

CANADA'S U-BOAT

Shortly after VE-Day,
U-190 surrendered to
the Royal Canadian Navy

"My-boat men!" announced *Kriegsmarine Großadmiral* (grand admiral)-turned-leader of Nazi Germany Karl Dönitz in a May 4, 1945, radio communiqué, "A crushing [Allied] material superiority has forced us into a narrow area. A continuation of our fight...is no longer possible. Undefeated and spotless you lay down your arms...."

A food- and fuel-depleted *U-190*, a Type IXC/40 U-boat launched in June 1942, was travelling to any still-German-controlled port in Norway when it heard the news. *Oberleutnant zur See* Hans-Erwin Reith promptly relayed the order to jettison all remaining ammunition into the Atlantic Ocean.

Missing from the arsenal was an acoustic torpedo, which had struck HMCS *Esquimalt* on April 16, a mere three weeks earlier.

Sunk just outside Halifax harbour, some 44 crew perished.

The minesweeper was the last Canadian vessel lost to enemy action during the Second World War. It was also only the second—and last—kill credited to *U-190*.

"For us, the war was over," recalled German chief engineer Werner Hirschmann.

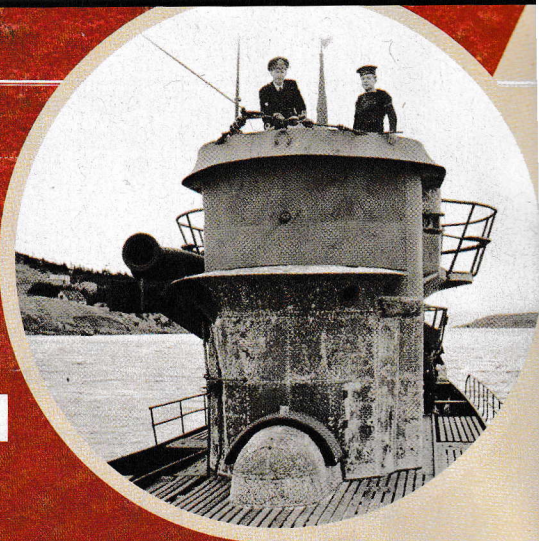
On May 11, HMCS *Victoriaville* and HMCS *Thorlock* intercepted *U-190* some 800 kilometres off Cape Race, Nfld. Thirty Canadian sailors boarded it, relieving most of its 54-strong crew, excluding those required to manoeuvre it to port.

Twenty-two-year-old Hirschmann was among the German sailors put to that task.

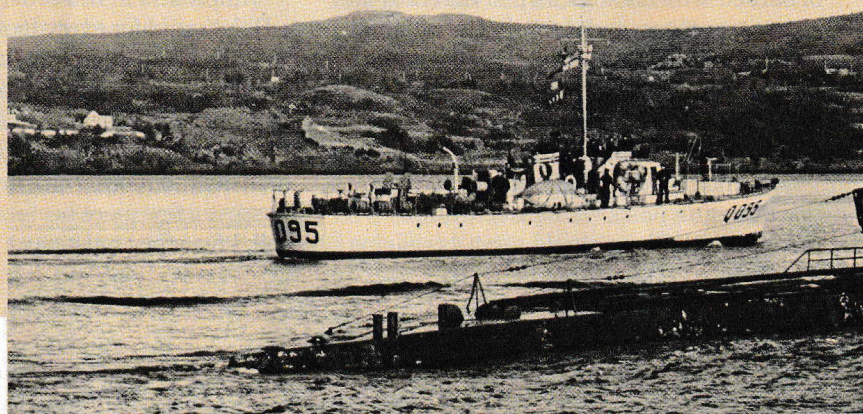
They were the lucky ones, along with the 90 U-boats escorted into U.K. ports by the end of May, another 47 into German and Norwegian ports, five into U.S. harbours and two to Canada. Meanwhile, of the 40,900 German sailors sent to sea in nearly 1,000 U-boats, an estimated 28,000 were killed and some 700 boats destroyed—an operational loss of about 70 per cent.

"In war's final year," said Ted Barris, author of *Battle of the Atlantic: Gauntlet to Victory*, "life expectancy of a *Kriegsmarine* submariner was fewer than 100 days."

Of course, the Allies had suffered, too, including 24 Canadian



HMCS *ML 095* escorts *U-190* near Bay Bulls, Nfld., on May 14, 1945 (BELOW).





The White Ensign flies above the *Kriegsmarine* flag on *U-190* near St. John's, Nfld., in June 1945.

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is no longer possible.
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warships sunk and 2,024 sailors dead. Hirschmann expected the sinking of *Esquimalt* to not be easily forgiven.

Despite this, the chief engineer was surprised by the reception he received from his adversaries,

who proudly flew the White Ensign from *U-190*, but otherwise treated him and his fellow crew members with respect.

U-190 docked at Bay Bulls, Nfld., on May 14, marking its official surrender and the beginning of



Albert Frederick Tigerstedt/DND/LAC/PA-134169; Edward Wellington Dinsmore/DND/LAC/PA-145577; Edward Wellington Dinsmore/DND/LAC/PA-145588

BY THE NUMBERS

6

Patrols carried out by *U-190*

7,605

Tons of Allied shipping sunk by *U-190*

19

Minutes it took for *U-190* to sink near *Esquimalt's* wreck

62

Years that the Crow's Nest Officers' Club has housed *U-190's* periscope

Hirschmann's time as a prisoner of war. The U-boat was soon commissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy as HMCS *U-190* and embarked on a publicity tour.

After two years, however, it had outlived its usefulness and became fodder for target practice.

On Oct. 21, 1947, Canadian naval authorities launched Operation Scuttled, reportedly to train post-war recruits. Towing HMCS *U-190* to the scene of *Esquimalt's* sinking, warships and aircraft delivered a symbolic *coup de grâce*. Thus, predator and prey came to rest together.

Hirschmann later immigrated to Canada and became friends with *Esquimalt* survivor Joe Wilson. On Nov. 7, 2019, the former German chief engineer died at the age of 96, by then a Canadian citizen.

Since 1963, *U-190's* periscope has been preserved at the Crow's Nest Officers' Club in St. John's, N.L.

"Our artifacts have proven to be a pathway in the reconciliation process," said the club's Gary Green, "and seeing veterans from both sides connect over them is a truly moving experience." **1**