

## Submarine Warfare World War I

Submarine warfare in World War I was partly a fight between German [U-Boats](#) and Atlantic supply convoys bound for Great Britain. British and Allied submarines conducted wide spread operations in the Baltic, North Sea, Atlantic, Mediterranean and Black Seas. Only a few actions occurred outside of the wider European-Atlantic theatre. German submarine attacks on allied merchant ships gave a direct cause for Americans to enter the war in April 1917.

All participants were supposed to abide by the [Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907](#) but this was found to be impracticable for submarines. Initially German submarines did attempt to comply with the [Prize Rules](#) but then went to [unrestricted submarine warfare](#). American diplomatic pressure forced the Germans to stop this for a while but in January 1917 declared a War Zone around the British Isles and sank up to a quarter of shipping entering it, until escorted convoys were introduced. <sup>[1]</sup> The sinking of the [Pathfinder](#) was the first combat victory of a modern submarine,<sup>[2]</sup> and the exploits of [U-9](#), which sank three British cruisers in under an hour, establishing the submarine as an important new component of naval warfare.<sup>[3]</sup>

German submarines were used to lay mines and to attack iron ore shipping in the Baltic. The [British submarine flotilla in the Baltic](#) operated in support of the Russians until the Russian-German Pact.

During the war, the British invested efforts in developing a submarine that could operate in conjunction with a battleship fleet - the "Fleet Submarine". To achieve the necessary 20 knots (surfaced) the [K class submarines](#) were steam powered. In practice the K class were a constant problem and could not operate effectively with a fleet.

### Definition:

Unrestricted submarine warfare occurs when submarines attack merchant ships without warning rather than following prize regulations. First used during [World War I](#), this type of warfare was highly controversial and deemed a breach of the rules of war. Resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare by Germany in early 1917 was a key reason the United States entered the conflict.

Submarine warfare played a major part in World War 1 and was just as important as all the trench battles on the Eastern Front. In most cases gained much more victories and losses in a much quicker fashion than the trenches. The battles in the trenches were long and resulted in much more loss of life while the naval battles in most cases helped bring about the end of the war. They played the part of starving out Germany and bringing a halt to the war just by barricading trade. If not for the use of submarines in the war it would have been a much longer war and would probably have resulted in complete destruction of Europe. Also if Germans had not used the submarine when it did America's entering in the war would have been prolonged and the allies would probably have lost.

At the outset of [World War One](#), German U-Boats were not very effective. Although they caused the officers of the British Royal Navy to become rather paranoid of them, they remained ineffective when it came to blockading of Britain. The primary reason this was the case were the

[prize rules](#). The prize rules were a series of international agreements that stated that merchant ships could not be fired upon without warning; merchant ships could be sunk by enemy ships if and only if the crews would be taken aboard or they could get to shore on their own via lifeboat. The prize rules were written without [submarines](#) in mind; the confined spaces of submarines allowed for no excess passengers, and the principle advantage of the submarine was the element of surprise. By and large, [Germany](#) followed these rules throughout [1914](#).

In 1915, however, the prize rules were abandoned. Germany believed that [Britain](#) was violating certain naval agreements, so they needed not to worry about the prize rules. [Unrestricted submarine warfare](#) was thus begun, and it was a huge success for Germany; hundreds of thousands of tons of Allied ships were sunk each month. It should be noted, Germany, although having a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, did not want to bring neutral powers into the war. Germany went so far as to print warnings in major newspapers of neutral powers warning against boarding certain ships, such as an advertisement printed in the [New York Times](#).

On May 7, 1915, a German [U-Boat](#) sank the passenger ship RMS [Lusitania](#). In the attack, 1,198 were killed, 128 of them American. The [United States](#) was outraged; in order for to quell the outrage, Germany agreed to not attack passenger ships. Much more care was taken in what ships were attacked, however, the care Germany took was not enough. The sinkings of the [Arabic](#) on August 19, 1915 and the [Sussex](#) on March 24, 1916, with the latter attack killing fifty Americans, nearly pushed the isolationist United States into war. President [Woodrow Wilson](#) thus issued to Germany an ultimatum, either Germany immediately stop their unrestricted submarine warfare, or the US would enter the war on the Allied side. Chancellor [Bethmann-Hollweg](#) of Germany, backed down, he feared Germany could not deal with another power. Many of the Generals of the [Kriegsmarine](#) believed Bethmann-Hollweg was in error, in 1917, however, as Germany grew weaker, they had their way.

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