plan to prepare the defenses of the United States, Roosevelt signed a bill on 15 June 1940 calling for a two "ocean navy" capable of meeting Axis threats in both the Atlantic and the Pacific simultaneously. The new navy bill approved enough money for the construction of 257 new warships equaling a 70 per cent increase in USN strength.1 However, a new navy could not be built immediately. At the same time the RN urgently needed to replace the destroyers it had lost while evacuating the British Expeditionary Corps from Dunkirk. By executive order in September 1940, President Roosevelt traded fifty First-World-War-vintage destroyers to the British for a ninety-nine year lease on a chain of air and naval bases extending from the Caribbean to Canada.2 Once elected to his third term as president, Roosevelt managed to get the Lend-Lease Act approved by the United States Congress in March 1941. Of great assistance to the British, the Lend Lease Act allowed the United States to provide arms,

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2Ibid.
munitions, and other supplies to nations whose defense was vital to the defense of the United States.\(^3\)

While the Lend-Lease Act was of immense benefit to Britain, German U-boats prevented the act from having as positive an effect on the British war effort as it could have. As German U-boat bases in France became operational and U-boats extended their operations further into the Atlantic, the RN was hard pressed to counter the highly effective wolfpack tactics of Doenitz's submarines. During the First half of 1941, the British lost 756 merchant vessels with 1,450 more damaged. Had merchant-shipping losses continued at these levels they would have reached the awesome sum of seven million tons of shipping by the end of that year which amounted to more than double the capacity that shipyards in Britain and the United States could produce if combined. Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox made the observation that Lend-Lease materials were not going to do the British any good if they never made the transit across the Atlantic safely.\(^4\) In order to help ensure Britain's survival, the USN had to take a step that brought the United States perilously close to war with Germany. After a series of staff conferences between high ranking members of the British, Canadian, and United States armed forces, Churchill and Roosevelt agreed that the USN would start escorting North Atlantic convoys.

The conferences, known as the American British Conversations, that set the foundation for USN escort duties in the North Atlantic took place in Washington, D.C. and resulted in the ABC-I agreement of March 1941. In addition to making the defeat of

\(^3\)Ibid.

\(^4\)Ibid., 207
Germany the primary object should the United States enter the war against the Axis, issues over hemisphere defense were resolved. The United States assumed responsibility for protecting the Western Hemisphere including the Western Atlantic. As part of their defense mandate, United States military forces occupied Greenland and Iceland in July 1941. Also, despite the fact the United States was still officially neutral, the USN obtained control over all RN and RCN forces operating in the Western Atlantic. On 16 September 1941, the USN began escorting convoys to and from North American ports to MOMP south of Iceland. At MOMP the convoys bound for ports in the United Kingdom were turned over to the RN and exchanged for convoys bound for ports in North America.

When trying to understand what shaped USN tactical doctrines on convoys and their escorts, particular attention must be paid to the early experiences of the USN escorting convoys in the North Atlantic during the period of undeclared war between the USN and Germany’s U-boats in 1941. The first attack by U-boats on a convoy escorted by the USN occurred on the night of 16-17 October 1941. This attack was significant because it was the first time a USN escorted convoy was attacked by a wolfpack, and because the USS *Kearny* (DD-432), a modern destroyer commissioned in 1940, was torpedoed. The torpedoing of the *Kearny* while operating as part of the escort force for convoy SC-48 on 17 October 1941 had a major impact on the views within the USN on the nature of what constituted an effective convoy escort force. While the *Kearny* did not sink, the men who died as a result of the torpedoing were the first casualties the USN experienced during the Second World War. Consisting of 50 merchantmen, SC-48 was a heavily guarded convoy. At the time the *Kearny* was torpedoed SC-48 was escorted by
three modern destroyers, two First World War vintage “four-stackers” or “short-legged”
destroyers, (one from the RCN), and four RCN corvettes. On the same night the Kearny
was torpedoed, eight merchantmen were sunk from SC-48.

What was particularly disturbing to Captain L. Hewlitt Thebaud, USN, who
commanded the escort force of SC-48 and later became the United States naval control
officer at Londonderry, was the dearth of sonar contacts despite the clear night and calm
weather. When writing his report, Captain Thebaud concluded that the enemy “torpedoes
were fired from positions well outside of the screening ships and well beyond the effective
range of their listening gear.” Captain Thebaud also believed that the convoy was
screened throughout the day by U-boats because the convoy was attacked after sunset and
just thirty minutes after a seventy-six degree course change. After his experience with SC-
48, Captain Thebaud was convinced that when a U-boat firing torpedoes was “aiming at a
mass of forty or fifty ships proceeding at 7 knots, it would seem almost impossible to
miss.” Thebaud concluded his report by making a statement that mirrored Admiral
King’s dictum that a weakly escorted convoy was worse than none. Captain Thebaud
“submitted that a convoy proceeding at a speed of 7 knots and shadowed by submarines is
doomed to the acceptance of very severe losses unless escorted by an impractically large

5Farago, The Tenth Fleet, 158.

Convoy SC-48 & the Torpedoing of Kearny,” TF-4.1.2 to TF-4.1.4, Action and
Operational Reports, RG 38, NACP.

7Ibid.
number of screening vessels. The answer – if there is one – is to prevent shadowing.” In a separate letter to the CNO dated 21 October 1941 that referred to SC-48, Admiral Bristol, the commander of Task Force-4, stated that “Inasmuch as this is the first convoy attack in which United States forces have been engaged, it warrants the most careful study and analysis.” Admiral Bristol concluded by stating that a full report with practical comments would be submitted as soon as practicable.⁹

When Admiral Bristol made his report on the attack of SC-48, he made a number of salient points that were eventually formulated into USN doctrine on convoys. Admiral Bristol stated that the “outstanding feature of the entire series of attacks” was that the U-boats that made the attacks were never heard or seen. He accounted for this because the escorts were stationed between 1000 and 1500 yards away from the convoy. Bristol also observed that the escorts were not actively patrolling at night but when the attacks occurred the escorts were maintaining station with the convoy at the slow speed of six and a half knots. By maintaining station, the escorts themselves became potential targets. Bristol proposed that when fuel allowed, escorts should patrol aggressively at all times, day or night, and hunt in the areas surrounding convoys from which submarines were most likely to attack.¹⁰ Bristol’s report on Convoy SC-48 was dated 7 November 1941.

Interestingly, the ideas espoused in Bristol’s report matched the ideas sent to Bristol in a

⁸Ibid.


