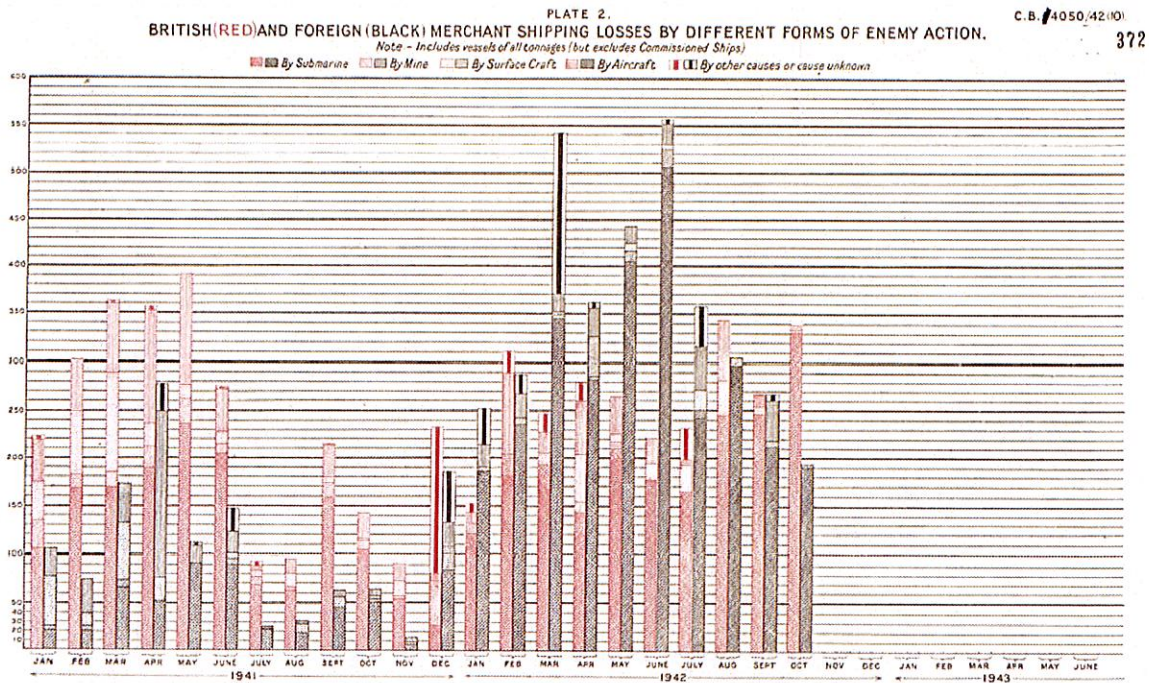


ATLANTIC 1939-1945: THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

Source A: Graph to show Allied shipping losses and causes of loss, 1941-42

Catalogue ref: MFQ 586/7/372

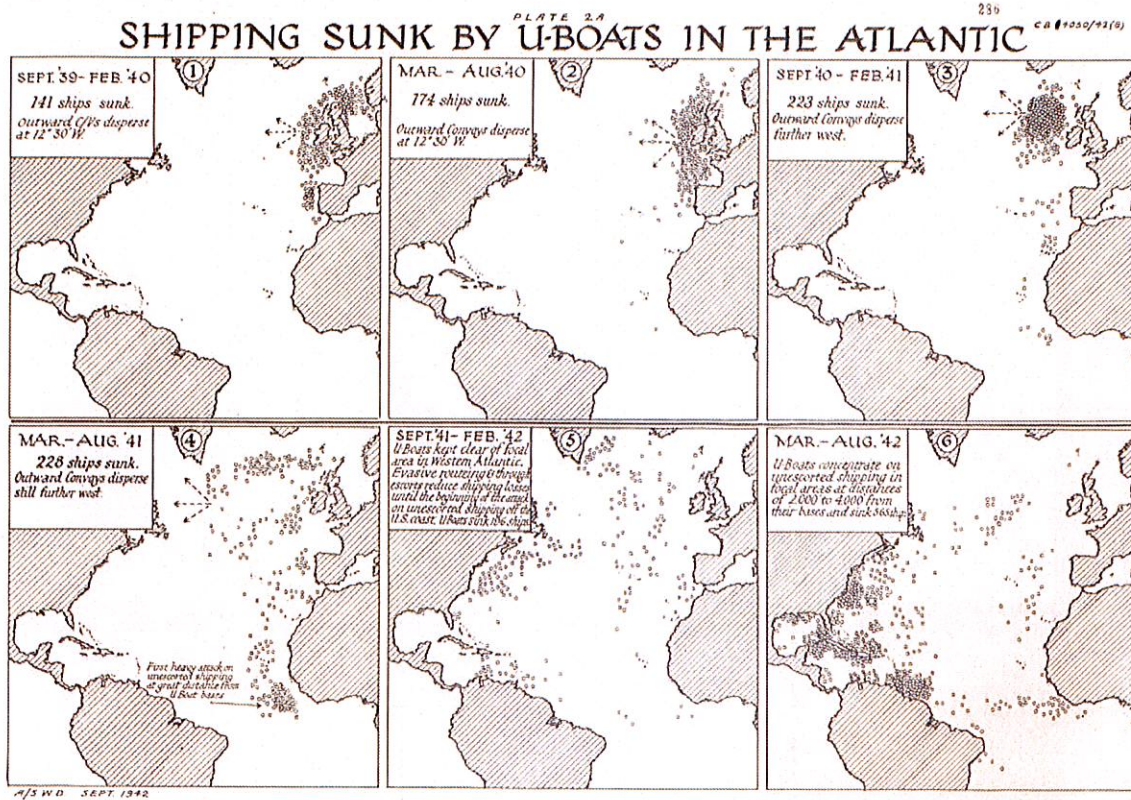


A S W DIVISION, NOVEMBER 1942

ATLANTIC 1939-1945: THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

Source B: Chart to show the location of Allied shipping losses, 1941-42

Catalogue ref: MFQ 586/5/286



ATLANTIC 1939–1945: THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC**What is this source?**

The Royal Navy produced both sources. They show how serious the situation was in the Battle of the Atlantic in 1941–42.

No details are entered for 1943 because the graph (Source a) was completed in 1942. This does not mean that there were no losses for that year!

What's the background to this source?

From 1940 onwards the greatest danger for Britain in WW2 was that German forces could cut off supplies of troops, food, medicine and equipment from Canada and the USA. This was exactly what the Germans tried to do. This campaign became known as the Battle of the Atlantic. The Germans used submarines (U-boats), aircraft and surface ships to attack shipping bound for Britain.

The years 1941 and 1942 were the worst years in the Battle of the Atlantic. In 1941 they lost 1300 ships and in 1942 they lost 1661 ships.

It's worth knowing that...

By late 1942 Britain was only able to import about one third of the goods it normally imported in peacetime.

