

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 365

### “The Second Happy Time”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril.”

Winston Churchill.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 365. The Second Happy Time.

Back in episode 356, I talked about the U-boat war in the Atlantic, up through the intelligence coup the British gained when they captured an intact U-boat, *U-570*. That was in August 1941. Today I want to pick up where that episode left off, in September 1941, the second anniversary of the beginning of the war in Europe, and take up again the naval war in the Atlantic.

That previous episode was meant to take us through the end of 1941, but oh, well.

Germany invaded Russia in June of 1941, and I’ve already told you that Churchill and Roosevelt worried that even if the USSR wasn’t completely defeated, that Stalin might seek a separate peace with Germany. The Western allies promised aid, but what Stalin really wanted to see was a second front open up in Europe.

That wasn’t going to happen. The war in North Africa was about all the British Army was capable of at the time, and the US was still neutral, so in lieu of a second front, both countries offered aid. One possible route for Western aid would run through Iran, cross the Caspian Sea and up the Volga River, but that was slow going. The quicker, easier route was to bring aid to the Soviet Arctic, so in September 1941, the British began running aid convoys from Iceland to Archangel.

Adolf Hitler had already ordered U-boat patrols in the waters near Norway; I told you about in that earlier episode. The commander of the U-boat arm of the German Navy, Admiral Karl Dönitz, protested this order vigorously. U-boats were best used to attack enemy shipping, he

argued. But Hitler had a feeling that the British were planning to invade Norway, and in Nazi Germany, Hitler's feelings became Wehrmacht strategy roughly two seconds later.

When the aid convoys to the Soviet Arctic began, this gave the U-boats in Norway a juicy target, though Dönitz still believed it was the wrong way to use them. The numbers back him up on this. In the four months from September to December 1941, seven British convoys escorted 53 merchant ships to the Soviet Union, delivering hundreds of tanks and airplanes, a thousand trucks, and a hundred thousand tons of ammunition and supplies. Some of these merchant ships suffered damage from the persistent bad weather and heavy seas in the Arctic, but not one was lost to a German U-boat.

The Soviets had promised to use icebreakers to keep the port of Archangel open all winter so it could continue to receive these aid convoys, but they quit on December 12, which forced the British convoys to divert to Murmansk, which was ice free year round, but Murmansk had fewer docking facilities, making the offloading of cargo slower and more cumbersome. British and American sailors expected a warm welcome and expressions of gratitude in Murmansk; instead they got the cold shoulder. Figuratively as well as literally. Sailors grew to hate the Murmansk run, even though other convoy runs were more dangerous.

The dockworkers in Murmansk may have been prisoners conscripted into this work, since most able-bodied men were needed at the front. One American sailor recalled hearing a rumor that the Russian dockworkers were on starvation rations, and of one case in which a dockworker got hold of a can of Spam when a crate broke open. He was caught eating the contents of the can and was shot and killed on the spot. This might explain their unfriendly attitude.

Then Hitler began to worry about North Africa. Rommel had the British on the run, but he was limited by tenuous and unreliable sea supply from Italy, which was vulnerable to the Royal Navy. Hitler therefore ordered more U-boats taken from Atlantic convoy hunting and sent to the Mediterranean to assist the Italians in guarding that vital supply route.

No doubt Dönitz was gnashing his teeth so hard they were in danger of breaking. After the sinking of *Bismarck*, the *Führer* had finally seemed to appreciate the value of the U-boats. He'd ordered U-boat production accelerated, in order to get as many boats into the Atlantic as possible, which is what Dönitz had been arguing for since the war began. Only now, what the *Führer* gave with one hand, he took away with the other.

Germany was ramping up U-boat production, but there were problems. Skilled shipyard workers were in short supply; new and untrained workers made mistakes that forced the Kriegsmarine to return some of the new boats they'd received for additional work. The U-boat training program had been moved from the Baltic to Norway, which led to delays in training. Finished U-boats were backing up in German ports for want of crews to operate them, and when the crews did arrive, they were poorly trained and prone to mistakes, as we saw in the case of *U-570*.