¹⁰Report from Admiral Bristol to CNO, 7 Nov. 1941, “Escort of Convoy SC-48 and Torpedoing of Kearny,” TF-4.1.2 to TF-4.1.4, Action and Operational Reports, RG 38, NACP.
letter from Captain Morton L. Deyo USN dated 31 October 1941. Captain Deyo was a successful escort force commander who eventually rose to the rank of Rear Admiral. Considering the similarity between the two documents, one cannot help but think that Bristol’s report to the CNO was influenced heavily by Captain Deyo’s recommendations at a time when Captain Deyo commanded an escort group in the North Atlantic. Also significant was Captain Deyo’s assessment that “passive escorting,” where the escorts remained close to the convoy and concerned themselves with just driving off the U-boats rather than aggressively hunting them to destruction, was of no value anymore.\footnote{Letter from M. L. Deyo to A. L. Bristol, 31 Oct. 1941, file Iceland, Destroyer Squadron 11 1941-n.d., The Papers of Morton L. Deyo, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter LC).}

The confirmation that Bristol’s forces operating in the North Atlantic were the major influence behind USN doctrines on convoys and their escorts is found in the fact Captain Deyo wrote a document entitled \textit{Proposed Escort Doctrine} dated 24 November 1941. Captain Deyo’s proposed doctrine encouraged aggressive hunting, wide sweeps by escort vessels, and maintaining the attack if a U-boat was contacted. Furthermore, destroyers were the only escort vessels that were referred to. After Captain Deyo’s proposals and Bristol’s report on SC-48, Admiral King sent a letter dated 27 November 1942 to the Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, outlining some of the changes that had been implemented in the way USN escorts operated while actively guarding a convoy. Previously USN escorts maintained station between 1000 and 1500 yards from the convoy.\footnote{Morison, \textit{The Battle of the Atlantic}, 92.} King’s letter stated that the U-boats that attacked SC-48 fired their torpedoes from between 4000 and 5000 yards away from the convoy. On the advice
of the commander Task Force 4, Admiral King advised Knox that patrolling stations for escorts were now 4000 and 5000 yards away from the convoy.\textsuperscript{13}

Ideas on the correct way to escort convoys were further refined during other operations. In his report dated 24 November 1941 on convoy HX-159, the escort force commander, Captain A. G. Kirk USN, made a number of important recommendations. Kirk reasoned that the longer the convoys remained at sea the more fuel the escorts consumed and the greater the likelihood the convoy would be attacked. Also, the more fuel escorts consumed in traveling to their destination, the less fuel they had to patrol aggressively.\textsuperscript{14} Captain Kirk was against mixed groups of escorts and was especially critical of the 1200 ton First-World-War-vintage destroyers. He complained that they could not be sent on searches above eleven knots since they lacked the fuel capacity to operate at high speeds for extended periods. Many of his ships did not have radar and they were unable to hunt for surfaced submarines at night. Due to the shortcomings of his escorts, Captain Kirk was frustrated since his forces were “entirely on the defensive, and not able to conduct aggressive, offensive operations against the enemy.”\textsuperscript{15} Captain Kirk’s views on the old four-stacker destroyers were in concurrence with those held by Captain Deyo. In a report dated 1 October 1941, after escorting convoy HX-140, Captain Deyo reported that “short-legged” Destroyers have not much leeway in fuel. They cannot

\textsuperscript{13}Admiral King to the Secretary of the Navy, 24 Nov. 1941, “Escort of Convoy SC-48 and Torpedoing of Kearny,” TF-4.1.2 to TF-4.1.4, Action and Operational Reports, RG 38, NACP. See also Morison, \textit{The Battle of the Atlantic}, 93.

\textsuperscript{14}Report from A. G. Kirk to Commander Task Force 4, 24 Nov. 1941, “Escort of Convoy HX-159,” TF-4.1.2 to TF-4.1.4, Action and Operational Reports, RG 38, NACP.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.
engage in operations calling for even moderate speeds.” In a report to Admiral Bristol dated 5 January 1942, another experienced destroyer commander who commanded Destroyer Squadron 30 before the war, Captain M. Y. Cohen, USN, the escort force commander for convoy ON-49, reported that:

In order to allow them to reach port the 1200-ton destroyers were forced to cease patrolling during the last five days of the voyage and every effort was made to prevent the use of high-speeds. Had an attack developed, or the use of high-speeds been necessary, these vessels would have been unable to reach port under their own power. The fuel shortage of the 1200-ton destroyers is a major problem for the escort unit commander, and restricts the full capabilities of the unit as a whole.17

To many naval officers, the older destroyers provided inadequate protection for the convoy and were as vulnerable as the merchant vessels they were escorting.

Many of the concerns discussed by Kirk, Deyo, Cohen and Thebaud seemed confirmed when the old First-World-War-vintage destroyer USS Reuben James (DD-245) was sunk on the night of 31 October 1941 while escorting convoy HX-156. The Reuben James had been steaming at about nine knots approximately 2000 yards off the port beam of the port column of the convoy when a single torpedo struck it from U-552.18 The Reuben James was one of the escorts with HX-156 that lacked the fuel necessary for aggressive patrolling. Occurring months before Pearl Harbor, the Reuben James was the first USN warship to be lost during the Second World War.

16Report from Captain M. L. Deyo to CINCLANT, 1 Oct. 1941, “Convoy H.X. 150, Escort of,” TF-2.7 to TF-4.1.1, Action and Operational Reports, RG 38, NACP.

17Letter from M. Y. Cohen to Commander Task Force Four, 6 Jan. 1942, “Escort of Convoy ON-49,” TF-2.7 to TF-4.1.1, Action and Operational Reports, RG 38, NACP.

In contrast to the poor performance of the First World War destroyers, a report from the Commander of Task Force 4 to the CNO offered high praise for the modern Destroyer USS *Niblack*. Launched in 1940, the *Niblack* possessed speed, endurance, and radar. Thus equipped, the *Niblack* was able to patrol aggressively, including at night, and guard the entire stern of a convoy alone.¹⁹ For the officers of the USN, greater numbers of modern destroyers and other escort vessels capable of high speed and endurance were vital tools the navy needed before wolfpack tactics could be countered.

The desire on the part of the USN for powerfully armed, fast, high endurance destroyers for escort duty, and the disdain that was articulated by USN officers for the old “four-stackers,” says much about the direction in which escort doctrine was developing. For escort forces to be successful against U-boats, the escorts needed to be aggressive and numerous. When the *Kearny* was torpedoed it was not patrolling aggressively. When the *Reuben James* was lost, it was because it lacked the fuel to patrol aggressively. In the prewar period of 1941, the experiences of SC-48 and HX-156 sent shock waves throughout the USN and went a long way to establishing the nature and composition of USN escort forces during the Second World War. However, shortages of equipment were not the only problem the USN faced with its convoy and ASW activities.

