



WOMPATUCK NEWS

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Memories of the Bridge at Heron Pond

"I was going through some old photos I had stored in a shoebox. Yes, they were prints. I'm one of those guys that prefer paper and pencil to computer, vinyl LPs to MP3s and film to digital, but that's me, I guess. In the box I found a nice autumn shot of a footbridge over a small pond. I recognized it. This is that old catwalk in Wompatuck, I remembered. I wanted to know more.

"I knew it was Heron pond and that the bridge was no longer there. But who built it and who took it down? I contacted Wompatuck State Park Supervisor Steve Gammon. Steve said, 'YEAH, I built that thing back in 1976!' I pondered why I called it a catwalk. It was neither here nor there and certainly not official. Steve added that it never had a title but referred to it as the 'bridge to nowhere' – since the end point was easily accessed by a trail.

"Upon further conversation with Steve, I learned a little more about the bridge. The project began as part of the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) in '76. The YCC program was abandoned in the early stages. With all the materials on site, Steve and some of the park staff decided to still build the bridge. The crew built two "cribs" of utility poles with bases and upright supports. The cribs were floated out into Heron pond, positioned and filled with rocks. Once filled, the cribs sank into place, creating the underwater support system. From these supports the visible part of the bridge was built (see photo).



Heron Pond bridge

"Steve remembers doing a lot of maintenance on the bridge over the years. A few years ago, it was determined to be unsafe for use, needed too much repair and was removed. 'We didn't think it would last one winter and it lasted 25 or so years!' Steve reflected. This photo was taken around 1995, give or take a couple of years.

"One memory I have of the bridge is with my dog Banjo. He was just a pup in '99 or '00. We worked our way over to the pond on our hike. I decided to visit the catwalk. Banjo didn't think too much of Steve's handiwork. With the bridge nearing the end of its life, Banjo was probably right. As I walked across, Banjo sat and cried. He's a vocal dog if you never met him. Sitting just off the bridge, he cried

Bridge at Herron Pond continued on page 2



Courtesy of Fred Benson



Courtesy of National Archives



Courtesy of National Archives

Top photo: U-853 sunk two ships off New England coast. Bottom photos: anti-submarine Hedgehog projectiles before and after firing. Hedgehogs were produced at Cohasset Annex.

“Battle of the Atlantic”

When World War II Came to New England Shores

By Jim Rose, FOW News Editor and Historian

As New Englanders honor Memorial Day, most think World War II took place on some other continent – “over there” – either Europe or the Pacific. Few realize enemy action took place a few miles off shore.

Germany declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941, four days after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Nazi submarines (also called U-boats) struck the U.S. East Coast in early January 1942 and sank Allied ships at the rate of one every four hours. During the first six months, 500 ships were sunk in the western Atlantic.

On June 12, 1942, the U-87 crept into Boston Harbor and mined the entrance. Luckily, because of poor placement, no ships were sunk. However, the sub sank two ships off Provincetown, killing 93 men. U-boats also mined the waters of New York, Chesapeake Bay and Florida.

New England and the rest of the country were ill prepared for the first U-boat attacks. In terms of ships sunk and lives

lost, the beginning of the “Battle of the Atlantic” was a greater disaster than Pearl Harbor. New England lost nine ships during the early months of battle.

Horst von Schroeter, former watch officer of the U-123, remembers the action off the U.S. coast during 1942 as a time of anguish as well as elated victory. “I remember the night we sank two tankers in a very short time, perhaps within one hour,” said von Schroeter. “There was no special danger or risk present. No anti-submarine defense to prevent us from sinking those poor ships that ran into our torpedoes. I think for men going to sea, it was always a terrible sight to see a ship sinking. Never mind if it was our intention or an accident. But on the other hand, it was our job, our duty to sink ships.”



von Schroeter

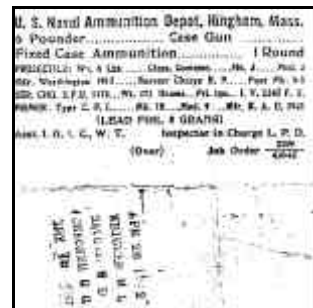
Losses decreased after August 1942 when American cities enforced blackouts, **'Battle of the Atlantic'** continued on page 2



Map of U-853 and Blackpoint wrecks



Blackpoint



Hingham inspection certificate

“Battle of the Atlantic” (continued from page 1)

radio communication was controlled and the convoy system put into operation. The Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot and Cohasset Annex became the major source of ordnance for the Navy’s Atlantic Fleet. The “Depot” worked shifts around the clock to meet war’s demands.

