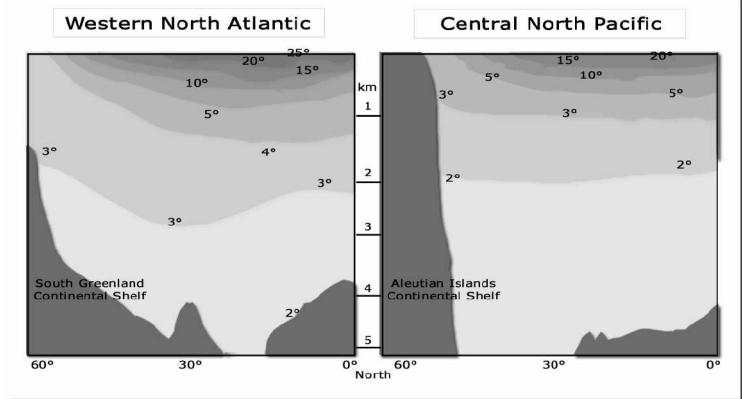


The Atlantic Convoy

Effective supply was essential in order to obtain a war victory. Thousands of accounts talk about dramatic events at sea. On September 21/22, 1940, the Convoy HX72 was caught in a twelve-hour battle, in which eleven ships were sunk and other two damaged, with a total loss of 100,000 tons of supplies and around 45,000 tons of fuel.



At the beginning of the war, the convoy escort was small in number and not always sailing with the group for the full distance of the voyage. In 1941, the average size of a convoy was of about forty ships, accompanied by six naval vessels as escort. Later on, certain escorts became quite massive. For example, in 1942, the Convoy ON202, made up of 38 merchant ships, had an escort of 3 destroyers and 3 corvettes; while the escort for the Convoy ONS18 comprised 6 destroyers, 8 corvettes, and one trawler.

A special aspect concerns the loss of tankers between 1939 and 1941. The British fleet lost 1,469 tank-ships and the Norwegians 430 in just 28 months. If one assumes that the average loading capacity of each ship was of 2,000 cargo tons and that half of the sunken vessels were loaded, the total oil overflow could sum up to two million tons in 2 years, an amount corresponding to the total oil overflow of tank ships between 1967 and 2002.

However, U-boats were not acting alone in the North Atlantic. Since the Luftwaffe could operate out of France since summer 1940, long-range aircrafts were sent out in the Atlantic to attack supply routes. The total shipping tonnage sunk by the Axis airplanes in all sea areas during the first two war years is claimed to be of 1.5 million tons.