The Germans weren't the only ones with these sorts of problems. When convoys crossed the Atlantic eastbound, they were escorted by three different escort groups in three segments: first, the Royal Canadian Navy, then Royal Navy ships based in Iceland, and finally Royal Navy ships based in Britain. But the Canadian Navy was also suffering from growing pains. Its Atlantic force went from six destroyers to thirteen after receiving seven of the fifty destroyers the Americans had given to the British, plus about fifty smaller corvettes built in Canada, and Canadian shipyards were producing five new corvettes every month. The Canadians used these ships to provide their escorts, but this rapid expansion of the Canadian Navy meant that all but a handful of its 19,000 sailors were recent recruits with little to no training or experience.

Following the summit meeting between Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt in Newfoundland in August, the United States expanded its declared security zone all the way to Iceland. Afterward, Atlantic convoys were escorted in two segments: American and Canadian ships as far as Iceland; afterward, the Royal Navy took over.

The Americans really threw themselves into the job. Admiral Ernest King committed most of the US Atlantic Fleet to the task: Six battleships, five cruisers, and fifty destroyers, including the Denmark Straits patrol, plus two aircraft carrier task forces, one based in Newfoundland, the other in Bermuda, on call as needed.

Under this new arrangement, the Canadian Navy in the Atlantic was placed under Admiral King's command. While the Canadians were happy to receive American assistance, the subordination of their own wartime navy to the navy of a neutral nation didn't sit well.

The British were running two convoys every six days, a fast convoy, moving at ten knots, and a slower convoy moving at 7.5 knots. Admiral King decreed that the US Navy would take responsibility for escorting the fast convoys, while the Royal Canadian Navy would escort the slow convoys. This made some sense, since the Americans had faster ships, but the responsibility for escorting half the convoys by themselves stretched the Canadians thin. They requested American assistance, but Admiral King turned them down. He believed that ships of different navies should not operate together, as each navy has its own procedures and customs, and combining ships unfamiliar with each others' way of doing things was an invitation to accidents and disaster.

On October 17, a brand new American destroyer, USS *Kearney*, was hit by a German torpedo and seriously damaged. On October 31, 1941, the World War I vintage American destroyer USS *Reuben James* was torpedoed and sunk by *U-552* while escorting a convoy through the American security zone. One hundred American sailors were killed, prompting Admiral Stark, the Chief of Naval Operations to proclaim, "Whether the country knows it or not, we are at war." Folk singer and songwriter Woody Guthrie memorialized the loss by writing a song, "The Sinking of the *Reuben James*."

That month some 900 merchant ships crossed the Atlantic, but the U-boats were only able to sink 14 merchant ships, a British destroyer, a British corvette, and the *Reuben James*. This was a great disappointment to the Germans, given that they now had close to two dozen boats on patrol in the North Atlantic. November, though, would be even worse. The German Admiralty ordered fourteen U-boats onto various escort duties and six to the Western Mediterranean because Hitler had a feeling that a British invasion of Algeria was imminent. Because of these diversions, which aggravated Dönitz to no end, the Allies lost only nine merchant ships that month.

The story in December was similar. The German U-boat flotilla had accomplished disappointingly little in the final four months of 1941, notwithstanding increased numbers of boats on patrol. The attacks on *Kearny* and *Reuben James* provoked anger in the United States and greater support for Roosevelt's policy of aiding Germany's enemies. Arguably the U-boat campaign had become a net loss for Germany.

As of the end of 1941, German U-boats had sunk a total of 5.3 million tons of Allied shipping. This figure includes 28 warships, including two aircraft carriers and two battleships. During the same period, Britain had built two millions tons' worth of new merchant ships, more modern than the ships they replaced. The British also acquired four million tons' worth of ships by purchase, lease, or confiscation of Axis ships, meaning that Britain actually had more merchant shipping available to it at the end of 1941 than it had at the beginning of the war.

