

Zenon B. Lukošius and THE CAPTURE OF U-505

How a Lithuanian American Became a Naval Hero of the Battle of the Atlantic

By Henry L. Gaidis

MOST HISTORIANS WILL AGREE that World War II in Europe was won on the beaches of Normandy, through the hedgerows of France, across the rivers into Germany and in the sky over the German heartland. Still, the war could have been lost during the Battle of the Atlantic, the longest continuous campaign of the war. England required more than a million tons of imported matériel per week to survive and fight. Likewise, the island nation was essential to a United States invasion of Europe. For the most part, the campaign pitted the German Navy's Unterseeboot (German, U-Boot; English, U-boat) against Allied ships delivering vital supplies to England. Winston Churchill coined the term Battle of the Atlantic and described it as the "longest, largest, and most complex" naval battle in history.

The Allied Nations were finally victorious in the battle, which saw over 3,500 merchant ships and 175 warships lost; but the Allies, led by the U.S. Navy, kept England's sea lanes open, escorting convoys that often numbered over 100 vessels. It has been estimated that over 1,000 ship encounters took place, during which at least 783 U-boats were sunk and the German Navy virtually destroyed. Had it not been for the courage and fortitude of the U.S. Navy, there may not have been a Normandy landing or total victory in the European Theater.

Key to the German naval effort was its ability to communicate with and direct the attacks of its U-boat "wolf

packs" sailing from European coastal fortifications to ravage allied convoys bound for England and Russia. Such attacks proved very successful during the first years of the war, and many felt that England would not survive the blockade. To upgrade its ability to communicate with its wolf packs at sea, the Kriegsmarine, in 1942, began to install a new version of its secret Enigma communication coding machine in its U-boats. The capture of one of these new Triton encrypting machines became vital to the Allied war effort. Although several were captured during the war, allowing Allied code breakers to locate U-boats at sea, the story of the capture of U-505 was surely one of the most heroic U.S. Naval operations of the war.

No American ship had captured an enemy vessel on the high seas since the War of 1812, and few thought a capture by boarding was possible in the age of modern warfare. The idea of taking a U-boat at sea was the brainchild of Admiral Daniel Vincent Gallery, a career officer who saw extensive service during World War II. In 1942, he served as commander of the Fleet Air Base in Reykjavik, Iceland, providing air cover to convoys crossing the Atlantic. In 1943, he was given command of the USS Guadalcanal, a newly commissioned escort carrier, and in 1944 he headed the Norfolk-based antisubmarine



Zenon Lukošius inside the U-505 during one of his later visits to the German submarine he helped to capture.

Task Group 21.12. Sailing aboard his flagship, the Guadalcanal, Gallery's task force soon sank U-544. Observing how U-boat crews abandoned ship when sinking, he developed a plan to force one to surface and capture it before it could be scuttled.

On April 9, 1944, Gallery, using the 24-hour flight operations he had pioneered, forced U-515 to the surface, but the vessel was too damaged to be boarded. The night his aircraft caught U-68 on the surface in broad moonlight, they sank her with only one survivor caught on deck as she attempted a crash dive. In June 1944, Gallery, commanding Task Group 22.3, attacked U-505, and his dream of boarding a German submarine on the high seas and capturing its secret Enigma coding machine before it went under came true. The quick thinking of a young Lithuanian American sailor from Chicago would help him capture that German submarine.

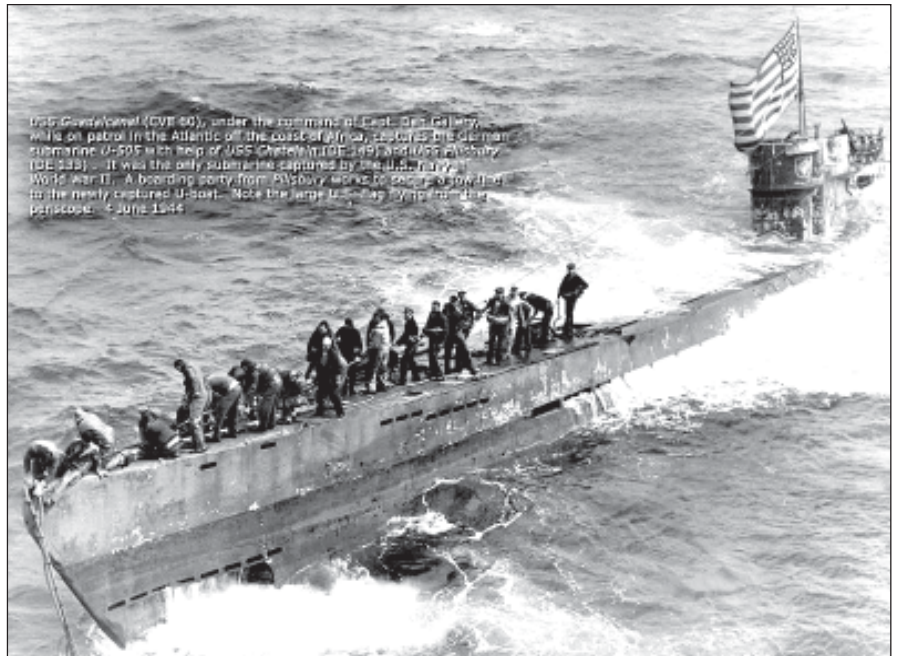
According to the Cook County, Illinois, Birth Certificates Index, Zenon Benedict Lukošius was born in Chicago on August 24, 1918 to Lithuanian American immigrants, Paul Lukošius and Barbara Gortautas (most likely Goštautas). His father, Paul, was born on August 15,

1887 in Plungė, Lithuania and immigrated to the United States in 1912. His mother, Barbara, was born in Lithuania in 1889 and came to America in 1913. Paul and Barbara met and married in Chicago and settled in the city's Roseland area, where they had six children. Paul initially worked as a laborer for a railroad in Dalton, Illinois and registered for the First World War draft in 1918, but was never called because he was married with children. He later worked as a laborer in a Chicago railroad car shop until his death on September 20, 1933 in a motor vehicle accident. With his father's untimely death, Zenon had to quit school at the age of fourteen to help support his mother and younger siblings. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the United States entered World War II, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy.

After completing basic and mechanic training, Seaman Lukošius was assigned to duty in the Atlantic. On December 31, 1943, he mustered aboard the USS Pillsbury, an Edsall Class destroyer escort, and went to sea for the first time. While on a five-week shore leave in New York City, he married his childhood sweetheart, Dorothy Lebus, who was born on July 3, 1923 in Chicago. Like many other World War II romances, their blissful honeymoon was cut short, and Zenon was soon serving at sea again.

In May, 1944, Zenon, now Motor Machines Mechanic, First Class, found himself aboard the Pillsbury as part of Admiral Gallery's Task Group 22.3, sailing from Norfolk on an antisubmarine patrol in the South Atlantic to search for U-boats near the Canary Islands. Part of his duty was to train on a small whaleboat to board an anticipated German submarine, once its crew had abandoned ship, to recover its Enigma coding machine and codebooks before it sank.

On June 4, 1944, two F4F Wild-



U.S. Navy (CVE 50), under the command of Capt. Dan Gallery, will be on patrol in the Atlantic off the coast of Africa, to locate the German submarine U-505 with help of USS Chatelain (DD-349) and USS Pillsbury (DE 238). It was the only submarine captured by the U.S. Navy in World War II. A boarding party from Pillsbury works to secure a tow line to the newly captured U-boat. Note the large U.S. flag flying from the stern. (photo: © June 1944)



TOP: A boarding party from the USS Pillsbury works to secure a tow line to the newly captured U-boat. ABOVE: The U-505 on display at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry.

cat fighters, flying from Guadalcanal, spotted U-505, a Type IXC Submarine, commanded by Oberleutnant Harald Lange, running on the surface, and the destroyer escorts Pillsbury, USS Chatelain, and USS Jenks were immediately ordered to the area at full steam. As U-505 attempted to dive and evade, it was shaken by the fighters' depth charges, which caused severe damage to its engine room. The crew was ordered to scuttle and abandon ship, but in

their haste, the procedures were not fully implemented. Sailing in the immediate area of operations, the three American vessels arrived quickly, and Admiral Gallery immediately ordered boarding parties to attempt to capture the vessel. As the fighter planes and ships' gun crews raked the Germans to hasten their departure, the historic American naval cry, "Away all boarders," not heard since the War of 1812, was given the Pillsbury's boarding parties.

