

ATLANTIC 1939-1945: THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

This in our Time

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Extract 1 from a British newsreel called "This in our time" about the history of Liverpool.

Transcript

1939. After the years of rehabilitation it was war again and Liverpool became the gateway to the Western Approaches. And this time it was a grim struggle for survival. A struggle kept alive by Britain's mastery of the seas but a mastery that was challenged to its limits by the ruthlessness of the Luftwaffe and the German U-Boats.

And from a cellar in the shadow of the town hall operated the nerve centre of the convoy system which played its part against tremendous odds with the dogged courage that has always been associated with the Merchant Marine.

What is this source?

These extracts come from a film about the history of Liverpool. It was made towards the end of the war.

The film used footage from previous reports and broadcasts and then added a voice over to explain Liverpool's role in the Battle of the Atlantic.

What's the background to this source?

By 1940 Nazi leader Adolf Hitler was in control of most of Western Europe. Only Britain and its empire opposed him. Although Hitler failed to invade Britain in 1940, his forces still threatened the country. The greatest danger for Britain was that German forces could cut off supplies of troops, food, medicine and equipment from Canada and the USA. This was exactly what the Germans tried to do. This campaign became known as the Battle of the Atlantic.

The Germans used submarines (U-boats), aircraft and surface ships to attack shipping bound for Britain. When the war began Canada also declared war on Germany. The USA was neutral, although it favoured Britain strongly by supplying food and equipment. A good example was the Lend Lease scheme that supplied huge amounts of military equipment to Britain. When the USA joined

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the war in 1941 the scheme continued, and the US naval forces also took direct action against German forces in the Atlantic.

It's worth knowing that...

The British headquarters for the Battle of the Atlantic was originally in Plymouth. However, it was vulnerable to air raids and was not a main port for the Atlantic convoys. In 1940 the command centre was moved to an underground bunker in Liverpool.

During the war Liverpool handled about one third of Britain's total imports unloading around four convoys a week. During the war about 4.7 million troops passed through, about 1.2 million of them Americans.

How will you use this source?

1. Why was Liverpool the command centre for the Battle of the Atlantic?
2. Is there any evidence that Liverpool handled the pressure of war well?
3. What impression do you get of life for the sailors in the convoys?
4. Would you say this source is more useful than our "starter" source showing the journey of convoy in August 1942 for studying the Battle of the Atlantic?
5. Do these film extracts help you to explain why the Battle of the Atlantic was so significant?

Use this report table to help plan your report