

ADMIRAL SIR MAX KENNEDY HORTON

'SOMETHING
OF A PIRATE'

Allan George explores the career of master submariner and C-in-C Western Approaches, Admiral Max Horton, the man who won the most important battle of the Second World War.

It was a campaign that spanned an entire ocean, but it was crucial for survival and the enabler for victory. Admiral Sir Max Horton carried the enormous responsibility of winning this one battle where the price of failure was ultimate. However, his defeat of the U-boat assault on the supply lines was the greatest achievement of a ground-breaking career.

Such responsibility demanded extraordinary gifts: competence, depth of character, inner strength, ruthlessness, far-sighted judgement, and courage. Horton possessed these in abundance. Undeniably efficient, hardworking, devoid of pomposity, intelligent, patriotic, and a master of his profession, he was one of the great admirals.

RADIATED CONFIDENCE

In his relations with others there was a paradox and he had few – if any – friends in high naval circles. Ruthless, Horton weeded out those who did not meet his exacting standards and drove his command hard. His reaction when informed his son was on board a lost warship was allegedly: “Yes, but what happened to the ship.”

Yet, he was most thoughtful for those in trouble and underneath this formidable exterior was a warm heart. Officers closely associated with Horton described him as lonely and complex. One who served with him on HMS *Resolution* wrote: “I suppose he was a hard man and a hard taskmaster, but he was a mighty efficient one, and underneath a rather firm and forbidding appearance there was a very human and understanding nature.”

Others thought him intolerant, even obstinate, but an American admiral said: “My first and lasting impression of Sir Max was that he was an officer and gentleman of the old school. Absolutely fearless for his personal safety he had only one thought – how to damage the enemy. A man of the highest personal integrity... [He] had a superb loyalty downward to those he could trust and who served him well... No one was quicker at putting his finger on the weak spot and no one was more ruthless to attain efficiency. A mistake could be made once, but never twice without swift retribution.”

Author Charles McCain wrote: “The men and women under his command in Western »



ABOVE Admiral Sir Max Horton, KCB, DSO, C-in-C, Western Approaches, stood in his office at Derby House, Liverpool.

ADMIRAL SIR MAX KENNEDY HORTON

Nickname(s): Max-Knows-Everything.

Born: 29 November 1883, Rhosneigr, Wales.

Died: 30 July 1951 (aged 67), London.

Allegiance: United Kingdom.

Service/branch: Royal Navy; Western Approaches Command.

Battles/wars: First World War; North Sea, Baltic Sea, Second World War: Blockade of Germany, Invasion of Norway and Denmark, Battle of the Atlantic.

Awards: GCB, DSO & two bars, SGM, MID, Order of St. George (Russia), Order of St Vladimir (Russia), Order of St Anna (Russia), Order of St Stanislaus (Russia), Légion d'honneur (France), Croix de Guerre (France), Order of Orange-Nassau (Netherlands), Legion of Merit (USA), Order of St Olaf (Norway).

BELOW Depth charges explode to the rear of HMS Starling, possibly on 31 January 1944, when 2nd Escort Group's sixth U-boat victory was brought to the surface and sunk. Starling, a Black Swan-class sloop, was the Royal Navy's most successful sub-hunter of the war, credited with sinking 14 U-boats.



"I SUPPOSE HE WAS A HARD MAN AND A HARD TASKMASTER, BUT HE WAS A MIGHTY EFFICIENT ONE, AND UNDERNEATH A RATHER FIRM AND FORBIDDING APPEARANCE THERE WAS A VERY HUMAN AND UNDERSTANDING NATURE."

RIGHT
The cruiser SMS Prinz Adalbert was torpedoed by Horton on 2 July 1915.

