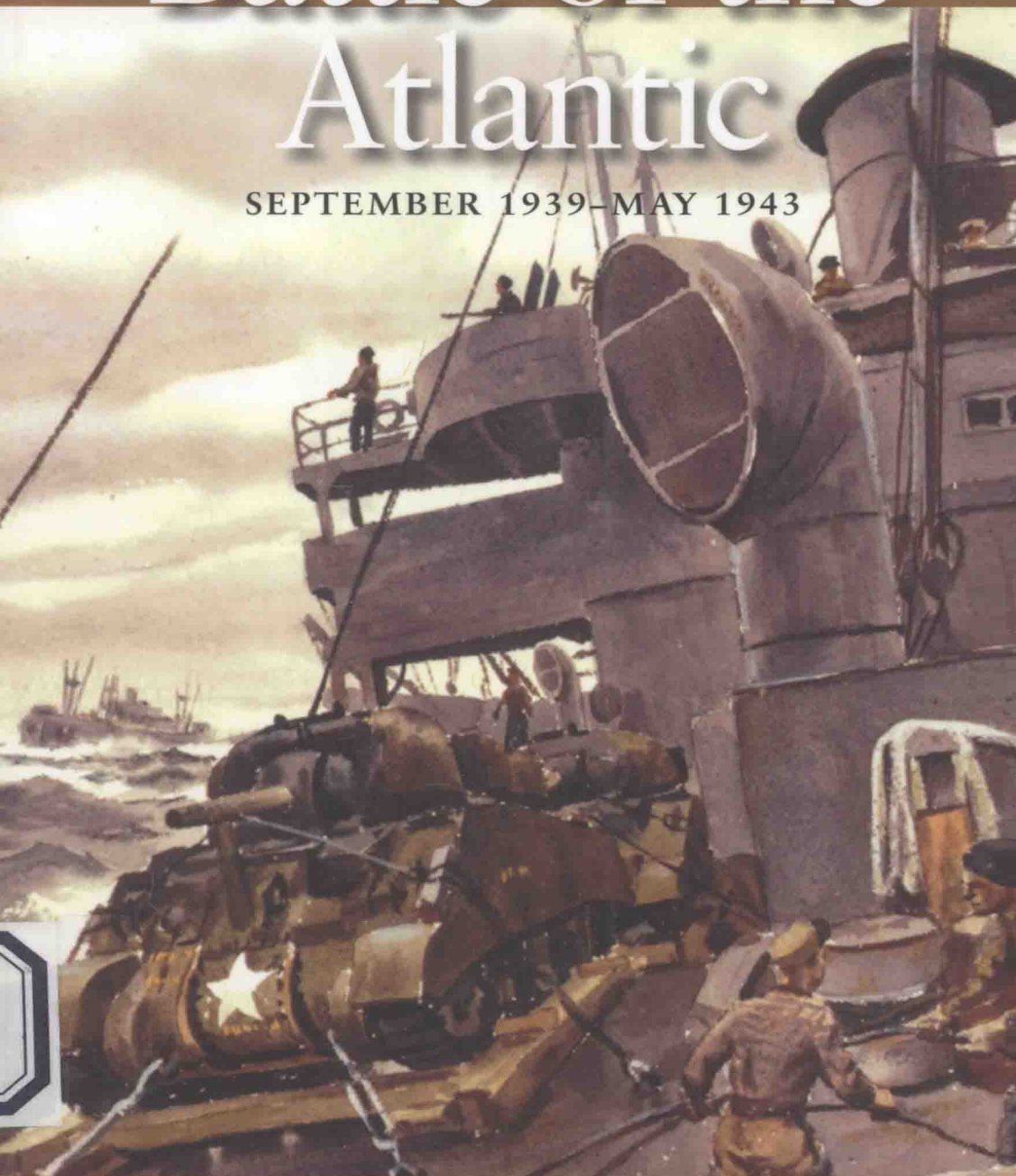


HISTORY OF UNITED STATES NAVAL OPERATIONS
IN WORLD WAR II | VOLUME 1

THE Battle of the Atlantic

SEPTEMBER 1939–MAY 1943



SAMUEL ELIOT MORISON

HISTORY OF UNITED STATES NAVAL
OPERATIONS IN WORLD WAR II

VOLUME 1

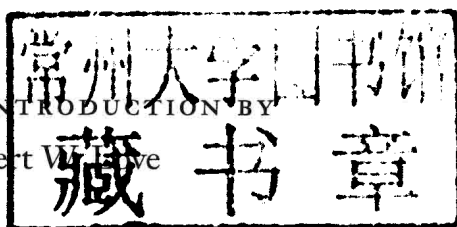
The Battle of the Atlantic

September 1939–May 1943

BY SAMUEL ELIOT MORISON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Robert W. Service



NAVAL INSTITUTE PRESS
Annapolis, Maryland

This book was brought to publication with the generous assistance of
Marguerite and Gerry Lenfest.