In January 1943 the Royal Navy only had two months worth of oil left to supply its ships.

How will you use this source?

1. Study **Source a**. Find the heaviest months for British shipping losses.
2. Which weapons used by the Germans seemed to do most damage?
3. What does **Source b** tell us about German tactics in the Battle of the Atlantic?
4. Is it possible to see links between both sources?
5. Would these sources have been useful to navy commanders?
6. Would it be fair to say these sources show that Britain's situation in 1942 was serious, or do you think desperate is a more accurate word?
7. Does this source help you to explain why the Battle of the Atlantic was so significant?

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A telegram sent by US President Roosevelt to Prime Minister Churchill, November 1943

Catalogue ref: PREM 3/413/4

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

OUR OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION AND NAVY DEPARTMENT RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT, WITH WHICH I AGREE:

[1. DURING THE MONTHS OF AUGUST, SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER APPROXIMATELY 60 UBOATS WERE DESTROYED. THIS BRINGS TO MORE THAN 150 THE NUMBER OF UBOATS DESTROYED DURING THE LAST SIX MONTHS. THE RECORD OF THE LAST THREE MONTHS IS PARTICULARLY GRATIFYING BECAUSE DURING MOST OF THIS PERIOD FEWER UBOATS WERE OPERATING. FEWER TARGETS WERE PRESENTED FOR OUR AIR AND SEA FORCES.

