

Channel Predators

COVER STORY

Fighting from the first day of the war until the very last, the Schnellboote flotillas acquitted themselves as “respectable adversaries”, becoming the very scourge of the English Channel as **Robin Schäfer** outlines.

It would be fair to say that at the start of the Second World War the usefulness and capabilities of the Kriegsmarine's newest asset, the Schnellboot, had not yet been properly recognised. On the outbreak of war, the available vessels were concentrated into two Flotille: 1. Schnellbootflottille in the Baltic with 2. Schnellbootflottille in the North Sea, operating from Heligoland. Lacking any operational concept, the boats were employed on work for which they were not designed, including escort duties and submarine hunting. On 1 September 1939, though, 1. Schnellbootflottille started patrolling in the Gulf of Danzig. It was there, a few hours after the first shots of the war had been fired, that S-23 (Oblt. Christiansen) sank a Polish pilot vessel (formerly the trawler *Lloyd Bydgoski*) with fire from its 20mm cannon after the crew had been given time to evacuate. It was the first vessel sunk by S-Boot during the war.

Later, during Unternehmen Weserübung in April 1940, with the capabilities of the S-Boote still not recognised, the boats of both flotillas were used for reconnaissance, high-speed landing craft or to dropping regular German infantry on the coast near Bergen and Kristiansand. No

boats were lost to enemy action, but one was damaged by collision and some by gunfire. As war gathered pace, so naval high command began to understand the value of these little vessels. But it was not until May and June that the pfennig finally dropped.

EARLY ACTIONS IN THE CHANNEL

On 9 and 10 May 1940, four Schnellboote launched coordinated attacks on British ships of the Home Fleet in the Skagerrak. Two boats were forced to withdraw in the face of heavy gunfire, while S-33 lost part of its forecastle in a collision with a destroyer. One boat, S-31 under Oblt. Opdenhoff, managed to launch two torpedoes against HMS *Kelly*, damaging it so badly that it had to be towed back to the Tyne.

With the opening of the campaign in the west, though, a new hunting ground opened up for the Schnellboote of the Kriegsmarine. From Borkum, and later Den Helder and Hoek van Holland, they attacked British and French shipping and engaged evacuation vessels at Dunkirk. Slowly, new and effective operational tactics were put into play.

On 19 May, 1 and 2 Flotille were ordered to Nieuport to intercept Allied shipping beginning to evacuate Boulogne and Calais. Two days later, S-32, under Oblt.z.S. Carl Eberhard, destroyed a 2,000-ton transport ship off Nieuport in a gigantic explosion. On the night of 22 May, having intercepted Allied radio messages, the Kriegsmarine ordered 1. Flotille into the Channel around Dunkirk. Lying in wait for their prey, S-21 and S-23 soon spotted the silhouette of the *Jaguar*, a French torpedo-boat destroyer, heading slowly into the Channel. Only minutes later, two torpedoes hit and the sound of explosions shattered the night. The *Jaguar*, listing dangerously, was towed to the beach at Malo-le-Bains and grounded. At sunset on 28 May 1940, S-25, S-30 and S-34 sailed from Den Helder and employed the Lauertaktik (lit.



■ Forerunner of the classic S-Boot design of the Second World War, this was the S.2, one of the vessels developed in the late 1930s. With a petrol engine, later developments saw S-Boote fitted with powerful diesel engines which reduced the fire risk.

■ Right: 'Always the Same Enemy - Fight With Us' is the message on this striking 1943 recruitment poster which appealed to 17th century Dutch history in a call to enlist Dutch volunteers into the Kriegsmarine, the Dutch warship accompanied by a German S-Boot.

STEEDS DEZELFDE VJAND!

1673
1943



STRIJDT MET ONS MEDE!



■ Left: A torpedo is loaded aboard an S-Boot. (BA)

■ Right: Despite their relatively diminutive scale, and relatively limited firepower, the S-Boot was a deadly weapon against much larger warships. In May 1940, the S-31 disabled the destroyer, HMS *Kelly*, in a torpedo strike.



lurking tactic) in which boats, spaced one nautical mile apart, slowly approached a presumed target in line before breaking up and attacking at high-speed on a broad front.

While S-34 unsuccessfully engaged a British sloop south of Fairy Bank, the commander of S-30 (Kptlt. Zimmermann) spotted a British destroyer, HMS *Wakeful*, which was transporting 640 British troops from the beaches of Dunkirk. Using darkness as cover, Zimmermann approached and launched two torpedoes from a distance of 600 metres, one hitting *Wakeful*

amidships. The resulting detonation split her in two and, trapped inside the sinking ship, 638 Allied troops and 85 members of the crew were lost. At about the same time, the freighter SS *Abukir* was sunk by a torpedo fired by S-34 under Oblt.z.S. Obermaier.

On 31 May, S-23 and S-26 attacked the French Bourrasque-class destroyer *Siroco* heading to England with British and French soldiers on board. Two torpedoes hit its starboard stern. The resulting detonation tore into the ship and very quickly the machine room was filling with water. *Siroco* pitched over to starboard and sank within two minutes, taking 660 of the 930 troops on board down into the deep. At the same time, S-24 under Oblt.z.S. Detlefsen, encountered the *Cyclone*, another Bourrasque-class vessel. She was hit by one torpedo which ripped a hole in her prow, killing two crew members. Severely damaged, she limped back to Brest and was scuttled on 18 June. Up to 1 June, the S-34 managed to sink HMT *Stella Dorado*, while S-35 sank HMT *Argyllshire*.

By June 1940, the Kriegsmarine had possession of all Dutch, Belgian and several French ports on the English Channel, giving direct access to the Atlantic and excellent offensive bases from which to harass sea traffic and convoys along the south and north-east coasts of Britain. During the night of 19/20 June, SS *Roseburn* (3,103 tons) was sunk off Dungeness in the first successful S-Boat operation to the English south coast. On 23 June, during an attack on another convoy south of Dungeness, S-36 under Oblt.z.S. Eberhard, sank SS *Albuera* (3,474 tons) while S-19 sank the armed packet boat *Kingfisher*. By 25 June, 1. Flottile was based in Cherbourg from which it could intercept sea traffic from the Isle of Wight to Brighton, while 2. Flottile in Ostend could operate against shipping along Britain's southeast coast. Rotterdam housed 3. Flottile, while the port of Boulogne was being prepared for its own contingent of Schnellboote.



■ Two S-Boote are prepared for sea.



■ The S-21 at speed. She was part of 1.Flottille and on the night of 7/8 August 1940, under command of Oblt.z.S. Bernd Klug, took part in an attack on Convoy CW9 off Beachy Head and Newhaven.

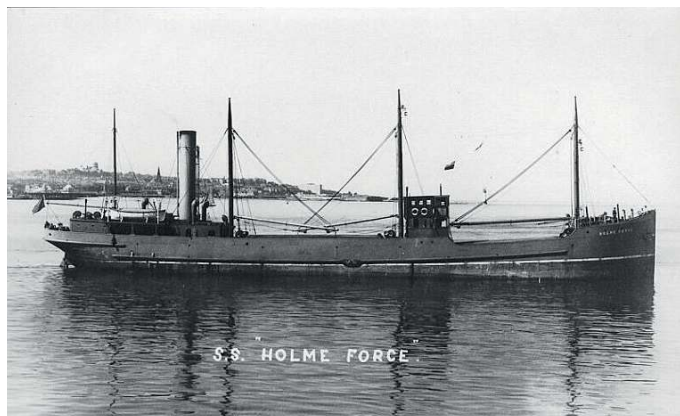
■ Below: Among the vessels sunk by the S-Boote of 1.Flottille on 7/8 August 1940 was the SS *Holme Force*. She was typical of the targets singled out for attack by the S-Boote flotillas.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

On 4 July, convoy OA 178 was attacked by Rotten (pairs) of S-Boote of 1. Flottille, damaging several vessels and sinking the 6,000-ton freighter SS *Elmcrest*, while on 24 July another convoy was attacked by five S-Boote. That same night, a Rotte of S-Boote (S-19 and S-27), spotted a white light and headed towards it, believing it to be a German flying boat reported as having made an emergency landing. It soon became clear that the light was from the brightly illuminated 18,000-ton French liner, *Meknes*, travelling unescorted with 1,100 French sailors on board who were being repatriated to France. One torpedo hit the stern of *Meknes* and 374 men went down with her.