On the other hand, the war effort required that a large portion of this shipping be used to move troops and supplies. Imports to Britain were halved during this period, from 60 million tons in 1939 to 31 million tons in 1941, due to U-boats and also Luftwaffe attacks on British shipping. The British government were by this time rationing virtually all foodstuffs and consumer goods.

[music: Wagner, "Ride of the Valkyries."]

The entry of the United States into the war was good news for Dönitz, as it handed him an excellent argument for redeploying the U-boats away their Mediterranean duties and back to the North Atlantic. Even better, the U-boats would no longer be restrained from attacking American targets.

In 1942, a much larger proportion of the population of the United States lived in the northeastern portion of the country than is the case in our time. Being Americans, they consumed a lot of gasoline and other petroleum products. Most of America's oil production was in Texas and the Great Plains. When this oil was first exploited commercially, around the turn of the century, the bulk of it was shipped to the Northeast in railroad tanker cars, but as demand increased, the oil companies switched to a more economical method of transporting large quantities of their products: tanker ships. American tankers loaded up on oil in ports in Texas and carried it around Florida and up the US coast to the big Eastern ports. British tankers followed the same route, only then they continued to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland where they joined convoys to cross

the Atlantic. In 1942, more than 90% of the petroleum products consumed in the Northeastern United States and in eastern Canada arrived by ship.

Shortly after the German declaration of war on the US, Dönitz began an operation codenamed *Paukenschlag*, which is usually translated into English as Operation Drumbeat. The United States was too far away and out of range of the Kriegsmarine's Type VII U-boat, so the first attacks were conducted by longer-range Type IX boats. Since the Germans didn't have so many of these, the first wave consisted of just five boats, assigned to hunt solo along designated parts of the US East Coast.

One drawback to submarines hunting along the East Coast of the United States is the relatively wide continental shelf, which limits a sub's ability to dive deep in order to avoid detection. The U-boats were ordered to quickly withdraw to deep sea after attacking a ship close to shore, which took up precious patrol time and burned equally precious fuel.

The narrowest point in the continental shelf is at Cape Hatteras in North Carolina, where the barrier islands force any passing ship to turn east, closer to deep sea and making for something of a choke point in ship traffic, where one might expect to find many merchant ships close together.

The first U-boat crews to hunt in American waters were astonished at how many ships they found and how few precautions any of them took. Captains reported seeing a dozen or more ships at a time, some with their lights on at night. Even ships sailing dark could be spotted when their silhouettes moved across the city lights of American ports. The Americans were loathe to order blackouts in their cities, as this would be bad for business.

There were more targets than the U-boats had torpedoes. In the first nine days after these five U-boats arrived, they sank 27 ships, most of them tankers. German U-boat crews called it *Die zweite glückliche Zeit*, the Second Happy Time.

Dönitz also made sure to send some of his shorter-range Type VII boats to the Canadian coast to keep up the pressure on the trans-Atlantic convoys and to discourage the Allies from redeploying their anti-submarine escort ships and planes from the convoys there to the American East Coast.

No ships in American waters were operating in convoys, except for those traveling the trans-Atlantic route to and from Britain. The heavy losses led to infighting between Royal Navy commanders and their US counterparts, chiefly Admiral King, the former commander of the US Atlantic Fleet, now promoted to Chief of Naval Operations.

King had a reputation for hostility toward the Royal Navy and its leaders, though a story is told that when a British admiral complained to an American admiral of King's antipathy toward the British, the American is supposed to have replied that no, King was like that toward everybody. Franklin Roosevelt liked to say that King shaved every morning with a blow torch.

Perhaps this is the reason why history is usually sympathetic to the British side of this debate, while King is often dismissed as short-sighted and stubbornly unwilling to learn from the British experience. And lesson one of the British experience was that convoys were the best defense against U-boats. They urged King to organize merchant shipping along the US Atlantic coast into convoys, but it took months before King put that into effect.

In defense of King, one of the other ideas the British were pushing was to assign a single overall commander in charge of escorting Allied convoys in the Atlantic, and of course they had in mind a British admiral for that job. King refused, because he couldn't stomach the idea of a British admiral in charge of organizing domestic US shipping. Aside from simple nationalism, you'll recall that King thought it was safer to keep navies of different nations separate.

