

L A W R E N C E P A T E R S O N



U-BOAT WAR PATROL

The Hidden Photographic Diary of U 564

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Lawrence Paterson was born in New Zealand and has had a long-time interest in the Kriegsmarine. A keen scuba diver, he has done much research on German World War II wrecks and for some years lived close to the Brest U-boat bunkers.

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FRONTLINE BOOKS

U-Boat War Patrol



A Greenhill Book

First published in 2004 by Greenhill Books, Lionel Leventhal Limited
www.greenhillbooks.com

This edition published in 2016 by



Frontline Books

an imprint of Pen & Sword Books Ltd,
47 Church Street, Barnsley, S. Yorkshire, S70 2AS.
For more information on our books, please visit
www.frontline-books.com, email info@frontline-books.com
or write to us at the above address.

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ISBN: 978-1-84832-784-9

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CIP data records for this title are available from the British Library

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

To Audrey 'Mumbles' Paterson

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All times quoted in this book are in German Summer Time (the standard time kept aboard U-boats) unless otherwise noted.

≡ Preface

FIFTY-FIVE years after the end of the Second World War in Europe, history's long arm reached out from the distant shadows of long silent battlefields to the most unlikely of places. During April 2000, in a tiny Post Office at Staintondale, on the edge of the Yorkshire Moors, a unique time capsule arrived unexpectedly into the hands of the Post Office's owner Frank James. Twenty black-and-white photographs, some dappled with age, were handed over by a man unsure of their provenance, or indeed of what to do with them. The photographs showed young men aboard a submarine, the national cockade on their caps surmounted by an eagle clutching in its talons the unmistakable swastika symbol of the Third Reich. Obviously it was a U-boat crew, but who they were, and where, remained a mystery to Frank.

With an interest in all aspects of history, but no knowledge of the U-Boat Service, Frank proceeded to research what he could about the random photographs. Aiding him enormously was the fact that most boats carried an unofficial symbol, a distinctive *Wappen* (emblem, or coat of arms) painted somewhere on the conning tower. In this case it was instantly recognisable – a large black cat, tail held proudly upright and back arched over the digits '3X'. Although some fourteen U-boats carried cats as part of their *Wappen*, this must be one of the five U-boats that carried the *dreimal schwarze Kater* symbol – 'Three Black Cats'. In turn it soon became apparent that the photographs were all taken aboard *U 564*, commanded by the legendary Reinhard 'Teddy' Suhren.

Foster Appleyard, a wartime Royal Navy diver and postwar landlord of a small public house in Bradford, had given Frank's visitor the photographs. Although Appleyard had since died, there was more of the collection to be found in the safekeeping of a friend of the deceased diver. On the proviso that they be properly archived and researched, a shoebox full of photographs arrived in Staintondale soon afterwards, bringing the grand total to 361.

It transpired that Appleyard had been part of the extensive team of naval personnel involved during 1944 and 1945 in clearing the

massive amount of debris and detritus of battle from the French harbour at Brest, in Brittany. Brest had been one of five French ports taken over in 1940 by the conquering German *Wehrmacht* with the express purpose of converting them to forward U-boat bases. Stationed in Brest, *U 564* had been part of the 1st U-Boat Flotilla, a unit whose Type VIIC boats ranged as far west as the Caribbean Sea in the grim battle of attrition against Allied convoy traffic that stretched between the New World and the Old across the expansive wastes of the North Atlantic.

As the tide of war swung inexorably against the Germans, the beleaguered U-boat service was pushed back until its submarines were fighting running battles against a superior enemy off the coast of France itself. In August 1944 Brest was finally besieged by American soldiers of General Patton's Third Army, racing from the Normandy beaches towards Brittany. A month of savage and costly street fighting against German paratroopers, infantry and naval personnel ended with the city's eventual surrender to the Allies, who then faced the arduous task of evaluating the harbour for possible use as a supply head for advancing Allied forces in France. It soon became apparent that the harbour was useless: not only was it clogged with scuttled and destroyed shipping, but the capture of the deep-water port of Cherbourg and the unexpectedly rapid advance of the Allies towards Germany rendered Brest too far from the front lines and surplus to requirements.

