

Volume 3
Spring 2023

Ken Wiggins, the Museum Curator recently gave an interview to **Delaware Online**. This interview is attracting new visitors to the museum.

You can read the full story under “**What’s New at the Museum**”.

The Delaware Connection article is the history of Convoys, starting with the Spanish through modern day convoys being protected from Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden.

The last convoy to be written about in the article is an Arctic convoy to Russia during WW II that had a devastating end. The *Delaware Connection* is William A. Carter, who was a Navy Ensign in charge of one of the Armed Naval Guard units aboard one of the merchant ships.

Within the article are several links to websites that give more detailed information on how important these convoys were.

WILL CONVOYS BE NEEDED IN THE FUTURE?

The South China Sea is ringed by China, Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries, but China is claiming most of it. The Chinese are trying to control the South China Seas by building many military bases on coral reefs that have become homes for missiles, radar and air strips. They have tried to stop the passage of Naval ships from many countries in these waters. As recently as late March 2023, the Southern Theatre Command of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) warned the **USS Milius**, a guided missile destroyer, that was transiting these waters near the Paracel Islands. China’s militarization of these waters is already having an impact on commercial vessels.

Will commercial vessels have to travel in convoys in this area?

Will they have to be armed? Will they need military escorts?

“*Honor and Preserve Delaware’s Military Heritage*”

www.delawaremilitarymuseum.org





WHAT'S NEW AT THE MUSEUM

By Ken Wiggins

The following was an article on [DelawareOnline.com](https://www.delawareonline.com)
February 19, 2023

Open Call: Delaware Military Museum offers history, art, education & more
Brig. Gen. Kennard R. Wiggins, Jr.
Guest Columnist

Where else could you sit in a jet fighter ejector seat, view a Charles Parks sculpture of our women aviators from World War II, and gaze upon a Jamie Wyeth watercolor of Vietnam?

Where else can you find an Afghan burka, grass skirts from the Pacific War, and a German World War I machine gun? Who else has a complete set of paintings of all seven USS Delawares?

The Delaware Military Heritage and Education Foundation is located at the Delaware National Guard Wilmington Readiness Center (also home to the Mid-County Senior Center). They established the Delaware Military Museum, which opened its doors in 2017 at First Regiment Road, Wilmington 19808.



The Delaware Military Museum

The Delaware Military Museum houses a 5000-volume library of military history, an archive of about 20,000 documents and photographs, a collection of over 300 uniforms, as well as hundreds of military artifacts donated and collected over the years. It is manned and managed by an all-volunteer staff.

The museum has a series of themed exhibits in nine galleries.

The first exhibit's theme is Delaware's role in World War I and was built in the centennial year of 2017. This was followed by various additional themed galleries:

- Delaware's Colonial Era Militia and the Revolutionary War
- War of 1812, the Barbary Pirates and Quasi-War with France
- Delaware's role in World War
- Delawareans in Vietnam
- The Korean War
- The Persian Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq Wars
- A Kiddie Corner room where children can "please touch"

There are also themed exhibits on:

- The Delaware Army and Air National Guard
- The Commander in Chief, a Presidential resource
- Delaware Women in the Military (online) at izi.travel/en/6406-delaware-women-in-the-military/en



Educational programs

The Foundation is responsible for a number of educational programs. Over the years we have conducted many outreach programs including: Leadership programs for scouts, JROTC, and other youth groups., and outreach programs in cooperation with other organizations such as the annual “Wings and Wheels” at Georgetown Airport, Fort Miles annual open house, Pencader Museum, Wilmington College, and others.

The Delaware Military Museum sponsors a monthly William Duncan Memorial Lecture Series on topics as varied as the Battle of Cooch’s Bridge, the Tuskegee Airmen, Vietnam Mailbag, and the WAFS who served in Wilmington during World War II. We have provided speakers on military topics to various veteran’s events and observations such as Pearl Harbor Day, Memorial Day and POW day.



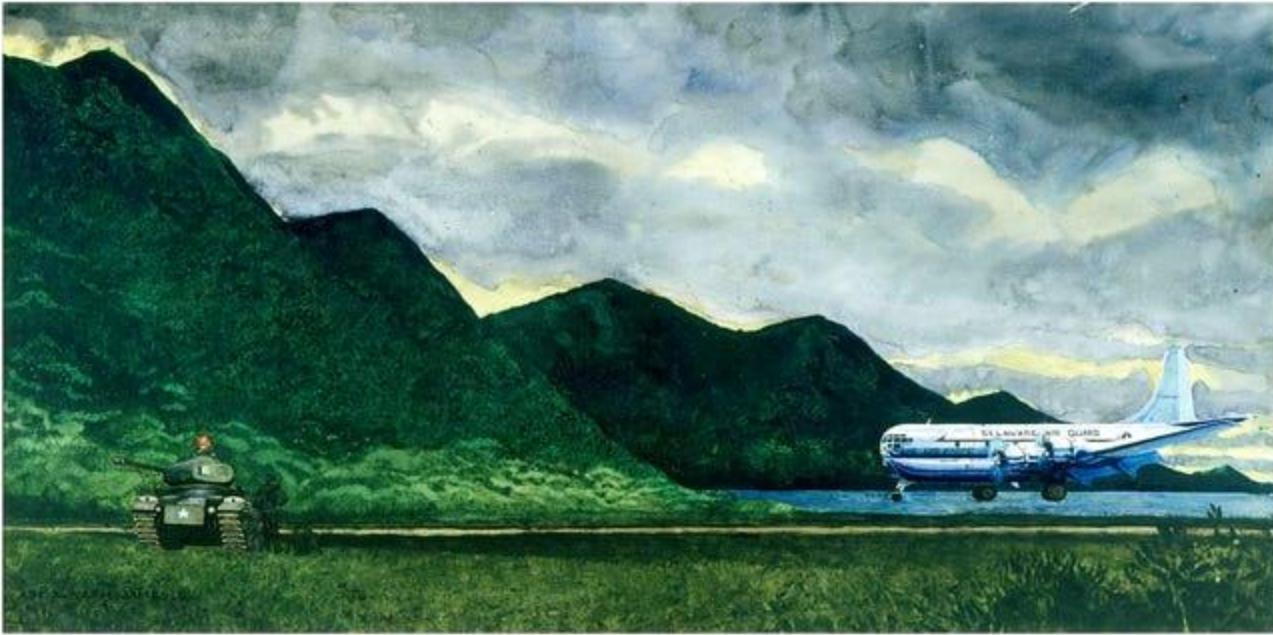
Research programs

As previously stated, the museum houses a 5000-volume library of military history and an extensive archive of rosters, orders, documents, paintings, photographs, maps, posters, scrapbooks, photo albums, diaries and letters. Our aim is to make these historical materials available to teachers, students, writers, and researchers.