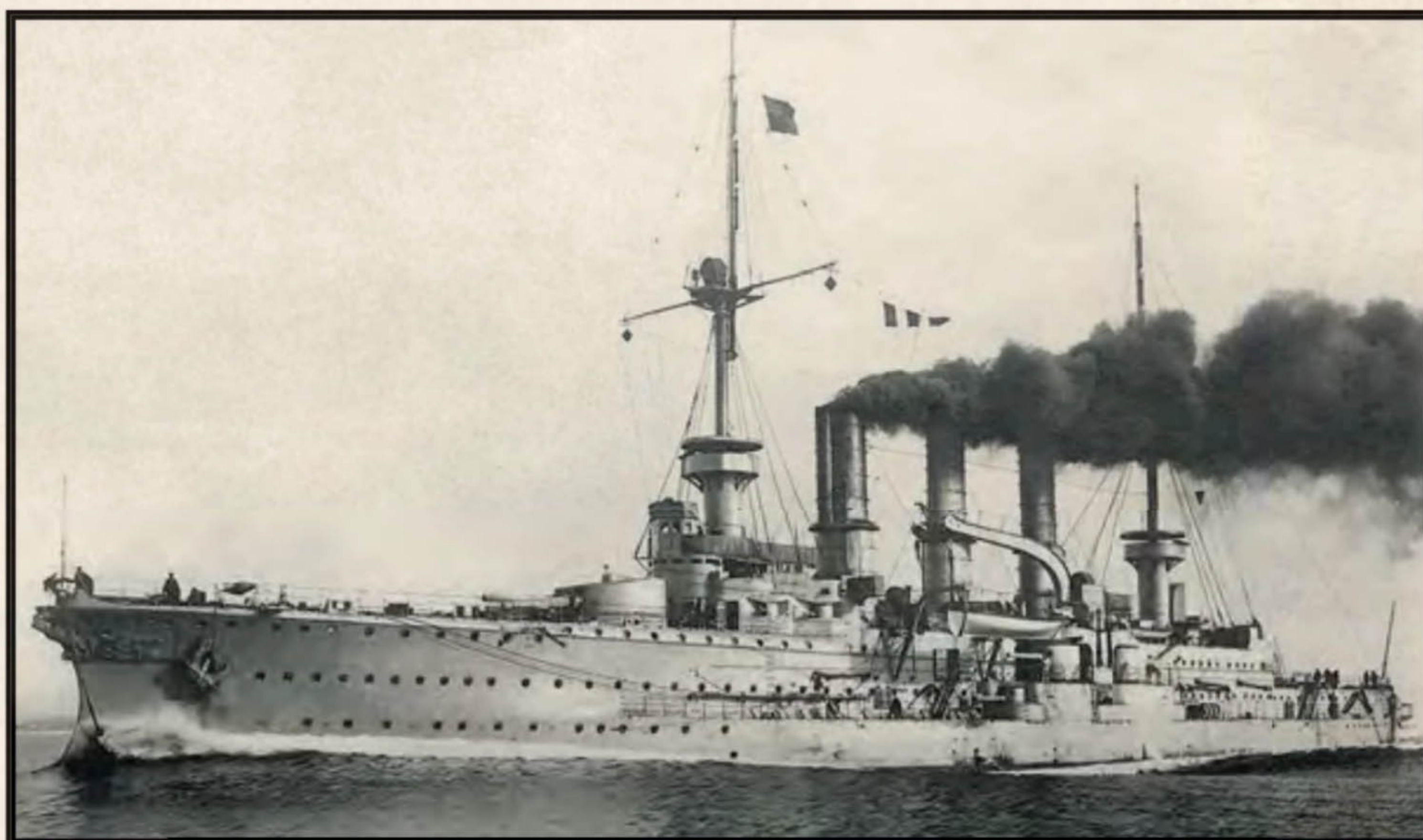
(US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

Approaches never came to love him. They never came to like him. But they came quickly to respect him and even more, have the greatest confidence in him – for Sir Max radiated confidence."

EARLY YEARS

Max Horton was born in 29 November 1883 at Maelog House Hotel, Rhosneigr on the northwest coast of Anglesey, a somewhat remote and bleak spot bought by his stockbroker father for its fishing and shooting rights. It was here Horton spent his childhood and, after boarding school, he joined the Royal Navy in September 1898. At the training ship *Britannia* he excelled at football and won a middleweight boxing prize. He showed interest in engines, machinery and motorcycles and the newly formed submarine branch appealed accordingly. It offered scope for initiative, adventure and perhaps early command.

BELOW
HMS E9 at Reval, 1915. Autographed by Horton in 1919.



In 1904 he was appointed to HMS *Thames*, a submarine depot ship, as a sub-lieutenant where he set out to master the elaborate details of undersea operations. Aged 22, he was given command of *A1*, the first British-designed submarine. These primitive craft were limited in what they could do, and some time was to pass before technical development enabled them to be seen as weapons of offence. Even then, there was much resistance; many regarded submariners as pirates, with Horton the pirate-in-chief.