During his work in Brest's shattered remains, Appleyard had followed the majority of troops stationed there and explored the cavernous interior of the port's imposing concrete U-boat pens. Within the labyrinthine interior, Appleyard stumbled across the collection of photographs, 'liberating' them and eventually returning to Yorkshire with them in his haversack. Thus, nearly sixty years later, the collection again saw the light of day and was soon on its way to a photographic archive in Gosport, England.

Frank had taken his research as far as he could, and, after enquiries to several U-boat-related museums and archives had yielded nothing, he approached Debbie Corner, Keeper of Photographs at the Royal Navy Submarine Museum in Gosport, home of the Second World War British submarine fleet. Debbie instantly recognised the importance of the photographs, and they were soon housed securely within the Museum's collection in pristine blue folders, where they remain still. Despite, obviously, focusing on the Royal Navy's own submarine service, the Museum holds a great many U-boat photographs and related records, often overlooked by researchers and writers.

At this point I entered the story. After several years living in France, near Brest, researching the *Kriegsmarine* and its U-boat service, my wife and I returned to England as I was putting the finishing touches to a book on the history of the 1st U-Boat Flotilla. I soon became involved with the Archive Working Group within the Submarine Museum, my particular role being to assist with all U-boat related material. After organising and beginning to catalogue the huge numbers of U-boat photographs, I turned once again to the 'Appleyard Collection', and the exceptional study of Suhren's U-boat patrol during the summer of 1942. Many gaps remained in piecing together the story that unfolded with each photograph, and soon it became a full-time research operation in Germany, England and France. This book is the result.

An entire collection that charts the course of a single patrol is a rare find indeed, and *U 564*'s successes and trials provide a unique insight into life aboard the medium-size U-boats. Taken during the summer of 1942 by an onboard war correspondent, the photographs show a U-boat in action within the Atlantic and Caribbean, as the German submarine service teetered on the brink of what was, with hindsight, the unstoppable downward slide into defeat. However, at the stage of the war at which they were taken, U-boats could still spend time surfaced without fear of Allied air attack within the mid-Atlantic and were raking a harvest of considerable numbers of Allied merchant ships.

The German crew are shown in virtually every station, and several other U-boats and their commanders also feature within the photographs as the 'wolfpacks' gathered to fight or be resupplied. Most of these pictures are previously unpublished; many of the photos are taken from segments of newsreel shown as part of the weekly cinema record of the war for German theatre audiences; and a select few were taken by Joseph Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry for inclusion in the magazines *Signal* and *Die Kriegsmarine*. Accompanying the reproductions of those photographs now housed in Gosport are a few selected from the files of the *U-Boot Archiv* in Altenbruch, Germany. There, too, are many photographs taken aboard *U 564* or involving the crew at leisure in Brest, most of them having been 'snapped' unofficially. The reason for the breadth of material relating to *U 564* can perhaps be explained by the character of her commander, Reinhard 'Teddy' Suhren.

Teddy remains legendary within the U-boat world. Fondly remembered for his good nature and command ability as much for his irreverent and rebellious wit that frequently led to brushes with

authority, Suhren was a dynamic member of the German Navy. One of the most highly decorated men of the élite German submarine service, Suhren fired more successful torpedo shots than any other man during the war, most while still a watch officer aboard *U 48* prior to taking his own command. However, it is not his remarkable combat record that causes a now-familiar sparkle to enter the eye of every U-boat veteran that I speak to, nearly sixty years after the end of the war; rather, it was Teddy's perpetual reluctance to conform to the rigidity of thought desired by National Socialist Germany. Veterans spend time recounting numerous tales of Teddy's tribulations with those in authority above him. However, despite this trait, Suhren found himself at times remarkably close to the centre of power within Germany, earning the second highest *Wehrmacht* award for valour, being invited to stay with Martin Bormann and his family, and even dancing with Eva Braun. He was ultimately one of the lucky third of all U-boat men to survive the dreadful casualty rate during the war. He died of stomach cancer in 1984.

