

History and Disposition of the *U-352*

Of the three vessels in this study, the *U-352* had the least eventful operational career. However, the wreck site is likely the U-boat most frequently dived by recreational divers. As such, it likely represents the most significant economic cultural resource investigated in this study. Unlike the *U-85* and the *U-701*, *U-352* rests south of Cape Hatteras, off Cape Lookout in more stable conditions and more inviting Gulf Stream water for the average diver. This is not to belittle the economic importance of the other sites in this study, but it is an important point that the *U-352* is a site that enjoys a high degree of visibility in the diving community. As such, it is important to be aware that there are many stakeholders with a vested interest in this site. The sites longevity as a viable and enjoyable dive site is crucial to dive operators on the southern outer banks. Formally assessing the site's degradation and identifying contributing factors may allow for suggestions for mitigation, ensuring this is a resource for the economy of the diving community in the future.

Like the *U-85*, this site has been known in the diving community for decades. Though most have respected these sites and enjoyed them without interfering with their integrity, there has been a great deal of interference by divers over the years. Cataloging human and natural degradation of the resource will be an integral part of the sites assessment.

History of U-352

The *U-352* was built at the Flensburg Schiffsbau shipyard and as such carried the city of Flensburg's crest on its conning tower. The keel was laid down on 11 March 1940 and following an unusually long time, the vessel was launched on 7 May 1941. *U-352* was commissioned a little over three months later on 28 August 1941 with the Feldpost Number 45 428 (Wynn 1997: 232).

Command of the 352 was given to Kapitänleutnant Hellmut Rathke, born in Czychen, East Prussia on 3 December 1910. Rathke was a member of the Naval Officers Class of 1930. Rathke eventually took a position as the Course Leader of Torpedo School at Murwik from May 1939 through June 1940. At that time he took a new position as a Staff Officer at the Naval Command Station in Calais until October, whereupon he returned to his former position at torpedo school until April 1941. From April through July Rathke attended U-boat training school. Unlike Degen and Greger, it seems that Rathke did not undertake a training cruise as a pupil. Instead, he was awarded command of the *U-352* almost immediately upon the completion of school. He began baubelehrung in July and took full command on 28 August 1941 (USONI 1942b: 5; Busch and Röhl 1999: 207).

By January 1942, Rathke and his crew on the *U-352* had completed work-ups in the Baltic and were ready to begin patrol duty. On 15 January 1942 *U-352* transferred from Kiel to Bergen, where they set out for their first patrol on 20 January. *U-352* was part of Group *Schlei* and was ordered, along with twelve other U-boats, to converge on an area West of Rockall and begin seeking convoys. This patrol mission was recalled shortly after its deployment due to the offensive off the East Coast of the United States. Dönitz

was eager to put heavy pressure on the newly opened theatre, and was receiving favorable reports on shipping along the U.S. Eastern Seaboard. Group *Schlei* was to return to France and begin preparing for deployment to U.S. waters (USONI 1942b: 5; Wynn 1997: 232).

However, the *U-352* would not be reaching U.S. waters with the rest of Group *Schlei*. Eight of the twelve boats were again redirected to Iceland, the Faroes, and Scotland. This northern patrol duty was, in part, carried out by Rathke in the *U-352*. They spent several weeks at sea, which were largely uneventful. Rathke attempted to carry out at least one attack, but was thwarted by the depth charges of escort corvettes. No serious damage was acquired on the first patrol of *U-352*, but no shipping was sunk either and the vessel returned to St. Nazaire on 26 February empty handed (USONI 1942b: 5; Wynn 1997: 232).

In St. Nazaire the *U-352* underwent minor repairs and was ready for a second war cruise. This time Rathke was heading for the U.S. East Coast. *U-352* set out from St. Nazaire on 7 April 1942. As this was early in the U-boat offensive against the United States some operational procedures were changing. Wolf pack tactics were proving impractical for the scale of the area covered and fuel, especially for Type VIIIs severely limited their range. As such, U-tankers were coming into use. On the crossing to the U.S. East Coast, Rathke was scheduled to resupply with U-tanker *U-459*, one of the first such boats for that purpose. The transfer of fuel to the *U-352* took place approximately 500 miles Northeast of Bermuda. After Rathke was fully provisioned he set a course for his operational area off the coast of North Carolina (USONI 1942b: 5; Hickam 1989: 182; Blair 1996: 575; Wynn 1997: 232).

