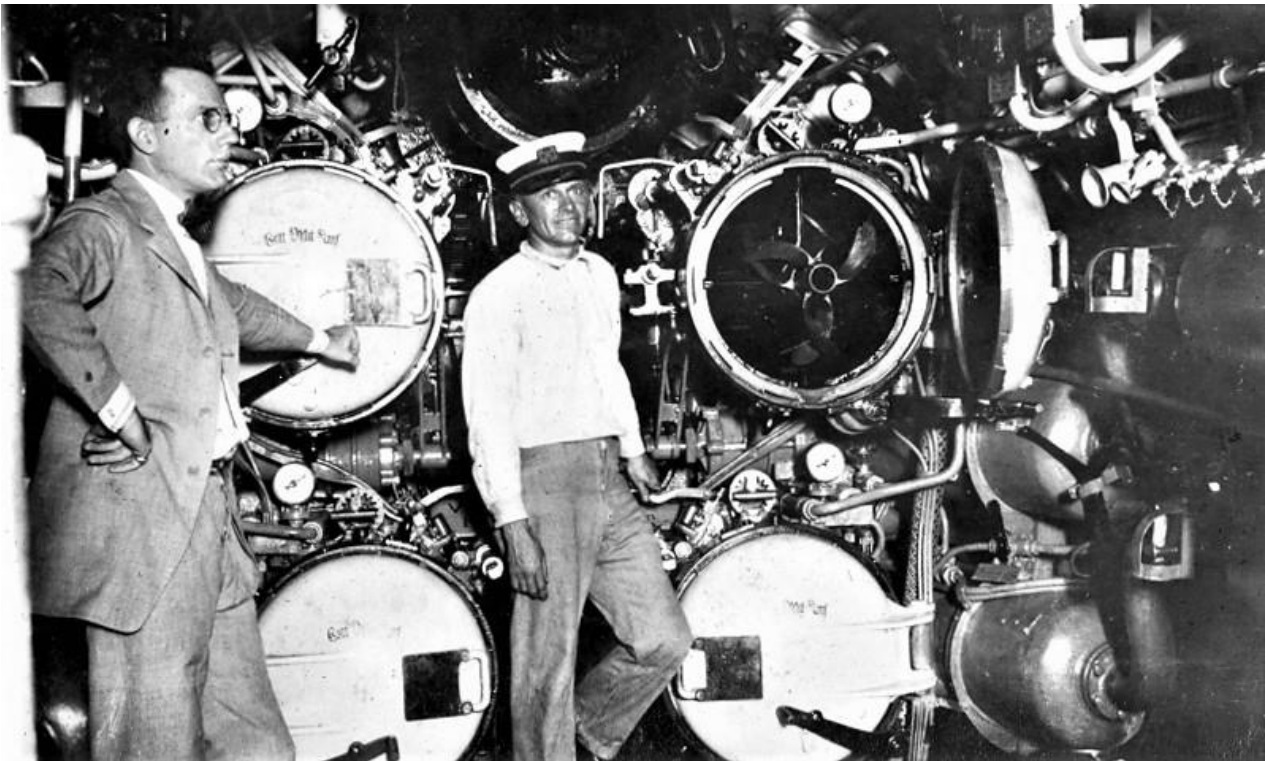


GERMAN SUBMARINE UB-87



UB-81 was the 34th of 89 Type UBIII coastal torpedo attack boats commissioned in the First World War. It was launched on 4 August 1917 by A.G. Weser, commissioned at Bremen on 18 September 1917 and was equipped with 10 x 50cm torpedoes fired through 4 bow tubes and/or 1 stern tube, one 88mm deck gun with 160 rounds but no mines. Double skinned, its steel pressure hull was 40.1m long and 3.90m wide, rated for 75m depth but could go deeper if required, and the vessel had a nominal complement of 35 crew. Twin diesel engines and twin electric motors drove the vessel through twin screws, rendering it capable of 13.6 knots on the surface and 8 knots submerged with a range of 9,040 miles at 6 knots surfaced and 55 miles at 4 knots submerged. The UBIII type coastal torpedo submarine, which entered service during 1917 through to the cessation of hostilities bore some of the features of the different but successful earlier Type UCII minelaying submarine and despite the somewhat late start and the increased difficulty they had due to the introduction by the British of convoys with destroyer escorts as a defensive measure, UBIII's collectively sank 519 ships. Figure 1 shows the torpedo room of the similar UB-88.