And there was the Pacific. As you know, the Japanese were at this time scoring victory after victory in the Pacific theater. These Japanese gains were attracting more attention, from the US Navy, the US government, and the American public, than was the U-boat war. Something needed to be done, beginning with deploying the US Army and Marines to the region. King and the US Navy still placed a high priority on escorting troop convoys, all the more so in the months after Pearl Harbor, when things were looking bleak in the Pacific Theater. If a troop convoy was successfully attacked and many lives lost, it would surely be a serious blow to morale.

And like the Royal Navy before them, the US Navy found it had more escort responsibilities than escort ships to handle them. Many US destroyers were old, and the reality is that a fleet destroyer is not necessarily the ideal anti-submarine escort. The Royal Navy had learned that smaller, slower, but more maneuverable ships equipped primarily with anti-submarine weapons and equipment were cheaper than destroyers and offered more bang for the buck (bang for the quid?) than fleet destroyers.

The British called this class of ships frigates. The Americans called them destroyer escorts. Whatever you call them, the US Navy didn't have enough of them when it went to war. The US began a crash program to build some, but that would take a few months before the first escorts went into service. Meanwhile, losses would mount. And Admiral King believed that it was better to have no convoys at all than to group ships into inadequately defended convoys. In this, British experience had already shown he was wrong. Merchant ships were safer in convoys than they were going it alone, even when the convoy was unescorted, but King clung to his view. You can certainly blame him for that.

The Americans had also been slow to adopt British technologies like radar and sonar and huff-duff that were useful in hunting submarines. Here too, the Americans soon began to produce more advanced and effective detection technology. And speaking of detection, the Americans were also short on naval reconnaissance aircraft such as the highly versatile PBY Catalina flying boats, for the simple reason that the Japanese had destroyed so many of them at Pearl Harbor and elsewhere in the Pacific during the opening weeks of the war.

And it has to be said that at this point in the war, the Germans were getting a run of luck. In 1941, an expansion of U-boat patrols in the Atlantic yielded little in the way of additional sinkings, which led Admiral Dönitz to suspect that the Allies were able to read Enigma messages, even though pretty much everyone else in the German military insisted that was impossible. Maybe so, but just to be on the safe side, Dönitz tightened security on U-boat communications, even those using Enigma, and in February 1942, the Kriegsmarine switched to a new four-rotor Enigma machine, and just like that, Bletchley Park was in the dark. No one could read the German Navy's Enigma messages anymore.

At the same time, German naval intelligence cracked the Allied Naval Cipher No. 3, which was used by both the British and American navies when they communicated with each other. For a few months at least, in 1942, it was the Germans, not the Allies, who held the lead in the codebreaking competition.

Also at this time, the Germans solved some of the technical problems that had been plaguing their torpedoes and they were now operating more reliably. These factors, combined with the lack of convoys on the US coast, explain the sudden uptick in merchant ship sinkings.

Actually, it was a bit unfortunate for the Germans that there were several other explanations for the improved results in the U-boat campaign that distracted them from considering how it coincided so closely with the introduction of a new Enigma machine. If that had been the only change, it might have convinced the German military that the Allies had indeed been decrypting their Enigma messages.

And speaking of Enigma, if we're assigning blame for the slow American start in anti-submarine operations, we might also mention how the British were less than forthcoming about their Ultra project. The Americans had more resources and access to better technology; they could have built more and better bombs than the ones at Bletchley Park, but it would not be until the fall of 1942 that the British would bring the Americans fully up to speed on what they had learned about Enigma. Had the British shared more information sooner, the Americans might have helped crack the four-rotor Naval Enigma sooner, which would have saved ships and lives.

[music: Wagner, "Ride of the Valkyries."]