In addition to lacking modern equipment, no manuals on ASW or the escort of convoys had been produced for the USN since the First World War. With a lack of planning prior to the war and the advent of wolfpack tactics, USN escort forces had to develop doctrines on ASW and escorting convoys while they were actually engaged in

¹⁹Report from Commander Task Force Four to The Chef of Naval Operation (Director of Fleet Training), 26 Nov. 1941, “Escort of Convoy HX-156,” TF-4.1.2 to TF-4.1.4, Action and Operational Reports, RG 38, NACP.
escort operations in the North Atlantic. Months earlier, then Commander-in-Chief of the United States Fleet, Admiral James O. Richardson USN, in an United States Fleet confidential letter issued from Pearl Harbor on 27 January 1941, admitted there was a lack of tactical doctrine. The letter concluded that "In past years, development of doctrine and tactical procedures have suffered perhaps more from lack of continuity in successive years than from any other cause."20 During the period prior to the official entry of the United States into the Second World War, there was no consensus or standardized body of ASW doctrine available for the United States Atlantic Fleet.21 The first tentative effort to produce a manual covering ASW doctrine and procedures did not appear until June 1942 when the Anti-Submarine Warfare Unit in Boston prepared one.22 Even when manuals on ASW were available, they were in such short supply that the officers of the Atlantic Fleet had to "bootleg" copies if they wanted to ensure their escort vessels had one.23

After so many years of neglect, and all the changes wolfpack tactics had brought to submarine warfare, the USN turned to its active escort forces in the North Atlantic to help formulate doctrines on ASW and the escort of convoys. The powerful influence that North Atlantic escort forces had on shaping USN escort and ASW doctrine is demonstrated by a letter dated 16 November 1941 from Admiral Bristol to his subordinate Captain Deyo. At this time, Deyo was Commander of Destroyer Squadron 11 based in


21Abbazia, Mr. Roosevelt's Navy, 295-6.

22Meigs, Slide Rules and Submarines, 85.

23Ibid., 51.
Reykjavik, Iceland. In his letter, Bristol told Captain Deyo that he appreciated his thoughts on escort doctrine and that the whole spirit of the escort vessels needed to be aggressive. More significantly, Admiral Bristol told Captain Deyo that Deyo's recommendations were "being given to escort units as doctrine."\(^{24}\) The importance of Bristol's command in the formulation of escort doctrine is also demonstrated in a letter from Commander Lewis of the United States Atlantic Fleet Anti-Submarine Unit. In a letter to the CINCLANT dated 19 September 1942, Lewis stated that prior to the entry of the United States into the war, when the USN needed "guidance in escort of convoy operations. . . . Task Force Commanders and, in particular, Commander Task Force TWENTY-FOUR, issued amplifying instructions in this phase of naval operations."\(^{25}\)

Commander Lewis's sentiments were an echo of a dispatch released by Admiral King on 16 April 1942 to Vice Admiral Bristol the commander of Task Force 24. In a document offering high praise to Bristol's command, King outlined one of its greatest contributions as the "conduct of an antisubmarine training program."\(^{26}\) Yet, not only were Bristol's forces responsible for training USN forces for operating against U-boats in the North Atlantic, but they also provided the expertise, doctrine, and training early in 1942 when the USN was moving toward the implementation of a comprehensive system of

\(^{24}\)Letter from A. L. Bristol to M. L. Deyo, 16 Nov. 1941, file Iceland Commander Destroyer Squadron 11 1941-n.d., The Papers of Morton L. Deyo, LC.

\(^{25}\)Letter from T. L. Lewis to the CINCLANT, 19 Sept. 1942, file A14 Convoys Operations Reports, 1941-1945 A14-A16 (3), ASMD, RG 38, NACP.

\(^{26}\)Admiral King to Admiral Bristol, 16 Apr. 1942, msg 171440, Atlantic Dispatches, RG 38 NACP.
coastal convoys. Clearly the experiences of USN forces operating in the North Atlantic in 1941 and 1942 had a pivotal role in shaping the development of escort doctrine. For escorts to defend convoys effectively, they had to be fast, aggressive, numerous, and with high endurance. However, as the last chapter has indicated, the USN made a number of misassumptions about the requirements for effective convoys. Attention must now be given to why the USN based its escort doctrine on its own limited experience in 1941 and early 1942 in preference to the information and experience provided by the RN and RCN since 1939.

The RN provided an enormous amount of information on its own experiences with Germany’s U-boats prior to the entry of the United States into the Second World War. In August 1940, the USN sent a mission to England tasked to obtain all pertinent information from the RN on countering U-boats. Not only did the RN share its experiences with the American mission, the RN provided the USN with the latest technological developments including radar. In addition to technical information, the RN provided the USN with its doctrines on ASW, convoying, and the control of shipping. According to Samuel Eliot Morison, Rear Admiral Robert L. Ghormley USN, told his superiors in Washington that "he was obtaining information fresh from the laboratory of war, of priceless value to national defense." This flow of information from the RN to the USN continued after Admiral Harold Stark arrived in England in March 1942 to command the American naval

27CTF 4 LANT to CINCLANT, 14 Feb. 1942, msg 112035, Atlantic Dispatches, RG 38, NACP.

28Morison, The Battle of the Atlantic, 41.
forces in Europe.²⁹ Despite the information provided by the RN, the lack of preparation by the USN to fight U-boats in 1941 and 1942 is confirmed in both the “United States Naval Administrative Histories of World War II” and a letter written by Jonas H. Ingram USN. Ingram served on the staff of Tenth Fleet as an admiral.³⁰ Oddly enough, part of the reason the USN may have had the attitude it did toward convoys and ASW had to do with the information the RN had provided.