With the beginning of the Battle of Britain, anti-convoy operations took something of a back seat and 1. Flottille were increasingly rescuing Luftwaffe personnel downed over the Channel. However, on 8 August, 1. Flottille pounced on Convoy CW9 off Beachy Head under cover of darkness and sent the freighters *Holme Force*, *Ouse* and *Fife Coast* to the bottom.

In early July, the Schnellboote started laying mines in the Thames Estuary and continued until September with these operations achieving significant results. Faced with the threat of the sleek channel predators, the RAF bombed Ostende and Vlissingen, sinking two S-Boote and damaging five others. In October, with weather conditions deteriorating, attacks on Allied shipping slowed down and 2. and 3. Flottille had only seven S-Boote available. Then, on 20 November, in zero visibility and stormy weather, S-38 (Oblt.z.S Hans Detlefsen) was sunk by the destroyers HMS *Garth* and HMS *Campbell*. Nevertheless, when 1940 ended, the Kriegsmarine could look back on positive results: its S-Boote had claimed 26 Allied commercial vessels (49,985 tons) and 10 destroyers sunk or badly damaged. Such



was their impact that British intelligence misjudged the operational capacities of the S-Boote Flotillas, estimating a combined force of 50 vessels in three operational flotillas. This was more than twice the number of serviceable S-Boote actually available.

More important than these successes was the logistical and operational fusion of all S-Boote units under the F.d.T., "Führer der Torpedoboote", Kapitän zur See Hans Bütow. Under his command, the office coordinated operations with the Luftwaffe and mine-searching formations.

Schnellboot crews faced strenuous tasks in harsh conditions and bad weather, moonlit nights and, from 1941, interdiction by MGBs which all made effective operations difficult and risky. Effectiveness was further hampered by the fact that, even though German destroyers and torpedo boats were now operating from French bases, there was still no coordinated cooperation between the flotillas and naval formations in any combined arms approach.



■ An S-38 class vessel of 5 Flottille in the Baltic Sea in 1941.



■ A Schnellboot crew member mans the boat's 20mm cannon. (BA)

THE BRITISH FIGHT BACK

With the beginning of 1941, Britain started reorganising its coastal forces and began to turn out light attack vessels which were delivered to different fleets. MTBs and MGBs were now accompanying convoys in addition to heavier escort vessels. At the same time, the threat from aerial attack became more acute. In January 1941, the Schnellbootwaffe could, on paper at least, line up 40 x S-Boote against Allied shipping. In reality, only 21 were operational. Throughout January, operations were hampered by the weather but on 26 February, in rough seas and low visibility, elements of 2. Flottille spotted a convoy heading north. The S-30 (Oblt.z.S. Feldt), supported by S-33, identified and engaged a Hunt-class destroyer, firing two torpedoes from 700 metres. HMS

Exmoor was cut in two, disappearing beneath the waves in seconds. Then, on 7/8 March, the three Schnellboot-Flotillen, after Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft reported two convoys (FN 26 and FN 29) off Cromer and Southwold, attacked at night. The S-Boote claimed no less than seven merchant ships with a total tonnage of 13,134 tons.

During an attack on a convoy in April, German S-Boote (S-57 and S-58) were for the first time effectively engaged by their British counterparts. Attacking a convoy near Haisborough Sand, the S-Boote suddenly spotted three MTBs, opening up on them with all barrels. Both S-Boote, though damaged, managed to return safely to base. However, it had become clear that the British were capable of responding to the S-Boot threat. Then, on 29 April, during mine-laying operations between Hammond Knoll and Haisborough Tail in the Thames Estuary, S-58 and S-61 were attacked by two MGBs. The ensuing combat lasted nearly half an hour, the adversaries trying to outmaneuver one another to bring firepower to bear. S61 alone fired over 800 x 20mm shells during the engagement, yet neither side managed to inflict serious damage.



