

Defiant Until the

The Channel Islands were the only British territory occupied by Germany in World War II. The liberation of this archipelago off Normandy's Cherbourg Peninsula might have seemed mandatory as a matter of prestige, but when the Allies conquered Normandy they chose instead to blockade and isolate the German garrison. This strategy led to a miniature and hard-fought naval war within a war around the islands, far behind the front lines, that lasted nearly a year until the final destruction and surrender of the Nazi regime in May 1945.

The German navy had five destroyers, six torpedo boats, 38 motor torpedo boats (*Schnellboote*, or S-boats) and 319 minesweepers and patrol vessels (from the large M classes down to motor minesweepers and converted fishing trawlers) deployed in French waters in June 1944. The handy and versatile M-class minesweepers formed the backbone of this fleet. These 775-ton vessels could sail at 17 knots and were armed with a 4.1-inch/45, a 37mm and seven 20mm guns. According to one naval historian, they were "extremely well designed and suited to a variety of tasks, including escort, antisubmarine warfare, anti-aircraft cover and minelaying. Russian naval intelligence referred to them as small M-type destroyers."

In the two weeks following D-Day, Germany's offensive warships—the destroyers, torpedo boats and S-boats—fought a series of futile battles. On June 8 the British/Canadian/Polish 10th Destroyer Flotilla intercepted the German 8th Destroyer Flotilla in transit from Brest to the battle zone. In a long and confused night action, the Allies sank Z-32 and ZH-1 and badly damaged Z-24. German S-boats

German M-class boats conduct minesweeping operations in the English Channel. Rather than surrender, when the tide of war passed over them the sailors of the 24th and 46th Minesweeper flotillas carried on an energetic naval campaign against Allied shipping in the Channel. If they did little to alter the strategic course of the war in Europe, the German sailors in the Channel Islands demonstrated that the *Kriegsmarine* was not to be discounted (Courtesy of Przemyslaw Federowicz).

End

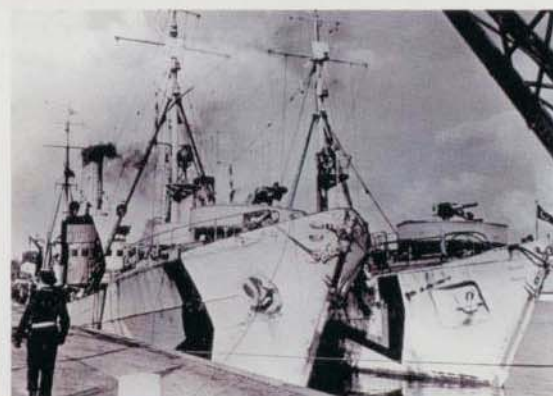
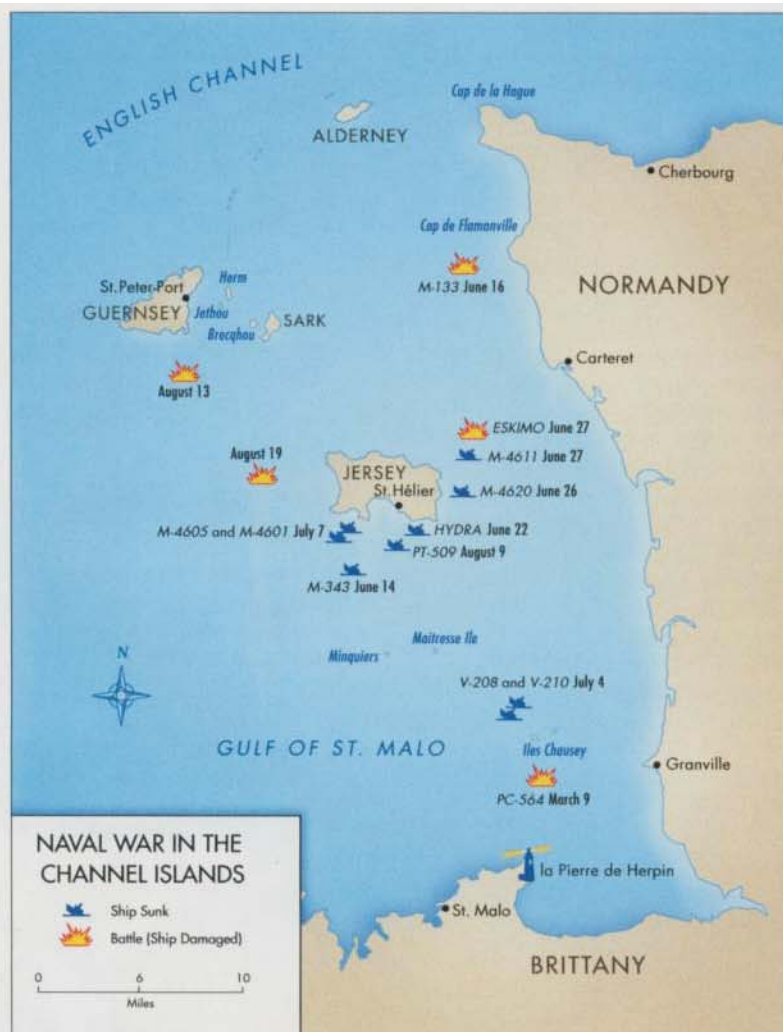
The naval war off the Channel Islands demonstrated what a handful of brave and determined men could accomplish against all odds.