Through our website at izi.travel/en/b160-delaware-military-museum-digital-collection/en, researchers can access a virtual museum where many of our artifacts are on view. These exhibits usually include an image, a short description, references to other resources, and oftentimes a video. This online gallery largely parallels our physical exhibits but has many extra features.

A relatively new effort is our link to the Delaware Libraries managed website called “Delaware Collections,” where we are adding new digital material every month.

Visit cdm16397.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16397coll26/search



Artwork

The Foundation has responsibility for the artwork collection of the Delaware National Guard. In the past we have raised funds for cleaning and the restoration of murals and paintings of value. Our collection of World War One art by Brandywine School artists is currently on loan to the Delaware Archives. You can view over 40 artworks at our on-line gallery at izi.travel/en/531c-museum-art-gallery/en

The museum facility

Our library has a very large conference table with seating able to accommodate up to about 40 people. We freely share this room and its facilities with other local groups of veterans, re-enactors, and educators. There is an adjoining kitchenette, so we can even cater on a modest scale.

We rely upon electronic media to get the word out on our programs and activities. We have a Facebook page, Delaware Military Heritage and Education Foundation, and a very active Facebook group Delaware Military Museum.

Our website is delawaremilitarymuseum.org/.

Brig. Gen. Kennard R. Wiggins, Jr. (DE ANG Ret.) is curator of the Delaware Military Museum



THE HISTORY OF CONVOYS

A convoy is a way of protecting a group of ships or vehicles. I suppose you could say that wagon trains heading west through hostile territory were convoys. In general terms, we see convoys as follows: military vehicles traveling to a destination; humanitarian aid convoys; truck convoys including utility trucks traveling to an area that has had a disaster. But for the most part, we think of convoys as merchant ships traveling together, protected by naval vessels.

From the 16th to the 18th century, Spain used convoys to transport goods from the Americas to Spain. Their ships would bring European goods to their colonies in the New World, and these same ships would return to Spain with treasure, such as silver. Not only did the Spaniards have to worry about pirates but they also had to worry about their enemy, the British.

Many European nations involved with the colonization of the America's used convoys for protection.

In recent modern times, ship convoys were needed in the Gulf of Aden because of Somali pirates. In 2007, there were 15 pirate attacks for the whole year; by 2009, there were 15 a month. In 2011, the cargo ships now started to have convoys that were defended by military ships from various nations.

Cargo ships that desired to be part of a convoy, would meet at a designated rendezvous point (latitude and longitude), where they would be placed under protection of navies from different countries. The ships had to apply for protection and the base speed for the convoy ships was given.

Here is a schedule from <https://safety4sea.com/gulf-of-aden-japanese-convoy/>

Schedule March 2011

In March 2011 the Government of Japan (GOJ) will provide escort operations by Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) for vessels in accordance with the schedule below. Please note that due to an increase in piracy activity, the easternmost rendezvous point "C" has been moved further eastwards.

Westbound convoys, rendezvous point "C": 14 55 N – 054 38 E:

09 March, 1500Z

14 March, 1500Z

23 March, 0500Z

31 March, 0500Z

Eastbound convoys, rendezvous point "A": 11 50 N – 045 00 E:

04 March, 1500Z

12 March, 0500Z

20 March, 1500Z

28 March, 1500Z

There is a website called gCaptain.com that gives maritime and offshore news. In 2011, the following navies were listed as providing protection for convoys that were being formed.

July	Turkish Maritime Task Group
Jul/Aug	Japanese Maritime Defense Force Convoy
July	People's Liberation Army Navy Convoy
Jul/Aug	Korean Naval Convoy
Jul/Aug	Russian Naval Convoy

<https://gcaptain.com/weekly-maritime-crime-piracy-julytwentyone/>

Insurance for cargo ships traveling in these waters skyrocketed. Some of the ships hired PCASP (Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel) whose employees were veterans of the contract business in Iraq and Afghanistan but a question of whether cargo ships should have armed guards was raised. **NOTE:** In World War II, armed guards were standard on cargo ship convoys. More on this topic later on in this article!

There were four multinational groups formed for the protection of the convoys.

EUNAVFOR (Operation Atalanta)	Formed by the EU
NATO (Operation Ocean Shield)	Formed by NATO
Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)	Formed by the USA with a 27 nation partnership
Others (Russia, India, China, Japan & Saudi Arabia)	

https://www.marshallcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-10/pC_V4N2_en-6_perConcordiamStaff.pdf

The Maersk Alabama, the first US ship to be hijacked since the early 19th century, was boarded by pirates on 9 April 2009 and ultimately freed on 12 April 2009 by the US Navy.



<https://www.britannica.com/event/Maersk-Alabama-hijacking>

As of 10 March 2023, MARAD (Maritime Administration that is part of the US Department of Transportation) issued the following warning:

On 3 March 2023 the US Maritime Administration (MARAD) issued a revised advisory ([2023-003](#)) to US flagged commercial vessels operating in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Red Sea, and Western Indian Ocean. The advisory warns that regional conflict, heightened military activity, and increased political tensions continue to pose threats to merchant vessels operating in these geographical areas. It further states that threats may come from a number of different sources including, but not limited to, drones (unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)), limpet mines, explosive boats, and pirates and armed robbers. With little or no warning, vessels operating in these areas may also encounter navigation or communication disruptions, such as [GPS interference](#), [AIS spoofing](#), and bridge-to-bridge communications spoofing.