2. DURING AUGUST, SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER MORE UBOATS WERE DESTROYED THAN ALLIED MERCHANT SHIPS WERE SUNK BY UBOAT ACTION. THE RATIO OF UBOAT TO MERCHANT SHIP ATTRITION DURING OCTOBER WAS MORE SATISFACTORY THAN IN ANY PREVIOUS MONTH. IN FACT, OUR TONNAGE LOSSES FROM ALL CAUSES IN OCTOBER WERE THE LOWEST OF ANY MONTH OF THE WAR.

What is this source?

This source is part of a series of telegrams which President Roosevelt of the USA and Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent each other during the course of the Battle of the Atlantic.

Roosevelt and Churchill had a close relationship that probably helped effective cooperation in the battle.

What's the background to this source?

During the Battle of the Atlantic German U-Boats and aircraft tried to cut off Britain's supply lines across the Atlantic. The years 1941 and 1942 were the

ATLANTIC 1939-1945: THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

worst years in the Battle of the Atlantic. In 1941 the British and their Allies lost 1300 ships and in 1942 they lost 1661 ships. By late 1942 Britain was only able to import about one third of the goods it normally imported in peacetime.

The tide began to turn in 1943. At that time British code breakers were able to read many German naval signals. There were also effective new weapons against U-Boats such as depth charges.

It's worth knowing that...

One of the key elements in turning the tide against the U-boats was the development of long-range aircraft that could spot the U-boats using specially developed radar. These could direct escort ships to attack the U-boats or they could attack the U-boats themselves.

Another key factor was the development of the Liberty Ship. This was a ship built in US shipyards that could be built in a few months. By 1943 the US shipyards were producing more ships than the U-boats could sink.

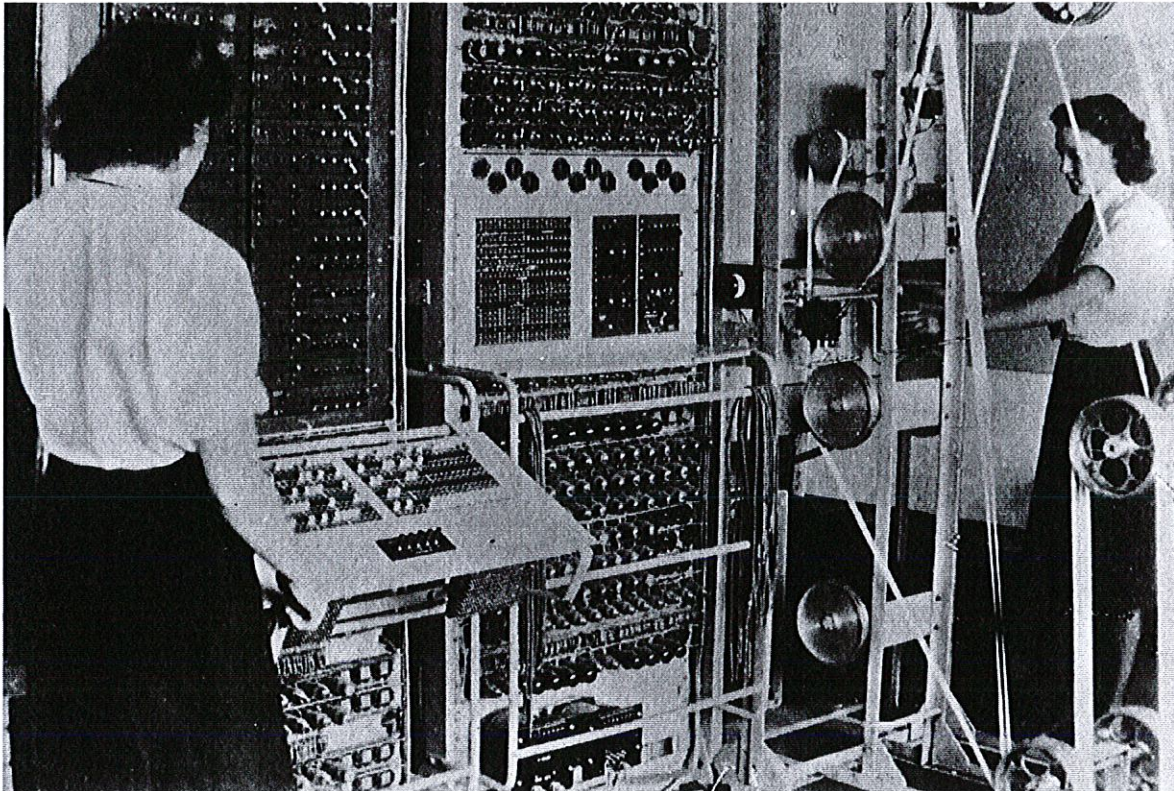
How will you use this source?