Life was risky for submariners, but Horton developed a reputation for coolness and his commitment was rewarded with command of *C8*, bigger, more powerful and better armed than *A1*. Later, promotion to lieutenant came with two compulsory years at sea in a surface warship to gain experience of general service. He was posted to the cruiser HMS *Duke of Edinburgh* in 1910. In December 1911 at Gibraltar, the *Duke of Edinburgh* received a signal that the P&O liner *Delhi* had gone ashore at Cape Spartel and was despatched to her rescue. Horton commanded one of the boats sent from the cruiser to rescue passengers and was awarded the Board of Trade Silver Medal for Saving Life at Sea.

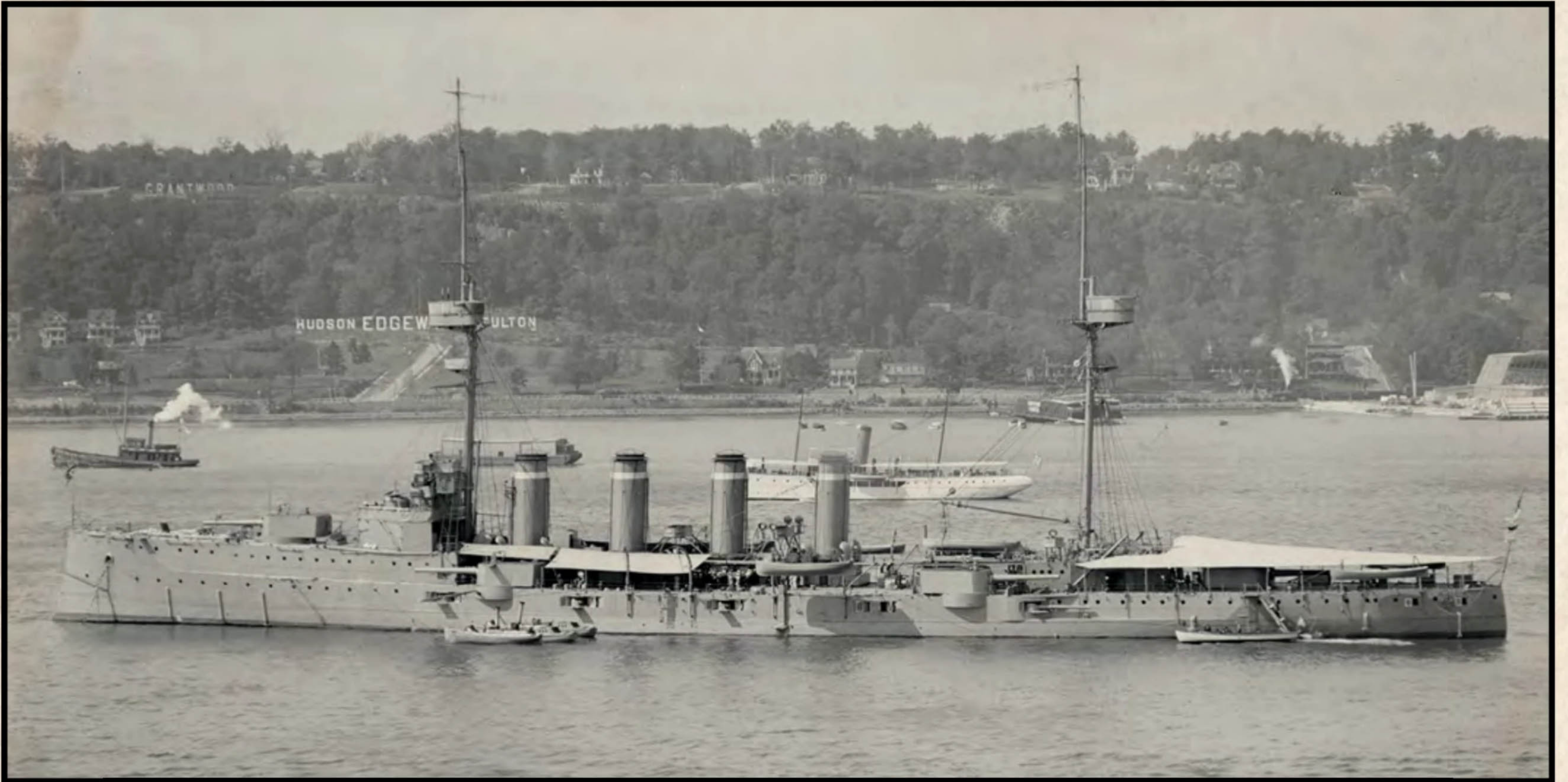
HOSTILITIES

Horton returned to the Submarine Service in 1912 in command of *D6*. The D-class were larger and improved versions of the C boats

powered by diesel engines rather than the dangerous petrol ones used before. In *D6*, Horton penetrated the Firth of Forth during an exercise and 'torpedoed' two vessels anchored upstream of the Forth Bridge, a considerable feat which demonstrated what submarines could achieve.

