

## NOAA and partners to survey ships sunk off NC in WWII

NOAA will lead a three-week research expedition in August to study World War II shipwrecks sunk in 1942 off the coast of North Carolina during the Battle of the Atlantic. The shipwrecks are located in an area known as the "graveyard of the Atlantic," which includes sunken vessels from U.S. and British naval fleets, merchant ships, and German U-boats.

"The information collected during this expedition will help us better understand and document this often lost chapter of America's maritime history and its significance to the nation," said David W. Alberg, expedition leader and superintendent of the *USS Monitor* National Marine Sanctuary.

"It continues the work conducted by NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries last summer to research and document historically significant shipwrecks tragically lost during World War II."

Alberg said the expedition, which started August 4 and goes through August 24, will also help document the condition of these vessels some 67 years after they were lost.

Understanding the wrecks' current condition is a crucial first step in establishing efforts to preserve these historic sites, which serve as "time capsules from one of the darkest times in the nation's history," he said.

This year's project will be divided into two phases.

Phase one of the expedition will be conducted aboard the NOAA research vessel *Nancy Foster*. Using advanced remote sensing technologies, including sidescan and multibeam sonar systems, researchers will attempt to locate several previously undiscovered WWII shipwrecks.

NOAA and its expedition part-

ners from the University of North Carolina will also deploy an advanced remotely operated vehicle to take high-definition imagery of these shipwrecks.

During the second phase, NOAA divers and partners will survey and photograph visible sections of a British armed trawler, *HMT Bedfordshire*, using non-invasive methods.

*Bedfordshire* was sunk by a torpedo fired from the German submarine *U-558* on May 12, 1942, resulting in the loss of the entire crew. The survey team will also study marine life found at the site which now serves as a vibrant artificial reef.

Consistent with U.S. and international policy, the shipwreck site is considered a war grave and will not be disturbed during the expedition.

Many of the WWII wrecks off North Carolina, some lying as shallow as 130 feet, serve as popular recreational dive sites. Unfortunately, some of these wrecks have been severely impacted over the years by human activity. Both NOAA and the recreational diving community promote open access to the shipwrecks and encourage responsible dive behavior and preservation of underwater resources.

Through this expedition, NOAA hopes to highlight maritime history and demonstrate the importance of preserving these shipwrecks for the study and enjoyment of future generations of divers and for all Americans.

In consultation with the British and German governments, NOAA is conducting this expedition survey with technical expertise and logistical support from the Minerals Management Service, the National Park Service, the State of North Carolina, and East Carolina University.

The University of North Carolina Coastal Studies Institute, the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, the Georgia Aquarium, and Mariners' Museum are also providing support.

Information is available at: the *Monitor* site, [monitor.noaa.gov](http://monitor.noaa.gov); Battle of the Atlantic Expedition site, [sanctuaries.noaa.gov/missions/battleoftheatlantic2](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/missions/battleoftheatlantic2); and NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, [sanctuaries.noaa.gov](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov).