

Background: This is Goebbels' *Das Reich* lead article for 21 June 1942. The war was looking promising. The Germans were advancing in the Soviet Union, Rommel was driving toward the Suez Canal and the U-boats were sinking devastating numbers of Allied ships. Goebbels' praise of the U-boat crews echoes Churchill's earlier comments on the Royal Air Force.

The source: "Der Tonnagekrieg," *Das eherne Herz* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1943), pp. 351-358.

The Tonnage War

by Joseph Goebbels

The enemy at the moment is nowhere so threatened as at sea. One no longer hears boasting claims from Churchill and Roosevelt that the danger of German U-boats has been overcome. To the contrary, an eloquent silence has replaced those premature statements. Now and again it is broken by a worried voice saying that the sea war has entered its most acute and dangerous phase, and that it has become the cardinal issue for the English-American war effort.

For the first time since September 1939, a leading London newspaper has written that England could lose the war if things continue as they are now, and a large group of U.S. newspapers seems to have agreed that Germany is sinking more ships than America and England can build, but that fewer U-boats are being sunk than the Germans are capable of building. That is a rather understated description of the danger now facing the Anglo-Saxon powers, and one can understand the vehement requests on the enemy public's side to finally tell the truth about the real state of the tonnage war rather than settling for broad generalities or clever numerical fantasies.

We predicted such a development. When Mr. Churchill announced 15 months ago that data on the number and tonnage of ships sunk would no longer be published for security reasons, we knew what it meant. The Admiralty's argument was too transparent. What can they conceal from our U-boats, which generally know exactly what they have sunk! England can conceal from us only ships sunk by mines or acts of God. Releasing the figures, which we know, would only increase to a great degree the concern on the part of the British-American public.

The sea war has entered a critical phase for England and the U.S.A. English papers recently commented that the control of the seas is no theoretical matter, but rather a matter of daily struggle, and that the most powerful fleet of warships is of little value when it no longer fulfills its purpose, namely keeping England's vital sea and transport routes open. Unlike us, England depends on the freedom and security of the seas. We meet our needs primarily from the European continent itself. England needs essential supplies from its Empire and from distant countries. If the sea routes are broken and England does not succeed in restoring them, the gradual paralysis of the British motherland is assured. The collapse of the English war effort is only a matter of time.

We have no illusions in the matter. The tonnage war is not the only means to checkmate England, but it is one of the most important. One can therefore understand why Churchill and Roosevelt are doing all in their power to conceal the situation from their publics on grounds of military security, and why they are working feverishly to find ways and means to combat the German U-boat danger and to reduce the sunk tonnage to a halfway acceptable level. Since that is much harder to do in practice than it is in propaganda, they are depending first of all on propaganda.

Mr. Churchill is doubtless better in this regard than Mr. Roosevelt; he sets the tone. Nothing is admitted

that can be plausibly denied. Mostly one says something only when the crew of a sunken ship arrives in a neutral harbor and reliable witnesses report the event. They make a gesture or two. When the cases add up over a short period and disconcert the English or the U.S. public to the point that they demand an explanation, Mr. Churchill or Mr. Roosevelt have one of their spokesmen, who is no longer able to minimize the U-boat danger, talk about the enormous ship-building program on both sides of the Atlantic that will soon replace the sunken ships.

We expect, as the situation becomes more critical in the coming weeks and months, new propaganda tricks from Churchill and Roosevelt to confuse the Anglo-Saxon peoples and divert them from the threatening danger. They will certainly try bluffs, and will attempt to ridicule our figures with their own fantastic statistics. We know these methods, and are ready for them. The people of the enemy states will demand an accounting. Their governments are not in the position to give them one without admitting to a deadly danger. What alternative do they have but to minimize the situation, to cast doubts on our accurate figures or to try to divert the debate to another topic? The world public sees too clearly their responsibility for the war; they cannot admit failures in any area. They have no choice but to save face, lest they face the risk of being chased out of office in shame by their own peoples.