<https://www.gard.no/web/articles?documentId=34287407>

Cargo ships are being notified of issues, but so are yachts in a publication called *Onboard Online*. These warnings are for the Gulf of Aden, Yemeni and Somali waters including the NW Indian Ocean north of 5° S and west of 60° E. This website has some interesting facts as of 2 January 2023 that you might find interesting:

<https://www.onboardonline.com/yacht-industry-news/business/new-guidelines-published-on-danger-of-piracy-for-yachts/>

However, the word convoy to many historians, evokes images of those naval convoys that came about during WW I and WW II, to bring supplies and troops across the Atlantic Ocean.

World War I

Convoys now converted from sail to steam. They were now protected by escort ships on the high seas and when they were in coastal waters, by aircraft. Statistics for May 1917 thru 1 Nov 1918 show that only 154 out of 16,539 ships were sunk on the Atlantic crossings. Of these 16 occurred because of the problems with crossing the seas and 36 because they couldn't keep up with the convoy. An interesting fact about convoys in WW I, was the fact that the first convoy was from Australia and New Zealand and was protected by Japanese & Australian cruisers. The Japanese continued to protect convoys during WW I. Airships were used to bring these ships into their final destination harbor. Ships from neutral nations were supposedly free from attack in the beginning, but the Germans decided they would be targets too, so they started to travel in convoys.

In March 1917, the British War Cabinet requested that convoys be used but the British Admiralty refused. After significant sinking by submarines of ships carrying grain (England only had 6 weeks of grain reserves left), the Admiralty finally agreed in April 1917 to Atlantic north and south convoys.

NH 89 Convoy



<https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/wwi/wwi-convoys/convoys.html>

The First U.S. Overseas Troop Convoy



<https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-i/history/first-troop-convoy.html>

Since aircraft carriers had not yet been developed, observation balloons known as kytoons (kite balloons) were used to spot submarines. They had baskets beneath them that would be manned by observers who changed when their watch was over.



<https://www.navalgazing.net/Naval-Airships-Part-3>



<https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/us-navy-aircraft/lighter-than-air/balloons/kite-balloons.html>

At first the merchant ships in the convoy were small in number (12) and were escorted by British warships, but the success of the convoys, led to more merchant ships (36) being escorted. The escort ships varied, depending upon what waters they were in. In ocean waters, they were escorted by obsolete cruisers, pre-dreadnought battleships and armed merchant cruisers. When they reached

waters nearer to Britain they were escorted by destroyers. The British Navy however, had a limited number of destroyers available for escort duty.

The first trans-Atlantic convoy came from Hampton Roads and was followed by ones from Halifax, Nova Scotia and New York: they were escorted by British warships. Other convoys started for Britain from the South Atlantic. The US Navy started providing destroyers (30) for convoy duty, right after the USA entered the war. The German U-Boats had to change their strategy because of the success of the convoys, and started going after ships to the outbound (going home) part of their journey. Convoys also existed in the Mediterranean, but were more difficult to protect but other countries provided escorts besides the British: France, Japan, Italy, Brazil and the USA.

It should be noted that troop convoys were always escorted. Merchant cargo ships had a harder time, because of the lack of British Navy escort ships and miscalculations of how many escort ships were needed by the British Admiralty. *See more about miscalculations by the British Admiralty later on in this article, during WW II and the Arctic Convoys.*

There were 4 types of convoys in World War I.

- Short-distance commercial (Britain and European Allies)

- Warships, usually troopships

- Ocean (transoceanic commerce)

- Coastal (commercial and military ship movement)

World War II

World War II saw convoys come into being again but this time they were worldwide: European Coastal Atlantic, North Atlantic, North American Coastal and Caribbean, South Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Pacific and finally the Normandy Invasion.

EUROPEAN COASTAL ATLANTIC

These convoys were mostly military ferry or troop convoys, in waters around the British Isles or from Britain to Iceland, the Faroe Islands or Norway. In the early years of the war, German submarines, operating in the North Sea and the South Western approach to the UK, were a threat to these ships.

NORTH AMERICAN COASTAL AND CARIBBEAN

The convoys existed from Nova Scotia to Panama. In 1942, German U-Boats started operating individually, inshore of the USA. Unfortunately, Americans refused to dim their lights at vacation locations thinking they were safe from Germany. On 14 Jan 1942, U-123 was off the coast of Rhode Island Sound that had lights ablaze on its shore. The U-Boat commander, LC Hardegen told his lookouts that "*I have the feeling that the Americans are going to be very surprised*" and moments later sunk the tanker *Norness*. He then took his submarine to Cape Hatteras whose lights were on, and he sank 4 more ships.

In the spring of 1942, the US Navy used 80 small ships and 160 aircraft to patrol the coastal waters. The results were a disaster because everything the Navy did was on a routine basis, and the German submarines adapted to this **set** routine. It wasn't until Mid-May that convoys started with ships sailing from Hampton Roads to Key West.

Nineteen U-Boats started operating in the Caribbean and even had their own submarine tanker. In May they sunk 115 ships (close to half were in the Gulf) and in June they sunk 122 ships. When the

convoys started, the U-Boats moved out of the area and started looking for targets off the coast of Brazil.

Operation Paukenschlag was the German code name for German U-Boats operating off the eastern US Coast. The Germans knew that the USA was not prepared to defend its coastline and the submarines success far exceeded what the Germans expected.

