The sinking of the Grey Wolves

John Griffiths, formerly of Holyhead, but now living in Kidlington, Oxfordshire talks about the ominous presence of the Grey Wolves off the NW Wales coast. During WWII, the Battle of the Atlantic raged between the allies and the deadly German U-boats, three of which lie under the sea off Anglesey.

"Towards the end of the Second World War, Britain and her allies turned the tables on what Winston Churchill described as his 'greatest fear' - the voracious German U-boat. By the time the Battle of the Atlantic was concluded, the allies had the measure of the 'grey wolves' and the tide of victory had turned in their favour.

The port of Liverpool was still a major target for the Germans. Despite the presence of the Royal Navy and with Holyhead as a location for a small naval force, including a detachment of the Dutch Navy, the Germans actively considered the area worth patrolling.

During January of 1945, U-1051 under Oberleutnant Heinrich von Holleben was found by a hunting group of four ships - HM ships Aylmer, Calder, Bentinck and Manners - and was sunk in position 53.39N, 05.23W with the loss of all 47 crew. A type VIIC boat, she had enjoyed only a brief career in which she had sunk two vessels, totalling 425 tons.

Another U-boat - U-246 - under Kapitanleutnant Ernst Raabe, was lost in the Irish Sea in position 53.40N, 04.53.W - although exactly how remains a mystery. Another Type VIIC boat, her exact fate and that of her 48 crew is unknown. Her last message was heard on 5th April, the date given of her sinking - but why this boat vanished has never been explained. No allied sources ever claimed her as a 'kill'. She was listed as an 'operational loss' by the Germans as it was thought she was sunk en route to the Irish Sea - but she has since been discovered midway between the Island of Anglesey and the Isle of Man - not too far from U-1051.

U-1024, a larger Type VIIC/41, was perhaps the most interesting loss. Under Kapitanleutnant Hans-Joachim Gutteck she had already sunk one ship for a 'tonnage total' of 7000 tons. She had also attacked two merchant ships between Anglesey and the Isle of Man during her patrol - which was akin to sending the Royal Navy an invitation to look for her. On April 12th 1945 they did. She ran into two ships of the RN's 8th Escort Group - HMS Loch Glendhu and Loch More.
Both vessels attacked U-1024, forcing her to the surface, her crew ready to abandon ship. As she appeared, she was raked by gunfire from the Royal Navy vessels. Both RN vessels continued to rake the U-boat with their guns until it was realised that her crew were not trying to fight but abandon ship. Her Commander, Gutteck, was killed in the initial surface action. German records say he was killed by gunfire from the RN ships - but RN records say he shot himself.

On ceasing fire, HMS Loch More put her boarding party aboard the U-boat to strip her of as much valuable equipment as they could, including the boat's Enigma machine and its codes. The Navy then attempted to tow the U-boat back to Liverpool. However, U-1024 had taken more damage than was realised and, on 13th April 1945, she sank in position 53.39N 05.03W. Of her crew of 46, nine were dead and 37 taken into captivity.

Coincidentally, all three boats lost North West of Anglesey were from the same Bergen based 11 Flottille and, in the case of U-1024, this was the last of Doenitz's grey wolves to be captured in action. Four weeks after her loss the war in Europe came to an end.

Today, the crews of the three boats who were killed in action continue in what submariners the world over call 'eternal patrol'. They are amongst the 27,491 of their fellow Ubootfahrers who remain in their iron coffins."

"Ben asks: "My grandfather was on the Aylmer and had a few Welsh mates. Can anyone give me more information?"