It had long been my desire to write a biography of this unique man and his wartime career, but he had already put so much of it down in his inimitable style within an autobiography named *Nasses Eichenlaub* (Wet Oak Leaves), edited by Fritz Brustat-Naval in 1984. Gesa Suhren vividly remembers her father dictating the story to his wife Hannelore, who painstakingly typed the entire manuscript. Thus, this book seeks to illustrate life onboard *U 564* at the period when the outcome of the U-boat war hung in the balance. However, Suhren's widow Hannelore and daughter Gesa have also related a multitude of anecdotes of Teddy's exploits, and no study of *U 564* could begin without a look at this extraordinary man's career up to 1942, when *U 564* put to sea from Brest carrying a war correspondent to record her journey into Atlantic action.

L. P.

≡ Acknowledgements

AS ALWAYS, the writing of a book like this would be impossible without help and support from a great number of people. First of all I would like to thank Sarah Paterson for her help with archive research and travelling the length and breadth of Germany in search of clues, and Audrey, Shane, Ray, Megan and James Paterson for their constant support and encouragement. Secondly, enormous thanks are due to Frank James, without whom this collection would not have come to light, and who did an extraordinary amount of research on its provenance.

Of course, the photographic compilation would not have featured at all without the kind permission and help of Debbie Corner, the Keeper of Photographs at Gosport's Royal Navy Submarine Museum. Maggie Bidmead, the Keeper of Archives at the RNSM also helped with information, encouragement and fine afternoon chats in her office – as well as, later, proof-reading the whole book for me.

The preparation of this manuscript was aided enormously by Elizabeth Burbridge, who allowed me to occupy what once was her library and is now my cluttered office! More impeccable proof-reading by Tonya Allen has helped me to avoid the many mistakes that my less-than-perfect typing creates, and her wide knowledge of the subject matter helped me to check my facts. Lionel Leventhal and the entire staff of Greenhill Books have made the production of this work a pleasure.

For information, help or inspiration I am deeply indebted to the following people: Frau Hannelore Suhren, Gesa Suhren, Erik Lawaetz, Frau Lawaetz, Hans Hausruckinger, Jak Mallmann-Showell, Ted Savas, Carlo Guzzi, Ralf Bublitz, Jürgen Weber and the *München U-Boot-Kameradschaft*, Mats Karlsson, Siri Lawson, Deborah Eaton (Head Librarian and Keeper of the Emden Naval Collection, St Edmund Hall, Oxford), Jürgen Schlemm (Editor of the excellent *Das Archiv*), Frans Beckers, Ulrich and Cristel Zimmermann, Erhard Holthusen and the Deutsches Haus 'Rowdy Table', Peter Carlow (the 'B. C. of U-Boats'), David Beasley (godfather of the Portsmouth car parking scheme), 'Saint' Mike and his never-ending supply of paper, Bruce

Dickinson, Dave Murray, Adrian Smith, Steve Harris, Clive Burr, Nicko McBrain, the courteous and helpful staff of Kew's Public Records Office, and Horst and Annmarie Bredow of Altenbruch's *U-Boot Archiv*.

My most sincere thanks go to the many veterans of this terrible conflict who have shared their knowledge and memories with me. In particular, I would like to mention Herbert Waldschmidt (*U 564, U 146, U 2374 and U 4719*), Herman Hausruckingier (*U 564*), Jürgen Oesten (*U 61, U 106 and U 861*), Georg Seitz (*U 604 and U 873*), Hans Rudolf Rösing (*U 48*), Ludwig Stoll (*U 148*), Horst Bredow (*U 288*) and Claus Peter Carlsen (*U 732*).