**DIXIE ARROW, A TANKER, BURNS OFF THE COAST OF THE OUTER BANKS,
AFTER BEING TORPEDOED BY U-71**



https://www.nps.gov/articles/wwii_caha_torpedo_junction.htm

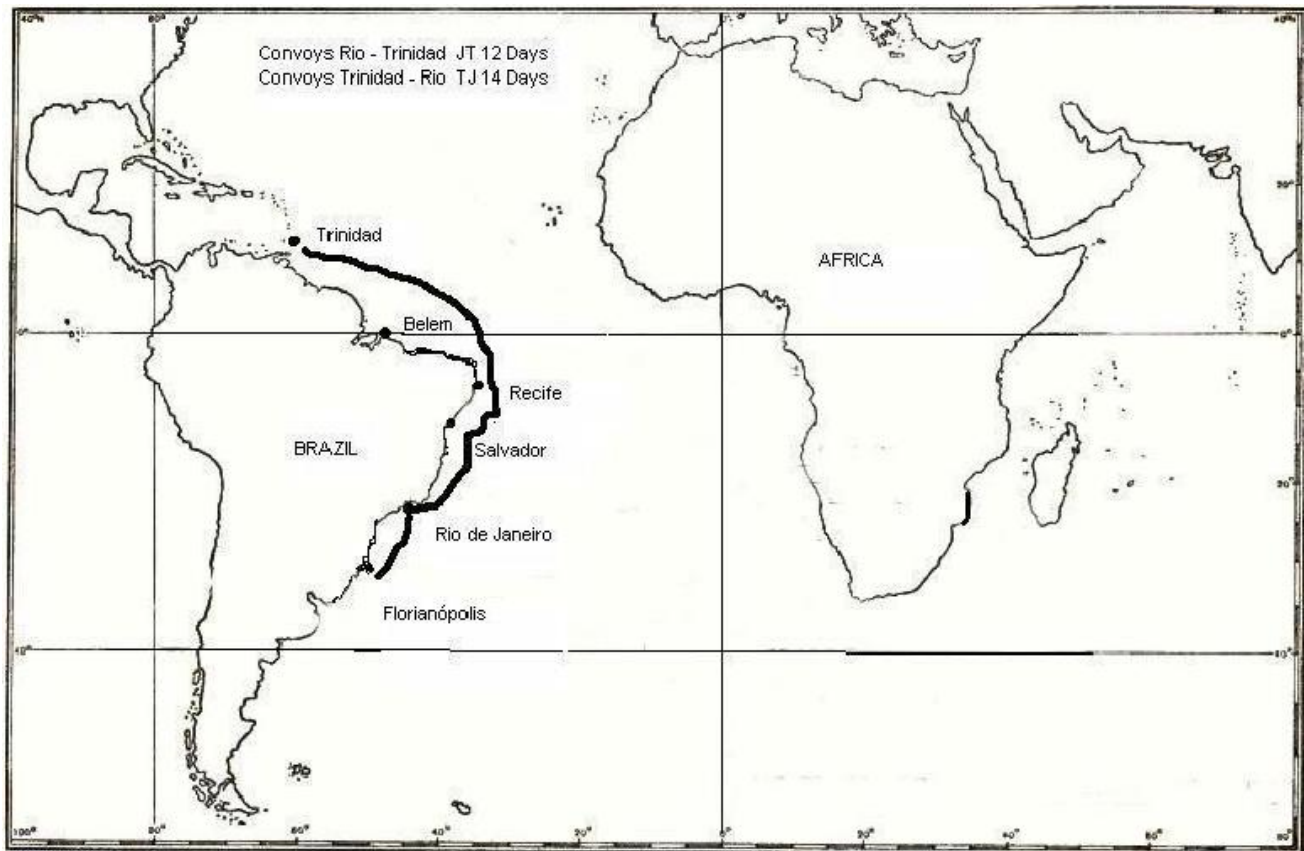
SOUTH ATLANTIC CONVOYS

When Brazil broke relations with the Axis in early 1942 (it was originally a neutral country), it utilized convoys from April to late-August 1942. The South Atlantic Convoys operated from Trinidad down towards Brazil.

The picture below is a large convoy off the coast of Brazil, guarded by Brazilian Navy Ships. On certain convoys, US Navy ships were also used as escorts. Merchant ships were attacked, even when entering the Amazon River.

Not only did German U-Boats operate off of the South American coast but two Italian submarines targeted ships too. Hitler sent 10 submarines and one of them, U-507, torpedoed 5 ships between 15 Aug and 17 Aug, 1942. The nation's anger was so great, that Brazil declared war on Germany on 22

Aug 1942. By that date, 36 Brazilian flagged ships had been sunk. All in all, the Brazilian Navy escorted 614 convoys.



More information about the South Atlantic convoys and battles can be read in the following online article that also included the above pictures.

[https://www.sixtant.net/2011/artigos.php?cat=the-first-convoys&sub=the-convoy-system-*&tag=1\)south-atlantic-convoys.](https://www.sixtant.net/2011/artigos.php?cat=the-first-convoys&sub=the-convoy-system-*&tag=1)south-atlantic-convoys)

INDIAN OCEAN CONVOYS

The Indian Ocean was a major trade route from its colonies and countries and their convoys operated between the following places: Burma, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, the Persian Gulf, the Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Africa, the Suez Canal, Western Australia and Yemen.

The Allies eventually had three Axis enemies in WW 2 - the Germans, the Italians and the Japanese. The sinking of merchant ships began on Nov 15, 1939, when the German battleship, the *Graf Spee*, sank a tanker off the coast of Madagascar.

In 1940, convoys protecting Australia, Indian and New Zealand troops were headed west across the Indian Ocean and protected by Australian and New Zealand cruisers. After Pearl Harbor, everything changed in this operating theatre. These countries now had to deal with the war in their own backyard and German and Japanese submarines operated at will. The Japanese actually wanted to occupy Madagascar where they could destroy the Allied convoys in that area, including the ones bringing supplies to Russia.

CONVOY WS-12 EN ROUTE TO CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, 27 NOVEMBER 1941



<https://picryl.com/media/convoy-ws-12-en-route-to-cape-town-1941-01dfb8>

PACIFIC OCEAN CONVOYS

Even though the Pacific is vast, Allied convoys only operated between certain areas: Admiralty Islands, Australia, New Caledonia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Panama Canal, Papua New Guinea, Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, Tarawa and the United States (Oregon). The Japanese didn't worry too much about protecting their ships using a convoy because of the poor performance of American torpedoes. But soon, the USA developed formidable torpedoes and the Japanese started to use convoys in late 1943. The Japanese waited so long to adapt to the convoy system that at one time 32 ships waited for 3 months at Palau because no escorts were being assigned to them....and escorts were now at a premium.

