

BOEM ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM: ONGOING STUDIES

BOEM OCS Region: Atlantic

Planning Area: Mid-Atlantic

Title: Battle of the Atlantic Expedition

Total Cost: \$500,000

Period of Performance: FY 2010-2017

Conducting Organization: NOAA Monitor National Marine Sanctuary

BOEM Contact: [William Hoffman](#)

Background: BOEM and NOAA, Monitor National Marine Sanctuary have committed to a multi-year project to document the Battle of the Atlantic by conducting archaeological investigation of both Axis and Allied losses during World War II offshore North Carolina. An Interagency Agreement was developed in 2010 to provide support over a five-year period toward documenting these casualties.

Perhaps the longest military campaign of World War II, the Battle of the Atlantic was waged from the waters off England to the east coast of the United States and into the Gulf of Mexico. From its beginnings in 1939 through the end of the war with Germany, hundreds of vessels were lost and are now located on the seafloor as archaeological resources. Given the violent nature of these vessel losses, many are also war graves. The area offshore North Carolina was the closest theater of war to the continental United States.

Objectives: This expedition will investigate Axis and Allied losses in the Graveyard of the Atlantic. Many of these wrecks have undergone illegal salvage, especially those at depths shallower than 130 feet. The objectives of this project are to collect detailed documentation of these vessels and to develop a complete inventory of WWII losses in the region.

Methods: Fieldwork includes site mapping, creation of photo-mosaics, video/photo documentation, and an evaluation of the artificial reef effect at each of the sites. Testing will be performed by marine archaeologists applying a variety of techniques including remote sensing, diving, and ROV inspection.

Products: Products from this project will include a cumulative report; nomination of sites to the National Register of Historic Places; and outreach products, including a Battle of the Atlantic web site, posters, and educational materials. Additionally, this project will strengthen existing federal, state, and academic partnerships, as well as create new ones.

Importance to BOEM: An inventory and evaluation of World War II vessel losses in this region is necessary information to support BOEM's consideration of historic properties under the National Historic Preservation Act. This information is particularly timely and relevant as BOEM is currently considering renewable energy activities offshore North Carolina.

Current Status: The first field expedition was carried out over a three-week period in July 2008. The 2008 Expedition successfully documented the remains of the German U-boats U-85, U-352, and U-701, all in Federal waters. The 2009 Expedition successfully documented the remains of the converted British military trawler H.M.S. Bedfordshire, sunk by U-558, as well as completing remote sensing survey operations in deeper water, which successfully relocated the remains of the U.S. Navy trawler YP-389, sunk by U-701. The three-week field expedition in 2010 investigated several shipwreck sites including the oil tanker, Dixie Arrow, torpedoed by U-71, and the Navy tugboat Keshena that struck a mine and sank. The 2011 expedition in June and August conducted wide area remote sensing surveys to identify additional targets for investigation as well as shipwrecks associated with the Battle of Convoy KS-520. The team also revisited several wrecks from previous expeditions to continue site investigations, mapping, and recording. In 2012, research continued, focusing on targeted multibeam surveys of anomalies discovered in 2011. Eight targeted surveys were completed, with the discovery of at least two previously unknown wreck sites. Additionally, baseline diver surveys were conducted on seven known WWII wreck sites. The 2013 expedition continued the efforts of the previous years, investigating 12 sites to verify their identity and gather information to support consideration of their eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. In 2013, field methods were also expanded to include the documentation of several sites beyond recreational diving limits through the use of decompression and closed-circuit rebreather diving procedures.

During 2014 fieldwork, the team identified the remains of casualties lost during the 1942 attack on the KS-520 Convoy. This includes the German U-boat U-576 and the tanker Bluefields which now rest on the seabed less than 240 yards apart (<http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/news/press/2014/pr102114.html>). Preparation of the final report is underway.

Final Report Due: Fall 2017

Publications: None

Affiliated WWW Sites: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/missions/battleoftheatlantic/>

Revised date: July 2016