Back on 25 February, the *Daily Mail* wrote that those Englishmen who believe that the American shipping industry could replace British losses deceived themselves. That was during a phase of the U-boat war that was still not life-threatening for the enemy. Since then, the situation has worsened for England and the U.S.A. The sunken tonnage has reached a level that is an acute danger to enemy shipping, whereas German U-boat losses are nowhere near the boasting levels claimed by the British and U.S. admiralties. Serious papers and naval correspondents on the enemy side grant this. The *Daily Sketch*, for example, in a 30 May dispatch from New York, reported that American circles in which the wish is father to the thought claim to sink one of three U-Boats operating off the Atlantic coast. But that is only wishful thinking. They might better keep in mind the fact that hundreds of Allied ships have been hit by torpedoes in the Western Atlantic since the U.S. entry into the war. That is clear enough, and needs no commentary. Churchill's claim that the U-boat danger is under control is rather astonishing. He is attempting to minimize a danger that is critical to the British-American war effort.

We are fully aware of the difficulties and possibilities of the U-boat war. The brave crews on our U-boats have a difficult job. The homeland hears of their successes so often that they risk being taken for granted. Nothing could be more wrong. The enemy knows how important the battle is, and will do everything it can to reduce the rapidly rising curve of U-boat losses to the point where it is at least not critical. Other factors in the U-boat war include the weather and the seasons.

Only when one keeps in mind the relatively small number of battle-tested young men who carry this burden, and the decisive significance for the enemy of open sea lanes, can one understand the situation. Rarely in the course of battle between nations have so few men played so decisive a role. Each U-boat that leaves our harbors to sail against the enemy is a masterpiece of German shipbuilding, and its crew includes the best of our German youth who are struggling heroically for the freedom of our people. This world-famous German weapon has earned the admiration of the whole world, even of the enemy. Our U-boats are the primary reason why Germany has not been blockaded in this war, but instead has imposed a counter-blockade on the enemy. Our U-boat men can be proud that they have plunged the enemy into panic and that a good part of our certainty of victory rests in their brave endeavors.

We know precisely what enemy countermeasures are, and which we have to take seriously, which not. One can understand the enemy's war strategy only in the context of the general situation. Churchill and Roosevelt are living from hand to mouth. They can no longer tell the truth to their own people, the neutrals or us. They are pursued by a thousand hounds, and can hardly say things as they are. In the tonnage war, too, they are in a tight spot. They can no longer tell their own people the depressing facts, since the war has taken a direction entirely different than they expected. They are forced to save face,

to cover up their losses and to invent victories that in reality do not exist. We are facing hard-core sinners who will give up only when they have no other alternative. That will not be tomorrow or the day after. They must be dealt with until they are flat on the ground.

Public opinion in England and the U.S.A. alternates between wild optimism and deep pessimism. Occasionally newspapers loyal to the government ask the reason for the widespread illusions of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. Naturally, they cannot say that their own lies and swindles have given their peoples a false and misleading picture of the situation. They protest against the illusions of the man in the street without given a clear reason why such illusions are unreasonable. The talk in circles, and an end to their witches' Sabbath is not yet in sight.

We have no choice but to increase our war effort and keep on the narrow path, taking enemy boasting for just what it is. Any war effort naturally has its limits. It depends on facts, not wishes. The war itself has twists and turns that one must prepare for as best one can. He does best who keeps a realistic view of the situation and who is diverted neither by setbacks or successes from his goal. We know precisely where we are and where we are going. The enemy side knows neither. As a result, they will encounter the most unpleasant surprises in coming weeks and months.

Death is sailing the seas with his eye focused on our enemies. He reaps a terrible harvest of their ships, men and material. Churchill and Roosevelt cannot do anything about it by speeches and statements, only through action. But that is what under present conditions they are unable to do.