WORLD WAR 2 TROOPSHIP RANGITIKI, WELLINGTON HARBOUR



<https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/features/troopship-convoys>

ATLANTIC CONVOYS

Much has been written or filmed about the Atlantic Convoys. Churchill and Roosevelt met in Argentia, Newfoundland in August 1941 about the war. It was decided that the US Navy would protect convoys from Iceland west, thereby freeing up the Royal Navy. When the convoys reached Iceland, the escort duty would be picked up by the Royal Navy. There were two types of convoys going to Britain – fast convoys and slower convoys. Fast convoys could make it to Great Britain in 13-14 days and a new convoy left every 6 days. The slow convoys, left every 6 days but it took them 16-17 days to cross the ocean to GB. In the beginning the convoys left from Nova Scotia and in September 1942, the convoys started from New York or other US ports. The US Navy protected the fast convoys while the Canadian Navy protected the slow convoys.

The merchant ships would gather in a designated harbor and a Convoy Commodore, usually a retired Naval Officer, was stationed on one of them and he would coordinate with the military escorts. When all the merchant ships were ready to leave, they would meet their naval escorts at sea. The naval escorts had an Escort Commander. A variety of Navy ships were used as escorts: Destroyers, Destroyer Escorts, Coast Guard Cutters, Cruiser and sometime battleships. If a CVE (Escort Carrier) was available, it might join in escort duty. The main enemy was U-Boats but if an enemy surface ship tried to raid the convoy, the battleships and CVE's would be put to use.

A meeting would be held prior to the convoy's departure and Masters of the cargo ships, Commanding Officers of the escort vessels, the Convoy Commodore, the Escort Commander, Communication Officers and the Armed Guard Officers attended, along with someone from the Pilot's Association. They would receive the convoy formation plan, when each ship would depart for joining up, communication information, when radio silence would occur and any other information deemed necessary before beginning the float. At this time questions could be asked by the vessels commanding officers. It should be noted that the convoy's ultimate destination was classified as "Top Secret" and only the Convoy Commodore and Escort Commander knew what it was before sailing. Envelopes were opened at sea so that each ship knew what port it was going to.

The convoy usually had 40 ships in a grid. There would be nine columns with five ships in each column. The columns would be $\frac{1}{2}$ mile apart and the distance between the ships in a column was $\frac{1}{3}$ of a mile. Tankers and ammunition ships were placed in the center of the convoy formation. A Command Ship was in front and the military escorts were on the flanks and astern of the merchant ships. The Navy would select the route and the entire convoy would zigzag across the Atlantic. The convoys had to run at a certain speed - stragglers were left behind. At various points along the route, the merchant ships would peel off to go to their assigned port that was usually in Ireland, Scotland or England.

A folder was issued to the commanding officers of all vessels which contained the sailing orders as well as general instructions upon a variety of subjects. To name a few, these included a diagram of the ships in formation, order of departure of ships from docks or anchorages, details of swept channel, air coverage, radio telephone and other methods of communication, radio silence, smoke floats, magnetic and sabotage mines, paravanes, balloons, degaussing, *etc.* **Note:** A paravane is described in the following website.

<https://imechearchive.wordpress.com/2016/05/23/paravanes/>

All convoys were assigned a prefix. For example, "AT" was from the United States to Great Britain and were troop ships. "TCU" was from the United States to Liverpool and consisted of 14 knot tankers and fast cargo ships with troops "UGF" were fast ships from the Chesapeake Bay to the

Mediterranean (used in Operation Torch) and “UGS” were slow ships from the Chesapeake to the Med. This website will give you all the codes for convoys during World War II

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Allied_convoy_during_World_War_II_by_region

CONVOY SHIPS IN BEDFORD BASIN, HALIFAX, NS WAITING TO SET SAIL – 1 APRIL 1942



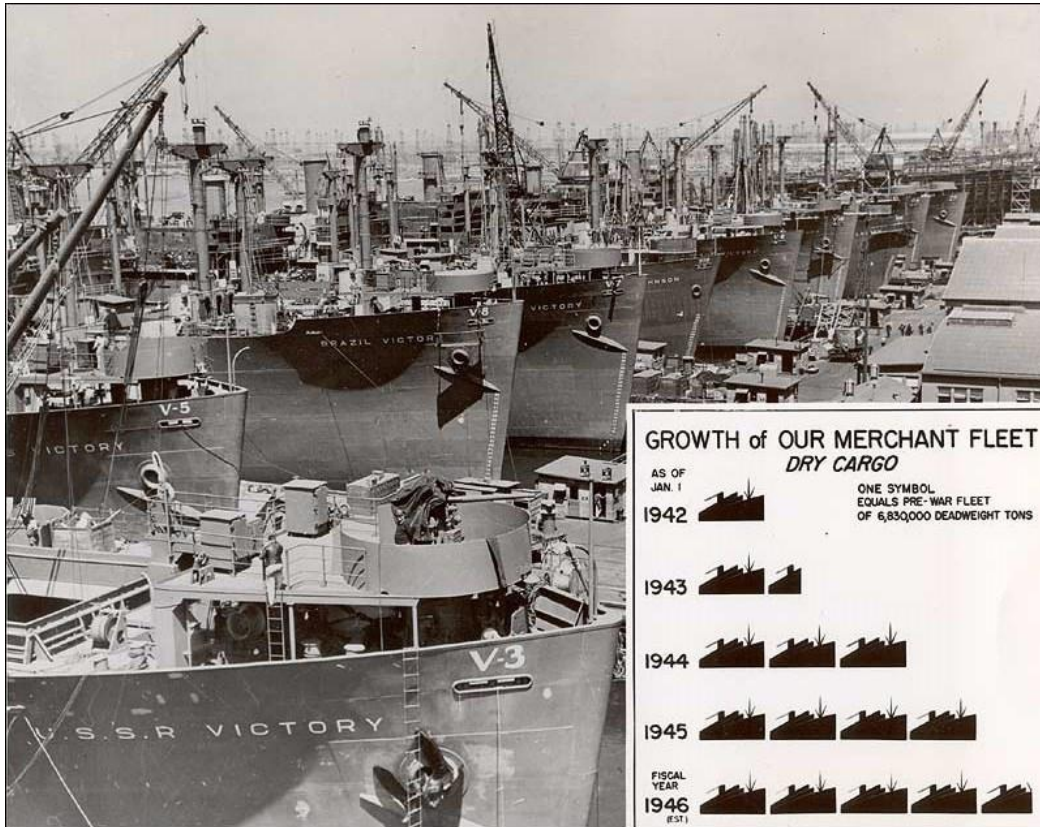
<http://www.junobeach.org/canada-in-wwii/articles/convoys/>

