

“MEN IN THE WATER!”

DURING 1975, THE REMAINS OF U-352 WERE DISCOVERED OFF THE NORTH CAROLINA COAST. SUNK BY A COAST GUARD CUTTER, IN MANY WAYS IT WAS A BLACK DAY FOR THE USCG CREW AS THEY MACHINE-GUNNED GERMAN SAILORS ATTEMPTING TO SURRENDER. THE AUTHOR EXAMINES THE U-BOAT, ITS SINKING, AND DISCOVERY
BY HOMER H. HICKAM, JR.



Hellmut Rathke desired the Iron Cross but his mission with the ill-fated U-352 would deny him the coveted award.

The German Naval High Command acted quickly after Pearl Harbor. As part of Admiral Doenitz's long-planned Operation *Paukenschlag* (the roll of drums), German U-Boats were dispatched from French ports to destroy shipping along the American coast.

In America, city lights, buoy lights, even ship's lights lit up the sky. Fat freighters and tankers wallowed alone down familiar trade routes. All vessels, even American Navy units, routinely radioed their positions and sailing dates. The U-Boats struck hard. Between January and June,

1942, 72 ships were sunk off North Carolina alone. The Royal Navy caustically referred to the latest U-Boat campaign as the "American Shooting Gallery" and dispatched several corvettes across the Atlantic to help. A bloody, bitter struggle began.

On 9 May 1942, the tiny US Coast Guard Cutter *Icarus* engaged the German U-Boat U-352 in a fight to the finish. Decades later, the wreckage of a U-Boat was discovered and on 22 August 1976, I visited the site of that battle and examined the remains.

This is the story of the battle and my visit into the sea off Cape Lookout known as the Graveyard of the Atlantic.

UNTERSEEBOOT 352

It was morning when *Kapitanleutnant* Hellmut Rathke signaled his crew to cast off all lines. Obediently, they sprang to their stations and the *Unterseeboot 352* edged out into the St. Nazaire harbor. No band disturbed the misty quiet of the port city. Rathke had not wanted one, reasoning the less attention given his departure the better. He believed his assignment to be the most important of his life. His 220-foot long Type VII-C boat carried 14 torpedoes and Rathke meant to make each of them count. After reaching the open sea safely, he ordered "*langsame Fahrt*," slow speed, for the long journey. His destination: America. Rathke hoped to win the Iron Cross while covering himself and his crew in glory.

THE US COAST GUARD CUTTER ICARUS

The USCG Cutter *Icarus* was only 165-feet long with a 25-foot 3-inch beam, displacing 334-tons. Her crew of 75 officers and men were cramped for space but, at least, this produced a necessary closeness and cooperative spirit among them. Equipped only with obsolete sound detection gear, the *Icarus*, within a month of Pearl Harbor, had already encountered submarines off the Ambrose Channel and Atlantic City. The combat seasoned Germans,

Today, the shattered hulk of U-352 has become a popular location for divers.