The outbreak of war saw Horton, now a lieutenant-commander, in charge of one of the first British ocean-going submarines, the 800-ton HMS *E9*. At dawn on 13 September 1914 he sank the German cruiser *Hela* off Heligoland while evading his pursuers and reaching Harwich. Entering port, Horton initiated the tradition of British submariners hoisting the Jolly Roger – reinforcing the pre-war bias of the more conservative elements of naval establishment. Weeks later, Horton skilfully sank the destroyer *S116* off the mouth of the River Ems. For these, Horton was awarded the DSO.

The German High Seas Fleet kept a number of its capital ships in the Baltic – tempting targets – with additional opportunities to disrupt iron ore trade between Sweden and Germany. The Admiralty despatched three submarines in October 1914 to operate from Reval, now Tallinn, Latvia – then part of Imperial Russia. It was no mean feat to sail 1,000 miles (1,609km) across the Baltic through the sound separating



Denmark and Sweden, contending with minefields and the constant danger of discovery.

Before the winter ice formed, Horton sank a number of merchant vessels, giving crews warning and time to take to their lifeboats. He also downed another destroyer. On 31 December 1914 Horton, then 31, was promoted to commander. The following summer he sank a third destroyer and damaged the cruiser *Prinz Adalbert*, putting her out of action for four months.

SOMETHING OF A PIRATE

Such success prompted Russian requests for more submarines and four more *E*-class boats were deployed. But pickings were slim – the Baltic was nicknamed ‘Hortensee’ (Horton’s Sea) by the Germans, who withdrew many capital vessels. Horton was soon ordered home, though the Chief of the Russian Navy Staff requested he become the Senior Naval Officer of the British submarines. This was refused, the Second Sea Lord writing on Horton’s official docket: “I understand Commander Horton is something of a pirate and not at all fitted for the position.” Instead, in 1916 Horton was appointed to command *J6* – a prestigious posting. These new boats were larger at 1,200 tons and faster on the surface.

In 1917, Horton was awarded the bar to his DSO for his services and was selected to supervise the

building of *M1*, the first of a new class of submarine. In addition to torpedo tubes, these ill-fated craft were fitted with a 12in gun. *M1* was launched in wartime, with Horton overseeing her sea trials, but she saw no action prior to the Armistice. While the war ended in 1918 Horton was appointed to command

the depot ship *HMS Maidstone* and her attached submarines back in the Baltic, operating against the revolutionary Russian Navy. They saw little action and were withdrawn in 1920.

In June 1920 Horton was promoted to captain and, aged just 37, became Chief of Staff to what would



ABOVE

HMS Duke of Edinburgh in the Hudson River, 1909. The ship was one of several vessels that assisted the *SS Delhi* after she ran aground off Cape Spartel in December 1911.

LEFT

Horton's nemesis, German Admiral Karl Dönitz. (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE US NAVY)

RIGHT
Officers on
the bridge of a
destroyer keep
sharp watch,
October 1941.

become Rear-Admiral, Submarines, a post then occupied by Rear-Admiral Douglas Dent. Two years later he was given command of the cruiser HMS *Conquest* and a squadron of the fast, but flawed, steam-driven K-class submarines. He set exacting standards, sailing in the ungainly craft to show he was prepared to do anything he asked of his crews and showing a depth of technical knowledge that surprised engineer officers. Even in peacetime, Horton demanded peak of efficiency and frequently said: "There is no margin for mistakes, you are either alive or dead."

Four years ashore followed, part of which was spent commanding the submarine base in Gosport, before Horton was given command of the battleship HMS *Resolution*. He took her to become the flagship of Admiral Sir William Fisher, C-in-C Mediterranean Fleet, a Jutland veteran and regarded as the 'outstanding' admiral of the inter-war period. In October 1932 Horton was promoted to rear-admiral and given command of 2nd Battle Squadron, where, from HMS *Barham*, he doubled as second-in-command of the Home Fleet. Forward 18 months, and Horton was posted to 1st Cruiser Squadron in the Mediterranean, leading from the County-class cruiser, HMS *London*.