The USA was ill-prepared for transporting war goods to their British allies at the beginning of the war. The building of ships became fast paced with the Liberty Ships being built first and they were followed by the Victory Ships. They were constructed as if they were on an assembly line and could be modified as needed. The Liberty Ships production started in 1941 and the first one was named the SS Patrick Henry because he said “*Give me liberty, or give me death*”. Average time to build a Liberty ship was 42 days by 1944 (2,751 were built). They were built to last 5 years but many lasted 20 years.

NOTE: *In Kennett Square, PA, there is a building called “The Market at Liberty Place”. It is named for the WW II cargo ship “Liberty” and was built with repurposed steel beams from this Baltimore-based ship. Information about this and pictures are displayed on the first floor.*

The Liberty ships were slow (11 knots) and were replaced by the Victory Ships that were faster (15-17 knots). The first Victory ship was called “SS *United Victory*”. A total of 531 vessels were built with 414 as cargo ships and 117 as attack transports.

"YOUR MERCHANT MARINE HAS GROWN."



<https://www.nps.gov/articles/liberty-ships-and-victory-ships-america-s-lifeline-in-war-teaching-with-historic-places.htm>

CONVOY OF 24 SHIPS STEAMING SOUTH OF NEWFOUNDLAND ON 28 JULY 1942



<https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/80-g/80-G-20000/80-g-21187-north-atlantic-convoy--1942.html>

Interesting US Coast Guard video taken during WW II can be seen on the website below.

USCG NORTH ATLANTIC CONVOY DUTY 82530

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhY7UT9W8Wg>

ARCTIC CONVOYS

The Arctic Convoys taking supplies (LEND-LEASE AID) to Russia started in 1941, after Germany invaded that country. The convoys ran from Iceland to Murmansk or Archangel, Russia and were by far, the most hazardous because of the waters and the proximity to German occupied Norway.

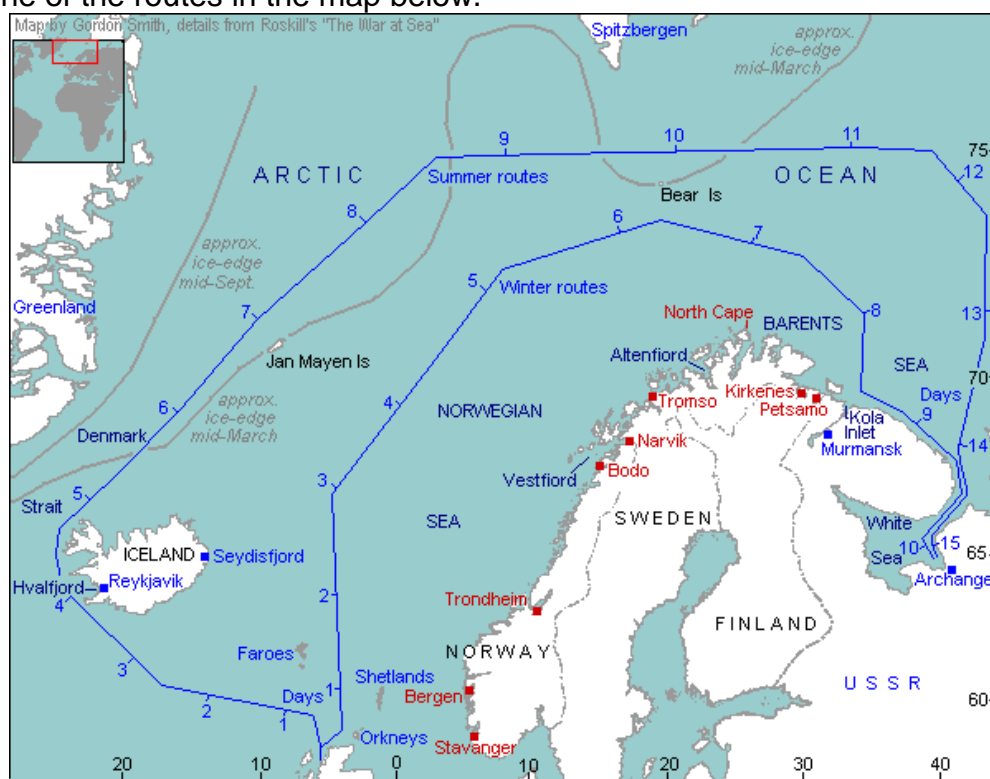
Outbound convoys had the prefix PQ and Homebound Convoys had the prefix QP and both started approximately on the same date. Their route depended upon the location of the pack ice and each convoy had close in escorts as well as a covering force that operated farther from the convoy. These convoys would carry tanks, fighter planes, fuel, ammunition, raw materials and food.

Negotiations for the convoy dates and supplies between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt, were contentious because of Stalin's demands. Stalin was demanding that a Second Front (Western Europe) be started by the Allies, who were not prepared at that time for the invasion of Europe. The UK and USA instead, would send as much as they could to Russia for its fight with the Germans.

Much has been written about the alliance set up by these three men and it ultimately had an effect on the Arctic convoys.

Churchill didn't trust or like Stalin
Churchill didn't full trust Roosevelt
Roosevelt didn't fully trust Churchill
Stalin didn't trust anyone

The ships of the Arctic Convoys would assemble in an Iceland harbor and depending upon the weather, take one of the routes in the map below.



<https://www.naval-history.net/WW2CampaignsRussianConvoys.htm>

Hostile action by German aircraft and submarines was a constant threat on these voyages. In addition the many fjords of Norway, offered anchorage to German ships that could surface attack these convoys. One of them was the huge battleship, the "Tirpitz" (sister ship of the "Bismarck"). Intelligence reports were another issue. The British had broken the code of the German military communications, but by the time it was decoded, the German aircraft or submarines had hours to attack. The Germans would change their code every day and decoding would have to start all over again. The only times the convoy was safe was if there was fog (and there was a lot of it in those waters) or if the water was like glass (enabling the ships lookouts to spot submarine periscopes). The convoy truly depended upon their naval escorts, both close and far away. AND, at this time of the year, it was almost constant daylight at this latitude giving the submarines advantage in targeting the ships.

In theory, German submarines would spot the convoy, radio their position to the German airfields, which would then launch their attack aircraft, if the weather was satisfactory. But the German command organizations in the north were not organized to work together under a joint command and always had Hitler looking over their shoulders; he would make decisions for them from a far away geographic location.

The Germans never built aircraft carriers and Hitler was well aware what damage the Allied carrier based planes could do, so he never wanted to put his ships in harm's way if a carrier was present. He depended a lot upon intelligence reports as to where the Allied ships were located before he would authorize his surface ships into battle.

THE US NAVY ARMED GUARDS

When the USA signed the neutrality Act of 1939, they were not allowed to arm merchant ships. After the act was repealed in 17 November 1941, that all changed in 31 January 1942 when the responsibility was given to the Arming Merchant Ship Section in the Fleet Maintenance Division of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.

To say that many agencies were involved was an understatement.

Bureau of Naval Personnel	assigned/trained personnel
Bureau of Ships/Bureau of Ordnance	supplied the guns and equipment
Maritime Commission War Shipping Administration	installed the guns on the ships
Port Directors	administered the program under the CNO

The Armed Guards trained at three locations: Little Creek, VA; San Diego, CA; Gulfport, MS. The Armed Guard personnel (officers and enlisted), were pulled from combat ships and other activities. Many of them had never been to sea but one of their requirements was – they all had to be swimmers. They would not live with other US Navy personnel but with merchant seamen for months on end. There was a huge gap in what they were paid, but all would go into harm's way. It was important that the Armed Guard Officer on a merchant ship get along with the ships Master.

The armament that the Armed Guards would use aboard a merchant ship:

- One 5"/38 dual purpose stern gun**
- One 3"/50 AA gun**
- Eight 20mm machine guns**

They trained to shoot at airplanes and submarines. Other assigned tasks were degaussing ships (magnetic mines), launching both smoke floats to hide ships from attacks and barrage balloons.

The Armed Guard were stationed on convoys all over the world, but their most important task though, was to adapt to conditions while afloat and under attack, especially in the dangerous waters of the Arctic.

And now for the sad plight of Convoy PQ-17.

CONVOY PQ-17

The merchant ships were gathering and waiting for weeks in the harbor of Hvalfjord, Iceland before sailing on 27 June 1941. There were 39 ships total: (23 U.S., 8 U.K., 2 Soviet, 2 Panamanian, 1 Dutch) and 3 rescue ships (UK). **Note:** *the rescue ships were used to pick up survivors of a sinking ship. They had sick bays, operating tables, a surgeon and medics besides the regular crew.*

The naval close escort (**Convoy Screen**) was all British: 6 destroyers, 4 corvettes, 3 minesweepers, 4 anti-submarine trawlers, 2 anti-aircraft ships and 2 submarines.

A cruiser covering force, "**Cruiser Squadron 1**", that was sailing miles from the convoy, consisted of 2 British cruisers, 2 American cruisers and 4 American destroyers. It was not allowed to sail past Bear Island, in the Arctic.

And finally, at the outer edge, was a **battle fleet** that consisted of 1 British aircraft carrier, 1 British battleship, 2 British cruisers, 1 American battleship and 9 American destroyers. (*Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. was a gunnery officer on one of the destroyers*)

A supply group consisting of fleet oilers and a destroyer and a decoy convoy (**Force X**) were also organized and sailed.

NOTE: ALL NAVAL ESCORT GROUPS WERE UNDER THE COMMAND OF A BRITISH OFFICER.

As the convoy sailed, they zigzagged and kept radio silence. A few cargo ships had problems and had to turn back. On July 4th at 9:30 pm, all of the American ships lowered their flags, much to the dismay of the other ships, because that meant surrender. The flags they lowered were all tattered and they were instantly replaced by brand new flags, causing some of the British ships sending the message "Happy Birthday".

Much has been written and a movie made about **Convoy PQ-17** and why the naval escorts, for the most part, abandoned them but the bottom line was bad intelligence – on both sides. At first the convoy was moving eastward and being attacked, but for the most part it was sailing successfully. But the Germans were moving the Tirpitz battle group from fjord to fjord northward along the Norway coast to attack the convoy. Hitler had stated that the Tirpitz Battleship Group could attack the convoy, if it only had a **close escort**. He didn't want them getting into a battle with the heavy Allied Naval ships. The German reconnaissance planes mistook the convoy as the **second cover** and **heavy cover** force and the Tirpitz battle group was told to stop. On the other hand, the British Admiralty had been receiving intelligence reports about the Tirpitz Battleship Group movements along the Norway coast but did not know it had stopped (again the timing of the decoding of the radio transmissions of the Germans). The debacle started on July 4. First Sea Lord Sir Dudley Pound in England was in charge of the entire operation and assembled his staff to discuss what to do. His staff, including intelligence officers, felt that that convoy should continue and be protected by the naval forces, but Pound disagreed and issued the order for the Naval ships to start sailing westward, leaving the convoy unprotected. This message was sent to PQ-17: "**Most immediate ... Convoy is to scatter**".

