

Atlantic Convoys

As already mentioned above, the Allies completed over 300,000 Atlantic voyages during this war period. The heroic story of merchantmen has been written and rewritten in an uncountable number of books and essays. Here is only one case.

In March 1943, two convoys (SC122 and HX229) suffered forty-four hour attack of the U-boats on their route. During the three-day battle that ensued, twenty-three merchantmen of the two convoys were killed. At the same time, the convoy HX229A, which included thirteen tankers, eight refrigerator and four cargo liners (39 ships), was directed northeast, towards Greenland. There they came upon Arctic conditions. The three convoys, with a total of 131 ships, carried about 1,000,000 tons of cargo – petroleum fuel, frozen meat, food, tobacco, grain, timber, minerals, steel, gunpowder, detonators, bombs, shells, lorries, locomotives, invasion barges, aircraft and tanks.

Tanker and Ammunition ships

The destiny of many tankers proved to be extremely disastrous for their crew and for the ocean waters in the same time. The Allied and Neutral countries had about 1,000 tankers permanently in service since 1942. The total loss of tankers with a size of over 1,600 tons was of 4,221 ships between December 1941 and May 1944.

Depth Charges

One of the most effective means of penetrating deep below the sea surface is the depth charge. Depth charges, which could explode at a depth of 500 feet, were in use since 1942. The 'Hedgehog bomb', a highly powered explosive fired by a multi-barrelled mortar and filled with Torpex, was also in use. Its range was of 250 yards ahead of the escort vessel. When attacking ships, they could fire twenty-six depth charges in pairs, set to explode at 500 feet and 740 feet alternately, every ten seconds.

It seems difficult to obtain reliable figures with regard to the number of depth charges dropped in the Atlantic. The total figure could go somewhere around 500,000 or even more.

Gunners

After the WWI experience, transport ships were equipped with guns for protection against U-boats and surface raiders. During 12 months of war, 3,000 vessels were armed with a 4.7-inch gun manned usually by six trained gunners.