

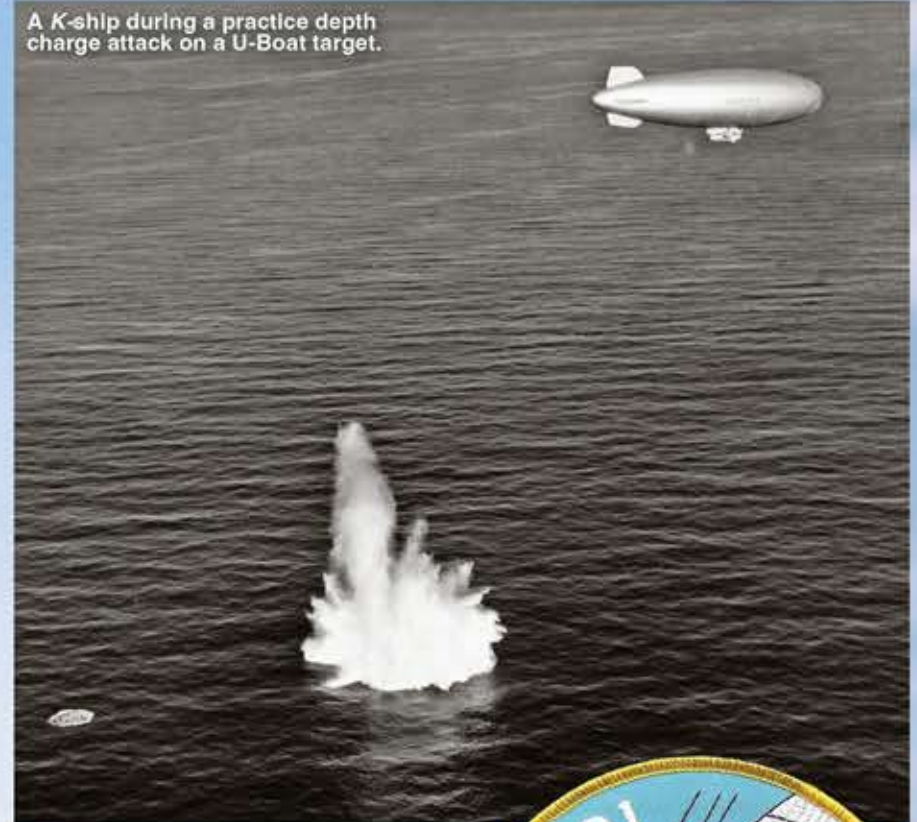
WHEN K-74 FOUGHT U-134

IN ALL OF NAVY HISTORY, THIS BATTLE BETWEEN A K-CLASS AIRSHIP AND A GERMAN U-BOAT WAS UNIQUE
BY ROBERT MITCHELL

The United States Navy's utilization of lighter-than-air (LTA) craft during the Second World War is almost forgotten today, yet those craft undertook an important mission when it came to protecting Allied shipping from Nazi Germany's dread fleet of undersea warriors. The Navy operated a number of LTA classes during the war and perhaps the most effective was the K-class.

Located in Akron, Ohio, the well-known company of Goodyear was the largest supplier of blimps to the US Navy. During 1937, the Navy ordered the K-2 airship from Goodyear and this contract also included the L-1, which was Goodyear's standard advertising/passenger blimp. Today, we still see a greatly modernized form of the L-1 utilized at events across the country. The K-2 went aloft on 6 December 1938 from Akron and was soon flying (slowly) on its way to NAS Lakehurst in New Jersey where it arrived on 16 December. At the time, the envelope for the K-2 was the largest in the Navy and it could hold 404,000-cu-ft of helium. At Lakehurst, the K-2 was used for testing and developing tactics.

On 24 October 1940, the Bureau of Aeronautics awarded another contract to Goodyear and this was for six airships that carried the Navy designation of K-3 through K-8 (Goodyear designation as ZNP-K). Designed for coastal patrol



and convoy escort, they were delivered between late 1941 and early 1942, by which time America was at war. These six airships (gaining the popular nickname of "blimp") were powered by a pair of Wright R-975-28 radials (replacing the Pratt & Whitney R-1340-16 engines in the K-2). These engines were attached to the gondola of the blimp (known in the Navy as the "car") but the tips of the props tended to go supersonic and, combined with the engine exhaust, this made for a



Flight jacket patch for ZP-21. As can be seen, this patch was created after the attack on U-134 by K-74.

A K-ship overflying USS *Missouri* during a shakedown cruise. Flying above the fleet or a convoy, the crew of a K-ship could often spot the outline of a submerged U-Boat or see the trailing wake of its periscope.