■ Successes by the men of the S-Boote flotillas were eagerly covered by the German news media of the period. Here, a radio reporter interviews men aboard one of the boats. (BA)

By the end of 1941, more encounters with heavily armed MGBs forced the Kriegsmarine to upgrade armour and weaponry of the Schnellboote. The new boats (starting with S-38 to S-53) would not only outclass their adversaries in firepower, but also in speed and operational radius. Heavier and larger than their predecessors, they had a top speed of 44 kts, sported a fully armoured bridge (from the end of 1942) and were armed with two 53.3 cm torpedo tubes and two 20 mm guns. These were reinforced in 1943 by 37 mm cannon. The new 92.5 ton vessels would set a technical standard which would serve the Schnellbootwaffe well, right up until D-Day.

On a tactical level, new attack methods like 'Stichansatz'



■ A radio operator on board an S-Boot.



■ Above: Shell bursts fall close to the S-27. By 1942, the tide had begun to turn against the unrivalled supremacy of the S-Boote as the Allies upped their game against these dangerous vessels.



■ A group of Kriegsmarine officers, including members of 1. Flotille, celebrate recent successes. Included in the photo are three officers who took part in the attack on Convoy CW9 on 7/8 August 1940. Oblt. z.S. von Mirbach (3rd from left), Oblt. z.S. Wuppermann (4th from left) and KptLt Birnbacher (6th from left).

were introduced. This relied on accurate B-Dienst and Luftwaffe reports to locate and engage convoys. The S-Boote would proceed towards pre-calculated target areas in Rotten (pairs) and disperse about 10 miles from and parallel to the target convoy's course - keeping gaps of about 2 miles between each Rotte. Having reached the convoy lane, the boats cut their engines and lay adrift waiting for their targets. If no target materialised within a predetermined time, the boats continued their search patterns. If a target was spotted, the Rotten launched high speed attacks in line-abreast, trying to disperse the convoy while leaving the escort ships no option but to concentrate their force.

The Channel had been established as the main battleground of the Schnellboote, and until the end of the war operations against merchant shipping remained their

focal task. Yet, at the end of May 1941, three flotillas were transferred to Swinemunde in preparation for the attack on the Soviet Union although on 1 October, 2. Flotille relocated back to the Channel while 1. Flotille transferred to Kiel to prepare for relocation into the Black Sea. The 3. Flotille had already been relocated in September to support the Italian Navy and Rommel's Afrikakorps in the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, 2., 4. and 5 Flotille were operating in the English Channel where they were joined by 6. Flotille.

S-Boats continued to inflict severe damage on shipping, launching successful attacks on several convoys in November and December. In total, during 1941, S-Boote sunk 29 commercial ships at 58,854 tons. In addition, 12 commercial vessels with a tonnage of over 50,000 were destroyed in December by mines alone.

OPERATION CERBERUS

Steadily, Britain's coastal forces were now starting to heavily outnumber their German adversaries and their vessels had also improved in quality. New MTB types started being delivered at the beginning of 1942, one being the Fairmile Type D - heavily armed, fast, and more stable than earlier models. The situation had gone from one of almost uncontested mastery in the arena of fast boat action in 1940 to a reversal of that position in 1942.

On 15 January, three Schnellboot-Flotillen were transferred to Ostende, Boulogne and Ijmuiden to participate in one of the biggest German naval operations of the war: to bring back to Germany, via the English Channel, the battleships *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* and heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen*, which had been stationed



■ The S-102 on patrol, the low profile of these fast craft is clear to see in this photograph.

in the Atlantic port of Brest. It was named operation 'Cerberus'.