Naval Institute Press
291 Wood Road
Annapolis, MD 21402

© 1947 by Samuel Eliot Morison

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any
form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and
recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without
permission in writing from the publisher.

This edition published by arrangement with Little, Brown and Company,
New York, NY. All rights reserved.

First Naval Institute Press paperback edition published 2010.

New Introduction © 2010 by United States Naval Institute.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Morison, Samuel Eliot, 1887–1976.

History of United States naval operations in World War II / Samuel Eliot
Morison.

v. cm.

Originally published: Boston : Little, Brown, 1947–62.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Contents: v. 1. The Battle of the Atlantic, 1939–1943 — v. 2. Operations in
North African waters, October 1942–June 1943 — v. 3. The Rising Sun in
the Pacific, 1931–April 1942.

ISBN 978-1-59114-547-9 (v. 1 : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-59114-548-6
(v. 2 : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-59114-549-3 (v. 3 : alk. paper) 1. World
War, 1939–1945—Naval operations, American. I. Title.

D773.M6 2010

940.54'5973—dc22

2009052288

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

First printing

To
The Memory of
FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

1882–1945

President of the United States

Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy

4 March 1933–12 April 1945

Foreword

EARLY IN 1942, Samuel Eliot Morison, Jonathan Trumbull Professor of American History in Harvard University, suggested to President Roosevelt the desirability of preparing for the American people a full, accurate, and early record of the activities of the Navy in World War II; he volunteered his services in the preparation of such a record. The proposal met with the approval of Secretary Knox, and Dr. Morison was commissioned in the Naval Reserve with the sole duty of preparing a "History of United States Naval Operations in World War II."

All naval activities, afloat and ashore, were directed to make available to Captain Morison such records as he might desire to consult. The complete work, of which this volume is a part, is the result. Captain Morison has been afforded access to official documents, with full authority to discuss them with all naval personnel concerned. He has visited the various theaters of war on combat ships and has taken part in several amphibious operations and surface engagements with the enemy. The Navy Department has done everything possible to enable him to make his research exhaustive and to afford him firsthand impressions.

This work, however, is in no sense an official history. The form, style and character of the narrative are the author's own. The opinions expressed and the conclusions reached are those of Dr. Morison, and of him alone. He has been subject to no restrictions other than those imposed by the necessity of safeguarding information which might endanger national security.

It is believed that the original purpose has been well served and the work is a stirring account of the Navy's operations in World War II.



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
Washington

O this may march through endless time, immortal,
if one but tell it well. If so it be,
across the fruitful earth and o'er the sea,
shoots a bright beam of noble deeds, unquenchable.

—PINDAR, *Isthmian Ode*, iv. 40-43

Preface

MY PURPOSE in writing this work was to tell the world what the United States Navy accomplished in the greatest of all naval wars, and how it was done. The story, in the main, is one of fighting; that is what the Navy is for and what its entire effort was directed toward. I have devoted just enough space to strategic discussions, planning, organization and logistics to explain the end product — the naval operations. And when other armed services of the United States and her allies participated, I have brought them in too, although not in so great detail.

The Navy plans various works to cover other phases of the war. Rear Admiral W. R. Carter USN (Ret.), who commanded Service Squadron 10 during the war, has written the history of naval logistics afloat in the Pacific, published in 1953 as *Beans, Bullets and Black Oil*; and he is now at work on a history of American naval logistics in the Atlantic. Rear Admiral J. A. Furer USN (Ret.), who served as Coordinator of Naval Research during the war, is now preparing a history of the Navy Department's administrative experiences during World War II.

