

Antisub COMMAND

By Lt. Col. C. A. Burrows

ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF, A-2



Brig. Gen. Westside T. Larson congratulates Captain John Shaw and his fellow crew-members of the plane "Tidewater Tillie" for sinking an Axis sub. At right, Sergts. Jack Weems, Luther Williams and Don Everhart load an anti-sub ship with a depth bomb—at an air base "somewhere in England".



PROMINENT in the United Nations' program to control and eliminate submarine activity is a recently announced component of the Army Air Forces—the Antisubmarine Command.

This command is the only unit of the AAF within United States continental limits having a major operational mission, or "shooting job". Its crews patrol all coastal waters and escort merchant ships hundreds of miles out into the sea. In the offensive against U-boats they are not only prime attackers but serve as the eyes and ears for American surface vessels.

Squadrons of the Antisubmarine Command also operate overseas—in any part of the world where enemy subs may be found.

Since this work calls for specialized combat crew training, the command has a school at an Eastern sea coast base and supervises all training in such warfare. Brigadier General Westside T. Larson is commanding general of the Antisubmarine Command, directly responsible to Lieutenant General Henry H. Arnold, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces.

Destroying enemy submarines from the air by land-based planes is definitely a development of this war. The job itself is not very spectacular. Tedious patrol, conducted for long hours, is the main work of anti-submarine squadrons, with occasional bursts

A new component of the Army Air Forces organized to combat the U-boat menace.

of fast and furious action in which a plane has only 30 to 60 seconds to accomplish the sinking of a sub.

However, unspectacular though it may be, the tracking and sinking of U-boats by Army bombers has, through increased perfection of attack, become a vital factor in the combined offensive against the enemy's undersea craft.

Origin of the command dates back to the beginning of the war. On December 8, 1941, the First Bomber Command began operations with the Navy against enemy submarines off the Eastern coast. A few months later, operational control of the First Bomber Command was placed under the Navy's Eastern Sea Frontier and Gulf Sea Frontier.

IN THE four months following Pearl Harbor the I Bomber Command and Naval aircraft cooperated with ships to protect unescorted merchant vessels from submarine attacks off our Eastern coast. Finally, in April, 1942, the Navy started escorting coastal convoys, with air escorts continuing. Meanwhile, air operations continued to ex-

pand and, in October, 1942, the Antisubmarine Command was formed with the First Bomber Command as a nucleus. The new and enlarged organization was prepared to operate on a world-wide scale.

Within the Command there are a number of Wings, which, for the purpose of receiving complete intelligence and operational data, coordinate their patrol area. At present, planes of the Antisubmarine Command are coordinated with the antisubmarine operations of the Eastern Sea Frontier, the Gulf Sea Frontier and the British Coastal Command. Other wings of an enlarged Antisubmarine Command carry the fight to U-boats wherever they can be found in the world.

The job of tracking and locating subs is a slow task. Sightings from many sources are compiled to give a complete picture of the submarine menace.

Patrols in an area of more than a million square miles are directed from control rooms in New York, Miami and overseas centers. In these rooms large staffs of Army, Navy and Allied communication experts, plotters and intelligence officers receive and evaluate reports of U-boats sighted. Here controllers give the quick orders which send aircraft and naval vessels to the attack.

Sometimes messages announcing sightings prove to be duds. (Continued on Page 28)

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However, the Navy and the Antisubmarine Command are careful to evaluate a message before wasting manpower and equipment on what might prove to be a wild goose chase.

The Antisubmarine Command and the Navy are cautious in their evaluation of successful attacks. Pilots say that, to convince their superiors, a plane crew must bring back the U-boat captain's cap.

A squadron of the Command did comply with this rigid test, producing not only a cap, but an enemy U-boat captain himself. Somewhat bedraggled, he was nevertheless convincing evidence. The captain and some of his German crew had escaped in rubber life boats from a submarine bombed by an Antisubmarine Command plane. They floated a couple of days until rescued by American surface craft.

So effective was the bombing from the air of this U-boat, that it was only a matter of minutes before she filled and sank. The Army bomber crew, witnessing the plight of the enemy men on the surface of the water, dropped lifesaving equipment. Two days elapsed before the Germans could be rescued, near death from exposure, by Coast Guardsmen.

Experience has shown that submarine crews fear aircraft. They will take their chances maneuvering with surface craft, but duck under water if they see an airplane in time. And they generally stay under if they know airplanes are in the vicinity.

However, on rare occasions aircraft are fired upon by the guns of the U-boats who then submerge after the plane has passed overhead—if the plane hasn't already done the submerging job. Probably, that captured U-boat captain failed to avoid destruction of his craft from the air because he lacked sufficient time to dive.

THE tough aspect of submarine fighting is the flying day-after-day, in all kinds of weather and over wide stretches of cold, treacherous water. The strain of this sort of work is hard to measure. One pilot has said: "I have more than once found myself making a sudden steep bank out at sea, under the impression that I was avoiding a mountain." Another declares: "One of my friends, shortly before he went on leave, swore he saw a man riding a motorcycle 450 miles off the coast."