L. P.

≡ Glossary, Abbreviations

A	(German) <i>Achtzig Meter</i> , KTB shorthand meaning 'eighty metres'. Thus a boat at a depth of 110 metres could be referred to as 'A+30'.
ASDIC	Term applied to the sonar equipment used for locating submerged submarines. A powerful and effective weapon, it emitted a distinct 'ping' when locating the target. The word is an acronym for Anti-Submarine Detection Committee, the organisation that began research into this device in 1917.
BdU	(German) <i>Befehlshaber der Unterseeboote</i> , or Commander U-Boats.
'Bold'	(German) Short for <i>Kobold</i> (goblin), an acoustic decoy, known also as the 'submarine bubble target', comprising a small, cylindrical, mesh container filled with calcium hydride. When ejected from a submerged U-boat, the compound reacted with sea water and gave off hydrogen bubbles – and thus a false echo to ASDIC operators. It was simple but effective.
cbm	Cubic metres
'Eel'	(German) <i>Aal</i> , a slang expression for torpedo.
'Enigma'	(German) Coding machine used by German Armed Forces throughout the Second World War.
FdU	(German) <i>Führer der Unterseeboote</i> , or Flag Officer for Submarines, responsible for a particular geographical region.
grt	Gross registered tonnage (or tons). A standard measurement of the size of a merchant ship, one ton equalling 100 cubic feet of cargo capacity.
<i>Ing.</i>	(German) <i>Ingenieur</i> , or engineering grade, e.g. <i>Kapltlt (Ing.)</i> .
<i>Kriegsmarine</i>	(German) Navy of the Third Reich.
KTB	(German) <i>Kriegstagebuch</i> , or War Diary. Kept by the commander during a U-boat's patrol. His handwritten version was later typed for the official records. It included torpedo firing diagrams.
LI	(German) <i>Leitender Ingenieur</i> , or Chief Engineer.
'Lords'	(German) Slang term for naval ratings.
<i>Luftwaffe</i>	(German) Air Force.
OKM	(German) <i>Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine</i> , or Navy High Command.
OKW	(German) <i>Oberkommando der Wehrmacht</i> , or Armed Forces High Command.
<i>Ritterkreuz</i>	(German) Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.

<i>Sperrbrecher</i>	(German) Barrage -breaker – a specialized mine destructor vessel.
<i>Turnm</i>	(German) Conning tower.
<i>U-Bootwaffe</i>	(German) U-Boat Service.
UZO	(German) <i>Überwasserzieloptik</i> , or surface targeting device.
VLR	(British) Very Long Range. Used in conjunction with aircraft, often Liberators.
<i>Vorpostenboot</i>	(German) Coastal patrol boat (or ship).
<i>Wabo</i>	(German) <i>Wasserbombe(n)</i> , or depth charge(s).
<i>Wachoffizier</i>	(German) Watch Officer. There were three separate U-boat watch crews, each consisting of an officer, a petty officer and two ratings. The ship's First Watch Officer (IWO) would be the Executive Officer (second-in-command), the Second Watch Officer (IIWO) the ship's designated Second Officer, and the Third Watch Officer (IIIWO) often the <i>Obersteuermann</i> (Navigation Officer). Their duties were typically divided into the following time frames: 0000 – 0400 (1st Watch), 0400–0800 (2nd Watch) and 0800–1200 (3rd Watch); and then 1200–1600 (1st Watch), 1600–2000 (2nd Watch) and 2000–2400 (3rd Watch). The duties of the IWO included the care and maintenance of the torpedo and firing system as well as the control of surface attacks; the IIWO handled administration regarding food and supplies as well as the operation of deck and flak weapons.
<i>Wehrmacht</i>	(German) Armed Forces.
<i>'Wintergarten'</i>	(German) Nickname given to the open-railed extension astern of the conning tower, built to accommodate increased flak weaponry and known to the Allies as a 'bandstand'.