By Vincent P. O'Hara

raided the invasion fleets nightly and fired a prodigious number of torpedoes at Allied vessels. They sank 12 ships and damaged another six. Although these attacks hardly dented the stream of Allied supplies flowing to France, they were an inconvenience and a reminder that the German navy was still a force to be reckoned with. On the evening of June 14, the Royal Air Force raided Le Havre and obliterated Germany's naval strength in the Channel east of the Allied beachhead. More than 1,200 tons of bombs sank the torpedo boats *Falke*, *Jaguar* and *Mörve*, 14 S-boats and 39 other craft, and damaged most of the surviving craft.

In the Gulf of St. Malo and around the Channel Islands, however, the German navy remained in action. The veteran 24th Minesweeper Flotilla, which consisted of the large M-class ships *M-343*, *M-412*, *M-424*, *M-432*, *M-442*, *M-452* and *M-475*, led by Commander Fritz Breithaupt, had been sweeping mines, escorting convoys and asserting Germany's control over the coastal waters since 1940. The 46th Minesweeper Flotilla, converted from civilian trawlers numbered sequentially *M-4600* through *M-4628*, under the young Lieutenant Armin Zimmermann, and the 2nd Patrol Boat Flotilla made up of V-boats, converted trawlers numbered *V-201* through *V-216*, supported the 24th. These ships maintained the lifeline between the islands and the mainland. The Allies anticipated a German withdrawal from the islands following the invasion; in this they were mistaken. Axis convoys sailed nearly every night, weather permitting, be-





Above left: Captured during the glory years of German victory, the British islands of Guernsey, Sark and Jersey remained in Nazi hands even after the Allies had liberated most of France. **Top right:** V-boats and converted civilian trawlers search for vulnerable Allied shipping in the Channel. **Above right:** Two unidentified trawlers await their next mission. Both have received a camouflage paint scheme.

tween the Channel Islands and France, rushing supplies in and evacuating construction workers and political prisoners.

After their victory on June 8, the ships of the Allied 10th Destroyer Flotilla patrolled across the Channel into the Gulf of St. Malo to suppress this traffic. On the night of June 13, the Polish destroyer *Piorun* and the British destroyer *Asbanti* were sailing from Ile de Batz to Jersey, looking for enemy destroyers, minesweepers or submarines. The wind was blowing from the southwest at 20 knots, lifting short, crested waves in the shallow waters of the gulf. There was a heavy overcast and visibility was only 4,000 to 6,000 yards. At sea that night, six minesweepers of the 24th Flotilla along with assorted V-boats were escorting a small convoy from St. Malo to St. Peter-Port in Guernsey.