The uncertainty of the outcome of an attack is well illustrated by the experience of an Antisubmarine Squadron bombing crew over the Bay of Biscay. A surfaced submarine was sighted by a member of the crew of a Liberator bomber piloted by 1st Lieutenant Walter Thorne of Marietta, Ohio.

As the plane approached for the bomb run, the U-boat started to crash-dive. However, before it disappeared from view, 1st Lieutenant Brent F. Walker of Jefferson City, Mo., attacked with machine gun fire.

The approach on the first run was made from the stern of the submarine. Three depth bombs exploded approximately fifty, thirty and sixteen feet from the stern, while others straddled the conning tower.

Private R. R. Williamson of Austin, Texas, reported seeing a part of the U-boat in the explosion geyser and fired another burst of machine gun fire into it. On a second run, Lieutenant Thorne saw an oil patch, 200 yards wide, spreading from a geyser-like center.

First Lieutenant Irving T. Colburn of Chicago was bombardier. Other crew members included co-pilot James Anderson of Austin, Texas; Staff Sergeant George Fowler of Spartanburg, S. C.; Staff Sergeant Hollander of Indiana, and Technical Sergeants Engles of Hazelton, Pa., L. T. Figg of Crew, Va., and J. Briston of Evansville, Indiana. The Army Air Forces has given credit to the crew for the destruction of this enemy submarine.

In other cases, bodies from inside the submarine have been seen coming to the surface. There is little doubt in those instances that the submarine was destroyed. Often, submarine crews have been rescued from the sea.

Rescues at sea have been effected for victims of lost merchant ships through patrol activities of the Antisubmarine Command. When a storm lashed the waters off Cape Hatteras recently, the 31 members of the crew of a merchant vessel were forced to take to a single lifeboat.

An Antisubmarine Command plane on routine patrol spotted the small craft, which was bobbing helplessly in the mountainous seas. The airplane was piloted by Lieutenant Norman E. Purdy of Hamilton, Ohio, who radioed for aid. A second plane went out, piloted by Lieutenant Ford A. Trotter, Jr., of Luverne, Ala. Emergency equipment, including food, water, clothing and blankets was dropped from the second aircraft.

The Navy sent out a Catalina patrol bomber under the command of Lieutenant Commander Delos C. Wait of Eldorado, Ark., which also dropped emergency equipment. Meanwhile, the Eastern Sea Frontier Command, which had been coordinating the Army and Navy air action at the scene, now sent a fourth plane—a Coast Guard Hall patrol bomber—to scout for aid.

Lieutenant-pilot Edwin B. Ing of Elizabeth, N. J., searched the area and found, about fifteen miles away from the lifeboat, a freighter. By blinker signal he told the plight of the 31 sailors in the small boat and then led the vessel to the spot. All 31 men were rescued.

While rescues of this type are only a by-product of the primary missions of sinking submarines, yet they are an important factor in saving human lives.

Ordinarily, the average air crew untrained in spotting an object in the water will miss seeing something actually on the surface. This happens for a number of reasons. It may be because of the manner in

which the surface is scanned, or because of a type of eye fatigue that fails to see what is in the field of vision, or because what is seen fails to register on the consciousness of the person making the observation.

In order to reduce to a minimum these and other factors that tended to make submarine bombing from aircraft in the early days an extremely hazardous undertaking, the Antisubmarine Command has set up a special training program. The proper method of scanning the horizon, the correct manner of dropping bombs and other instruction in tactics and technique are taught by a squadron skilled in the business of tracking down subs.

WHEN the Antisubmarine Command receives pilots, co-pilots, navigators, bombardiers, radio operators, gunners and engineers from Army Air Force Schools, they are immediately given this additional training. From this schooling a new type of combat crew is created which is highly skilled in "giving the business" to enemy U-boats.

The German Navy has declared that it is turning out submarines faster than the sea and air forces of the United Nations can destroy them. However, as new air crews are trained and turned out for battle, the destruction rate of U-boats will undoubtedly have the Axis singing a different tune.

Submarine warfare may be at a turning point. The Antisubmarine Command, in coordination with the Navy and Allied aircraft, is beginning to take the offensive. In addition, the campaigns in Africa and Russia may force U-boats to accept the defensive because of the impelling need for the enemy to interfere with the supply lines. Enemy submarines may no longer be free to go marauding after merchant shipping whenever it is within the range of underwater craft. They may be forced to concentrate their efforts on interference with convoys to Russia, Africa and England. This is an advantage to the Allies—they know where to expect the enemy.

The effect of Antisubmarine Command and Navy operations, at the moment, has been to eliminate enemy U-boats from American coast areas. Thus, the loss of coastal ships and crews due to enemy action has been reduced almost to the zero point.

Close cooperation has been carried on with the British Coastal Command which has the same functions as the Army Air Forces Antisubmarine Command. In a survey published by the New York Times of the two years of operations, the Coastal Command report stated that it escorted 4,947 merchant convoys, attacked 587 U-boats and flew some 55,000,000 miles.

While the record of the Antisubmarine Command does not yet approach that of the sub-sinking component of the Royal Air Force, millions of miles have already been flown and numerous U-boats have been attacked in the short period since its inception. ☆