It was an interesting time to serve in the Mediterranean. The League of Nations was proving unable to stop the Italians invading Abyssinia. The Royal Navy reinforced the Mediterranean Fleet but the political will to face the Italians was lacking. There was trouble in Iberia as well,

BELOW
A large Atlantic
convoy and escort.



**"I UNDERSTAND
COMMANDER HORTON IS
SOMETHING OF A PIRATE
AND NOT AT ALL FITTED
FOR THE POSITION."**

with the ambitions of other nations embroiled within Spain's raging civil war.

NORTHERN PATROL

In August 1936 Horton was promoted to vice-admiral, but no position was available until mid-1937, when he was given command of the reserve fleet. With hostilities approaching, Horton was most anxious his ships be ready and was delighted that King George VI would inspect the reserve fleet –

all 133 ships – in August 1939. For the inspection to take place 12,000 reservists were called up to man the ships for the review, which occurred off Weymouth. Evidently, Horton and his efforts were appreciated, as he was credited for his mobilisation. With war looming, and as the visiting German pocket battleship *Graf Spee* slipped into open sea following the royal review, senior British observers could surely only deem Horton's labour as timely.

After the declaration of war, Horton was appointed Vice-





Admiral, Northern Patrol and tasked to intercept all merchant ships sailing between Iceland and Scotland as part of the blockade of Germany. Initially he commanded eight aging cruisers, quite unsuitable for continuous work in the gale-swept seas northwest of Britain. Horton found it was best to establish his headquarters ashore and chose a former hotel in Kirkwall in the Orkneys. Before long, a number of liners had been converted to armed merchant cruisers. While these were better

at weathering heavy northern seas, they could have shortcomings in battle.

In November the *Rawalpindi*, a former P&O liner patrolling between Iceland and the Faroes, encountered the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. The outcome of the ill-matched 40-minute battle was inevitable. The outgunned *Rawalpindi* was armed only with eight 6in guns and two anti-aircraft guns, while the nearly new battleships mounted a main armament of nine 11in

guns each. Bravely, Captain Edward Coverley Kennedy RN, commanding *Rawalpindi*, did not decline battle, but the ship was lost with 270 of her crew including the gallant Kennedy. Nevertheless, under Horton's command, the work of the Northern Patrol ensured a steady stream of neutral merchant ships sailed into Lerwick and Kirkwall for examination.

ABOVE
A convoy to Britain assembles in Bedford Basin, near Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1941.
(PA ARCHIVE)



NORWAY

In early December 1939 Horton was appointed Rear-Admiral, Submarines and moved his headquarters to Northways, London. He felt the striking power of the submarine force could not have full effect unless he could work in close co-operation with naval staff and RAF Coastal Command, now just half an hour away at Northwood. With his trademark thoroughness and attention to detail, Horton understood how to employ Coastal Command assets and could make the bureaucratic cross-service effort work. He even accompanied aviators on sorties to know, first-hand, what they and their controllers faced.

During April 1940, when it was intended to mine the Leads – the islands running along the Norwegian coast – to prevent iron ore traffic sailing south, Horton

LEFT
On a cold Atlantic patrol, sailors on HMS Scylla use steam hoses to clear ice. c. February 1943.



ABOVE HMS *Starling*'s CO, Captain Frederic 'Johnnie' Walker, CB, DSO & Three Bar, MID. He was the most successful U-boat hunter of the Atlantic campaign, leading 2nd Escort Group until his death on 9 July 1944 following a stroke, aged 48.

(TOPFOTO)

had submarines positioned along the coast. At the same time, it was discovered the Germans were sending troop transports – many flying false flags – to invade Norway. Restrictions on firing on neutrals were lifted and 17 transports were sunk. Mines laid by the submarine HMS *Narwhal* sank four more. Horton's actions and knowing just where to place his craft delayed the German invasion. It is said Horton's intuition in predicting what the

enemy would do was uncannily accurate.