Encouraged by the U-boat successes off the East Coast of the United States, Dönitz began sending increasing numbers of U-boats there. Ship losses peaked in March, but that statistic is misleading, since the numbers of U-boats hunting in American waters was greater. Sinkings per U-boat were already declining by March, an early indicator that increasing use of convoys and escorts and improved anti-submarine procedures were having an effect.

The Allies lost a total of 609 ships between January and June 1942, against the loss of 22 U-boats. It could have been worse, were it not for Adolf Hitler's order that fifty U-boats be held in

reserve for the defense of Norway, as Hitler remained convinced that an Allied invasion of that country was coming soon.

Hitler also ordered all of his Navy's biggest surface ships to Norwegian waters, including the new battleship *Tirpitz* and the pocket battleships *Lützow* and *Admiral Scheer*. Since Hitler had vetoed further surface raids into the Atlantic, this was about all the remaining German surface fleet was good for.

The battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, along with the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen*, were still stuck in French Atlantic ports ever since Hitler ordered an end to surface raiding. Hitler wanted these ships in Norway as well. They certainly weren't doing the German war effort much good sitting in port where they were. All they were doing in France was attracting RAF bombing raids. As Hitler himself observed, the only benefit of keeping those three ships where they were would be that they were drawing away RAF bombers that would otherwise be bombing targets in Germany.

It would have been only a matter of time before the British succeeded in disabling or sinking all three of these ships. Hitler ordered them returned to Germany for redeployment to Norway. The trip around the British Isles was judged too risky; thus began an episode remembered as the "Channel Dash." German minesweepers cleared a path in the English Channel and on the night of February 11, 1942, the three ships made a break for it.

In a stunning development, the German ships went undetected until the following morning, by which time they made it as far as the Strait of Dover, even though the British had advance warning of the attempt though Enigma decrypts. The Royal Navy and the RAF then attempted to attack the German warships, unsuccessfully, although *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* each struck a mine in the North Sea and sustained damage.

The Channel Dash was a huge embarrassment for the Royal Navy, which for centuries had claimed the waters of the English Channel as its own. The British lost 250 sailors and air crew members killed and 42 aircraft lost in the episode. The Germans lost 36 sailors and air crew and 22 aircraft.

Though this was a morale and propaganda win for the Germans, it was a hollow victory. Two weeks later, *Gneisenau* was bombed while in dry dock for repairs and never went out to sea again. *Prinz Eugen* was repaired, torpedoed, repaired again, and spent the rest of the war in the Baltic. Only *Scharnhorst* made it to Norway to take up its new duties there.

And speaking of naval duties in Norway, Hitler had redeployed the best remaining surface ships in the Navy plus 25 U-boats on patrol to defend against the Allied invasion he was sure was imminent. That invasion never came, but the redeployment wasn't a complete failure.



As I said, the British began running convoys from Iceland to Archangel in August 1941 for the purpose of providing aid to the USSR. In the system of code letters the British used to identify their convoys, runs from Iceland to Archangel were designated PQ, and the return trip QP. These convoys ran twice a month; the first was designated PQ 1, then PQ 2, and so on.

These convoy runs were complicated by the existence of German air and naval units stationed in Norway, which acted as a fleet in being. In other words, it didn't matter whether *Tirpitz* attacked any of these convoys or not; every convoy had to be accompanied by Royal Navy battleships sufficient to defend against *Tirpitz*, just in case.

Apart from the Germans, the Arctic conditions added to the risk. There were strong currents and ice in the water, which made navigation difficult and ASDIC ineffective. Fog was common, and in the winter months at such a high latitude, it was dark for 24 hours every day.

These convoys traveled with a close escort of destroyers and other small ships, a covering force consisting of a squadron of cruisers, and a more distant covering force that included an aircraft carrier and battleships, ready to charge to the rescue should the *Tirpitz* show up.

The first thirteen of these convoys got there and back easily enough, losing a combined total of just one ship, but with the coming of spring and increasing hours of daylight, attacks from German bombers based in Norway began to increase. Convoy PQ 16, which ran in late May 1942, lost seven ships, all to the Luftwaffe, except for one ship sunk by a mine.