Valerie Godfrey, Aylesbury
Re U Boat 1023: My father, Robert Brown CERA, was one of the British crew that sailed U-1023 down the west coast of Britain in 1945.
Mon Jul 13 11:44:19 2009

Patrick Shepherd, Portland
If any of the contributors to this item have photos of HMS Aylmer or, even better, a crew photo I would love to see them.
Mon Mar 16 09:48:42 2009

Tony Blackburn, from Norfolk
I am the philatelist mentioned in Charles Brown's comment above (dated March 3rd 2006) and indeed have several envelopes written to and by A.W.Thomson (full name Alexander Woodburn Thomson, born September 9th 1887) during the Spanish civil war 1936 to 1939. I have written up his story as part of my philatelic talks, with much help from Charles Brown and many others. I have tried, without success, to get a photograph of A.W.Thomson, but know much of his family history. He had only one son, Thomas, who died without issue (so far as I know) in 1977. I have been in touch (through Charles Brown, with Jimmy Reeves and also with another of Pinto's crew, James Bruce,
2nd Officer on the Pinto, both of whom were saved and were still alive in 2003.
Fri Feb 27 09:29:34 2009

Maureen McDougall Keleher from Vermont
My father, Bruce A. McDougall, was on a merchant ship in the Atlantic when it was torpedoed on Friday the 13th and sunk. He and others survived in a lifeboat for over a week before coming ashore on the coast of Ireland. A U-Boat surfaced near them at one point and an older German officer asked if they needed food or water. They declined but were grateful to be alive after the encounter.
Mon Feb 9 10:16:49 2009

Steve Bartlett, Sutton, Surrey
My father Leonard, served on HMS Loch more during the incident with u1024 and would like to know if he was included in the boarding party, as I have been told, indeed it was sinking, and a hasty evacuation was needed.
Tue Dec 30 09:22:01 2008

Patrick Shepherd - Portland
My father Lt Arthur Shepherd RNR was the engineer officer of HMS Aylmer throughout her RN career - having stood by her in Boston USA where she was built. His version of the ramming was that the U boat surfaced so close ahead that collision was unavoidable. It caused damage to Aylmer and my father received 'mention' for his work in damage control. I had a day at sea on board out of Liverpool where she had been repaired. My father died in 1988 in his 89th year.
Wed May 14 10:53:17 2008

Chris Michael from Wirral
There are two versions of where U1024 eventually sank under tow - one is that she had nearly reached Fleetwood - the other is that she sank off Anglesey near the abandonment. Can anyone who was there (or has records of someone who was) confirm or deny this (Steve Hayward?)
Tue Mar 25 09:58:01 2008

Stuart Dunn Sheffield
My father Sub Lieutenant Frederick John Arden Dunn served on the Frigate Loch Glendu that saw action against U-1024. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his part in this succesful action. I am seeking the citation produced by his commanding officer for this award to be bestowed on my father now deceased. Best regards.
Tue Jan 29 15:37:59 2008

Ola Fridén Sweden
U-1024 has an interesting story. This U-boat left Germany for Norway but took a very long time to reach its new base at Bergen. About one month it stayed at Horten not far from Oslo. Why was U-1024 delayed? Why are there differences in the reports submitted by Germany and the US? The Germans reported the sinking of two US Navy ships by U-1024 in active service but the US Navy reported them back in service before the end of WWII. Where can I find more information about U-1024 and what happened to the crew in Wales after the action?
**James Binnie Ayr Scotland**

I was very interested to read Charles Brown’s message about the Pinto and his contact with a member of her crew when she was torpedoed. My cousin (James Binnie) was a D.E.M.S. gunner on board and was one of the ones that was lost. Presently i am compiling an article on the Pinto and would be very pleased if I could learn more about the sinking and the loss of my cousin.

Mon Jan 14 09:08:43 2008

**Ivan Dean from Burnley**

I saw a german uboat in the mersey about the end of the war and my parents told me it was the last uboat to surrender.Did a uboat surrender and be brought up the mersey or could this be U1023 when it was taken from Birkenhead to Manchester; Oct 2007


**Sheila Smith/ Wood**

Hi i am Sheila Wood daugter of Les Wood who served on HMS Aylmer as a stoker from i think 1943 to 45 and told me of the ramming of the u.Boat. i remember photos of the incident but cannot find them i have others if anyone is interested i would love any more information regarding my dad if you new him Regards Sheila

Mon Sep 3 10:26:42 2007

**Kenneth Durham**

My father Robert (Bob) Durham was a petty officer (engine room) on HMS Loch Glendhu. He was on a boarding party that went aboard U1024 and he often told me that he had to get off very quickly as it was sinking. It is my belief that he was then missing for some time, but I cannot confirm this.