Warships were also attacked by Horton's craft: HMS *Truant* sank the cruiser *Karlsruhe* off Kristiansand; the panzerschiff or 'pocket battleship' *Lützow* was torpedoed and so heavily damaged by HMS *Spearfish* that she was out of action for a year, and HMS *Sterlet* sank the training ship *Brummer*. In June HMS *Clyde* was on patrol off Norway when *Gneisenau* passed within range. The subsequent

hit put the battleship into dockyard hands for many months, ensuring she would not be available for Hitler's planned invasion of Britain.

Horton was convinced that U-boats could bring trade – the lifeblood of Britain – to a standstill. He also believed Germany would adopt this policy. While he, like every other British military leader, was concerned about invasion, Horton was more convinced blockade posed the greater danger and was conscious Germany was intensely building its underwater fleet. He knew the counter lay in large numbers of destroyers and frigates and support from the RAF. One of the great advantages of moving to London was it enabled Horton to work closely with the Air Officer Commanding Coastal Command, Air Marshal Sir Frederick Bowhill. In their important work, the pair became as 'thick as thieves'.

During the tense summer months of 1940, Horton's submarines were active on anti-invasion patrols and landing agents on the French coast. In the skirmishes off Norway, they, with the surface fleet, inflicted such damage on the German fleet to reduce the possibility of invasion. By August the enemy had just one pocket battleship, four cruisers and a handful of destroyers operational and could never seriously challenge



RIGHT From *Starling*, Captain 'Johnnie' Walker (right) takes a bearing on a submerged U-boat during the 16-hour action on 9 February 1944.



“THE PRESTIGE OF THE SUBMARINE SERVICE HAS NEVER STOOD HIGHER THAN IT DOES AT THIS MOMENT.”

for command of the sea. Horton's work was held in such regard that in October 1940 he was offered command of the Home Fleet, which he refused, believing the C-in-C Home Fleet did not have the same independence of action as he had. He was, however, promoted to admiral in January 1941.

C-IN-C WESTERN APPROACHES


During his tenure as Rear-Admiral, Submarines one initiative that appealed to Horton was the development of midget submarines. The Navy was acutely conscious of the threat from German heavy ships holed up in heavily protected fjords in Norway. Horton reflected upon the time, when in 1914, he lay on the bottom inside Heligoland harbour and was convinced small craft had the potential to penetrate fjords and attack whatever targets were there, including the *Tirpitz*. It came to his attention that a retired submarine officer, Cmdr C H Varley, was building a midget submarine as a hobby.

He immediately visited Varley, unannounced, saw the vessel, then arranged for support. It had not reached maturity by the time Horton hauled down his flag, but

this was the forerunner to the famous X-craft.

During his years in charge of the Submarine Service, Horton was committed to bringing the branch to a peak of efficiency. He received acknowledgement from the Board of Admiralty: “The prestige of the Submarine Service has never stood higher than it does at this moment.” A more personal accolade from Admiral of the Fleet Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord, read: “Thank God we have not had to guard our convoys against the attacks of your commanders.”

Just one week passed between Horton hauling down his flag as Rear-Admiral, Submarines and his taking up his post as C-in-C, Western Approaches on 19 November 1942, when he became responsible for the fighting the Battle of the Atlantic. His command extended from the Arctic to Portugal and halfway across the Atlantic to what was known as the ‘chop line’. In practice this authority extended further westwards. He flew his flag in Derby House, Liverpool. His own meticulous familiarisation with every single aspect of his command – no matter how menial, or new, and the establishment of unceasing training programmes, followed.

Horton hit the ground running, having already put in motion a major measure before he was appointed to head arguably the greatest struggle the Royal Navy has ever overcome. In 1940 Horton broached the use of dedicated rescue ships in convoys 

LEFT

A U-boat, possibly the U-210 or the U-379, seen from a Canadian corvette. The U-boat was rammed after a surface action. (PA ARCHIVE)

BELOW

British sailors on board the U-249 as it is escorted into Weymouth, Dorset, after the surrender of the German Navy. (PA ARCHIVE)



RIGHT

A British-marked R-4 Hoverfly in early 1944 on trials from the MV Daghestan.

The RN were impressed with its anti-submarine potential and the British soon would accept their first R-4s.

(US NAVY NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NAVAL AVIATION)



the strategy agreed by Britain and the US. They would defeat Germany first, the fundamentals for this being to keep Britain and the USSR in the war. The Atlantic lifeline – bringing troops, equipment, food and other supplies – was crucial to keep Britain fighting. More than a million tons a week were needed to feed everyone and to generate the strength to fight. Several ships were lost each day, and just weeks' worth of food was in store at any one time. Germany's remaining surface craft posed some threat, but this paled in comparison to the U-boats. Their objective: to starve Britain out. As Churchill wrote: "The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril."

