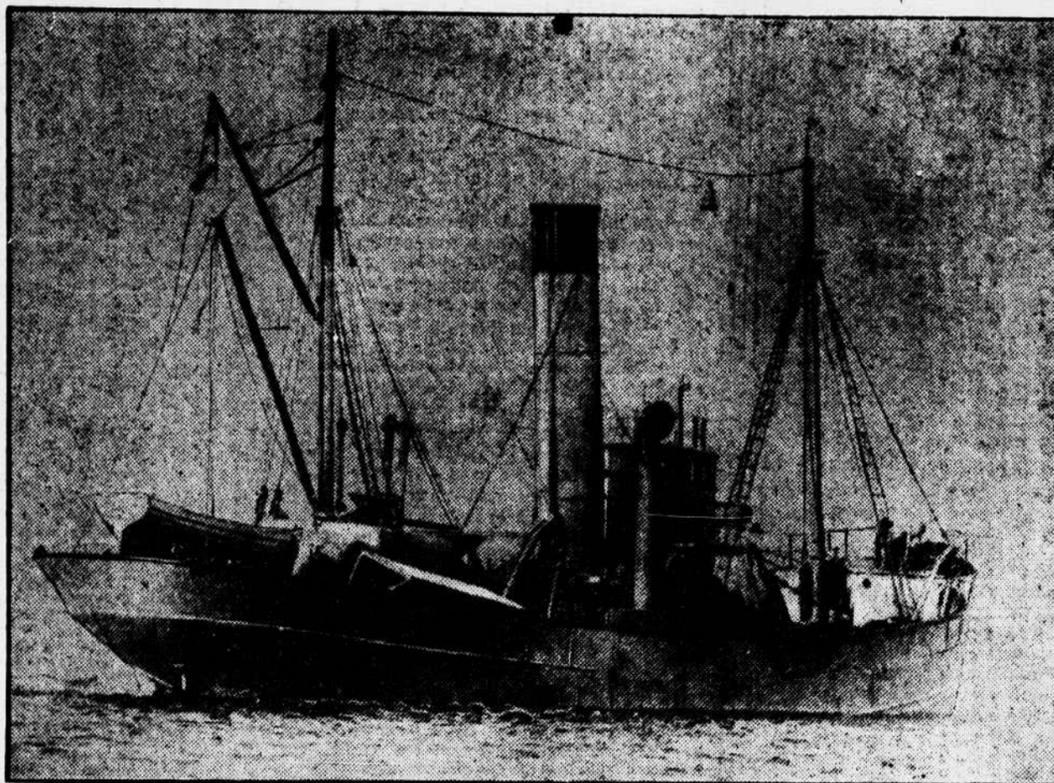


# The Victory at Sea *by* Admiral Sims.

## Young America on the Subchasers

First Boats Delivered at New London, Conn., Were Wrongly Planned—A Hard Winter for Boys on Small Boats, But They Stuck to Their Work Without a Whimper—Civilians, College Boys and Young Business Men in the Service.



A TRAWLER EQUIPPED AS A MINE SWEEPER.

Many of the great fleets of steam trawlers that before the war supplied the market with fish were taken over by the British government and proved invaluable as mine sweepers.

chaser training base had been established at New London. This news was apparently a godsend to the builders, who began to hustle their chasers into the water and send them to the Connecticut harbor in all stages of unreadiness for sea. In December of 1917 and January of 1918 these little despised boats began to arrive in scores.

That winter, as every one will recall, was the coldest in the memory of the present generation. Day after day the poor subchasers, coated with ice almost a foot thick, many with their engines wrecked, their planking torn and their propellers crumpled, were towed into the harbor and left at the first convenient mooring, where the ice immediately began to freeze them in. As was inevitable

under such conditions, the crews, for the most part, suffered acutely in this terrible weather; they had had absolutely no training in ordinary seamanship, to say nothing of the difficult work in which they were to engage.

The men and officers, indeed, presented what at first seemed to be almost as hopeless a spectacle as the vessels themselves. I do not think that the whole lot contained 1 per cent of graduates of Annapolis, or 5 per cent of experienced sailors; for the greater number that terrible trip in the icy ocean, with the thermometer several degrees below zero and with very little artificial warmth on board, represented their first experience at sea. Yet there was not the slightest sign of whimpering or

discouragement. Ignorant of salt water as these men at that time were, they really represented about the finest raw material in the nation for this service.