As historians have said, Pound was stubborn and authoritative, didn't listen to his staff and ignored his flag officers at sea. These flag officers were dismayed at the order but did as they were told.

NOTE: *Pound was not aware that he had a brain tumor at this time.
Whether it was a factor in his bad decision, will never be known.*

To compound the seriousness of what was happening, the messages from Pound were sent close together on July 4th.

2111

"Cruiser force withdraw to westward at high speed."

2123

"Owing to threat from surface ships convoy is to disperse and proceed to Russian ports."

2136

"My 2123/4th. Convoy is to scatter."

The second and third messages affected what would happen. "**Disperse**" signaled the formation to break apart, but stay in close proximity to each other. "**Scatter**" told the ships to break formation and sail on their own to their final destination and this included the naval escort vessels. Some of the merchant ships tried to keep up with the escort vessels but their speed was too slow. Morale on the naval ships was terrible – they felt they had let down the ships they were escorting.

The Commanding Officer of the Convoy Screen, Captain John Egerton Broome, radioed the Convoy Commodore John Dowding, the following:

"Sorry to leave you like this. Goodbye and good luck. It looks like a bloody business."

The merchant ships started to go their own way to reach Russia. One of the problems in that area is the fact that compasses wouldn't work because of the magnetic north phenomena.

One by one, merchant ships were either torpedoed or sunk by German aircraft. The airwaves were filled with messages such as these: "*Am being bombed by a large number of planes*", "*On fire in the ice*", "*Abandoning ship*", "*Six U-boats approaching on the surface.*" The cargo ships had life boats and life rafts. Needless to say that the life boats gave more protection in those icy waters than the life rafts.

If a U-Boat sank a cargo ship, it would surface near the survivors and ask who the Captain was. If the Captain identified himself, he was taken aboard the submarine as a prisoner. Often the sub would give food, cigarettes and water to the survivors and tell them which way to go to reach land. The submarine would then leave them!

The survivors could be at sea for a long time fighting the elements and it was hundreds of miles from land that would have civilization. Many of the survivors suffered from frostbite with ultimate amputation of limbs, *some without anesthesia*.

Some of the survivors would luck out, when another ship of the convoy would spot them and pick them up. And they might run out of luck again when that ship was then torpedoed. Without the naval escort ships the merchant ships were at the mercy of the U-Boat wolfpack dubbed "Ice Devils".

PICTURE OF LIFEBOATS TAKEN FROM A GERMAN SUBMARINE



<https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1942/atlantic/pg-17.html>

One of the anti-submarine trawlers, *HMS Ayrshire*, decided to head north to the ice pack and along the way, it picked up three merchant ships who also decided to sail north: *Troubador*, *Ironclad* and *Silver Sword*. The commanding officer of the *Ayrshire* was Lt. Leo J. Gradwell of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve who was an intellectual and ultimately saved these ships. Using a sextant and a book "**The Times World Geographic Pocket Book**", he plotted a course for the four ships into the Arctic ice pack, and proceeded to go in as far as he could using open water passages between the floating ice (there were no detailed nautical charts for this area of the ocean). Once deep in the ice pack, he found out that one of the ships was carrying white paint and the crews of the four ships painted everything they could, white, along with using every white piece of cloth they could find on their ship, so that their ship would blend into the surrounding area. This included tanks that were lashed to the upper decks. That way, German planes would not be able to see them because they were camouflaged in white. **Note:** *Upon their arrival in Archangel the Russians complained about the tanks being painted white. The Russians complained about everything when these ships finally made it to Russian shores.*

U.S. Navy Ensign Howard Carraway, from Olanta, SC, was the commanding officer of the Armed Guard on the *Troubador*. The guns already installed on the *Troubador* did not have enough ammunition. Since these four ships would be protecting each other, he decided to use the tanks that were lashed to the top deck as additional fire power. He and his eight Armed Guard men got the tanks ready and moved the ammunition from the cargo area below decks up to the tanks location.

Ensign William A. Carter, of the Eastern shore of Maryland, was the commanding officer of the Armed Guard on the *Ironclad*. The *Ironclad* was a relic from WW I and its crew called it a *rust bucket*. For this convoy it carried many goods, including 15 American built fighter planes, U.S. Army tanks and a number of trucks, all lashed to the main deck with steel cables. She had less armament than the *Troubador* so Carter trained his crew to fire at the closest enemy airplane when under attack. He wanted his crew to keep the guns stationary, instead of swinging them from side to side, and to create a wall of anti-aircraft rounds shrapnel. Carter had to deal with a mutiny by some of the civilian crew on the ship before it left Iceland as well as mental issues with a shipmate after the first air attack on the *Ironclad*.

These four ships ultimately had to start moving out of the icepack, because the wind was now coming from the south. They slowly got out of the icepack and started sailing east to the Matochkin Strait on the island of Novaya Zemlya that was occupied by the Russians. Along this route they had to worry about icebergs, shallow waters and rocks. There they found other surviving ships of the convoy and eventually the ships that could, sailed to Archangel. In Archangel, the ships transitioned from attacks by the Germans on their perilous journey to the reality of what Russia had become.

Only 11 merchant ships of the convoy, made it to Russia.

Further online information about Convoy PQ-17 can be found on the following.

<http://www.naval-history.net/Cr03-53-00PQ17.htm>

<https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/convoy-is-to-scatter-arctic-convoy-disaster/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convoy_PQ_17

<https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1163&context=nwc-review>

I was inspired to write this article on convoys after reading “**The Ghost Ships of the Archangel**” by William Geroux. He interviewed people for this book, including the son of William A. Carter. William A. Carter died in Millsboro, DE in 2010 at the age of 91. His inspirational obituary can be read here. <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/delawareonline/name/william-carter-obituary?pid=145415811>

The following articles are interesting to read about the future of convoys.

<https://warontherocks.com/2020/12/convoy-escort-the-navys-forgotten-purpose-mission/>

<https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-red-books/14/>

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-boxed-america-out-of-south-china-sea-military-d2833768>



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