As Assistant CNO to Admiral Stark, Admiral Ghormley had been ordered to London as Special Naval Observer for exploratory conversations with the British Chiefs-of-Staff.³¹ Arriving in England on 15 August 1940, Ghormley met with and questioned First Sea Lord Sir Dudley Pound about the German submarine campaign. Most significant to this study was Pound’s observation that due to the new wolfpack tactics, the “crying need” for that time was for more destroyers and long range flying boats for escort duty.³²

In addition to the Special Naval Observer, there was an Office of the Naval Attaché in London that made plans with the RN and sent reports back to the CNO on British convoy control procedures and methods for escorting convoys.³³ According to


³⁰“History of Convoy and Routing,” 29; and Letter from Jonas H. Ingram to the CNO, 26 Feb. 1942, file Correspondence, Personal Papers 1942-1944, Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll, NHC.


section IV of the "Historical Monograph, US-British Naval Cooperation," in February 1941 the escort forces of the Western Approaches consisted of nine escort groups of four or five corvettes each. These slim escort forces composed of corvettes were not the preference of the RN but were forced on them by the limited number of escort vessels available. Destroyers were especially in short supply. According to the "Historical Monograph," the Commander-in-Chief, Western Approaches, who at that time was Admiral Sir Percy Noble, would have preferred to have twelve destroyers in each convoy group for protecting large convoys.\(^{34}\)

Although the RN had concluded that placing ships in convoy proved to be the best method for ensuring the security of merchant shipping, convoying was not an elixir that could eradicate the submarine menace immediately. Between 20 September and 19 October 1940, when the first wolfpacks attacked the three RN escorted convoys OB-216, SC-7, and HX-79, none of the convoys managed to exact retribution from the U-boats. By comparison, of the combined number of 102 merchant ships from all three convoys, U-boats sank 38 and damaged two more. Furthermore, While OB-216 and SC-7 both had very weak escorts, HX-79 was heavily escorted with two destroyers, four corvettes, three antisubmarine trawlers, a minesweeper, and a submarine.\(^{35}\)

Although the RN continued to insist that convoying was the best way to protect merchant shipping, the experiences of OB-216, SC-7, and HX-79 cast doubt on the value of convoys with even a heavy escort. Weakly escorted convoys appeared especially suicidal. The real problem was a lack of training and coordination among the escorts for

\(^{34}\)Ibid., 393.

combating the new wolfpack tactic. However, based on the disastrous performance such as OB-216, SC-7, HX-79, and USN escorted convoys such as SC-48 where the *Kearny* was torpedoed, and HX-156 where the *Reuben James* was lost, it is easier to see why USN doctrine on the escort of convoys developed the way it did.

According to the "Command File World War II; The History of Task Force 24," Admiral Bristol based his own ideas on what constituted an adequate escort for North Atlantic convoys at least partially on RN advice. Based on information obtained in March 1941 from one Lieutenant Commander Poe RN, each RN escort group was supposed to have thirteen vessels. Theoretically, these groups were made up of five destroyers, four corvettes and four antisubmarine trawlers. In practice, the RN escort groups had five vessels of which only two were old destroyers with the rest of the group being made up of a mixture of trawlers and corvettes. When Admiral Bristol came to his own conclusions about what constituted an adequate escort group, his assessment went beyond Poe’s and mirrored Admiral Pound’s. Based primarily on British advice and later apparently confirmed by the experience of the USN, Bristol believed that “an ideal escort should consist of twelve ships, preferably destroyers.” Bristol also contended that each escort group would actually need far more than twelve vessels since ships would virtually always be missing due to special assignments or their need for overhaul.36

While Bristol’s ideas on the size and composition of escort groups seem extravagant, they appear to mirror RN advice at a time when wolfpacks were wreaking havoc on Allied convoys. One can sense despair in a letter from Admiral Bristol to Admiral Ingersoll dated 8 January 1942. In his letter Bristol complained that when the

USN started escorting convoys they could only assign five destroyers to convoys of between 30 and 50 merchant vessels. Bristol assessed that “Early experience indicated and subsequent experience has confirmed that five (5) ships are not enough to insure reasonable security for convoys of the size which have to be handled.” Bristol wanted at least seven ships in each escort group, but due to the shortage of escort vessels had “long since given up on that idea.” In addition to discussing many other training and maintenance problems, Bristol referred to the westward movement of U-boats that had been reported to the USN by British Naval Intelligence. These U-boats were the first that attacked the United States East Coast and were later immortalized in Michael Gannon’s book *Operation Drumbeat*. Of the challenge posed by the U-boats that were moving west across the Atlantic to attack the largely undefended coastal areas of America Bristol concluded, “We have no slack to meet it.”

While it is clear that its experiences in the North Atlantic and the advice from the RN were the major factors that shaped attitudes within the USN towards convoys in 1941 and 1942, the question must still be raised why the USN emphasized the offensive component of convoys. As outlined in chapter two, the USN believed that a convoy’s escort force had to have the ability to attack and destroy U-boats in addition to the ability to defend merchant shipping. By contrast, the RN and RCN believed that convoys were still effective even if they were purely defensive in nature.

The different philosophies between the RN and USN on convoys are based on the fact that for the USN convoys have always been part of military operations while for

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37Letter from Admiral Bristol to Admiral Ingersoll, 8 Jan. 1942, file Correspondence, Personal Papers 1942-1944, Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll, NHC.
Britain, oceanic trade and its protection, represented national survival. Within the RN the success of an escort force was measured exclusively in terms of whether it managed to get its convoy to port safely. Sinking submarines was a bonus, not a necessity. By contrast, while the safe and timely arrival of merchant shipping was important, real success for USN escort forces was measured in terms of how many U-boats they destroyed.

To understand more clearly the origins of the attitudes of the USN on convoys, the activities of USN escort forces during the First World War must be examined. During the First World War, the world’s major navies believed in Admiral Mahan’s dictates. As a result, the RN largely ignored ASW until Germany began its most intensive phase of unrestricted submarine warfare on 1 February 1917. In the first three months 1.3 million tons of allied shipping had been sunk. The losses of Allied merchant ship tonnage were expected to rise by another 900,000 tons during April. Leaders of the Allied navies seemed powerless to stop the depredations caused by the U-boats. When the United States declared war on Germany, the USN sent Rear Admiral William S. Sims to London to confer with the RN. After arriving, Sims met with the First Sea Lord Sir John Jellicoe on 10 April 1917. Sims was shocked when Jellicoe informed him that unless the losses of Allied merchant shipping could be reduced, the Germans would be winning the war.

In common with a number of RN officers, Sims believed that apart from the fact that they could submerge for short periods of time, U-boats were like any surface warship and that convoys could curtail their activities. Admiral Sir David Beatty RN, the

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38Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 76.


40Ibid.
Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet supported Sims's views. In addition, Commander Reginald G. H. Henderson RN,\textsuperscript{41} convinced Sir Maurice Hankey, the Secretary to the War Cabinet, that convoys were possible. In turn, Hankey convinced the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George of the viability of convoys. Administered by Commander Reginald Henderson, convoys were set up on 10 February 1917 to protect the colliers that transported coal from the United Kingdom to France. The collier convoys were a complete success.\textsuperscript{42}

Notwithstanding the success of the collier convoys, it took an order from Prime Minister David Lloyd George in April 1917 to get the Admiralty to start organizing convoys for all Allied merchant shipping. While the RN had used escorted convoys successfully to protect troop ships and the movements of the Grand Fleet, there had been considerable reticence to place merchant ships in convoys. There was a general feeling within the Admiralty that was shared by many merchant captains and shipping companies that convoys were inefficient. Convoys required that merchant ships be gathered together and sail at a uniform speed equal to the slowest ship in the convoy. This had the overall affect of slowing down the shipping cycle and thus reducing imports. There was also an assumption common in the Admiralty and among merchant captains that doubted that merchant vessels had the discipline or skill to maintain station within a convoy, especially in bad weather or when zigzagging to confuse a submarine's attack coordinates. The Admiralty was also concerned that the arrival of convoys would choke port facilities

\textsuperscript{41}Henderson was later knighted and rose to the rank of Admiral. He served as Third Sea Lord and Controller of the Navy from 1934 to 1939. See Terraine, \textit{The U-boat Wars}, 679.