At 0025 hours on the 14th, *Piorun's* radar operator picked up four pips that seemed to be ships headed north at 15 knots. The destroyers turned to investigate. At 0037 at a range of 2,300 yards, their 4-inch guns fired star shells. The drifting flares illuminated a line of three large minesweepers. The destroyers immediately opened fire and their 4.7-inch shells hit the lead German ship hard. The minesweepers turned toward the destroyers and fought back. According to one Polish participant, "Their returning fire was both vigorous and, as always with the Germans, accurate." One 4.1-inch shell exploded near *Piorun's* No. 4 gun and detonated ammunition, wounding four men and

igniting a small fire. A second round damaged the destroyer's aft 20mm mount and wounded two more men. At 0048 the Polish destroyer responded by firing its full load of five torpedoes; one ran true and exploded against *M-343's* bow, leaving it stopped and gravely damaged.

The destroyers were steaming north-northeast, drawing close to German-occupied Jersey. At 0057 there was the roar of heavy guns, and star shells from the 8.66-inch guns at Battery "Roon" on Jersey's southwestern promontory flashed overhead. Faced with this threat, the Allied ships made a high-speed turn. During this maneuver, *Piorun* damaged its gyrocompass, and at 0113 it fell back, letting *Asbanti* take the lead. As they steamed southwest, two more German ships emerged from the darkness two miles to the south and two others about the same distance to the northeast. The Allied ships swung to the northeast, and at 0132 they commenced fire at these new targets. As ranges closed to only 1,000 yards, machine guns joined in. The Germans fired back, and small-caliber shells punctured *Piorun's* quarterdeck. This action was over by 0155 as the German ships vanished in the smoke and dark. Only five minutes later, *Piorun* picked up still more radar contacts. Once again the Allied destroyers turned in pursuit. *Asbanti* fired star shells (the Polish destroyer had used up all of its own), illumi-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRZEMYSŁAW FEDEROWICZ



Following the invasion of Normandy, one of the first encounters between German and Allied naval forces occurred in the early hours of June 14, when the Polish destroyer *Piorun* (top) and HMS *Ashanti* unexpectedly encountered a column of German minesweepers. Later *Piorun's* captain, Commander Tadeusz Gorazdowski (above left), was decorated for his part in the action. Crewmen from *Piorun* (above right) work to clean their gun after the battle. Below: The action on the 14th came to an end when the Germans were able to retire to the shelter of their coastal gun installations, such as Guernsey's Battery "Mirus," which had been camouflaged to look like a seashore cabin.

nating enemy minesweepers about 4,000 yards east. The two groups exchanged fire, and the Allies claimed they set three enemy ships on fire. *Ashanti* finished off its star shells, but the destroyers kept firing using radar to find targets.

At 0228 Battery Roon intervened once again and two minutes later, magazines nearly empty, the destroyers turned for home. The number of shells fired indicated the intensity of the action that evening. *Piorun* had expended 679 rounds of 4.7-inch, 104 of 4-inch, 100 star shells and 1,260 40mm shells. A witness on Jersey remembered, "Watchers from the south coast reported that the sky was lit like daylight by the numerous star shells during the action." The Allied destroyers claimed three minesweepers sunk and one more severely damaged. In fact, the toll was much less. *M-343* sank at 0240, *M-412* was moderately damaged and had four men wounded. Four others, *M-422*, *M-432*, *M-442* and *M-452*, all escaped with only light damage. In fast-moving night actions it is hard to know what really happens, and claims of damaged inflicted were often exaggerated.

Two nights later Lt. Cmdr. J.H.R. Kirkpatrick's Canadian 65th Motor Torpedo Boat (MTB) Flotilla was in action. His *MTB-726*, *MTB-745*, *MTB-727* and *MTB-748*, all 115-foot type-D MTBs, each armed with a 6-pounder gun and four torpedo tubes, crossed the Channel on a routine patrol. Having reached the southern end of their patrol area, they were cruising north along the Cherbourg Peninsula near Cap de Flamanville when radar indicated ships steering south-southeast about 3,000 yards to the west. This proved to be a convoy of two M-class minesweepers, three trawlers and two merchantmen. The Canadians tried a stealthy approach, but when the Germans challenged them, they rushed to attack. Kirkpatrick's *MTB-727* fired two torpedoes from 1,500 yards, followed by *MTB-748* from 1,200. The Germans illuminated the area with star shells and laid down a heavy defensive fire. The

Canadians closed to point-blank range and passed up the side of the convoy blasting it with their Hotchkiss 6-pounders; then they circled around and ran past the enemy formation once more before retiring north. Because there were no explosions, they believed their torpedo had missed, but in fact they had hit *M-133*, which was out of a Cherbourg-based flotilla. The survivors towed the heavily damaged minesweeper to St. H  lier and later to St. Malo, where it was scuttled on August 6.