While the Chatelain and Jenks picked up survivors, the Pillsbury sent a nine-man boarding party, commanded by Lieutenant Junior Grade Albert L. David, in a small motorized whaleboat to attempt to capture the sinking vessel. The boarding crew, under Lieutenant David, consisted of George W. Jacobson, Zenon B. Lukošius, Chester A. Mocarski, Wayne M. Pickels, Arthur W. Knispel, William R. Riendeau, Stanley E. Wdowiak, and Gordon F. Hohne. The coxswain P. N. Trusheim Cox managed to bring the boat alongside the German submarine as the party attempted to board and capture its Enigma coding machine and current code books before it sank.

The boarding party knew that the standard scuttling operation included planting explosives and opening hatches so that a rush of seawater would quickly take the ship to the bottom. When Lieutenant David, with total disregard for booby traps, led his men aboard the submarine, its stern was submerged and water had almost reached the top of the conning tower. They found the body of a German submariner on deck and, upon entering the ship, found it under massive flooding. Lieutenant David immediately secured the Enigma machine, while his crew began to disconnect the scuttling charges and close the valves flooding the ship.

The major source of the flood was a sea strainer, open and totally under water. It was then that Lukošius took it upon himself to search the chamber for the strainer cover, secure it and stop the flooding. In his later years, he recounted how he had groped around the valve and found no wires leading to explosives. Upon finding the valve cover and struggling to put it back, he yelled to his mates, "Here goes nothing," because he knew it could be booby trapped and, "If I picked it up, we might be all gone." The cover was not booby trapped, and U-505 became an in-

valuable war prize.

With the flooding stopped by Lukošius's quick action, the Pillsbury secured the German U-boat and towed it in secret to Bermuda. Due to the great importance to Allied intelligence of the captured Enigma machine, the operation was declared top secret and the involved fighter pilots and ship crews sworn to secrecy.

Admiral Gallery was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his leadership in the capture of U-505, and Lieutenant David won the Congressional Medal of Honor for leading the boarding party, the only CMH awarded to a member of the Atlantic Fleet during World War II. Lukošius and the other members of the boarding party were awarded the Silver Star, and the U.S. Navy Task Group 22.3 was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

MoMM 1/c Lukošius continued to serve with great distinction aboard the landing ship Medium until his July 6, 1946 discharge. Like millions of his fellow countrymen, he returned home after the war to pick up his life where the war had torn him away. He and Dorothy lived in various Chicago South Side neighborhoods and eventually settled down in the suburb of South Holland. He earned his living as an industrial roofer, working atop two- and three-story flats and factory buildings across the Windy City.

After the war, Lukošius was an active member of the South Holland VFW Post 9964 and a twenty-year volunteer of the Thornton Township Seniors. He is known for never having embellished the story of or his part in the capture of U-505. His daughter said, "It never turned into a fish story with him. If you heard him tell it once and then heard him tell it again twenty years later, it was always the same." He insisted he was not a hero, but just a sailor who did a job he was trained to do.

Still, what he did that day in the

Atlantic many years ago took considerable courage. Motor Machinist's Mate, First Class Zenon B. Lukošius's Silver Star citation clearly documents his heroic action:

*The President of the United States
of America
Authorized by Act of Congress,
July 9, 1918,
has awarded the
Silver Star
ZENON B. LUKOSIUS, MoMM 1/c
United States Navy
for gallantry in action*

In 1954, U-505 was donated to the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, where it remains to this day. In the early 1950s, Lukošius answered the call of his former admiral and took an active part in raising the money to bring the submarine to the museum and install it as a permanent memorial. Thereafter, Lukošius and fellow boarding crew members periodically visited the ship they had risked their lives to capture many years earlier. Among the many artifacts on display with the ship is Lukošius's Silver Star. It is estimated that more than 25 million visitors have since visited the exhibit.

Dorothy passed away on January 13, 1995 and Zenon on August 12, 2006. He was given a Christian burial at the Spirit of God Fellowship Church in South Holland and interred at St. Casimir's Lithuanian Cemetery in Chicago. So a Lithuanian American World War II hero was peacefully laid to rest. Zenon Lukošius was one of the many of our nation's finest generation, in which all gave something, and some gave their all. ■

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