



**Centre for Port and Maritime History: Battle of the Atlantic 80.**

**Merseyside Maritime Museum**

**Royal Albert Dock, Liverpool, L3 4AQ**

**Saturday 20 May 2023.**

**0930 Refreshments.**

**1000 Welcome: Dr David Clampin, Liverpool John Moores University.**

**Introductory paper: Capt. Sean Ryan, The Maritime Warfare Centre, Naval Command Headquarters.**

Intelligence, wargaming, and naval doctrine.

**1030 Dr Jayne Friend, University of Portsmouth.**

‘Veterans and Relics: Britain’s Shipping Crisis and the V, W and Town-class Destroyers’.

**1130 Refreshments.**

**1200 Dr David Kohlen, Naval War College, USA.**

“All the Dismembered Heads”: Special Intelligence and the U.S. Navy in the Atlantic, 1937-1947.

**1300 Lunch.**

**1400 Dr Sarah-Louise Miller, visiting scholar at the University of Oxford.**

‘The Wargame Women: The Women’s Royal Naval Service and the Western Approaches Tactical Unit During the Battle of the Atlantic’.

**1500 Refreshments.**

**1530 Dr James W E Smith, King’s College London.**

‘Refighting the ‘Battle of the Atlantic’ After 1945: Policy, Plans, Doctrine, and the State’.

**1630 Close: Rear Admiral James Parkin CBE, Director Develop, Naval Command Headquarters.**

Innovation in the ASW space: NavyX and Patrick Blackett.

**1700 Drinks reception.**



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## Abstracts.

**Dr Jayne Friend, University of Portsmouth.**

‘Veterans and Relics: Britain’s Shipping Crisis and the V, W and Town-class Destroyers’.

The initial stages of the Battle of the Atlantic proved calamitous for Britain when the large number of vessels being sunk, the diversion of destroyers to coastal protection and losses in individual campaigns caused a significant shortage of naval escorts. Consequently, as many destroyers as possible were needed from the outset and to later overcome sustained attacks to allied shipping. Despite their differing origins, designs and careers, the V and W class and the Town-class destroyers had one clear thing in common: they were over-age. At the time of their inception, the V and W-class destroyers were the embodiment of naval technology and innovation but by the mid-1930s most were in reserve. Then, in 1940, the British government acquired 50 ageing American destroyers which were already outmoded at the start of their service and needed considerable refits. There was, however, a far more positive interpretation to be had, in which these veteran destroyers were coming to the rescue in the hour of dire need. Whilst the practical value of these vessels is debatable, they played an important symbolic role in negotiating naval deficiencies, Anglo-American diplomacy and the Royal Navy’s public image at a difficult time in the progress of the war. This talk examines the service of these fascinating vessels and their unique yet intertwined symbolic roles in the context of the battle including links to the Western Approaches Command and their place in popular culture and the public imagination.

**Dr David Kohnen, Naval War College, USA.**

“All the Dismembered Heads”: Special Intelligence and the U.S. Navy in the Atlantic, 1937-1947.

During the Second World War, Admiral Ernest J. King drew from personal experience to reorganize the American naval services. King fostered transatlantic collaboration within the global maritime arena during the 1920s and 1930s and maintained personal friendships with many British counterparts. Indeed, British methods for synthesizing global policy with naval strategy also informed his approach in the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor disaster. Making best with what he had, King merged the offices of Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and that of the Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet (CominCh) by May of 1942. He then replicated the British cryptologic organization at Bletchley Park by establishing the American naval equivalent at Nebraska Avenue in Washington, D.C. Killing the enemy with their own words after 1943, King empowered his staff to orchestrate global operations with intelligence.

The strategic fusion of British and American sea power enabled victory in the global maritime arena during two world wars. For the purposes of marking the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the “Battle of the Atlantic,” my paper focuses upon the character and organization of



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King's wartime headquarters and, more specifically, the global submarine tracking organization. Building from the well charted historiography of the Second World War, my paper also highlights previously uncharted areas of documentary research for future historians to explore into the twenty-first century and beyond.

**Dr Sarah-Louise Miller, visiting scholar at the University of Oxford.**

'The Wargame Women: The Women's Royal Naval Service and the Western Approaches Tactical Unit During the Battle of the Atlantic'.

During the Second World War, around 800 women worked at Western Approaches. They worked under conditions of absolute secrecy, a hidden but vital component in Allied naval operations. Members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and the Women's Royal Naval Service worked tirelessly in the nerve centre of the Battle of the Atlantic, monitoring Allied convoy routes and shipping, protecting precious supplies and lives. This paper will focus on the Women's Royal Naval Service at Western Approaches. Affectionately known as 'Wrens', these women worked to protect Allied shipping and made crucial contributions to the offensive against the enemy at sea. As is often expected of wartime military women, some worked in administrative and communications roles, and their work was critical to getting intelligence to commanders at sea who could make decisions and act on it. A hidden group of Wrens, however, were also involved in highly secret anti-submarine warfare operations, as analysts and wargamers. These young women constituted the main bulk of the staff in the Western Approaches Tactical Unit (WATU) and were highly trained in anti-submarine and naval warfare strategy and tactics. Studying U-Boat attacks and battle reports closely, they recreated the conflict at sea in wargaming simulations, helping to develop countermeasures that would be used successfully to tackle the grave threat posed to Allied shipping. The Wrens hosted seagoing naval officers for short training courses, and against all expectations, often defeated them in the battle simulations. Heavily involved in both the devising of anti-U-Boat tactics and the training of around 5,000 naval officers who would adopt them, these women made a significant contribution to the Allied effort in the Battle of the Atlantic. This paper will examine the work of the WRNS at Western Approaches, focusing on those in the WATU and placing their vital contribution in the wider context of the Battle of the Atlantic.

**Dr James W E Smith, King's College London.**

'Refighting the 'Battle of the Atlantic' After 1945: Policy, Plans, Doctrine, and the State'.

This paper turns to the theme of the legacy of the Battle of the Atlantic and the components that ultimately supported its successful execution, including that of wargaming. After 1945, Britain faced the harsh realities and costs of not one but two World Wars. The impact on national life, prosperity, and outlook in the post-war decades, along with Britain's changing role in the world, saw rapidly shifting political priorities, particularly as national finances and international influence declined. This greatly impacted defence policy, war planning and military doctrine as vested interests and agendas combined to the point where the understanding and experience of the war at sea



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fell into obscurity. While the Admiralty attempted to educate high-level decision makers and influential individuals not to discard this knowledge and experience, the ‘Battle of the Atlantic’ was pitted and compared against other inflated legacies such as overemphasising the importance of tactical air warfare of the summer of 1940 [termed by Winston Churchill as the ‘The Battle of Britain’]. During the post-war decades, the centrality of naval power and maritime culture to Britain that had served it well in the past was replaced with a defence and foreign policy alien to an island, one that focused on continental land and land-based air commitments. It was a policy that had little patience to understand naval and maritime perspectives and how tools like wargaming were universal to the successful future planning of defence and security for protecting Britain and its interests.



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