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Practically all officers and men were civilians; a small majority were amateur yachtsmen, but the great mass were American college undergraduates. Boys of Yale, Harvard, Princeton—of practically every college and university in the land—had dropped their books, left the comforts of their fraternity houses, and abandoned their athletic fields, eager for the great adventure against the Hun.

If there is any man who still doubts what the American system of higher education is doing for our country

he should have spent a few days at sea with these young men. That they knew nothing at first about navigation and naval technique was not important; the really important fact was that their minds were alert, their hearts filled with a tremendous enthusiasm for the cause, their souls clean and their bodies ready for the most exhausting task. Whenever I get to talking of the American college boys and other civilians in our Navy I find myself indulging in what may seem extravagant praise. I have even been inclined to suggest that it would be well, in the training of naval officers in future, to combine a college education with a shorter intensive technical course at the Naval Academy.

For these college men have what technical academies do not usually succeed in giving—a general education and a general training, which develops the power of initiative, independent thought, an ability quickly to grasp intricate situations, and to master, in a short time, almost any practical problem. At least this proved to be the case with our sub-chaser forces.

So little experience did these boys have of seafaring that as soon as they had completed their first voyage, we had to place a considerable portion in hospital to recover from seasickness. Yet a few months afterward we could leave these same men on the bridge at night in command of the ship. When they reached New London they knew no more navigation than so many babies. In a few weeks, however, they had



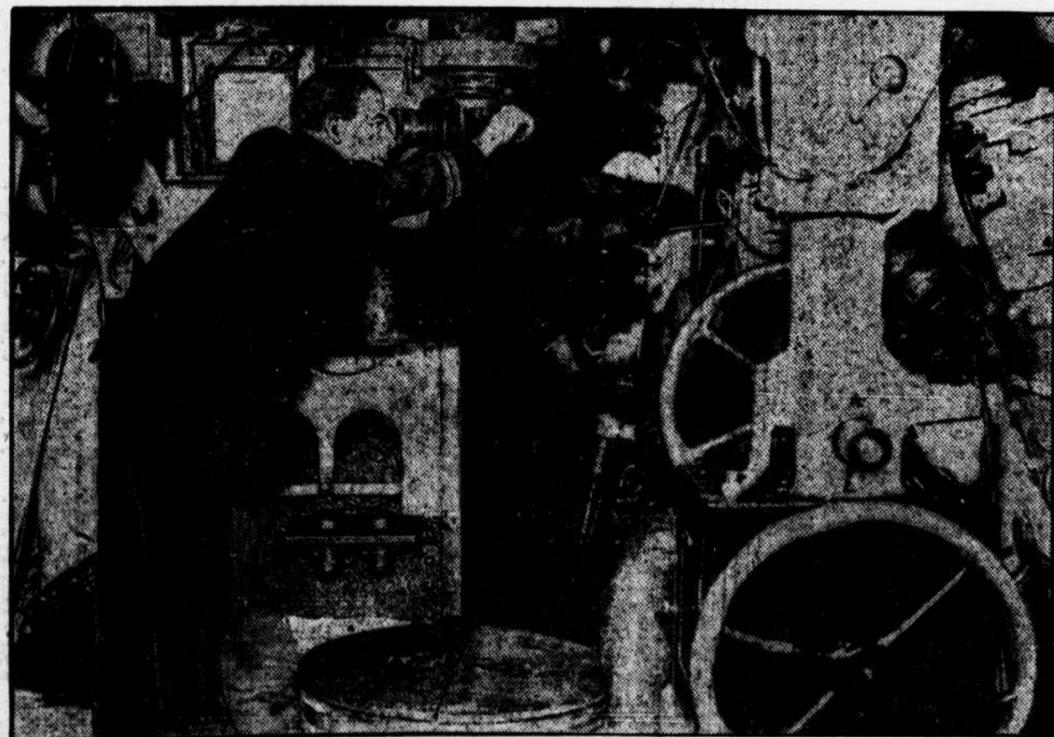
LIEUT. COMMANDER P. H. BASTEDO,  
U. S. N.,

Second in command of the subchaser detachment which screened the British and Italian warships in their bombardment of Durazzo.

learned enough to take their ships across the Atlantic; and these ships were smaller than the Santa Maria, in which Columbus made his first voyage.