"TWO MASTER SUBMARINIERS, HORTON AND DÖNITZ, BOTH TRYING TO OUT-THINK THE OTHER, SETTING THIEF TO CATCH THIEF, BOTH CONSTANTLY PROBING FOR WEAKNESSES"

BELOW

British senior officers who received awards from the French at the Institut Francais, London: (R to L): Air Chief Marshall Barratt, Admiral Dunbar-Nasmith VC, Admiral James, Admiral Horton, Admiral Lord Fraser of North Cape, and General Crocker. (PA ARCHIVE)

which was accepted. Smaller more agile merchant vessels (and later corvettes) were converted into Convoy Rescue Ships, which carried no cargo and were positioned at the rear of a convoy. Fitted with increased berthing space, a small operating theatre, and more boats, they took the pressure off escorts and other ships to rescue the crews of stricken vessels.

Just six of these vessels were lost (one to ice, five to enemy action) and in their important work they

saved more than 4,000 sailors on 797 convoys. A total of 30 were built or converted. Many carried radio direction-finding equipment, as their position at the rear of a convoy made them ideally sited to assist the lead escort and help triangulate a contact.

THE ATLANTIC PROBLEM

Horton headed the defining battle of the Second World War. 'Europe first' was the central element of

The Battle of the Atlantic is itself a misnomer. It wasn't a battle, rather a campaign which lasted from the first day of conflict in September 1939 until Germany's surrender in May 1945. It was arguably more significant than any other battle and the fortunes of both sides waxed and waned. Technological innovations, intelligence gathering and developing tactics were of utmost importance. Signals intercepts gave insights into opponents' tactical decisions, and helped to devise means to foil them. But, above all, the totality of the individual efforts of ordinary sailors and their vessels – naval and merchant – decided the outcome.

Both sides used aircraft for reconnaissance and the Allies employed them to hunt submarines. For some time, the Royal Navy was at a disadvantage as existing aircraft could not cover the entire Atlantic. But long-range aircraft, particularly the B-24 Liberator, coupled with the emergence of escort carriers slowly closed the 'black' gap. The Germans, as Horton foresaw, adopted wolf-pack tactics where groups of U-boats attacked in unison.

Horton instituted new tactics. Ordering escorts to be less defensive and more proactive in hunting U-boats, merchant ship losses first rose before falling as German losses mounted. Then, Horton deployed support groups – frigates and other



such vessels attached to convoys but with the freedom to peel off and relentlessly hunt U-boats while the convoy proceeded still with full escort. The success of these groups was decisive: 'six in one trip' moments generated heroic 'stars' for Pathé newsreel – such as Captain Frederic Walker and his charge, HMS *Starling* and 2nd Escort Group – so boosting British spirits and shattering morale among U-boat crews. Each navy exploited technological advances, better radar, better ASDIC, improved weapons such as the hedgehog and squid anti-submarine mortars or acoustic torpedoes that homed in on the noise ships made.

But both sides needed a controlling brain which saw the whole picture and made strategic decisions. Germany's U-boat campaign was controlled by Admiral Karl Dönitz, an experienced submarine



commander and regarded as a wily fox – albeit tunnel-minded, dour, and every bit the committed Nazi. The campaign can be seen almost as a chess contest between personal adversaries, two master submariners,

Horton and Dönitz, both trying to out-think the other, setting thief to catch thief, both constantly probing for weaknesses.

Stephen Roskill in *The War at Sea 1939-1945* stated of Horton: "With his knowledge and insight, his ruthless determination and driving energy, he was without doubt the right man to pit against Dönitz," and he equalled Dönitz in first-hand experience of submarines, in understanding their operations and how the minds of submariners worked. His ruthless will also matched Dönitz's, and it was the German who lost.

The campaign had been fought with increasing success before Horton was put in charge – his predecessor, Admiral Sir Percy Noble reorganised the escort force and its training – but at first, the Royal Navy had been woefully short of escort vessels and this was exacerbated by the Norwegian campaign and Dunkirk. The balance was gradually addressed, first thanks to the 'destroyers for bases' deal with the US. Fifty obsolete destroyers, of last-war vintage, swapped for bases. Soon there was an increasing number of corvettes and frigates coming out of the shipyards, and more and better trained crews.