Long summer days were not good for the U-boats either, as it also made their detection more likely. Keep in mind that submarines of this period could only operate underwater for short periods of time and did most of their patrolling on the surface. Dönitz thought the results of PQ 16 were a convincing demonstration that the U-boats stationed in Norway could be better used in the Atlantic, leaving attacks on the Archangel convoys to the Luftwaffe, but generally Hitler and the Wehrmacht command were encouraged by the results, encouraged enough to attempt something even bigger. Come the next convoy, PQ 17, the Germans would make an all-out effort, combining planes, ships, and subs, to destroy it completely.

The British wanted to suspend these convoys altogether for the summer months, but Washington and Moscow both disagreed vehemently. The 1942 offensive by Army Group South in the Soviet Union was forcing the Red Army to retreat and retreat and retreat again. Russia couldn't afford a delay in these vital shipments.

PQ 17 left Iceland on June 27, when the summer sun was at its highest. It was made up of 35 merchant ships, including 22 American, eight British, two Soviet, two Panamanian, and one Dutch, which together carried 300 aircraft, 600 tanks, 4,000 trucks and a hundred thousand tons of military supplies. The total value of the cargo is estimated at \$700 million, a huge sum of money for the time.

The Germans did not know the details of the convoy's departure or course, so they put up two lines of U-boats for reconnaissance. The convoy got past the first line undetected, but was found by *U-456* in the second line on July 1.

The German Admiralty ordered its surface ships in Norway to proceed north along the coast to Altenfjord, in the far north of the country. *Lützow* ran into rocks and had to turn back, but *Tirpitz*, *Admiral Scheer* and *Admiral Hipper* made it to their destination. Adolf Hitler was leery of sending the warships, though. One American and one British battleship and a British aircraft carrier were known to be out there somewhere, and the loss of what was left of the German surface fleet would be a serious blow to German morale and prestige. He ordered Raeder not to order these ships to attack the convoy unless it was certain that no Allied carrier, battleship, or submarine was close by.

The U-boats converged on the convoy, but conditions were not favorable, as dense fog made it nearly impossible to target the ships. The Luftwaffe had better luck; it bombed the convoy repeatedly from July 1 to July 4, striking in the afternoons, when the fog cleared. They were able to sink four of the merchant ships

In London, the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, was a nervous wreck. He knew from Enigma decrypts that the Germans had massed their warships at Altenfjord. He did not know of Hitler's reluctance to use them.

Late in the day on July 4, Pound became convinced that the German warships must have departed Altenfjord and would intercept the convoy the next day, supported by U-boats and air attacks. He decided the convoy could not defend itself from these threats. Even the nearby cruiser force was at risk. At 9:11 that evening, he issued an order to the cruiser escort that began "Most immediate..." ordering the cruisers to come about and head west at maximum speed. Twelve minutes later, the convoy ships received an order to disperse, owing to the threat from enemy surface ships, and proceed to Russian ports. Twenty-five minutes later, the convoy received an order, again with the header "Most Immediate..." directing the merchant ships to scatter.

These orders came with no explanation. Not that commanders are required to explain every order, but absent an explanation, the urgent tone of the messages left the convoy commanders with the impression that *Tirpitz* was likely to appear on the horizon at any moment. In fact, it was nowhere near.

The cruisers turned around and headed west, per their orders. The destroyers in the close escort had not been issued any orders, so their commanders assumed they were also to turn around and follow the cruisers, leaving only smaller trawlers, corvettes, and the like to defend the cargo ships, which dispersed as ordered and headed for Russian ports, each following its own course.

Now, an order to disperse like this would have been exactly the proper thing to do, had the convoy truly been in danger of interception by surface ships. But that was not the case. These cargo ships were separated and on their own in an environment in which U-boats were lurking all around them, Luftwaffe planes were hunting them from the skies, and it was always daylight.