\textsuperscript{42}Terraine, \textit{The U-boat Wars}, 54-5.
during the loading and unloading of the many merchant vessels. Finally, the Admiralty was afraid that convoys simply made a large target for U-boats and that even poorly aimed torpedoes were bound to find a target when fired at a convoy. Instead of using convoys, the RN had wasted its resources hunting for U-boats that accomplished virtually nothing.

As for those in the Admiralty and in the shipping companies who were afraid that convoys were an impossible option, their fears were unfounded. Merchant ships could maintain station, the ports were not choked during loading and unloading, and while the convoys slowed down the shipping cycle, convoys reduced the carrying capacity of merchant ships less than the continued losses to U-boats would have. Likewise, during the Second World War it was not until July 1943 that Allied merchant shipping production managed to equal Allied losses from all enemy action. Had the Allied merchant shipping losses not been reduced through the introduction of convoys, according to a letter to Admiral King dated 19 June 1942 from General George C. Marshall, the United States Army Chief of Staff, the entire allied war effort would have been threatened due to the reduced carrying capacity of the Allied merchant fleets. When convoys were introduced during the First World War, the Allies were faced with an equally serious situation.

As the convoy systems spread, statistics seemed to confirm the value of

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43 Blair, *Hitler's U-boat War*, 16.

44 S. W. Roskill, “Capros Not Convoy: Counter-Attack and Destroy!,” *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 82, no. 10 (October 1956): 1048.


46 Padfield, *War Beneath the Sea*, 222.
Although Admiral Sims and the Admiralty worked to implement convoys, it took time to develop the plans and infrastructure necessary for efficient convoying. Moreover, after the United States entered the war on 6 April 1917, the USN was still looking for a decisive battle between capital ships in the tradition of Mahan. Nevertheless, Sims and the newly converted British Admiralty were able to convince the United States Navy Department that convoying was the most important job for the navies of the western Allies for the remainder of the war.

Of particular interest to this study are the opinions of Admiral Sims on convoys since Sims was the driving force behind the role and activities of the USN during the First World War. In his book *The Victory at Sea*, Sims recorded a letter he wrote to Josephus Daniels, the Secretary of the United States Navy, written in London on 29 June 1917. In the letter to Daniels, Sims referred to escorted convoys as “purely an offensive measure.” Referring in another part of his book to the period just shortly after the United States had entered the First World War, Sims described how USN destroyers spent much time patrolling the East Coast of the United States in anticipation of U-boat attacks. He considered such antisubmarine U-boat patrols absurd. Sims realized that the Germans possessed few submarines with the endurance necessary to operate off the East Coast of the Americas to be a credible threat. Sims also contended that even if U-boats entered American waters, the experience gained by the Allied navies confirmed that hunting the oceans for U-boats is simply not an effective way of destroying submarines. If one wanted

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47See Chapter II, 32-5.

to sink submarines. "The thing to do," according to Sims, "was to make the submarines come to the anti-submarine craft and fight in order to get merchantmen." Especially important is the emphasis of Sims next statements. "I have made this point before, ... the patrol system was necessarily unsuccessful, because it made almost impossible any combats with submarines and afforded very little protection to shipping." Sims made the contrast that "the advantage of the convoy system, ... was precisely that it made such combats inevitable. In other words, it meant offensive warfare." While he viewed convoying as the best way to protect merchant shipping, Sims presented the real advantage of convoys as the best way to put escort vessels into a position where they would have the opportunity to destroy enemy submarines.

While Sims's emphasis on the destruction of enemy operating forces is open to question, it likely stemmed from the strategy of annihilation as utilized by Union General Ulysses S. Grant during the United States Civil War. This strategy had its origins in the writings of the Swiss military theorist and onetime Napoleonic general Antoine Jomini. Since Alfred Thayer Mahan applied Jomini's theories to warfare at sea, it is likely that Mahan's selective interpretation of Jomini's theories meant that part of the offensivemindedness of the USN was an outgrowth of the larger strategic culture of the United States armed forces.

49 Ibid., 111-2.


Whatever the origins of his ideas, the significance of Sims's views on convoys and the mission of escort vessels had greater impact on the USN during the Second World War than one might suppose. Before leaving for England in 1917, Sims had taught at the Naval War College from 1911 to 1913. From January to March 1917 he served as the War College's president. Sims returned to the War College after the war and resumed his post as president. Not only was Sims probably the most important reformer in USN history, he was also largely responsible for setting the standard for the Naval War College's course throughout the interwar years. Under Sims's guidance the Naval War College became the cultural nexus of the USN.\textsuperscript{52} The years between 1885 and 1945 marked the heyday of the institution's ability to transmit to the officers of the USN a shared sense of mission, traditions and cultural values.\textsuperscript{53} According to Michael Vlahos, during the interwar years, the Naval War College was able "to shape the thinking of the men who would plan for and command in the Second World War."\textsuperscript{54} Ernest King, Chester Nimitz, William F. Halsey Jr., and many others attended the Naval War College. The influence that the Naval War College had on the USN is demonstrated aptly by the fact that when the USN entered the Second World War, except for one, every flag officer that was qualified to command at sea was a graduate of the Naval War College.