Mon Jul 30 10:07:59 2007

**Wm.Gordon Parsons**

These subjects are especially interesting to me for a couple of reasons. My paternal grandfather was a light keeper on South Stack when my father was born ( at Pwhelli) in 1890. Secondly, I am reading 'The U-Boat Hunters' by Marc Milner. It lists all the U-Boats and merchant ships sunk in the Atlantic. Very interesting to me as I was in the Canadian Army from '39 to '45 and appreciated the Navy guys' work in getting the supplies over to us in the UK and later into the war zones. Reading about what they went through in the Battle of the Atlantic made our jobs look simple !One of the boys from my neighbourhood in Sarnia, Ontario, went down on a RCN ship in the St.Lawrence river. I must thank a fellow Ham Radio Operator for sending me this item. And thank you who set this site up !!

Thu Jun 21 09:48:56 2007

**Aritra Basistha from KOLKATA**

u-boat had played a significant role in world war two. modern submarines are greatly influenced by the sofisticated techniques of this extraordinary war equipment. it was one of the main pillars of nazi germany in naval battles. it had created a suffocating situations for allied warships,
destroyers. but at last the allied forces proved their ability
to sustain pressure & destructed axis forces with valor,
sacrifice, their tremendous willpower to establish a free
world.
Fri Apr 27 10:11:29 2007

Vince O'Grady from Bundoora (Melbourne)
Hi all of the relatives of HMS Aylmer crew. Have been
researching the 5th escort group and Aylmer for some time
now. Anyone interested please look me up in the telephone
book and give us a ring. I am happy to share info with you.
Tue Apr 10 10:37:37 2007

rob from nz
Phill Lloyd - my father was on board the HMS Aylmer, also a
telegraphist, when the Aylmer rammed the U boat. I would
be really interested in getting a copy of the photo you
mention if that is at all possible.
Mon Apr 2 12:48:24 2007

Phill Lloyd from Birmingham
My father (Ted Lloyd) still has his picture of the crew of the
HMS Aylmer proudly on display, he was a telegraphist on
the Aylmer. He told me that when the Aylmer struck the U
boat he was in the galley and ended up in a crumpled heap
on the floor.
Fri Feb 23 12:02:34 2007

Sam Davies Cheshire
I have an original photograph of my father taken aboard the
HMS Aylmer with the rest of the crew (about 150) around
1943. He talked occasionally about the ramming of the U-
Boat, but always claimed the ramming was an accident;
having said that, he also said he went through the entire
war without firing a shot in anger.
Mon May 22 11:44:45 2006

Terry Andrews
For all those interested in what happened to all the U-boats
after the German surrender. Look out for my soon to be
released book on Operation Deadlight - Bury The Wolves
Deep! It not only covers Deadlight, but also the U-boats that
did the tour of the UK etc. along with lots of Background
information that has never been published before. Any
feedback would be greatly appreciated.
Mon May 8 13:12:56 2006

Charles Brown Garelochhead Helensburgh
Richard Francis' father was Radio Officer on the Convoy
Rescue Ship Pinto, sunk by U-482 off Tory Island on 8
September 1944. Eighteen months ago I knew nothing of
the Pinto or its crew. A philatelist contacted my mother in
Fife, having purchased a Spanish Civil War letter sent from
its Chief Engineer to his family in Glasgow. She knew
nothing of AW Thomson but he was indeed my father's
uncle, who had been drowned and then buried at Oban,
along with several other crew members. Knowing only one
person who had served and been sunk (twice) on convoys, I
sought his advice on sources. Jimmy Reeves provided me
with a picture of the Pinto, explaining he had been on deck
as the torpedo hit. He landed in the water and spent many
days in a lifeboat; many others died before they were picked up by an outbound destroyer and the few survivors eventually landed days later. He had signed on for that trip as a seaman on the Pinto which was then based in Glasgow.