Believing that too many histories are written from the outside looking in, I or one of my assistants visited almost every theater of naval warfare and took part in as many operations as possible. In addition, an intensive research has been made in the naval archives of the United States and of allied and enemy powers; and oral evidence has been obtained from very many participants.

No history written during or shortly after the event it describes can pretend to be completely objective or even reasonably definitive. Facts that I know not will come to light; others that I discarded will be brought out and incorporated in new patterns of interpretation. Nevertheless, I believe that more is to be gained by writing in contact with the events, when most of the participants

are alive, than by waiting until the ships are broken up and the sailors have departed to wherever brave fighting men go. Historians in years to come may shoot this book full of holes; but they can never recapture the feeling of desperate urgency in our planning and preparations, of the excitement of battle, of exultation over a difficult operation successfully concluded, of sorrow for shipmates who did not live to enjoy the victory.

Feeling and seeing the thing are not the only advantage that a participant has. The historian should recreate the past for his readers, no matter how much time separates him from them, or from the events described. Perspective is an aid in giving events their true setting. Yet there is a roundness that one can only obtain on shipboard, seeing the events as they unroll, and later, "shooting the breeze" with shipmates and sailors of other ships. This saves one from the delusion common to historians, that they could have conducted the operation better. So could the admiral or general, if he had had possession of the facts and factors available to the historian. Seamen who write action reports seldom take the trouble to analyze their own minds and explain why they did thus and so; hence the historian often assumes that they knew far more than they did, and regards their estimates of the situation or their decisions as mistaken when, in view of facts in hand or legitimately apprehended, they may have been sound and wise. Also, historians are apt to overlook the tremendous influence of luck in all warfare, especially naval warfare. 'Twelve inches' difference in the course of a torpedo, a few yards' deflection in the fall of a salvo, may make the difference between victory and defeat. Historians with military experience will always be more tolerant of failure or lack of success than those without it, because they well know how slight a factor beyond his control may make or break a military commander.

On the other hand, if I confined myself to personal impressions and oral testimony this work would not be history. As rigorous a study of the written documents has been made as if this were a war of the last century. But official reports are not impeccable, and my own observations, as well as the oral testimony of

others, have been of great assistance in reconciling contradictory statements, and clearing up inconsistencies. At the same time documentary evidence has caused many of my own immediate impressions and tentative conclusions to be given the "deep six." In other words, a seaman's eye has been applied to the technique of a professional historian, but the seaman has also learned to discount the evidence of his eye.

The Introduction to this volume, numbered I of the series, was originally undertaken by Commodore Dudley W. Knox USN (Ret.), the senior historian of the United States Navy. Therein he has described both the development and the vicissitudes of the United States Navy during the twenty years between the two World Wars. A new Introduction has been written by Robert Love.

The entire History of Naval Operations, as published, consists of the following volumes:

- I. THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC, SEPTEMBER 1939-MAY 1943 (1st edition, 1947; new and revised edition, 1954.)
- II. OPERATIONS IN NORTH AFRICAN WATERS, OCTOBER 1942-JUNE 1943. (1st edition, 1947; new and revised edition, 1954.)
- III. THE RISING SUN IN THE PACIFIC. (1st edition, 1948; revised edition, 1954.)
- IV. CORAL SEA, MIDWAY AND SUBMARINE ACTIONS, MAY-AUGUST, 1942. (1st edition, 1949; revised edition, 1954.)
- V. THE STRUGGLE FOR GUADALCANAL, AUGUST 1942-FEBRUARY 1943. (1st edition, 1949; revised edition, 1954.)
- VI. BREAKING THE BISMARCK'S BARRIER, 22 JULY 1942-1 MAY 1944. (1st edition, 1950; revised edition, 1954.)
- VII. ALEUTIANS, GILBERTS AND MARSHALLS, JUNE 1942-APRIL 1944 (1st edition, 1951.)
- VIII. NEW GUINEA AND THE MARIANAS, 1944. (1st edition, 1953.)
- IX. SICILY, SALERNO AND ANZIO, 1943-1944. (1st edition, 1954.)
- X. THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC WON, MAY 1943-MAY 1945.
- XI. THE INVASION OF FRANCE AND GERMANY, 1944-1945.

- XII. LEYTE, JUNE 1944-JANUARY 1945.
- XIII. THE LIBERATION OF THE PHILIPPINES, 1944-1945.
- XIV. THE VICTORY IN THE PACIFIC, 1945.
- XV. GENERAL INDEX AND SUPPLEMENT.