To get the heavy vessels safely through the Channel and Dover Strait and to port in Germany under the noses of the British, the plan was to use maximum air and naval

cover. To draw naval forces away, 6. Flottille, with six x S-Boote, launched a diversionary attack off Dungeness and Beachy Head. Meanwhile, 2. and 4. Flottille were to escort heavy surface vessels. On 11 February, evading detection by the submarine HMS *Sealion*, the fleet crossed the Brest passage. The following day, it was spotted off Le Touquet, escorted by several destroyers and S-Boot flotillas. Several air attacks were unsuccessful due to the fighter screen, while in several attacks by MGBs and destroyers, the S-Boote acquitted themselves well, the convoy safely reaching Wilhelmshaven.



■ KKpt Werner Töniges, the most successful S-Boot commander of the war, sinking eighteen ships on 281 combat patrols, for a total of 86,200 tons of Allied shipping. He was awarded the Knight's Cross in recognition of his success.

To deploy S-Boote with greater effect, the Kriegsmarine took measures to create a fully independent Schnellboot arm when the Führer der Schnellboote (F.d.S.) was created in April, under Korvettenkapitän Rudolf Petersen, the former commander of 2. Flottille. As a former S-Boot and flotilla commander, Petersen understood all the operational requirements necessary to effectively deploy his boats. Well-liked by the crews, who considered him one of their own, he avoided unnecessary risk and wasn't afraid to speak his mind, qualities that didn't particularly endear him to his superiors and resulted in official rebukes for supposed lack of aggressiveness and success. From his new HQ in Scheveningen, he oversaw construction programmes and improvements in boat design and armament and discussed and planned tactics with his commanders. Together with the 'Grey Wolves', the U-Boote, the boats under his command were the only vessels capable of offensive operations in the North Sea and English Channel.

Luftwaffe reconnaissance reports on 9 July led several 2. Flottille boats to Convoy WP 183, which - for unknown reasons - had no escort. In minutes, seven vessels had been sunk. That same month, the first boats were equipped with 'Funkmessbeobachtungsgeraete', or FuMBs, which detected radar emissions from aircraft of Coastal Command and emitted a humming sound if one entered its range radius of about 60 kms. In October, the first S-Boote of 5. Flottille were equipped with Lichtenstein radar sets. At the end of 1942, S-Boote operating in the west had sunk over 43,000 tons of



■ The British responded to the S-Boote threat with large numbers of MTBs and MGBs. Here, Vosper MTBs are readied for sea and although they were not specifically designed to counter the S-Boote, they often encountered them in battle.

■ Right: Award document for the Schnellboot Kriegsabzeichen (S-Boat War Badge).

■ Below: The Schnellboot Kriegsabzeichen.



shipping, including two destroyers (HMS *Vortigern* and HMS *Penylan*), one MGB, one ML, four armed trawlers and 19 freighters. In addition, 21 Allied vessels (including two destroyers) had been sunk or damaged by mines - a combined total of 86,465 tons of shipping.

By 1943, the Kriegsmarine had a nominal strength of 90 S-Boote: 16 for training purposes and of the remaining 74 only about 40 were operational. However, the S-Boote were now up against 263 x modern vessels, including MGBs and MTBs.

When, in mid February, 15 S-Boote of all flotillas went mine laying off Sheringham and Great Yarmouth, the British were waiting. After an attack by Fairey Albacores, which failed to do any damage, S-71 was engaged by destroyers HMS *Garth* and *Montrose* and a pack of MGBs. S-71 received a number of hits, and after its engine stalled it was rammed and sunk by HMS *Garth*. Seventeen sailors went down with it. The tables had turned. The British had the upper hand, and S-Boat operations became more risky. Several boats were lost to mines, while several convoy attacks were abandoned due to dense escort screens. At the beginning of March, S-75 was sunk and 11 sailors killed in an attack by four Spitfires and two Typhoons. S-74 lost an engine and had three men killed in the same attack. By the middle of March, the combined strength in the west was just 15 x S-Boote. Successes against convoys remained rare, but on 13 April the Norwegian destroyer *Eskdale* was sunk by S-90, S-65 and S-112.

