

War in the Atlantic Ocean (1942 –1945)

Aerial warfare in the Atlantic Ocean

The use of planes during the Atlantic war progressed tremendously as the USA entered the war after the attack of Pearl Harbour, in December 1941. The US production was estimated at 127,000 planes in 1942, which exceeded the total number of German aircraft production during the whole war period. It meant that more aircrafts of a much better quality and power were available for surveillance, bombing and combat missions in the Atlantic Ocean. Even in August 1942, eighteen American B-24 aircraft, called 'Liberator', were ready to escort Atlantic convoys. These planes had a range of 2,400 miles, fuel tanks of 2,500 gallons and reached altitudes of 30,000 feet. After the winter 1942/43, anti-submarine missions were assigned to the long-range aircrafts in the Atlantic, which sank 33 submarines between April 1943 and September 1944. 209 long-range bomber aircrafts were available in the US navy in July 1942 and the number increased progressively to 2,200 aircrafts which searched and chased U-boats between June 1943 and May 1944.

In 1942 and 1943, U-boats had very little support from the Luftwaffe and, even though, that little help diminished after the D-Day (1944). On the other hand, the Allies' air force presence in the Atlantic Ocean improved significantly. The British Coastal Command launched approximately 238,000 sorties, totalizing 1,300,000 flying hours. According to report of the Coastal Command, fourteen U-boats were destroyed and another twelve damaged.

As the German Luftwaffe wasn't well equipped, it couldn't manage a significant performance in the North Atlantic battle. However, they had a few hundred long-range, four-engine planes in service, which flew from their bases to France, in 1941. During the month of August 1941, they succeeded in sinking more than 300.000 tons of shipping, i.e. almost one-third more than the U-boats sank during the same month. Axis airplanes must have sunk a total of about 800 merchant ships in all war theatres. Even if less than half of that number was sunk in the hazardous waters of the Northern Atlantic and Northern Pacific, it actually meant the use of many thousands of bombs and the fall of hundreds of planes into the oceans.