The Battle of the Atlantic attempts to include all United States naval operations in that Ocean, from pole to pole; and in the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, Barents Sea and Atlantic territorial waters. The story will be continued from the middle of 1943 to the end of the war in Volume X.

The United States Navy participated in no fleet actions in the Atlantic. Apart from the *Bismarck* battle and a few minor engagements in the Barents Sea there were none in that area during the period covered by this volume. The Battle of the Atlantic was, by and large, a fight for the protection of shipping, supply and troop transport waged by the United States Atlantic Fleet and Allied Navies against Axis submarines, supporting aircraft and a few surface ships. It was essentially a war of maintaining communications with our own forces in Europe and Africa and with our overseas Allies, including Russia; an offensive development of the original policy of hemispheric defense against an Axis approach to the New World.

Only Roosevelt and Churchill, of the heads of state concerned in the war, seem to have appreciated the transcendent importance of ocean communications. In all former wars, trade was the primary reason for "keeping 'em sailing"; and as Mahan proved, that nation won who could both trade and fight. In World War II this axiom was still true over a wider periphery, but private trading for profit declined to a vanishing point. The amount and kind of commerce among the Allies was determined exclusively by military considerations — the "war effort." All shipping not used for troop transport and supply was employed in transporting immense quantities of strategic materials from widely separated islands and continents in order to forge the weapons, equip the men and build the planes, ships and armored vehicles necessary to wage a modern war. Britain virtually abandoned her traditional

trade routes in order to become a military workshop, staging point and bridgehead; America followed suit, converting factories of consumer goods to war industry plants. Neither could do less to win; for armies can no longer live off an invaded country or reach a decision with infantry weapons alone. Their standard of living has gone up with that of the world at large; soldiers, sailors and aviators have to be supplied with food, drink, tobacco, clothing and special equipment in great quantity and variety. At the same time, the adoption of automatic weapons and mechanized equipment has vastly increased the shipping space necessary to keep an army supplied with ordnance, ammunition and a variety of land and amphibious vehicles. Even Russia, fighting a desperate war of defense on land, could only make her manpower effective against Germany if supplied by sea with armor and equipment from the workshops of the United Kingdom and the United States.

Germany had the advantage of a long head start in war preparations. Her land communications were vulnerable only from the air. Hitler had built up such enormous stockpiles before 1939, German scientists had worked out so many formulas for synthetic oil, rubber and the like, and the German armies as they overran western Europe acquired so much more food and materiel, that Hitler believed he could defy the tightest sea blockade. So he could up to a certain point; but that point came after the fall of France “called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old.” Then the Germans had reason to regret their Fuehrer’s flouting of sea power and ignorance of naval strategy. Unable to reach out across the seas to obtain more strategic supplies — except for a thin trickle from the Far East in blockade-runners and submarines — they concentrated their entire naval effort on cutting the lifelines of their enemies.

Thus the Battle of the Atlantic was second to none in its influence on the outcome of the war. Yet the history of it is exceedingly difficult to relate in an acceptable literary form. For Anti-Submarine Warfare is an extremely complicated, diverse and technical subject, somewhat repetitious in its operational details.

To simplify it by merely relating a series of the more spectacular fights between escorts and U-boats would be a grave distortion of the truth. So, in order to give the reader some idea of the difficulties involved in defeating the Axis submarines, I have had to go behind naval operations in the narrow sense, and describe some of the training schools, technical devices and scientific research that helped to make brave men and gallant ships effective. Many anti-submarine operations, moreover, were conducted jointly with the United States Army Air Force, or combined with the British and Canadian Navies and Air Forces, including attached units of the French and Polish Navies.¹ In a history of the United States Navy it is not possible to devote the space to the exploits of sister services and Allies that they would deserve in a general history of the war; yet, again, it would distort the picture if nothing were said about their participation, which was essential to victory.

During the emergency of 1942–1943 a number of auxiliary and amateur forces, such as the Civil Air Patrol and Coastal Picket Patrol, were created for the protection of shipping. As these represented a sincere effort on the part of civilians to help the Navy and the cause, a chapter has been devoted to them.