That same night the islanders saw the flash of gunfire on the west shore of the Cherbourg Peninsula, the same place they had



ISLANDS IN DANGER: ALAN AND MARY WOOD

first noted the presence of Germans four years before. To defenders and residents both, an invasion seemed imminent. On June 19, however, the weather imposed a temporary truce. An unseasonable gale blew up and huge seas swept the Channel, keeping surface forces, particularly coastal craft, sheltering in port.

After the weather moderated, the Germans began running convoys between the islands and the mainland again, and the Allies continued trying to stop them. On June 22, the 65th

Flotilla's MTB-748, MTB-727, MTB-745 and MTB-743, along with four British MTBs of the 52nd Flotilla, conducted a joint operation off Jersey. A German patrol drove away the 52nd, but near St. Hélier the 65th found an S-boat, a minesweeper and a pair of armed trawlers escorting the merchant ship *Hydra*. The Canadian MTBs began their high speed dash from 4,000 yards out, but the escort illuminated and opened fire. A shell exploded in MTB-745's engine room. The boat drifted to a stop while MTB-748 wrapped it in a smoke screen. Undaunted, MTB-727 and MTB-743 pressed on, their 6-pounders blazing. Then



Above: German minesweepers are tied up and ready for action. The M-class' 4.1-inch main armament was capable of holding its own against British destroyers. The vessels proved to be surprisingly feisty during the fighting in the Channel. Below: A German minesweeper crew enjoys a lighter moment. Although cut off from home and almost any chance of resupply, the sailors operating from the Channel Islands fought some of the war's most heroic, if overlooked, naval engagements.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF PRZEMISŁAW FIEDOROWICZ

MTB-748 caught up, and its shells ignited a large fire aboard *Hydra*. The merchantman eventually sank, but MTB-745 made it home at six knots, the best speed it could manage in its damaged condition. It was a long journey.

On the night of June 26, the type-D MTBs of the 52nd Flotilla had better luck off Jersey when, in poor visibility, they sneaked up on ships of the 46th Minesweeper Flotilla. The MTBs opened fire from 400 yards and then circled and launched torpedoes. One struck and sank *M-4620*. German return fire was heavy, but only one man of the 52nd lost his life and just two were wounded.

The battle between the 24th Flotilla and *Ashanti* and *Piorun* had demonstrated that the M-class minesweepers could stand up to destroyers, but only at great risk. It might seem that the con-

verted fishing trawlers were completely outmatched by large, modern destroyers, but a small action fought the night after *M-4620* sank illustrated the danger of night engagements, even for destroyers fighting trawlers. *Eskimo* and *Huron* had the duty that night. They intercepted *M-4611* and two patrol boats, *V-213* and *V-203*, all former fishing trawlers—smaller, slower and less capable boats than the six M-class ships their flotilla mates had sparred with two weeks before.

The destroyers shelled *M-4611* and set it afire. After maneuvering around and investigating a false contact, the destroyers returned to finish off the two patrol boats. Meanwhile, *V-213* was emitting a dense smoke screen. *Eskimo* entered the smoke, but the 282-ton trawler, whose heaviest weapon was an 88mm gun, struck first. An 88mm shell exploded in *Eskimo*'s No. 1 boiler room and a 37mm round pierced the main steam line in No. 3 boiler room. The powerful warship, 10 times the size of its enemy, lost steering and could only steam in circles at six knots. *Eskimo* eventually made it back to Plymouth while the pesky *V-213* escaped to St. Hélier.