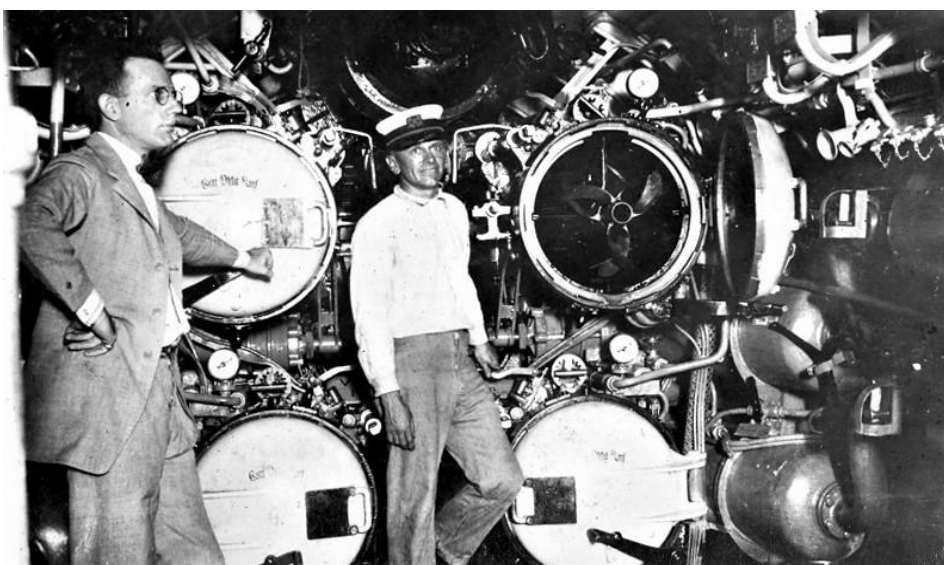


Figure 1: Control Room of UB-88

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Torpedo_room_of_SM_UB_88_submarine_c1920.jpeg
Lieutenant Thomas Marshall Colston, U.S. Navy, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

The image was taken in the United States where UB-88 surrendered on 26 November 1918. Exhibited in America and Panama, it was later scuttled off San Pedro after being used as a gunnery target by the American destroyer USS *Wilkes*.

UB-81 had one commander, Oblt. Reinhold Saltzwedel, Pour le Mérite, and the first patrol from Flandern I Flotilla out of Zeebrugge had no success despite Saltzwedel being experienced, he ranked 11th in the table of record sinkings by U-boat captains during the war. UB-81 left for its second patrol on 11 November 1917 and on 1 December, it had its only success when, without warning, it first torpedoed SS *Molesey* then scuttled it, without casualties, about 15 miles south

of Worthing. *Molesey*, a British steamer of 3,218 grt, had sailed from Gibraltar on 21 November 1917 with phosphate rock in convoy HG32 and was en route for The Downs for further orders.

On the following day, 2 December 1917, UB-81 with 34 crew on board struck a mine 10 miles SE of Dunnose Head near the Owers Lightship. UB-81 quickly sank to the bottom with the stern flooded and sealed off. The damage was at the extreme stern, but as the water was shallow the submarine blew all ballast forward, thus raising up the bow and lifting a torpedo tube exit to just above the water level. Six of the thinner members of the crew crawled out of the torpedo tubes. Leutnant zur See Hermann Freudendal, the LI, Marine Ingenieur Hans Denker, Maschinistenmaat Paul Redlin, Matrose Karl Blunk, Matrose Kirchbaum, and Steuermann Balthge managed to escape, as did Maschinistenmaat Heinrich Borries. Those who had emerged had fired distress flares and British Patrol Vessel HMS *P.32*, among those which responded, manoeuvred into position at the bow of the submarine. *P.32* impacted against the submarine causing water to enter the open torpedo tube resulting in an immediate sinking causing all those within, including its commander, to drown. Maschinistenmaat Heinrich Borries died soon afterwards and the *P.32* log states that the crew of *P.32* buried Heinrich Borries at sea on 3 December 1917. There is some controversy over the incident with the rescued Germans being adamant that the *P.32* had deliberately struck the U-boat, this was denied by the crew who indicated wave action had caused it.

The submarine, presumably retaining some of its buoyancy from air trapped in its bows, drifted some 12 miles south westwards, to where it was found in the 1970s, positioned upright on a flat sand and shingle seabed at about 28 m general depth, at around 14 miles south east of the Isle of Wight. The diver who found UB-81, at the time was working for a salvage firm, he reported the damage as slight. However, in 1989 it was found split in two, just aft of the conning tower. The highest point was the gun, which pointed towards the surface, with ammunition lying around. The main hatch was open to the control room and parts of the gun and bridge telegraph had been removed.

On 1st May 2008, the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 (Designation of Vessels and Controlled Sites) Order 2008 (Statutory Instrument No. 950) "*cited an area situated within a distance of 250 metres of the point at 50 29.442 North, 00 58.351 West, which contains the remains of the vessel known as UB-81, as a controlled site*". A controlled site under the Act means that diving on the wreck is forbidden.

The Shipwreck Centre and Maritime Museum displays artefacts from UB-81 including the bridge klaxon, remains of the compass binnacle, and a brass whistle. The submarine's engine room telegraph was auctioned on 11 June 2014 at Exeter which according to the saleroom catalogue, had been recovered by divers in the late 1970's/early 1980s.

There is a YouTube dive video of UB-81 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVeT3mQYCYA>