

8TH GRADE LESSONS/ACTIVITIES: WWII

WWII (Reading level 8.8)

Essential Standard 8.H.2 - Understand the ways in which conflict, compromise and negotiation have shaped North Carolina and the United States.

Essential Standard 8.H.3 – Understand the factors that contribute to change and continuity in North Carolina and the United States.

Essential Standard 8.G.1 – Understand the geographic factors that influences North Carolina and the United States.

Essential Standard 8.E.1 – Understand the economic activities of North Carolina and the United States.

WWII on the Outer Banks

Early morning before sunrise on January 19, 1942, an earthquake-like tremble was felt by residents on Hatteras Island. An orange fireball lit up the horizon looking out toward the ocean. Black smoke filled the night sky.

Just seven miles from Avon, one of seven Hatteras Island towns, a German U-boat torpedoed the U.S. freighter, *City of Atlanta*. The explosion sank the ship killing all but three of the 47 crew. Hours later, the same German submarine attacked two more ships. Less than six weeks earlier, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The violence of World War II now arrived on America's East Coast and North Carolina's beaches.

This wasn't the first time U-boats came to U.S. waters. During World War I, three German subs sank ten ships off the North Carolina coast to demonstrate their naval power. By 1942, U-boats were larger, faster, and more deadly. This time their presence in American waters meant war.

Within hours of the U-boat attack, debris and oil began washing up on the beaches. Over the next six months, along the East Coast and the Gulf of Mexico, at least sixty-five U-boats attacked American and British merchant ships. The ships were carrying important supplies to the Allies in Europe. This included fuel, food, lumber, metals, rubber, and cotton. By July of 1942, 397 ships were sunk or damaged. More than 5,000 people were killed.

The greatest concentration of U-boat attacks happened off North Carolina's Outer Banks, a busy shipping lane. So many ships were attacked that the waters near Cape Hatteras became known as "Torpedo Junction." Few people other than the government and the local residents knew what was happening at the coast. The U.S. military and government authorities didn't want people to worry. News reports of enemy U-boats near the coast were held back from the public for security reasons. Hatteras Islanders got used to the explosions, smoky skies and oil soaked beaches. With the ocean filled with oil, swimming was a challenge. Locals would scrub their legs and feet with kerosene to remove the oil. In 1942, about 150 million gallons of oil spilled into the sea and on the beaches.

It was a fearful time for residents. People worried that German spies would sneak ashore. Strangers to the area became suspect. A village postmistress was a secret coast watcher for the U.S. Navy. She kept an eye out for unusual activities and reported them to the local Coast Guard.

The U.S. military increased their patrols and began to prevent the U-boat attacks. "Blimps from a station at Elizabeth City searched for U-boats from high above, while private yachts and sailboats with two-way radios were sent out into the ocean to patrol and harass German warships. The military set up top-secret submarine listening and tracking facilities at places like Ocracoke to detect passing U-boats." (Source: www.leanrnc.org)

People who lived along the coast turned off their house lights at night and even covered their vehicle headlights to not be visible from the sea. An official blackout was eventually ordered in August 1942.

On April 14, 1942, a German U-boat was sunk by the U.S. navy sixteen miles southeast of Nags Head. Within months, three more U-boats were sunk along the coast by the U.S. military. North Carolina's total of four sunken U-

boats represents the most of any state. By July, Germany's U-boat commander became discouraged. He sent his remaining warships to the northern Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. Even though Germany failed to win the war, they considered their attack a success.

Sunken in the Graveyard of the Atlantic are the remains of at least 60 ships and unexploded mines, torpedoes, and depth charges. On Hatteras and Ocracoke islands are cemeteries containing the graves of British sailors who lost their lives in the Graveyard of the Atlantic. (Source: www.learnnc.org)

Questions

1. Why would the Germans choose the waters off North Carolina to target ships?
2. How did the bombing of ships affect the environment?
3. Explain how the war offshore affected the island people.
4. What precautions did islanders have to take to safeguard themselves during this period in history?
5. What effect would the bombing of freighters have on the American war effort?
6. What efforts did the American military put in place to gain ground in the war along the North Carolina Coast.
7. Other than national security, can you think of a reason why the U.S. government didn't want the American public to know about the U-boat action off the coast?

Activity

Researching WWII Vessel Casualties

Purpose: Building upon the WWII Lesson, drive home how harrowing shipping was off the NC Outer Banks and the nature of the actions displayed by both the Americans and the Germans, and the job of a researcher to search for related information and create a database.

Project: Research these Allied and Enemy Vessels that sunk during WWII off the North Carolina Outer Banks. Create a data sheet that lists the type of vessel, captain, tonnage, date built, builder, owner, home port, cargo, date of loss and cause, number of crew and/or passengers onboard, number of lives lost, interesting notes. Sources:

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<http://www.nc-wreckdiving.com/WRECKS/DIXIE/DIXIE.HTML>,

https://monitor.noaa.gov/shipwrecks/dixie_arrow.html, <https://uboat.net/allies/merchants/ship/1475.html>,

<https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/wwii/wwii-atlantic/battle-of-the-atlantic/atlantic-convoys/1942/march-16-dixie-arrow.html>,

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<https://monitor.noaa.gov/shipwrecks/u-85.html>

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