Several days later, on the night of July 3, several of *V-213*'s flotilla mates fell prey to Kirkpatrick's 65th Flotilla. MTB-748, MTB-743, MTB-735 and MTB-736 lay waiting with lights extinguished and engines quietly idling north of Iles Chausey. Their target was a convoy sailing from St. Hélier for St. Malo, which included the ex-tug *Minotaure* carrying 468 Russian laborers and civilians. *Minotaure* was led by *V-210*, a fishing trawler constructed in 1934 and armed with an 88mm and several 20mm guns. Bringing up the rear of the column were *V-209*, *M-4622* and *V-208*. Kirkpatrick quietly led his boats to a position in front of the Germans, and at 0132 on July 4, when the Germans were just eight miles north of their destination, the Canadians announced their presence with flares. Engines roared to life as one pair of boats attacked the head of the convoy from about 3,000 yards with torpedoes, and the others struck the rear. Their barrage was unusually deadly. A torpedo detonated in *V-210*'s engine room. The boat broke in two and quickly sank. *Minotaure* took two torpedoes in the bow and another near the rudder, but fortunately for the prisoners crammed aboard belowdecks, the tug somehow stayed afloat. A fourth torpedo slammed into *V-208*, and it followed its flotilla mate to the bottom. The Canadians closed in and fired at the German ships as they raced past. *V-209* and *M-4622* returned fire. The action was over in just four minutes. Twenty men from the two patrol boats died, but the survivors rescued 45 others. MTB-748 was holed and limped home down by the bow carrying five wounded men. In port the crew counted 14 shell holes. MTB-743 suffered slight damage and had one wounded.

On the night of July 7, *Huron* and *Tartar* had the offshore patrol. They intercepted elements of the 46th Minesweeper Flotilla and sank *M-4605* and *M-4601*. The rest of the German force ran for port, where shallow water and coastal batteries forced the destroyers to turn away. The balance of the month was relatively quiet. Poor weather kept the coastal craft in port. After the heavy attrition that had seen the Germans lose two large minesweepers, six armed trawlers and a supply ship off the Channel Islands in the four weeks following D-Day, they lost only *V-209* in the next four weeks in an Allied air raid on St. Peter-Port on July 24.

During this period of relative calm at sea, the land campaign intensified. Cherbourg fell on June 27. On July 25, the Americans ended the stalemate on the Cotentin Peninsula with their decisive breakout from St. Lô, and the 4th and 6th Armored divisions raced into Brittany. An air raid on August 4 caught *M-424* in St. Malo Roads and damaged it beyond repair. On the night of August 6, *M-412*, *M-432*, *M-442* and *M-452* of the 24th Minesweeper Flotilla evacuated St. Malo in the face of the advancing American Army. An Allied force consisting of two destroyers supporting motor torpedo boats intercepted Breit-



Above: A veteran of the April 1940 naval battle at Narvik, Norway, HMS *Eskimo* was badly damaged during an encounter with V-213 on June 27, 1944. **Left:** Motor torpedo boats such as MTB-724 were used by the Canadian 65th Flotilla during the battles in the Channel Islands. Later, the Allied effort to secure the shipping lanes around the Gulf of St. Malo was reinforced by two American PT-boat squadrons operating out of Cherbourg, which had been captured in July 1944 following the American breakout from Utah Beach.

haupt's ships off Jersey. The Channel Islanders heard heavy gunfire from this engagement, but the Allies could not prevent the remnants of the 24th from fighting through to St. Hélier. Two boats, V-215 and M-133, were too damaged to sail and had to be scuttled at St. Malo. The port held out until August 17 assisted by raiding parties from the islands equipped for antitank fighting. The Germans would sneak these troops in one night and usually bring them out the next. They also evacuated hundreds of wounded men.

