

Environmental Studies Program: Ongoing Study

Study Area(s): Atlantic

Administered By: BOEM, Office of Renewable Energy Programs

Title: Battle of the Atlantic Expedition

BOEM Information Need(s) to be Addressed: An inventory and evaluation of World War II vessel losses offshore North Carolina is needed to inform BOEM's consideration of historic properties under the National Historic Preservation Act. This information is timely and relevant as BOEM is currently considering renewable energy activities in this area.

Total BOEM Cost:(in thousands) \$500 **Period of Performance:** FY 2010–2019

Conducting Organization(s): Inter-agency partnership between BOEM and NOAA, Monitor National Marine Sanctuary

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Description:

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.

This expedition will identify and investigate Axis and Allied losses in the Graveyard of the Atlantic. 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: Methods include historical research and field investigations conducted by marine archaeologists. Field investigations have employed various types of remote sensing survey, video and photo documentation, and use of manned submersibles.

Current Status: The first field expedition, carried out over a three-week period in July 2008, successfully documented the remains of the German U-boats *U-85*, *U-352*, and *U-701*, located 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 identified 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 conducted wide area remote sensing surveys to identify additional targets for investigation as well as shipwrecks associated with the Battle of Convoy KS-520. In 2012, research 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. These sites were further investigated in 2016. Fieldwork under the agreement has been completed and preparation of the final report is underway.

Final Report Due: March 2019

Publications Completed: NA

Affiliated WWW Sites:

<http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/explorations/16battlefield/welcome.html>

Revised Date: August 7, 2018