Nearby U-boats observed the convoy scatter and reported it to the Luftwaffe. Then they moved in. Their only difficulty was in choosing which target to attack. Later came the bombers. German aircraft and submarines hunted the scattered ships for the following ten days. Admiral Raeder considered sending *Tirpitz* and the other German surface ships to hunt down the convoy, but decided against it. The U-boats and the Luftwaffe were doing fine on their own.

Wehrmacht command was delighted. Tallying reports from units engaged, they concluded that a total of 36 merchant ships had been sunk and therefore the convoy had been wiped out. Jubilation reigned. As was often the case during the Battle of the Atlantic, the Germans had overestimated, but the reality was bad enough. Of the 35 ships that had begun the voyage, 23 had been sunk, sending over 100,000 tons of badly needed aircraft, tanks, and other military aid to the bottom of the Barents Sea. Only 11 of the merchant ships reached port. More than 150 merchant seamen died, and hundreds more suffered injuries. These were the worst losses of any Allied convoy during the war.

Only Karl Dönitz was not celebrating. The success of this operation undermined his arguments for why his U-boats would be put to better use in the Atlantic. The Royal Navy, on the other hand, determined not to send any further convoys to Russia until autumn, no matter what the Soviets or the Americans had to say about it. And they had a lot to say about it.

By the time of the PQ 17 disaster, the situation had improved along the US East Coast. The US Navy had put together enough escort ships to begin running escorted convoys. In this they had assistance from the UK and Canada; those two countries gave the US Navy some armed trawlers and destroyer escorts, ships that had proven particularly useful in anti-submarine operations. You could call this a reverse Lend-Lease program.

It took longer to organize protection in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, but by July, ship losses were down and U-boat losses were up, and Admiral Dönitz was persuaded that Second Happy Time was over, and redirected his U-boat patrols to the mid-Atlantic and ordered them to hunt convoys running between Canada and the British Isles.

The U-boats remained a serious threat. Coastal anti-submarine aircraft were limited in range. The British were launching patrol planes from Newfoundland, Iceland, and Ireland, but there was a wide swath of the North Atlantic that was outside the range of any of these aircraft, where a U-boat could run on the surface in relative safety.

And in Germany, now that the German government and Navy were in agreement that their U-boats were their most potent naval weapon, U-boat production was increasing. By 1943,

Germany was launching more than 20 new U-boats every month, while monthly losses were running less than half that number, meaning the numbers of boats on patrol in the mid-Atlantic were ever increasing.

Second Happy Time may have been over, but the U-boats were still out there.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Richard and Mike for their kind donations, and thank you to Melatonin Munchies for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Richard and Mike and Melatonin Munchies help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you'll join me next week, here on the *History of the Twentieth Century*, as we revisit the situation in Africa, where Erwin Rommel remains frustrated by his inability to take Tobruk. The Desert Fox, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing.

A few minutes ago, I mentioned British anti-submarine aircraft patrols operating out of Ireland. I meant of course Northern Ireland, as the Irish Free State remained neutral during the Second World War.

If you look at a map of Ireland, you'll see that Northern Ireland is really more Northeastern Ireland. The west coast of the island is part of the Irish Free State all the way up to Malin Head, the island's northernmost point. Respect for Irish neutrality would therefore require RAF Coastal Command units based in Northern Ireland to fly north until they were farther north, then circle around Malin Head and proceed west and south into the Atlantic.

This adds about 500 miles, or 800 kilometers, give or take, to the round-trip flight such an aircraft would need to make, which would substantially reduce the range of aircraft based in Northern Ireland.

But a look at the map will also tell you that the westernmost point in Northern Ireland comes within seven kilometers of the Atlantic Ocean, separated only by a narrow strip of land belonging to the Irish Free State in County Donegal.

Despite its official neutrality, in 1941 Ireland gave permission for the RAF to fly through this airspace, which was valuable assistance during the Battle of the Atlantic. A reconnaissance plane flying out of Northern Ireland helped locate *Bismarck*, for example, which contributed to the German battleship's sinking.

Technically, the British only had permission to use this airspace for rescue missions, but the British ignored this restriction and the Irish government looked the other way.

[music: Closing War Theme]