With the German navy now squeezed off the mainland, the Allies proceeded to quarantine the Channel Islands. The battles in western Normandy and Brittany were both American operations and, after August 2, the containment of the German fleet became the responsibility of the U.S. Navy. To carry out that task, the Americans teamed destroyer escorts with Patrol Torpedo Squadron 30 (PTs 450-461), and PT-Squadron 34 (PTs 498-509) operating out of Cherbourg and began to patrol the waters around the islands every night. Their British liaison, Lt. Cmdr. Peter Scott remembered: "Our routine was to meet in Cherbourg at four in the afternoon with the plans for the night; then set off at five in the PT-boats for a rendezvous with the destroyers among the islands. At daybreak we returned to Cherbourg and, after a belated breakfast, planned the operations for the next night."

On the night of August 8, the American destroyer escort *Maloy* accompanied PT-500, PT-503, PT-507, PT-508 and PT-509 to the waters west of Jersey. At 0530 on the morning of August 9, *Maloy's* radar picked up contacts off St. Hélier that proved to be six trawlers of the 46th. In calm, foggy conditions, the PT-boats closed in. Two boats launched torpedoes by radar and missed.

Then *Maloy* sent PT-508 and PT-509 roaring in at 40 knots. They each fired a torpedo from 400 yards, missed again and circled to make a gunfire attack. But PT-509 entered a rent in the fog as it turned away and came under heavy fire. Aflame, the boat turned back and rammed one of the minesweepers. The German crew responded by riddling the PT with small-arms fire and a hail of grenades. The Americans managed to crowbar PT-509 off, but after that the boat sank and only one badly wounded man survived to be taken prisoner. Meanwhile, as PT-503 and PT-507 searched for their missing mate, they engaged a minesweeper in St. Hélier's roadstead, but were driven off with two crewmen killed.

On August 11, the American destroyer escort *Borum* supporting PT-500 and PT-502 attacked two ships of the 24th Minesweeper Flotilla off La Corbière, on the southwest coast of Jersey. The American PT-boats fired a pair of torpedoes each, but failed to inflict any damage on the German vessels. Heavy gunfire sent the Americans on their way after wounding three men aboard PT-502 and one on PT-500.

On the night of August 13, the British destroyers *Onslaught* and *Saumarez*, with *Borum*, PT-505, PT-498 and two British MTBs, engaged M-412, M-432, M-442, M-452 and a merchant vessel off St. Peter-Port. The minesweepers inflicted slight damage and some casualties on the destroyers and suffered light damage in return. *Borum* vectored the two American PT-boats in toward the German flotilla. The Germans illuminated when the small boats were 5,000 yards distant, but the PTs pressed on and launched two torpedoes each from 1,500 yards. PT-505 laid smoke as they turned away under heavy fire. The torpedoes all

missed, but the PTs retired undamaged.

On August 19, there was an engagement between Allied forces and a convoy from Guernsey escorted by the 24th Flotilla that lasted past dawn. The Allies heavily damaged *M-432* and then, according to historian Philip LeSauter, harassed the German force "all the way from Grosnez (in northeastern Jersey) until it got into St. Aubin's Bay, and close enough inshore for the coast batteries to take a hand." The minesweepers "came into harbour fastened abreast of each other and towed by a tug, their antics suggesting that the steering of one was deranged, whilst increasing smoke as they approached the pier clearly suggested that one of them was on fire."

After this action, a period of relative calm ensued as the U.S.



Defiant to the end, Lieutenant Armin Zimmermann (right) and a representative of German army forces on the Channel Islands meet with British representatives on May 9, 1945, on *HMS Bulldog* to arrange for the surrender of the islands. Although the war had moved on to Berlin itself, Zimmermann and the rest of the Channel Islands garrison had continued to resist the Allies until the very last day of the war in Europe.

Army liberated Brittany. With the 24th and 46th flotillas now keeping largely to port, the U.S. Navy discontinued offensive patrols. The Germans occupying the islands remained dug-in and isolated as supplies began to run low. Autumn passed into winter. The islands' continued resistance provided a small bright spot in Adolf Hitler's otherwise dismal briefings. To ensure that it continued, he promoted Vice Adm. Friedrich Hüffmeier, former captain of *Scharnhorst* and a fervent Nazi, to fortress commander in February 1945. Hitler preferred naval officers for these postings because, as he reasoned, "Many fortresses have been given up, but no ships were ever lost without fighting to the last man."