1. How does the message of this source compare to the map and chart showing Allied losses in the source box?
2. What is the biggest achievement mentioned in this source?
3. What made this turnaround possible?
4. Does this source help you to explain why the Battle of the Atlantic was so significant?

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Colossus codebreaking computer in operation, 1943

Catalogue ref: FO 850/234



What is this source?

This is a photograph of one of the highly advanced codebreaking computers developed at Bletchley Park. The job of this machine, called Colossus, was to try out thousands or even millions of combinations of possible codes in order to try and decode German messages.

The first Colossus was probably the most advanced computer in the world when it went into operation but after the war every single one was broken up because the project was so secret. This photograph is one of fewer than a dozen that give any idea of what the machines were like.

ATLANTIC 1939–1945: THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC**What's the background to this source?**

From 1940 onwards the greatest danger for Britain in WW2 was that German forces could cut off supplies of troops, food, medicine and equipment from Canada and the USA. This was exactly what the Germans tried to do. This campaign became known as the Battle of the Atlantic. The Germans used submarines (U-boats), aircraft and surface ships to attack shipping bound for Britain. U-Boats received information about targets and also about where to meet up with supply ships by radio. The Germans thought that their messages were safe because they were sent using the Enigma code.

In fact, British code breakers cracked the code, helping convoys to avoid attack. It also helped Allied ships and aircraft to hunt down U-Boats. The key development in cracking Enigma came when a British ship captured a U-Boat in May 1941. A team of code breakers including most famously mathematician Alan Turing based at Bletchley Park, near present day Milton Keynes, developed machinery like the Colossus to help do this.

It's worth knowing that...

The work of Turing and his colleagues played a key role in helping scientists and engineers to develop modern computers.

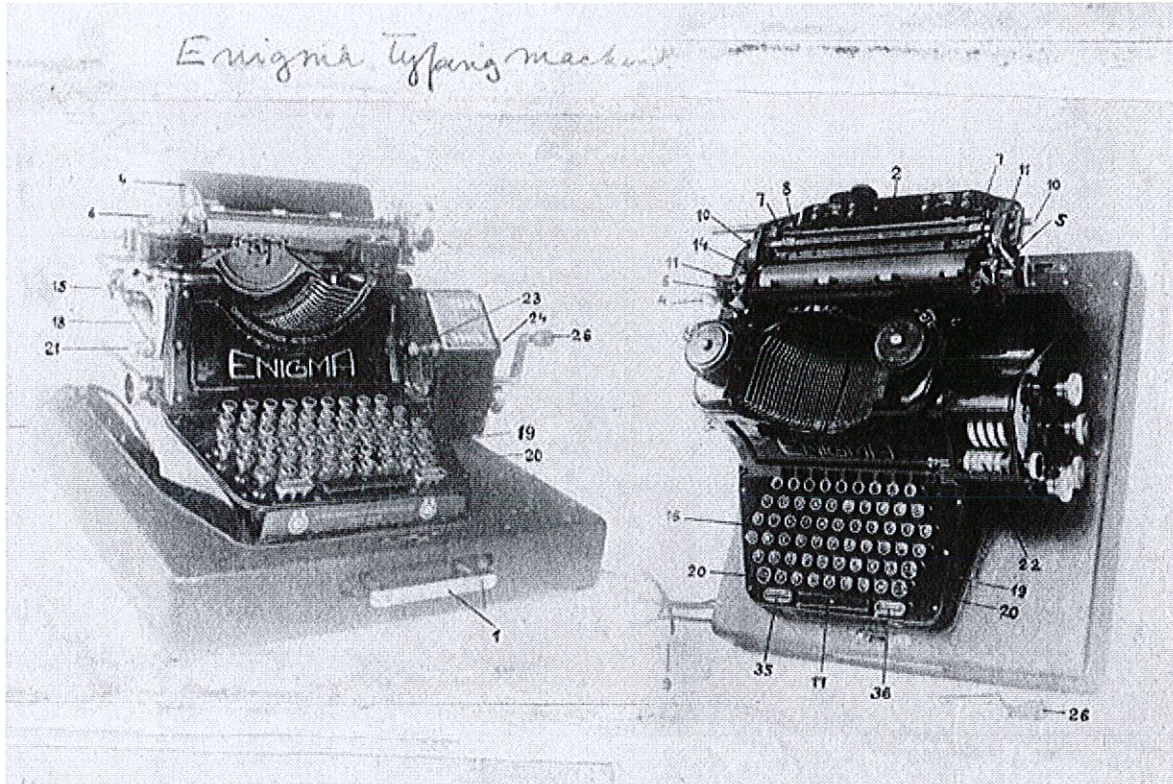
The Colossus machine itself was not used to break the Enigma code. It was used to crack a German army code called Lorenz.

