

German Submarines

The Imperial German Navy began the war with very few submarines but they started to grow in importance and eventually became the main weapon in the campaign to bring Britain to its knees by strangling its maritime trade routes.



Germany deployed the most technically advanced and largest fleet of submarines of all during World War I but actually had none in service before 1906. Its navy had around 30 submarines available in August 1914 but by the end of the war a further 350 or so had seen active service. Their operational peak came in June 1917 when 61 were at sea.

The Imperial German Navy actually produced very few different types of boat during the war as its planners rightly believed that concentrating on fewer types made production maintenance and the training of crews much more straight forward. Larger boats designed for long-range operations were given U-numbers, and there were smaller, short-range UB and UC boats that usually operated in shallower coastal waters.

The term U-boat derives from Unterseeboot (“submarine boat”) and these spearheaded the operation against British maritime commerce. They were built in batches and each differed in some ways but overall became larger and more powerful as the war progressed. It had a crew of 35 and carried four torpedo tubes and an 8.6cm deck gun.



The biggest of the U-boats were the Deutschland class which appeared in 1916 and started out as unarmed cargo carrying vessels. Deutschland itself caused



Conning tower of the *DEUTSCHLAND* showing members of crew on deck. Photo was probably taken at Baltimore.

something of a stir when it sailed as a merchant ship from Kiel to Baltimore in the then neutral USA, partly to return with war materials but also as a propaganda mission. It arrived at its destination on 9 July and returned home with a cargo of various key metals. The design of the larger Deutschland class was remodeled to be more effective, but the new model never saw action in the war.