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\textsuperscript{52}Michael Vlahos, \textit{The Blue Sword: The Naval War College and the American Mission, 1919-1941} (Newport: Naval War College Press, 1980), 58.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 67.
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War College had established.\textsuperscript{55}

More significant than the specifics of the course taught at the Naval War College was the way of thinking that the course tried to inculcate in its students. In the words of Michael Vlahos "the War College instructed less than it instilled."\textsuperscript{56} Sims stated that the War College was not a real college but a place where practical fleet officers could discuss and decide the important questions of how the USN could best conduct naval war under the various conditions that may arise.\textsuperscript{57} Sims stressed that the work at the college was wholly practical, and learning was based on the past and current experiences of the USN. Sims also stressed that there could be nothing theoretical about the principles of fighting. Instead the college sought to teach certain general principles. These principles then helped the college’s students make the correct decisions in real combat situations. Sims was emphatic that the school was not to establish codes or rules by which naval warfare was conducted. The college was also not organized to provide guidance in the formulation of either strategic or tactical planning. Instead, Sims hoped those graduates from the college program would be equipped to make such plans when the need arose. What Sims really wanted the college to accomplish was to train students the habit of applying three simple principles logically, correctly, and rapidly to resolve any situation that might occur within


\textsuperscript{56}Michael Vlahos, \textit{The Blue Sword}, 55

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 118.
the scope of naval warfare. John, B. Hattendorf, B. Mitchell Simpson III, and John R. Wadleigh in their book *Sailors and Scholars* stated that the course at the Naval War College “was a strict and practical method of problem solving, which correlated ends with means and objectives, and directed attention to operational and tactical issues. It did not attempt an analysis of the assumptions behind the objectives.”

With respect to convoys Sims is significant for two reasons. The first is that he appears to have set the standard on what convoys meant to the USN. This emphasis on offensive warfare was another product of Sims and the Naval War College. Officers were taught that only through offensive tactics and being invincible in battle could victory be gained. Citing the senior thesis of one Captain A. J. Hepburn, USN, from 1931, Vlahos asserts that victory was defined as “the complete destruction of the enemy.” Vlahos believes that Hepburn’s thesis reflected the collective belief of the USN during the interwar years. It is therefore highly likely the result of Sims’s influence while he taught at the Naval War College that the top officers of the USN during the Second World War viewed convoys as offensive weapons that were the best means for destroying U-boats.

The second reason Sims was important to convoys during the Second World War involves the way he established the curriculum at the Naval War College. By Sims’s own

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58 The three principles Sims sought to inculcate into his students were as follows: 1. A clear conception of the mission to be attained. 2. An accurate and logical estimate of the situation, which involved a mustering of all information available, and a discussion of its bearing upon the situation under consideration. 3. A decision that was the logical result of the mission and the estimate. See Hattendorf, *Sailors and Scholars*, 118-9.

59 Ibid., 119.

60 Michael Vlahos, *The Blue Sword*, 150-1.

61 Ibid., 78.
admission the curriculum did not stress theory, the development of tactical or strategic doctrine, or seek to analyze the assumptions behind the objectives of the USN. According to Sims, the curriculum at the Naval War College was supposed to be practical, not theoretical, and USN officers were trained to base their plans on both past and present experience. Since the officers of the USN were taught to base their plans on experience not theory, the curriculum of the Naval War College explains why the USN looked to its own most recent experiences in the North Atlantic for the formulation of escort doctrine. Finally, the senior officers of the USN would have never examined or questioned the use of convoys as anything other than an offensive weapon used to destroy U-boats since during their time at the War College they were not trained to examine the assumptions behind their objectives.

Perhaps the greatest testament to the influence that Admiral Sims had on the USN with respect to the role of escort vessels is found in a letter from Captain Deyo from late in 1941 to the captains of Destroyer Squadron 11. Writing a few words to the new destroyer captains, Deyo stated that Admiral Sims was in great measure responsible for the development of the destroyer service and believed that the “wisdom of his leadership” became more apparent as time went on. After referring to Sims expensively, Deyo finished his letter still quoting Sims’s belief that “The business of a naval officer is one which, above all others, needs daring and decision and if he must err on either side the nation can best afford to have him err on the side of too much daring rather than too much caution” [emphasis in original]. Not only can the influence of Sims be seen clearly in

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62Letter from M. L. Deyo to the Captains of Destroyer Squadron 11, file Iceland, Commander Destroyer Squadron 11, 1941-n.d., The Papers of Morton L. Deyo, LC.
Deyo's letter, but it is also much easier to see why the USN placed greater emphasis on the dashing and daring job of destroying U-boats rather than on the rather dull and unglamorous task of protecting merchant shipping.

Sims's spirit of offense and the experiences of the First World War seemed to echo throughout the USN during the Second World War. According to an untitled, unaddressed memorandum from 1918 found among Admiral King's papers, the antisubmarine measures it listed bore an uncanny resemblance to King's own methods for combating U-boats during the Second World War. The memorandum's first suggestion was that the ports used by enemy submarines should be blockaded, captured, or that the U-boats should be intercepted as they left the ports. Admiral King pressured the British throughout the Second World War to bomb the U-boat bases in France and attack U-boats while passing through the Bay of Biscay. The second suggestion in the memorandum was that offensive forces that included destroyers and aircraft should hunt U-boats. Admiral King ordered this in early 1942. Only at the end of the memorandum's section on antisubmarine measures is a defensive antisubmarine force in the form of escort vessels mentioned. Even then the word convoy was never used, and the protection of merchant shipping was mentioned as just another way of luring U-boats to predatory escort vessels. In 1942 Admiral King argued the USN lacked the escorts to do this.

Most important is the conclusion to the memorandum on antisubmarine measures. It stated that all of the measures designed to counter submarines at the tactical level were

63 Memorandum, 1918, file Correspondence 1917-1919, The Papers of Ernest J. King, LC, 3-4.
just part of a greater strategic effort to eliminate "the submarine menace as a whole."\textsuperscript{64} The emphasis of the memorandum is important because it concentrates solely on the destruction of enemy submarines as the best way of securing Allied sea communications.

Not surprisingly the suggestions found in this memorandum resembled the suggestions Admiral King made to General George C. Marshall in a letter dated 21 June 1942.\textsuperscript{65} When General Marshall wrote to Admiral King expressing his concerns over the losses of merchant shipping along the East Coast in 1942, King responded with a letter stating the situation within the USN with respect to ASW. King stated that the reason the USN was not able to institute a comprehensive system of coastal convoys was because of a shortage of escort vessels. King went on to discuss how the USN had developed a "killer" system so the navy could follow up a legitimate submarine contact and hunt the U-boat to destruction. He also described the vital need for more aircraft to patrol for U-boats and protect convoys. As in the memorandum from the First World War, King also told Marshall that he had been pressuring the British to destroy the U-boat building yards and bases since that was the only way King believed the submarine menace could be stopped. King stressed in his letter several times that while convoying was the best way to handle the U-boat situation, there were simply not enough escort vessels to make convoying possible if the standards for the minimum number of escorts deemed

\textsuperscript{64}\textit{Ibid.}, 1-4.

\textsuperscript{65}\textit{Letter from General George Marshall to Admiral Ernest King 19 June 1942}, file Review of the Marshall-Arnold-King Correspondence on ASW 1942-1943, Series XI, Admiral Ernest J. King Papers, NHC.
necessary by the USN were to be met. With respect to this study, the King-Marshall correspondence demonstrates that there was much similarity between the methods used by the USN to counter U-boats in both the First and Second World Wars.