≡ Table of Ranks

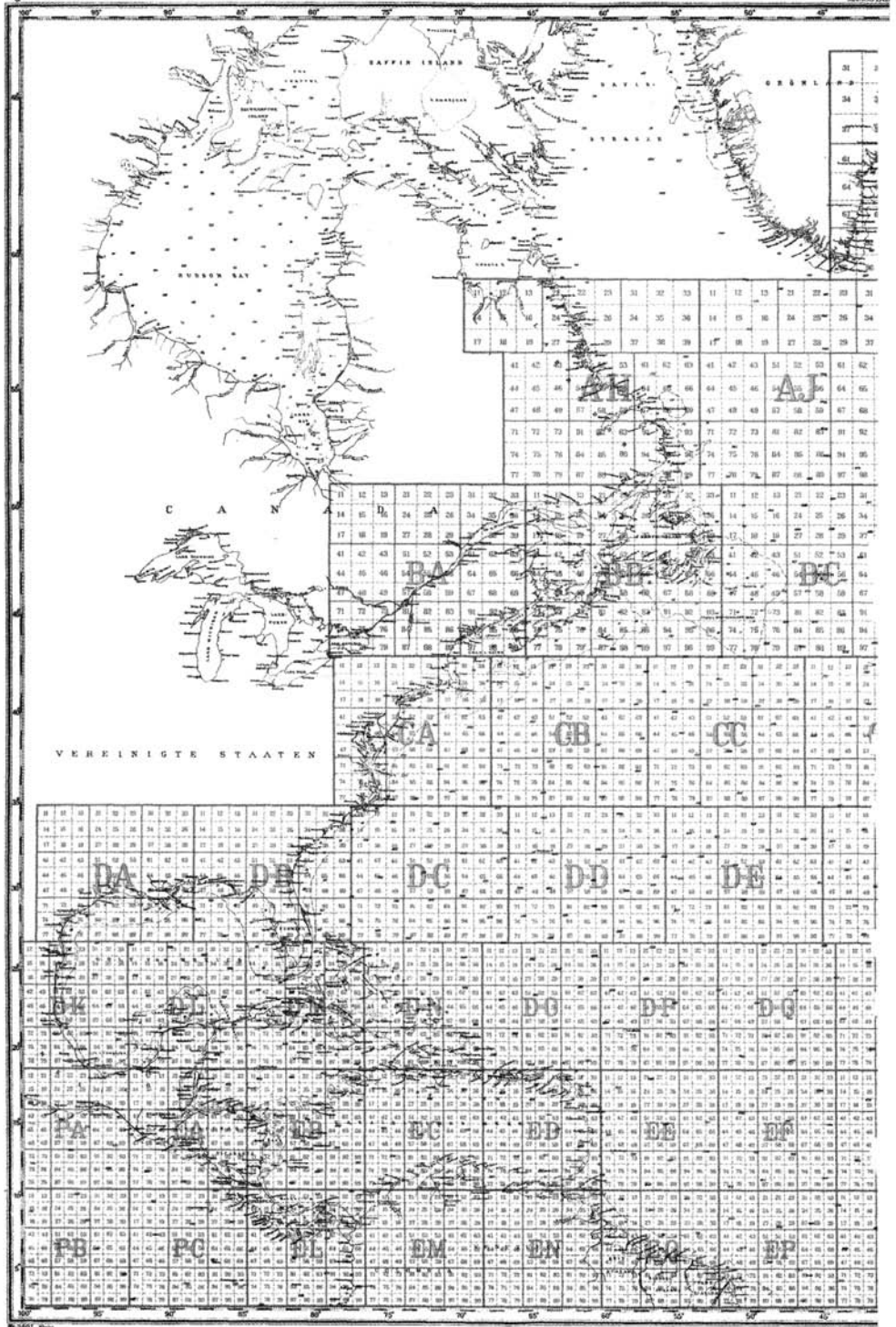
German

Grossadmiral
Admiral
Vizeadmiral (VA)
Konteradmiral (KA)
Kapitän zur See (KzS)
Fregattenkapitän (FK)
Korvettenkapitän (KK)
Kapitänleutnant (Kptlt)
Oberleutnant zur See (ObltzS)
Leutnant zur See (LzS)
Fähnrich
Stabsobersteuermann

Obermaschinist
Bootsmann
Oberbootsmannsmaat
Bootsmannsmaat
Mechanikermaat
-maat (trade inserted at dash)
Maschinenobergefreiter
Funkobergefreiter
Matrosenobergefreiter
Maschinengefreiter
Matrosengefreiter

British/American

Admiral of the Fleet/Fleet Admiral
 Admiral
 Vice-Admiral
 Rear-Admiral
 Captain
 Commander
 Commander
 Lieutenant-Commander
 Lieutenant
 Sub Lieutenant/Lieutenant (j.g.)
 Midshipman
 Senior Quartermaster/Warrant
 Quartermaster
 Senior Machinist/Warrant Machinist
 Boatswain
 Boatswain's Mate Second Class
 Coxswain
 Torpedo Petty Officer
 Petty Officer
 Leading Seaman Machinist
 Leading Seaman Telegraphist
 Leading Seaman
 Able Seaman Machinist
 Able Seaman



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