Veteran George Bartlett of Hingham reflects back to his homeland security duties, “I started out the war as a coastal observer and shore guard. After that, I transferred to Ordnance at the Annex. We all did our part. I remember seeing one sub in 1943 prowling the waters off Brant Rock looking for prey. As soon as I gave the alert, it disappeared. U-boats were always on the prowl. Boston Harbor and the depot perimeter were constantly patrolled by guard boats and watchmen looking for any security breaches.”



George Bartlett

Anna Cookson of Plaistow, New Hampshire, who worked at the Depot in administration said, “The Depot was a beehive of activity during the war. There were over 2,000 civilians and 1,100 sailors and marines involved there. Security was tight and safety was paramount. Civilian planes weren’t al-



Anna Cookson

lowed to fly over the depot. We always met or exceeded our production quota on time.”

Hingham’s Louise Mabel recalls some of the demanding work, “I loved working at the Annex. I not only assembled rockets and detonators but also worked as a welder. The women were just as good as the men getting the ammo out. We also provided ordnance for the British. I made a lot of great friends here and worked nights as well as the day shift.”



Louise Mabel

The tide turned against U-boats in 1943 when more effective anti-submarine tactics and weaponry were introduced. By 1944, more U-boats were sunk than merchant ships.

Not only did the enemy sink ships, but they also landed spies. The U-1230 sent ashore two intelligence agents inside Bar Harbor, Maine at Hancock Point on November 29, 1944. Their mission was to disrupt the Manhattan Project (atomic bomb) and gather information. The saboteurs were caught the following month but the sub did manage to torpedo and sink the Canadian freighter *Cornwallis* off Mount Desert Rock, Maine, killing 44 of its crew. Enemy agents were also put ashore on Long Island and Florida.

Even to war’s end, U-boats patrolled New England waters hunting for Allied ships. On April 23, 1945, the U-853 sank the sub chaser *USS Eagle* five miles off Cape Elizabeth, Maine, killing 49 sailors. On May 5, 1945, three days before Germany surrendered, the U-853 also sent to the bottom a coal freighter *Blackpoint* two and a quarter miles off Point Judith, Rhode Island, killing 12 crewmen. The following day, the U.S. Navy sank the U-853 with all hands on board in Block Island Sound.

Today, sport divers frequently explore the wrecks of the U-853 and *Blackpoint*. During a 2002 survey of the *Blackpoint*’s remains, a local scuba diver found a five-inch shell for the stern-mounted deck gun. An ammunition inspection certificate from the Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot (see photo above) floated out of the shell after being separated from the projectile. Arming the merchant fleet by the Navy shows the high level of threat to the U.S. coast during that time.

World War II cost Germany two thirds of its 1,162 U-boats and 28,962 of the 39,000 sailors who manned them. U-boats sank 13 ships off New England that resulted in 254 deaths and 457 rescued. U-boats sank a total of 2,979 merchant ships during the war, killing more than 6,000 American and 30,000 British mariners. ■

Bridge at Herron Pond (continued from page 1)

and cried. He didn’t know about the trail around the other side. I was just about to step off the far end of the bridge when I hear SPLOOOSH. Banjo chose to swim the channel rather than cross the bridge! He’s a good boy.

“So, I guess I have my answers about the old bridge to nowhere at Heron Pond. Now back to that shoebox of old film. I know I have a Super 8 reel of Buster Keaton in there somewhere.”

Andy Mills, FOW member



Eagle project bunker sign



Bunker garden