Admiral King also experienced first hand the ASW activities of the USN during the First World War. In 1914, King had served as Admiral Sims’s aide at a time when Sims was a Captain and the Commander of the Atlantic Destroyer flotilla. Later, in 1917, King served as acting Chief-of-Staff of the Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, Admiral Henry T. Mayo. Admiral Mayo was Admiral Sims’s superior. Learning from Sims before the war when Sims was defining the role of destroyers within the USN, and then working under Mayo during the First World War, Ernest King would have viewed the USN antisubmarine campaign from its infancy. It is therefore not surprising that many of King’s ideas on ASW and convoys in the Second World War appear to resemble the ideas of the USN during the First World War.

If the officers within the USN and at the Naval War College appeared rigid in their thinking with respect to escort doctrine and ASW, their strategic culture in many ways mirrored the political culture of the United States. During much of the history of the United States, its geographical isolation and territorial security meant that American foreign policy and diplomacy was opportunistic and reactive. It was not a carefully planned extension of government policy that reflected national objectives. According to Robert L. Beisner foreign affairs held little interest and only played a small part in

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66 Letter from Admiral Ernest King to General George Marshall 21 June 1942, file Review of the Marshall-Arnold-King Correspondence on ASW 1942-1943, Series XI, Admiral Ernest J. King Papers, NHC.
American politics. Diplomacy throughout most of the nineteenth century was amateurish and usually initiated abroad by people in the field. Robert Shufeldt, an American diplomat, wrote bitterly in 1879 of Washington’s official inertness that, “We seem to be left to our own devices.”

The unsophisticated and reactive style of diplomacy conducted by the United States government mirrored the way the United States army and navy were administered. During the 1870’s and 1880’s for example, the army had no planning board, was administered poorly, and during any crisis responded with improvisations instead of plans based on careful analysis and purposeful preparation. As for the USN, its squadrons operated independently of one another as “autonomous baronies” with no equivalent to a general staff for studying the future or ensuring that the navy’s bureaus were prepared to meet potential threats.

In 1890 the publication of Mahan’s The Influence of Sea Power upon History ushered in a period where the power of the United States expanded abroad and naval spending increased. Between 1890 and 1914 the USN rose from ranking twelfth in the world to third. Despite the increased power and a number of institutional reforms, the USN was not ready for the First World War. During the administration of President

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68 Ibid., 71.

69 Ibid., 58.

70 Ibid., 59.

71 Baer, One Hundred Years of Sea Power, 11.
Woodrow Wilson, the Naval Act of 1916 was to make the USN a force second to none by 1925. The build up of seapower was meant to serve the interests of American unilateralism and strategic independence. Rather than having a specific enemy in mind, the Naval Act meant to provide a fleet that gave the USN the power to react to any possible aggressor.\textsuperscript{72} However, no one questioned if the role for the USN extended beyond hemisphere defense or whether a future war would be fought along Mahanian lines. There were no plans to send either warships or troops to Europe, and navy planners never thought that the United States would be an important factor in Germany’s demise.\textsuperscript{73} This rigid and unrealistic way of thinking was characteristic of the USN in both World Wars. It was referred to by Henry L. Stimson, the Secretary of War, from 1911 to 1913, and again, from 1940 to 1945, as that, "peculiar psychology of the Navy Department, which frequently seemed to retire from the realm of logic into a dim religious world in which Neptune was God, Mahan his prophet, and the United States Navy the only true Church."\textsuperscript{74} George Baer summaries the situation well with his belief that the USN did not look far beyond its horizon. "Physical isolation and political neutrality distanced Americans from the changing war at sea." As a result, the USN concentrated on building an unbalanced fleet with too many battleships and too few destroyers even for fleet duty much less escort duty.\textsuperscript{75} Isolationism, the unrealistic appreciation of the evolving war at

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., 60-1.

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{74}Stimson and Bundy, \textit{On Active Service in Peace and War}, 506.

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., 61-2.
sea, and poor strategic judgement left the USN with no war plans in 1917. After entering the war with no war plans in place, it took the USN three months to announce a policy of cooperation with the Allies and a further ten months before that policy was put into full effect. Furthermore, the Navy Department failed to communicate to Admiral Sims, its representative in England, his instructions, responsibilities, level of authority, or often what any of the Navy Department's decisions were.

The ambiguity over strategy, policy, and doctrine continued during the interwar years. After the First World War, the USN tried to determine who its potential adversaries were and what kind of ships and weapons were needed to fight them. According to George Baer, the situation in 1919 was expressed aptly by Captain Harry Yarnell, a member of the CNO's Planning Division. Yarnell believed that war planning was like "trying to design a machine tool without knowing whether it is going to manufacture hairpins or locomotives." Yarnell said of the USN, "(a) We have no enemy in view. (b) We have no war plan to meet the enemy, even if we had one in view." In the aftermath of Germany's defeat in 1918, President Woodrow Wilson viewed with concern the possibility of war with Britain over trade due to competition for the world's markets. However, CNO Admiral Robert E. Coontz concluded that the Pacific was the area of greatest concern to the USN since Coontz saw Japanese expansion as threatening

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76Tracy Barrett Kittredge, Naval Lessons of the Great War (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1921), 83.

77Ibid., 86-7.

78Ibid., 130.

79Baer, One Hundred Years of Sea Power, 90.
American trading interests in China.\textsuperscript{80} 

In the spring of 1919, Navy secretary Josephus Daniels divided the USN into two fleets, one for the Pacific and another for the Atlantic. However, just how the two fleets were to be used and for what purpose remained an unknown point of contention for the next twenty years.\textsuperscript{81} While the bulk of USN strength lay in the Pacific, the fleet's presence was not part of a national policy towards Japan. Further, despite the presence of USN forces, there was no actual strategy for operations in the Pacific.\textsuperscript{82}

Although there was a dearth of planning on the part of the USN, as in the years prior to the First World War, the navy determined that it wanted more battleships, cruisers, aircraft carriers, and submarines to give it the fullest array of options in case America found itself at war with any opponent. At the end of the First World War, the "Navy did not reevaluate its battle doctrine in light of its wartime experience" but reverted to its prewar plans.\textsuperscript{83} Despite the depredations U-boats caused to Allied merchant shipping during the First World War, as the USN approached the Second World War, battleships and cruisers with the addition of aircraft carriers were viewed by the USN as the primary combatants at sea. As for submarines, agreements such as the Washington Naval Conference of 1921, the London Naval Treaty of 1930, and the London Submarine Protocol 1936 sought to establish international laws that were supposed to restrict submarine activity in wartime. Within the USN, submarines were assigned to screen battle

\textsuperscript{80}Ibid., 90-1.