Equally important was the supply of merchant ships, numbers had been rapidly reduced by the ravages of the U-boats. Mass production in the United States ensured a steady stream of Liberty and Victory ships and T2 tankers but these alone did not guarantee victory. U-boats were directed to untried areas and found happy hunting grounds, exploiting their new advantage until the Allies deployed sufficient resources

ABOVE

The damage to HMS *Stork*, 2nd Escort Group, after ramming a U-boat. (TOPFOTO)



GOOD FISHING

"Poor haul of cod and plaice? Bad luck, mate. What about these?"

LEFT

A cartoon by E H Shepard that ran in a 1942 issue of *Punch Magazine*. It features a fisherman describing his catch to Lord Wolltton, then Minister for Food. (TOPFOTO)



ABOVE
The surviving crew of U-873 under guard at Portsmouth Navy Yard, New Hampshire, in May 1945.
(US NATIONAL ARCHIVES)

to redress the balance and the cycle repeated.

All the time better techniques for destroying U-boats emerged. Allied strength grew and they were able to gain mastery in the Atlantic. How these strengths were applied was critical, and this is where Horton's skills were of supreme importance.

TURN OF THE TIDE

The tide turned in the Allies' favour. In May 1943 the 49-ship ONS-5 convoy and its escorts came under repeated attack by at least 30 U-boats across a seven-day period. While 13 ships were lost, aircraft and two escort groups saw six U-boats sunk and at least seven damaged. The action heralded change, a period the Germans came to know as 'Black May', where 25% of the U-boat fleet was lost. Dönitz temporarily withdrew his forces from the Atlantic, but not before his son, Peter, was killed when U-954 was sunk on 19 May.

The enemy didn't stop the flow of supplies to Britain or the build-up for the Normandy landings. The defeat of the U-boats was essential to ensure overall victory though it came at huge cost: more than 72,000 sailors lost their lives, 3,500 Allied merchant ships – totalling more than 14.5 million tons – and 175 Allied warships were sunk. The battle continued until the very end of hostilities in Europe. Soon after Germany surrendered to British forces on Lüneburg Heath, the Admiralty directed what remained of German High Command to order all U-boats at sea to stay on the

RIGHT
The Type IXC/40 U-boat U-185 sinking after an attack by USN aircraft, 24 August 1943. 29 of her 48 crew were lost, as well as 14 survivors from the U-604 picked up after she was scuttled two weeks earlier.
(US NAVY)

surface, hoist black flags and sail for specified ports. Horton, along with his predecessor, Admiral Noble could take credit for their victory.

Admiral Sir Max Horton formally took the surrender of a token eight U-boats at Lishally, near Londonderry, on 14 May 1945, but it took until September for the surrender to be fully observed as some U-boats were in distant waters. In the end, 156 turned themselves in, dozens more were scuttled or destroyed. There remained the question of what to do with the vessels now in British hands, and it was decided to scuttle them. Codenamed Operation Deadlight, the area selected for their disposal was about 100 miles northwest of Ireland and 116 U-boats were sunk as part of Deadlight. Several vessels escaped, being claimed as prizes. Four U-boats in the Far East at the time of

surrender were commandeered by Japan.

Soon after the war in Europe was over, Horton told the Admiralty he wanted to retire as he felt he had fulfilled his destiny. He may have been offered the post of First Sea Lord but while it has been speculated that Horton would have been outstanding in this role in wartime, his compatibility as a peacetime incumbent, when budgets were being slashed, fleets reduced and men demobbed, is up for discussion. Horton may have proven too forthright for the politics which followed the peace.

Horton's flag was struck at sunset on 15 August 1945 – VJ Day. In retirement Horton journeyed through Europe and his travels included an audience with Pope Pius XII, for which he prepared assiduously. He had kept his deeply held religious beliefs largely to himself throughout his service career. Sadly, the weight of high command had made such great inroads into Horton's reserves of strength that he died at the relatively early age of 67 in July 1951. He was given the honour of a State Funeral, which was held in Liverpool, from where he had exercised command in the life-and-death struggle in the Atlantic.

His tenure as C-in-C Western Approaches was remarkable; having built an enormous and ruthlessly administered command he out-thought and defeated an implacable enemy. The importance of the campaign was, simply, had he not won it the Allies could not have defeated Germany. 🇨🇭