How will you use this source?

1. Describe the Colossus machine. Are modern machines this complicated?
2. Does the Colossus suggest that the British government invested a lot of resources in technology and intelligence?
3. What do you notice about the operators of Colossus?
4. Is the Enigma machine a valuable piece of historical evidence?
5. Do these sources help you to explain why the Battle of the Atlantic was so significant?

The German Enigma Machine

Catalogue ref: HW 25/6



What is this source?

This is a photograph of an Enigma machine. This was the apparatus used by the German navy to 'encrypt' or code the messages they send to and from their ships in order to keep them secret.

Enigma worked like a typewriter except that it typed messages in code. The person receiving the message needed the key to the code to understand the message. It was supposed to be unbreakable.

ATLANTIC 1939–1945: THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

What's the background to this source?

From 1940 onwards the greatest danger for Britain in WW2 was that German forces could cut off supplies of troops, food, medicine and equipment from Canada and the USA. This was exactly what the Germans tried to do. This campaign became known as the Battle of the Atlantic. The Germans used submarines (U-boats), aircraft and surface ships to attack shipping bound for Britain. U-Boats received information about targets and also about where to meet up with supply ships by radio. The Germans thought that their messages were safe because they were sent using the Enigma code.

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It's worth knowing that...

The work of Turing and his colleagues played a key role in helping scientists and engineers to develop modern computers.

The information gained by Bletchley Park by reading decoded German messages was called 'Ultra'. It is often suggested that the use of Ultra shortened the war by at least a year.

How will you use this source?

1. Describe the Colossus machine. Are modern machines this complicated?
2. Does the Colossus suggest that the British government invested a lot of resources in technology and intelligence?
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ATLANTIC 1939–1945: THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC
Report table

Questions asked by historians to assess the significance of an event	Evidence which suggests that the Battle of the Atlantic was significant	Source(s) which support this
Was it important to people at the time?		
Did it have a deep impact on at least some people?		
How many people were affected in a big way?		
How long lasting were the effects?		
Were there any lessons that help us understand life today?		

Helpful points and ideas

As you study the sources, you may want to think about the following points:

- The technology developed in the Battle of the Atlantic
- What would have happened to the war effort if the Allies had lost the Battle of the Atlantic
- What it was like to be in a convoy
- What it was like to be in a U-Boat or aircraft attacking convoys
- The views of key figures like the British Prime Minister and the US President
- The impact of the Battle on port cities, where many of the sailors came from
- What shipping losses meant for ordinary people – hunger, lack of medicines etc
- The impact on the families of those lost at sea