By the middle of the year, the RAF were chasing S-Boote

up to and into their French ports. Under immense pressure, S-Boat activity slowed down and because of the threat of air attack, many boats received upgrades in weaponry with the installation of 3.7 cm guns, in addition to turrets housing rapid-fire 20mm quad Flak assembly, or Flakvierling. With the addition of a fully armoured bridge (Kalottenbrücke) and twin MG42 machine guns, the vessels stood a better chance against attack. Yet the larger, better-armed and more powerful German boats still faced a numerically superior enemy. On 24 July, S-77 was sunk by a MGB patrol and in the coming week several S-Boote were sunk or damaged in USAAF bombing raids and RAF fighter-bomber attacks. Instead of engaging them at sea, the Allies now targetted the S-Boote in their bases, although during an unsuccessful en-masse attack on convoy FN 1160, several boats were damaged, many crew members killed or wounded and S-88 sunk. The S-Boote would now revert to lightning attacks in small groups.

At the end of 1943, the ball was firmly with the Allies. More S-Boote were destroyed by Allied bombing, and on 26 April, S-167 was damaged and S-147 sunk by the Free French destroyer *La Combattante*, which spotted the S-Boote on radar and opened fire before they could engage. Yet there were still instances when Schnellboote were able to inflict serious damage.

Early on 28 April 1944, eight LCTs, full of US servicemen and equipment, converged on Lyme Bay, Devon, heading towards Slapton Sands for D-Day training exercises, codenamed Exercise Tiger. However, the three-mile long



■ A view across the 2cm Flak 38 gun towards the fully armoured bridge section (Kalottenbrücke) which was introduced with S-100.

convoy was pounced on by a group of S-Boote, which had been alerted by heavy radio traffic. The attack caught the Americans completely unaware, costing the lives of 197 US sailors and 441 GIs.

On the debit side, and on 13 May, more S-Boote were damaged and one (S-141) sunk - again by *La Combattante*. Among the victims was Lt.z.S. Klaus Doenitz, son of Admiral Doenitz.

OVERLORD

On the morning of 6 June, with the Normandy landings in full swing, groups of S-Boote headed out from Boulogne towards the invasion fleet. Immediately detected by radar and attacked by swarms of MBTs and a British destroyer, only their powerful engines saved them. Outnumbered, and with the element of surprise lost, they returned to base. This pattern continued over the following days and several



■ The bow of the S-27, showing the port of one of her torpedo tubes.



■ Another view of the S-27 at speed. She seems to wear the emblem of a prancing stallion on the port side of the superstructure.



■ The sleek lines of a Schnellboot are clearly apparent in this photograph taken off Norway in 1942.



■ Mines have been loaded aboard this S-Boot which is moored in a concrete bunker. Right up until the end of the war, mines sown by the S-Boote flotillas were a major hazard for Allied shipping. (BA)

attacks failed or were abandoned. Two S-Boote were also lost to mines and only a few LSTs and small support vessels were sunk.

On 12 June, S-138 (Oblt.z.S. Stohwasser) managed to severely damage the destroyer USS *Nelson* off Utah Beach. Taking on water and with 24 men killed, she was towed back to Portsmouth. A day later, RAF Beaufighters of 143 and 236 Sqns sank S-178, S-179 and S-189. Several more S-Boote were lost in an RAF raid on Le Havre when 1,300 tons of bombs were dropped and on 24 June, Cherbourg, one of the most important S-Boote bases, was lost. A month after D-day, S-Boote flotillas occupied only three French ports with just 13 boats. Yet operations continued, and on 30 July S-91, S-97 and S-114 cut off a convoy east of Eastbourne, sinking a freighter and seriously damaging four others. The fact that the S-Boots managed to evade fire from the frigate HMS *Thornbrough*, which fired over 850 shells, shows how effective the powerful German boats could be.

At the beginning of September, the last S-Boote in



■ A depth charge detonates in the wake of the S-47.

the Channel withdrew to Rotterdam and IJmuiden. By then, every offensive operation was spoiled by Allied air superiority, but in mid-September a small force of S-Boote managed to pierce the blockade around Dunkirk, delivering badly needed supplies and evacuating Generalleutnant Wolfgang Kluge, the CO of 226. Infanterie-Division, and his staff. At the beginning of October, with only 21 operational boats left, mine laying operations were launched from IJmuiden, Rotterdam and Hoek-van-Holland. It was risky work, though the minefields along the coasts caused long-term problems for Allied shipping.