Fri Mar 3 21:48:07 2006

Mark Taylor, South Stoke, Oxon
My father was an officer on HMS Loch Glendhu and I have a photograph which, although unlabelled, appears to be of U-1024 with HMS Loch More in the background. I am putting together a book about my father's WWII service and would love to hear from either John Griffiths or Russell Bennett.

Sat Feb 25 11:50:27 2006

Penny Gardner Morton; Cygnet, Tasmania
Adding yet another dimension to the story of U-1023: as my brother Pete Gardner said, we as six and seven-year-old, were filled with awe, being aboard a German U-boat in 1945, even though our parents had shielded us from many of the horrors of war. Interestingly, through a letter in a Tasmanian magazine, I met Kathleen Calver and we spent a delightful morning reminiscing about WWII, enjoying the synchronicity of our paths crossing on the other side of the world 60 years after our respective encounters with U-1023!

Sat Jan 7 00:35:01 2006

Kathleen Sumner Calver from Hobart
Picking up on the early comments regarding U1023 - I have a photograph of several WRNS(including myself) from HMS Eaglet in 1946 on U1023 when it was taken from Birkenhead to Manchester; it was a memorable day which caught a lot of attention along the Canal journey. I wonder if there are any others who remember that day?

Wed Dec 14 23:47:17 2005

Peter M. Gardner, Columbia, Missouri
Mum, my sister Penny, and I watched a British naval ship tow a German sub into Falmouth harbor at lunch time in May 1945. That evening Dad, Lt. Com. W. J. Gardner, the port doctor, told us officers families could tour it next day. We entered the sub, walked much of its length, passing bunks with simple blankets on and food [meat?] that dangled from the ceiling. I recall stumbling through doors that were not only narrow, they had sills high above the floor. Although I was only six, it was so close below decks that I knew I could never serve on such a vessel. It was probably U-1023, on its way from Land's End to Weymouth. These memories flooded back several years ago when touring U-505 at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry.

Wed Dec 7 15:24:27 2005

Richard Francis from Huddersfield
My father, Hugh Oliver Francis was a radio officer and served during the two world wars. He came from the village of Llandonna, near Beaumaris on the Island of Anglesey.

During World War I, he served on the "Carpathia", yes, the same vessel that was involved in the rescue of passengers from the ill fated Titanic - which was, of course, before his
time in service. On 17 July, 1918, the "Carpathia" was
steaming in convoy from Liverpool to Boston when it was
struck by two torpedoes from the German U-Boat U55. A
third torpedo slammed into her Hull as her lifeboats were
being lowered - five of her crew were immediately killed. The
ship slipped beneath the waves at 1240 hours, 120 miles
west of Fasnet. Dad was one of the surviving crew and
passengers that were picked up by British warship, HMS
Snowdrop. He was safely returned to Liverpool.

He was to go through a similar experience during World II.
On 8 September 1944, my dad served as Chief Radio Officer
on the Rescue Ship "Pinto", part of Convoy HXF-305, Halifax
to Greenock. This vessel was sunk by a torpedo from the U-
482 north-north east of Tory Island, enroute to the
assistance of another vessel, the "Empire Heritage" which
had already been attacked previously by the same U-boat
commanded by Kptit. Freiherr von Toppolczan und
Spaetgen(I think). Many crew members were lost. Dad was
lucky once more to be rescued by HMS Northern Wave and
landed at Londonderry.

I submit this as a tribute to this Welshman who came from
Anglesey.
Mon Oct 3 19:53:06 2005