Beginning on 5 May 1942, far to sea off Hatteras, *U-352* began a game of cat-and-mouse with the Swedish merchant vessel *SS Freden*. Rathke moved into position twice, each time firing a torpedo from the bow. Each torpedo missed. Despite having missed, the crew aboard the *Freden* believed they would be hit and decided to abandon the ship. When they stopped running in order to launch the lifeboats, the *U-352* passed them without notice and somehow lost contact. Meanwhile, the *Freden* was not sinking and upon gaining some more confidence, the Captain on the *Freden* ordered everyone back aboard to resume passage (Wynn 1997: 232).

The following day, Rathke came across the *Freden* again after conducting a search to regain contact. Over the next several hours Rathke got off an additional two torpedoes, both of which missed. However, once again, the crew on *Freden* panicked and took to the lifeboats. Evidently during the process of launching boats the *Freden* turned the stern towards the *U-352* so as to present a smaller target. Rathke mistook this for the vessel running off full speed and gave up chasing the *Freden*. The crew of the *Freden* drifted in their lifeboats all night. On the morning of the 7 May, they happened to drift by the completely untouched *Freden* and reboarded and continued their journey. This event has been described as an “amazing story of ineptitude on both sides” (Wynn 1997: 23).

On 9 May, the *U-352* began the engagement that would end in its demise. Rathke spotted the *Icarus*, a 165-foot USCG Cutter on antisubmarine patrol off Cape Lookout. *U-352* closed for an attack. In a scenario similar to the onset of the *Roper's* engagement of the *U-85*, *Icarus* got a sonar contact shortly before observing a torpedo attack. Rathke had fired at *Icarus*, but the torpedo either malfunctioned or hit the sea bottom as they were only in 110-120 feet of water (USONI 1942b: 7; Hoyt 1978 123; Hickam 1989: 188; Blair 1996: 575; Wynn 1997: 232).

Lieutenant Commander Maurice Jester aboard the *Icarus* reacted appropriately. He sent out five depth charges from the Y-gun, which damaged the *U-352* so badly they decided to play dead and lay still on the bottom, hoping to go unnoticed. Jester began dropping depth charges systematically and eventually forced Rathke to surface. As the crew of *U-352* prepared to scuttle, several began emerging from the conning tower preparing to jump overboard. Fearing that they may attempt to man their deck guns, *Icarus* began delivering heavy machine-gun fire, which resulted in the deaths of several crew aboard the U-boat (USONI 1942b: 7; Hoyt 1978, 123; Hickam 1989: 188; Blair 1996: 575; Wynn 1997: 232).

The *U-352* sank while the majority of the crew was able to escape. *Icarus* hauled off for approximately an hour to await instructions on how to proceed. They then returned to the site and collected 33 survivors, one of which died aboard the *Icarus* shortly thereafter. The survivors of the *U-352* were the first German submariners captured by American forces in the war. They were later interrogated and remained in various prisoner of war camps for the duration of the war, often intermingling with survivors from the *U-701* (USONI 1942b: 7; Hoyt 1978, 123; Hickam 1989: 188; Blair 1996: 575; Wynn 1997: 232).

Disposition of the U-352 Site

Strangely, the salvage attempts conducted by Navy divers just days after the event were as fruitless as they were on the *U-85* with regards to intelligence materials. Navy salvage vessel *Umpqua* located and dived the site but did not recover anything of military importance. Following the departure of salvage operation, and a subsequent depth charge attack on the site three months later, the *U-352* was left untouched and undisturbed for decades with the remains of as many as 13 men interred inside.

In 1975, a group of recreational divers in Morehead city located the wreck of the *U-352*. It was discovered by Claude Hall, George Purifoy, Rodd Gross and Dale McCullough. Since that time the *U-352* has been consistently visited by divers. The site itself has been met with some controversy over the years. The remains of unexploded ordnance was an issue during the 1980s. It was feared that in order to ensure safety there was a possibility the remains of the site would be exploded. However, this was mitigated by the Navy by removing external hazards and welding closed access points. This ensured no interference with hazardous materials located inside the hull and also served to protect the human remains. However, a diver eventually pried these hatches open and it has long since been

accessible to divers wishing to penetrate the hull (Farb 1985: 193; Gentile 1992: 203; Keatts and Farr 1994: 97).

Souvenir hunters have collected a great deal of loose artifacts and some larger scale items such as the 20mm deck have been salvaged. The extent of degradation appears to be somewhat less than that of the *U-85*, but this may or may not be the case when observed in the field. Signs of human interaction and degradation to the site are key components that must be recorded in detail.

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