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid., 91.

\textsuperscript{82}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83}Ibid., 83.
fleets.\textsuperscript{84} Since submarines were not supposed to conduct another unrestricted trade war, there was a lack of escort and ASW doctrine as well as a serious shortage of escort vessels in the USN when the Second World War began.

The ambiguity over strategy and the emphasis on battleships meant that during the 1920s and 1930s there was no planning for convoys, and no attempt was made to develop plans for the escort of convoys. Destroyers spent little time practicing ASW and there was little or no thought put into developing new weapons for ASW. On the eve of the Second World War, not only was the USN left fighting the U-boats with World War One vintage weapons,\textsuperscript{85} it was also scrambling to devise doctrines on how to apply its resources to counter enemy submarines in the most effective manner. In the absence of any prior planning, the USN turned to the one source of information that USN officers had been conditioned to turn for guidance. The USN looked back on its own history and the experiences of its forces operating in the Atlantic in 1941 for guidance.

\textsuperscript{84}Abbazia, \textit{Mr. Roosevelt's Navy}, 16-7.

\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., 18.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

When examining why the USN did not believe that it had a sufficient number of escort vessels to implement coastal convoys in early 1942, attention must be paid to from where the USN developed its doctrines on the escort of convoys. To begin with, the USN had a fundamentally different view on what convoys accomplished that of from the RN. While the escort forces of the RN and RCN viewed the safe and timely arrival of merchant shipping as the primary duty of a convoy’s escort force, the USN believed that the main job of the escorts was the destruction of enemy submarines. It is likely that the fundamentally different roles of escort forces within the RN and RCN, as opposed to the USN, can be traced back to the views of Admiral Sims during the First World War. An important reformer, Sims emphasized aggressiveness among destroyer commanders, and in 1917 and 1918, at a time when U-boats were wreaking havoc on Allied merchant shipping, Sims stressed that the best way to bring antisubmarine forces into contact with U-boats was to place the escorts around convoys which were the targets of the U-boats.

Sims’s emphasis on convoys as being the best way to destroy U-boats was likely passed on to all USN officers throughout the interwar years since Sims was a major figure at the United States Naval War College. Sims was also important since he was a major force in establishing the Naval War College’s curriculum. He emphasized practical problem solving that involved using the past and present experiences of the USN to derive logical solutions to real problems in combat. While Sims’s method of problem solving
worked well at the tactical level, the War College ignored theory and the analysis of the assumptions behind the tasks that the USN was assigned. As a result of this somewhat narrow scope of education, both tactical doctrines and higher naval strategy were neglected. During the interwar years, shifting defense policies left the USN with an nebulous role that made planning for fleet actions difficult. When the USN found itself in a position where it had to escort convoys in the North Atlantic starting in 1941, wolfpack tactics had changed the nature of submarine warfare but the USN had not developed any new methods or weapons capable of meeting this new threat.

As it tried to grapple with the threat to shipping posed by submarines, the USN was forced to try to improvise a solution to the new wolfpack tactics. The officers who had attended the Naval War College during the interwar years reverted to their college training, and they looked to the past and most recent experience of the USN to find a solution to the submarine menace. Inculcated with the belief that they must destroy enemy forces, the USN turned to those forces that had been escorting convoys in the North Atlantic for their insights on ASW and convoy doctrine. The forces commanded successively by Admirals Bristol and Brainard made it clear that when fighting wolfpacks, only large and powerful escort groups could fulfill the dual role of hunting U-boats to destruction as well as protecting the convoy. The experiences of the USN North Atlantic escort forces indicated that only destroyers or purpose built destroyer escorts that had the speed, endurance, seaworthiness, armament, and sensory systems could provide adequate protection for a convoy. The USN wanted these ideal escorts in large numbers. The top admirals of the USN assumed that weakly defended convoys with escorts that lacked speed and endurance amounted to large targets that could not be protected. The
massacres of RN escorted convoys such as OB-216, SC-7 and HX-79 as well as the USN escorted convoys SC-48 where the USS Kearny was torpedoed and HX-156 where the USS Reuben James was lost reinforced in the minds of USN admirals the dangers of having convoys that were weakly escorted. These and other early experiences in the North Atlantic were reinforced by the advice given to the USN by the RN before the United States entered the war. The RN presented an ideal escort force that in theory had twelve escort vessels, preferably all destroyers.

To the same extent that there were a lack of tactical doctrine for escorting convoys in the North Atlantic in 1941 and early 1942, there was an equal lack of tactical doctrine for coastal convoys. Due to this lack of tactical doctrine, the USN made no distinction between the operational requirements for convoys operating in coastal areas and those operating in the North Atlantic. Based on their experiences in the North Atlantic, the USN believed that it lacked a sufficient number of destroyers and other oceangoing escort vessels to implement coastal convoys of equal strength and offensive capability as North Atlantic convoys. As a result, the USN only implemented convoys slowly along the East Coast of the United States since the USN did not have a sufficient number of escorts in early 1942 to give coastal convoys the offensive power the navy wanted.

RN and RCN experience with defensive convoys with weak escorts contrasted sharply with the ideas of the USN. Despite the high losses that were experienced occasionally by weakly escorted convoys that were mauled by wolfpacks, statistics proved that even weakly defended convoys offered far more protection to merchant shipping than independent sailing. Furthermore, while convoys slowed down the shipping cycle, they preserved more merchant tonnage and thus maintained the carrying capacity of the Allied
merchant fleets better than letting ships sail independently when increased loses outweighed the faster pace of the shipping cycle.

In early 1942 the USN did have enough escort vessels to implement coastal convoys as Donald Macintyre was quick to point out.\(^1\) This was especially the case since wolfpacks could not operate in the dangerous, shallow coastal areas. However, the escort forces advocated by Macintyre and the RN in 1942 were purely defensive. That Canadian coastal convoys were successful at a time when the RCN was as short of ships as the USN for meeting its operational requirements proved the fundamental truth that any convoy, no matter how weak in escorts or even without an escort, was better than no convoy at all. Despite the errors of USN doctrine on coastal convoys, better training, better equipment and more airpower allowed the Allies to defeat the wolfpacks in the North Atlantic in 1943. By that time, and with the U-boats already on the defensive, the massive industrial capacity of the United States began to produce so many new destroyers, destroyer escorts, escort aircraft carriers, and merchant ships that a change or reexamination of escort doctrine became irrelevant.

\(^1\)Macintyre, *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 141-3.
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