December brought an end to a year of defeats and the massive concrete bunker installations in the ports no longer offered protection from new bombs deployed by the RAF. Nevertheless, in the face of this, the Schnellboote sunk 33 ships with a combined tonnage of 40,475 tons, their mines also accounting for 100,000 tons of shipping sunk or damaged beyond repair, to the end of December 1944.

In 1945, the S-Boote went down fighting. In the face of total technological and numerical superiority at sea and in the air, Schnellboot command and crews could only counter with increased tenacity, aggressiveness and daring. Mining operations continued wherever possible, and during the night of 18 February it was payback time when *La Combattante*, vanquisher of S-141 and S-147, ran onto a German mine off the Norfolk coast and was sunk. Convoy FS1734 was hit hard by 9 x S-Boote on 22 February, sinking two freighters and damaging a third. In addition, February cost the Allies 19,551 tons of shipping to mines.

Up to the very last day of the war, the Channel predators fought on. Outnumbered and outgunned, they formed a serious threat to Allied shipping. This is nowhere better expressed than in a report of the Home Fleet on 1 May 1945:

“Attacks by German motor torpedo boats against our convoys have increased during the last three months, notably by the use of more daring approach techniques. Our enemies use two or three boats operating in small, independent groups, which makes the possibility of

interception by our escort ships difficult. The action of the Coastal Command aircraft, in spite of regular sorties and a total absence of enemy aircraft, is unable to stem the offensives of these Kriegsmarine units. In spite of a power ratio unfavourable to them, they represent a constant threat to our maritime traffic."

While everything fell to pieces, the German Army disintegrated, the Luftwaffe ceased to exist and Allied armies moved into the heart of Germany, the Schnellbootwaffe still had 21 boats operational in its Dutch bases by mid-April 1945. At the end of the month, they had sunk - mostly by mines - 88,971 tons of Allied ships.

The final S-Boot sortie was launched on 13 May 1945 by S-204 and S-205, which crossed the North Sea from Den Helder towards England. On board S-204 was Konteradmiral Erich Breuning, on his way to sign the surrender of German naval forces in Holland. Ten MTB met the Germans at South Fall Buoy before escorting them to their destination. A number of British officers went on board S-205. One was Captain Peter Scott, who later wrote:

"This was the first time I'd ever sailed on an enemy boat and I was immediately impressed by the size of the S-Boot. Its silhouette was hardly visible above the surface of the water, and everything seemed to have been designed to minimum resistance to the elements and maximum protection for the crew when the boat was travelling at full speed. In spite of the rolling, we soon reached 30 knots. The MTB's behind us couldn't keep up, and in spite of the speed we kept perfectly dry, while my comrades on our boats had to pull on their oilskins."*



■ At speed, as Captain Peter Scott RN later observed, the bow spray from the S-Boote rose up and passed over the vessel, leaving the crew dry. The opposite was the case on British MTBs!



■ "A respectable adversary". An unidentified S-Boot officer in 1942. (BA)

THE COST

A total of 239 S-Boote of several types were put into service between 1930 and 1945. Only 99 survived the war. In total, 767 men of the Schnellbootwaffe had been killed, 620 wounded and 322 taken POW. Of the 99 surviving boats, 34 were surrendered to Britain and 30 to the US Navy which gave 27 to the Danish and Norwegian navies in 1947. The Soviets received 28 as war reparations. Two S-Boote were returned to the new Bundesmarine in 1951 and served as training boats.

The S-Boote served with distinction and in the words of naval historian Stephen Roskill, their crews: "...fought valiantly up until the end of the war. If they had been used with efficient support vessels, and in tight collaboration with the Luftwaffe, they could have caused much greater losses to our shipping. The tenacity and crusading spirit of their crews made them respectable adversaries".

***Note:** To the Allies, the German S-Boote were generally referred to as E-Boats, the E standing for enemy.