Although the United States Navy began indirect participation in the Atlantic struggle several months in advance of the formally declared war by Germany, the British and Canadians fought the lonely battle for almost two years. Hence I have begun this volume by describing the convoy system established in the fall of 1939 by the naval authorities in Ottawa and London. And as escort-of-convoy was the first belligerent service assumed by the United States Navy, that was the first subject that I pursued after receiving my commission in May 1942.

¹The operations of the United States Coast Guard are, however, included with those of the Navy, because President Roosevelt, as authorized by Act of Congress, directed the Coast Guard to "operate as a part of the Navy, subject to the orders of the Secretary of the Navy," on 1 Nov. 1941. It was turned back to the Treasury Department by executive order of President Truman effective 1 Jan. 1946.

In order to obtain the necessary background of experience, I was ordered to temporary duty on the staff of Captain John B. Heffernan, commanding Destroyer Squadron 13, and sailed in his flagship, U.S.S. *Buck*, to the United Kingdom and back in July 1942 with Task Force 37 escorting Convoy AT-17. Captain Heffernan gave me most valuable indoctrination in modern naval warfare and escort-of-convoy duty. I then caught up with anti-submarine history by obtaining temporary duty with the Anti-Submarine Warfare Unit of the Atlantic Fleet at Boston, then under the direction of Commander Thomas L. Lewis. The same subject was pursued at Eastern Sea Frontier Headquarters, and in the Convoy and Routing and Anti-Submarine Warfare Sections of the Navy Department. After making fairly satisfactory progress, I felt obliged to depart for Africa in October 1942. Writing the history of Operation "Torch" and a subsequent tour of temporary duty in the Pacific prevented my returning to the Atlantic battle before the summer of 1943.

By that time the peak of German success had passed, and the whole set-up of anti-submarine warfare had changed, with the creation of the Tenth Fleet. I therefore returned to the Pacific while my assistant, Ensign Henry Salomon Jr., USNR, proceeded to Bermuda, the West Indies and Brazil to gather information on the war in the Caribbean and South Atlantic. We both returned to the United States early in 1944, and devoted the next few months to completing the first draft of this volume. During that stage of the work, Captain P. R. Heineman, commanding the Anti-Submarine Warfare Unit Atlantic Fleet, and Commander C. E. Ames USN R, in the Convoy and Routing Section Tenth Fleet, were particularly helpful. Additional information was obtained from time to time on visits to Headquarters Operational Training Command Atlantic Fleet, Subchaser School at Miami, Sound Schools at Key West and San Diego, Headquarters Gulf, Eastern and Caribbean Sea Frontiers. And I acquired more experience of convoy duty and anti-submarine warfare in November–December 1944 while crossing by the southern route with Convoy UGS-61 as a tempo-

rary member of *the staff of the escort commander, Captain W. A. P. Martin, in U. S. Coast Guard Cutter Campbell.*

Although personally I have seldom passed a dull moment at sea, whether in peace or in war, in sail or in steam, it must be admitted that for most sailors and aviators the Holmesian dictum "war is an organized bore" has a particular application to this Battle of the Atlantic. It could not be otherwise when by far the greater part of anti-submarine warfare consisted in searching and waiting for a fight that very rarely took place; yet every escort or patrol ship was supposed to be completely alert from the time she passed the sea buoy until she returned to harbor. Visual lookouts became weary with reporting floating boxes and bottles as periscopes; deck officers became exasperated with the vagaries of merchant seamen; they in turn got "gold braid" in their hair; and the monotonous, never-ending "ping"-ing of the echo-ranging sound gear had the cumulative effect of a jungle tom-tom. Officers and bluejackets in escort vessels, coastguardsmen on their frigid offshore and Greenland patrols, aviators searching the sea lanes for submarines or survivors, experienced excruciating boredom, despite the need of constant alertness; and if no action materialized for weeks on end, as often happened, a feeling of frustration made the monotony almost unbearable for young men. One cannot write a history of things that do not happen. So I wish to emphasize here the ninety-and-nine moments of devoted, continuous vigilance on the part of ships, planes and men, as against the one moment of action (always welcome, often joyful, but sometimes tragic) that makes the stuff of operational history.

During visits to London in 1942, 1944 and 1951, I made fruitful connections with Captain A. C. Dewar RN and his successor Vice Admiral Roger M. Bellairs RN, who headed the Historical Section of the Admiralty. We have continued to exchange information ever since. I have also received much assistance from the historical staff of the Royal Canadian Navy under Dr. Gilbert Tucker.

