U-boat commander who sank an unequaled 1,000 tons of Allied shipping for every day at sea during the war, and in peacetime served within NATO's naval forces. Otto Kretschmer, known as the Wolf of the Atlantic, operated the German U-boat U.99, which was the highest scoring U-boat “ace” of the war, according to the official records of the German press called “die glücklich Zeit” (the happy time) in the last months of 1940. On November 3, Kretschmer attacked the outward bound convoy OB.237 and sank four large vessels of over 40,000 tons, including the armed merchant cruiser Laurentia. On the same day, he sank a second armed merchant cruiser, Patroclus, when she stopped to pick up survivors. Kretschmer himself thought Patroclus’ Captain Anteil gerrick – “unwar-wary” – to stop in such circumstances.

U-boat captains were instructed that 3,000 yards was the best range for torpedoes, which should be fired from a depth of four or six, so as to make certain of a hit. But Kretschmer evolved his own tactics. His motto was “one torpedo-one ship.”

He stayed on the surface while attacking a convoy, making deadly diagonal strikes through its columns, and sank off individual ships from close range with a sniper’s skill.

Once dived, U.99 was invisible to radar. The enemy searched in vain for the U-boat’s contact. But Kretschmer said later he felt “as exposed as a man sun-bathing on a beach.” He was retiring, having expended all his torpedoes, when U.99 was detected by the escort in the early hours of March 17. Kretschmer was never equalled during World War II.

Flotillenadmiral Otto Kretschmer

Flotillenadmiral Otto Kretschmer, who has died aged 86, was the highest scoring U-boat commander of the Second World War – the German press called him the “Wolf of the Atlantic.” Kretschmer was a prisoner of war and was a household name in Germany, where his deeds were remembered with national head-lines, and he was obviously very useful for the Nazi propaganda machine. But unlike some other U-boat aces he would not make propaganda value out of his life. His death was reported in the Spanish civil war.

In 1993, he took part in television programmes celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic. Speaking from his house in his retirement, Kretschmer said: “There was far too much suspicion being expressed. In simple words, to measure his judgment, the state of his nerves, and the expected and the unexpected from seniors and his juniors, the expected was almost impossible to detect by escorts which still continued to fire, having expended all their torpedoes, when U.99 was detected by the escort in the early hours of March 17. Kretschmer was never equalled during World War II.

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