The lack of supplies and above all coal—the big minesweepers were all coal burners—was Hüffmeier's biggest problem, and he was anxious to play some part in the war that had seemingly passed him by. By coincidence, the Allies were shipping coal to the nearby port of Granville, which had good rail connections to Paris, in their effort to keep the French capital warm during the winter of 1944-45. Hüffmeier learned of this from some German prisoners who escaped from the mainland and made their way back to Jersey. They told him about the collier convoys, and this gave him an idea. He could strike a blow at the Allies and improve his own situation as well.

Hüffmeier's first attempt to raid Granville, on the night of February 6, failed due to weather and the vigilance of an American patrol craft. The Germans, however, were not discouraged and prepared a second, larger force to try again. On the night of

March 8, a small fleet under Lieutenant Carl-Friedrich Mohr (Breithaupt had died in a plane crash some weeks before) consisting of *M-412*, *M-432*, *M-442*, *M-452*, a tug, three artillery lighters, three fast launches and a pair of armed trawlers sailed from St. Héliér. That night, the U.S. submarine-chaser *PC-564* (463 tons, one 3-inch gun, one 40mm, two 20mm, and capable of 19 knots), commanded by Lieutenant Percy Sandel, was on routine patrol outside Granville Harbor. At 2244 Granville tower radioed *PC-564* that there were three unidentified radar contacts between Jersey and Iles Chausey. Sandel turned his ship due west and sailed to intercept them just beyond Chausey. The sub-chaser's radar picked up a contact 10,200 yards to the west-northwest at 2359 heading south. Sandel's boat closed to 3,800 yards and then fired a spread of three star shells. These revealed two targets. He ordered another trio of star shells, trying to better fix what he was facing. After those burst, *PC-564* turned to starboard to run broadside to the enemy. The boat's 3-inch gun fired one round and then the breechblock jammed. Mohr's minesweepers suffered no such disadvantage. "Within a matter of a few seconds, and just as we had started turning, we received a hit from a large-caliber gun, in the front of the pilothouse which killed all of the personnel in the pilothouse," Sandel remembered.

The American's portside 20mm and its 40mm gun on the stern opened fire, but they were quickly silenced when two more shells struck in rapid succession, one at the mast that killed or wounded the 20mm crews and another astern that took out the 40mm crew. German star shells were falling heavy around the American ship, keeping it pinned in their harsh light. Sandel wrote, "Tracer fire became more intense at this time and as there was no organization of the crew and all the guns were out, it was decided the only thing to do was to stand by to abandon ship." After stopping the engines in preparation to going over the side, Sandel changed his mind: "It appearing that there was a great deal of difficulty in letting the life rafts go and the firing having decreased in intensity, it was decided not to abandon ship." However, 14 men did not get the word and jumped into a raft they had released over the fantail.

The luckless *PC-564* finally got underway, steering directly for la Pierre de Herpin lighthouse, chased by star shells and under the impression that the enemy was following. Sandel ran his ship aground at 0130 to seek help for his wounded men. All told, the minesweepers hit the American ship four times, killing 14 crewmen and wounding 11. The Germans rescued the men who prematurely abandoned ship, and they sat out the war's final months as prisoners.

Despite Sandel's fears of pursuit, Mohr's ships headed straight for Granville and were inside the artificial harbor by 0100 on the 9th. Ignoring the radar warning and the fireworks from the naval battle, the garrison was caught by surprise. As 90 German troops stormed ashore in rubber boats, the minesweepers stood off and machine-gunned the quay. The troops destroyed the port facilities and liberated 67 German prisoners; they killed two U.S. Marines, six Royal Navy personnel and captured six Americans—some were still clad in pajamas. Everything went as planned except that *M-412* ran aground on a mud bank in the outer harbor. At 0300 hours Mohr gave the order to retire. With the ebbing tide, however, he was only able to tow away one collier loaded with 112 tons of coal. His men sank the others. There was no time to salvage *M-412*, so its crew blew it up.

Inspired by the success of the Granville operation, the Germans prepared another strike against American forces on the Cotentin Peninsula. Unlike the earlier raid, this attack would be carried out by a small group of army infantrymen accompanied by two sailors. The target was a small railway bridge near Cherbourg that was a crucial link in the supply pipeline that fed the Ameri-

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gantlet of fire and steel. Afterward, both tanks were incapable of further combat.

The story was the same everywhere along the II Corps front lines where increasing Soviet pressure pushed the Germans back to the west and north. North of the Daugavpils battleground, the 3rd Baltic Front joined the offensive against AGN. A dozen armies with more than 80 divisions were hurled at the exhausted AGN soldiers who had been in almost ceaseless combat for the last six months. The continued defense of Daugavpils was considered pointless.

On the 23rd, one of Hitler's favorite generals, the fervent Bavarian Nazi, Col. Gen. Ferdinand Schörner, had replaced Friessner as commander of AGN. Schörner, infamous for his draconian executions of "cowardly" officers, was no more able to restore the situation than Friessner had been. On the 26th AGN ordered the evacuation of burning Daugavpils, which fell into the hands of the 2nd Baltic Front. Soviet hesitancy in following up their victories allowed the Germans to pull back and establish new front lines during the nights of July 27-29. Yet it was only a matter of time before those front lines cracked as well. On August 1, the soldiers of the 1st Baltic Front reached the Gulf of Riga, leaving charred tank hulks and swaths of dead Russian and German soldiers in their wake. As General Friessner had predicted, the 30 divisions of AGN were now cut off from AGC and trapped in northern Latvia and Estonia.

The 502nd Heavy Panzer Battalion was virtually destroyed outside Daugavpils. In Carius' words: "Only one Tiger managed to reach the bridge of the Düna [Dvina]... the men who could get out of their burning tanks had to swim across the Düna. Our company never recovered from this severe bloodletting... the rest of our tanks were farmed out individually and were lost one after another." Eichhorn and Nienstedt were both wounded and replaced with less capable officers. The Soviets, however, had paid dearly for the 502nd's destruction. During the month-long battle for Daugavpils, more than 160 of their tanks and guns fell prey to the German armor. Such tallies justifiably reinforced the fearsome reputation of the Tiger. □

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can armies operating on the peninsula. The raid was scheduled for early April 1945, and the troops involved spent a good deal of time in preparation. Finally, on April 4, the raiders landed near the port city. Unlike the earlier attack on Granville, however, this one quickly unraveled, and soon all of the raiders were killed or captured with only one making his way back to the islands. It was the last gasp for German forces on the Channel Islands.

Still, it is to their credit that 11 months after two Allied armies had invaded France, a large German force remained active on the Channel Islands. The narrow and shoal-ridden waters saw a dozen naval actions ranging from hit-and-run motor torpedo boat raids to full-blown naval battles in a protracted campaign to neutralize that Axis stronghold. Although those battles pitted modern destroyers and heavily armed motor torpedo boats against coal-burning minesweepers and converted fishing trawlers, the Allied navies were unable to completely suppress their German enemies, and they had their noses bloodied more than once.

It was not until May 8, 1945—V-E Day—that the British delivered their surrender ultimatum to the Germans. Even in defeat, however, the German sailors were defiant. When HMS *Bulldog* approached Guernsey to receive the German surrender, a battered old minesweeper from the 46th brought Lieutenant Zimmermann out to parlay.

Brig. Gen. Alfred E. Snow stated he expected an immediate surrender, and Zimmermann replied he would have to inform Hüffmeier. He then declared: "I am instructed to inform you that your ships must move away immediately from these shores. If they do not, Admiral Hüffmeier will regard their presence as a breach of faith and a provocative act." Backing up this boast were the 12-inch guns of the islands' shore batteries.

Although the outcome was inevitable, Snow stood off and duly received the formal surrender of German forces on the island the next day. It was clear the German occupiers of the Channel Islands felt they had never been defeated. □

Vincent P. O'Hara writes frequently on naval matters. The author wishes to thank Przemyslaw Federowicz, who was instrumental in writing this article and who is an authority on the German navy of World War II. For further reading, see The German Occupation of the Channel Islands, by Charles Cruickshank.