The German Admiralty Records were seized by United States armed forces shortly after the surrender of Germany and taken to

London, where they have been studied and, to some extent, translated by British and American military men. Copies of these were made available to me early in 1946, when Lieutenant Commander Henry D. Reck USNR of my staff, in addition to his other duties, applied himself to analyzing and abstracting the relevant portions of the German records.

Since 1950, the study of these German records has been resumed by Lieutenant Philip K. Lundeberg USNR, at the same time that he prepared the groundwork for Volume X, in which the Battle of the Atlantic will be continued to its victorious conclusion.

German submarine logs are not uniformly reliable. Most of those consulted appear to have been written up after return to base from rough notes, memory and guesswork, and from knowledge received ashore; bluff and bravado characterize many. On the other hand, the War Diary of the German Submarine Command is on the whole a realistic and reliable source, in which submarine movements and losses are accurately recorded. By comparing these with the known facts of our own and Allied attacks on submarines, it is possible to reach a reasonably accurate score of kills, but not of damage. The Navy's Press Release of 27 June 1946, "German, Japanese and Italian Submarine Losses in World War II," is probably as accurate a list as we shall ever have.

Mr. Reck and Mr. Salomon were my assistants in preparing this volume. Lieutenant J. Willard Hurst USNR collected material for me on the North Russia convoys, the Merchant Marine and the Naval Armed Guards. The charts were executed by Elinor M. Ball, Specialist Wave 1st Class. The checking and some of the typing were done by Chief Yeoman Donald R. Martin USNR; the rest of the typing by Antha E. Card, Wave Yeoman 1st Class, and Harry E. Foster, Yeoman 2nd Class. At least a score of officers of the United States and Royal Navies who had special knowledge of the events or movements described have read the whole or parts of the text and provided many corrections and elucidations. I am particularly grateful to two Directors of Naval History, Rear Admirals Vincent R. Murphy and John B. Heffernan; to Commodore Dudley W. Knox, their predecessor, and to several

members of his staff, notably Captain John W. McElroy uszvil and Commander Walter M. Whitehill USNR, as well as the efficient Naval Archivist, Miss Loretta I. MacCrindle.

Captain McElroy, after several active tours of sea duty in World War II and the Korean War, undertook in 1952 to prepare this revised edition. He weighed and checked the large number of corrections and suggestions for improvement that had flowed in since the first edition was published, and supplied other corrections and improvements from his own knowledge.

In retrospect, the person I feel most grateful to is the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt. For he appreciated the value of a history of this sort, as soon as I had called the need of it to his attention; he commissioned me to undertake it, and even during the war found time to talk with me on the subject. My admiration for the quality of his leadership of our armed forces has, if anything, increased with the lapse of years. So I have dedicated this revised Volume I, and the series, to his memory.

SAMUEL E. MORISON

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

1947 and 1953

List of Illustrations

(All photographs not otherwise described are Official
United States Navy)

Admiral Ernest J. King USN	Frontispiece
N.O.B. Bermuda: Secretary Knox and Admiral King on board U.S.S. <i>Augusta</i> , September 1941	36
–Air View of Bermuda, 26 September 1942	
United States Naval Stations: Submarine base and airfield, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, June 1942	37
–Naval Air Station, St. Lucia, May 1942	
Northern Patrols: <i>Benson</i> class destroyer patrolling Grand Banks off Newfoundland, autumn 1941	60
–U.S.C.G.C. <i>Amarock</i> at entrance Inland Passage, Southern Greenland	
Greenland Patrol: Freighter and Coast Guard Tug at Kungnat Bay, February 1943	61
–Cutter <i>Northland</i> on mission to destroy German weather-reporting station, Northern Greenland	
The Atlantic Conference, August 1941: The President boards H.M.S. <i>Prince of Wales</i> from U.S.S. <i>McDougal</i>	70
–Group on deck of <i>Prince of Wales</i> following Divine Service	
“Newfyjohn” and Argentina: St. Johns, Newfoundland	71
–United States Naval Operating Base and Naval Air Station, Argentina, about 1 September 1941	
Iceland: “Camp Snafu” of Navy Patrol Squadron 74 near Reykjavik, 1941	92
–Hvalfjordur Anchorage, about October 1941	