The early eighty-foot subchasers which we built for Great Britain and France crossed the ocean on the decks of ocean liners; but all of the 110-footers which these young men commanded crossed the ocean under their own power, and many in the face of the fierce January and February gales, almost constantly tossed upon the waves like pieces of cork. As soon as they were sufficiently trained and prepared to make the trip groups were dispatched under escort of a naval vessel fitted to supply them with gasoline at sea.

Such matters as gunnery these young men also learned with lightning speed. The most valuable were those who had specialized in mathematics, chemistry and general science, but they were all a splendid lot, and to their spirit and energy are chiefly due their remarkable success in learning their various duties.



LOOKING THROUGH THE PERISCOPE INSIDE A SUBMARINE.

The commander was obliged to make the most careful calculations before discharging his torpedo.

THE greatest advantage which the new listening devices of our Navy had over those of other navies was that they could more efficiently determine not only the sound, but also the direction from which it came.

After this demonstration Capt. Leigh, who had been sent to Europe to confer with the allied admiralties and to test the American detection devices when they were in actual uses, visited several British naval stations, consulting with the British officers, explaining our sound detection devices and testing the new appliances in all kinds of conditions.

The net result of his trip was a general reversal of opinion on the value of this method of hunting submarines. The British admiralty ordered from the United States large quantities of the American mechanisms, and also began manufacturing them in England.

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About the time that it was shown that these listening devices would probably have great practical value, the first "subchasers" were delivered at New London, Conn. As originally planned the subchaser type represented one of the misconceptions of the war. At the beginning most naval officers believed that the limitations of the submarine were such that it could not operate far from coastal waters. Hardly any one, except a few experienced submarine officers, had regarded it as possible that these small boats would successfully attack vessels upon the high seas or remain for any extended period away from their base. High authorities condemned them.

This is hard to realize, now that we know so well the offensive possibilities of submarines, but we have ample evidence as to what former opinions were. For example, a distinguished naval writer says that at that time "the view of the majority of admirals and captains probably was that submersible craft were 'just marvelous toys, good for circus performances in carefully selected places in fine weather.'" He adds that certain very prominent naval men of great experience declared that the submarine could "operate only by day in fair weather; that it was practically useless in misty weather;" that it had to come to the surface to fire its torpedo; that its crowning defect lay in its want of habitability; that "a week's peace maneuvers got to the bottom of the health of officers and men"; and that "on the high seas the chances (of successful attack) will be few, and submarines will require for their existence parent ships."

The first triumph of Otto Weddigen, that of sinking the Cressy, the Hogue, and the Aboukir, did not change this conviction, for these three warships had been sunk in comparatively restricted waters under conditions which were very favorable to the submarine.

It was not until the Audacious went to the bottom off the northwest coast of Ireland, many hundreds of miles from any German submarine base, that the possibilities of this new weapon were partially understood; for it was clear that the Audacious had been sunk by a mine, and that that mine must have been laid by a submarine. Even then many doubted the ability of the U-boats to operate successfully in the open sea westward of the British Isles. Therefore the subchaser was designed to fight the submarine in restricted waters; Great Britain and France ordered more than 500 smaller (80-foot) vessels of this type, or of approximately this type, built in the United States; and, on our declaration of war, the United States began building several hundred of a somewhat larger type (the 110-foot chaser) with the idea of using them as patrol boats near the harbor and coastal waters of our own country.

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Long before these vessels were finished, however, it became apparent that Germany could not engage in any serious, extensive campaign on this side; it was also evident that the subchaser had little value in convoy work; and we were all rather doubtful as to just what use we could make of them. The subchaser thus became something of a joke, and the shipbuilding yards, which were constantly pressed by the department to push the construction of destroyers, looked upon these little boats which were incumbering their ways as nuisances.

It now became known that a sub-