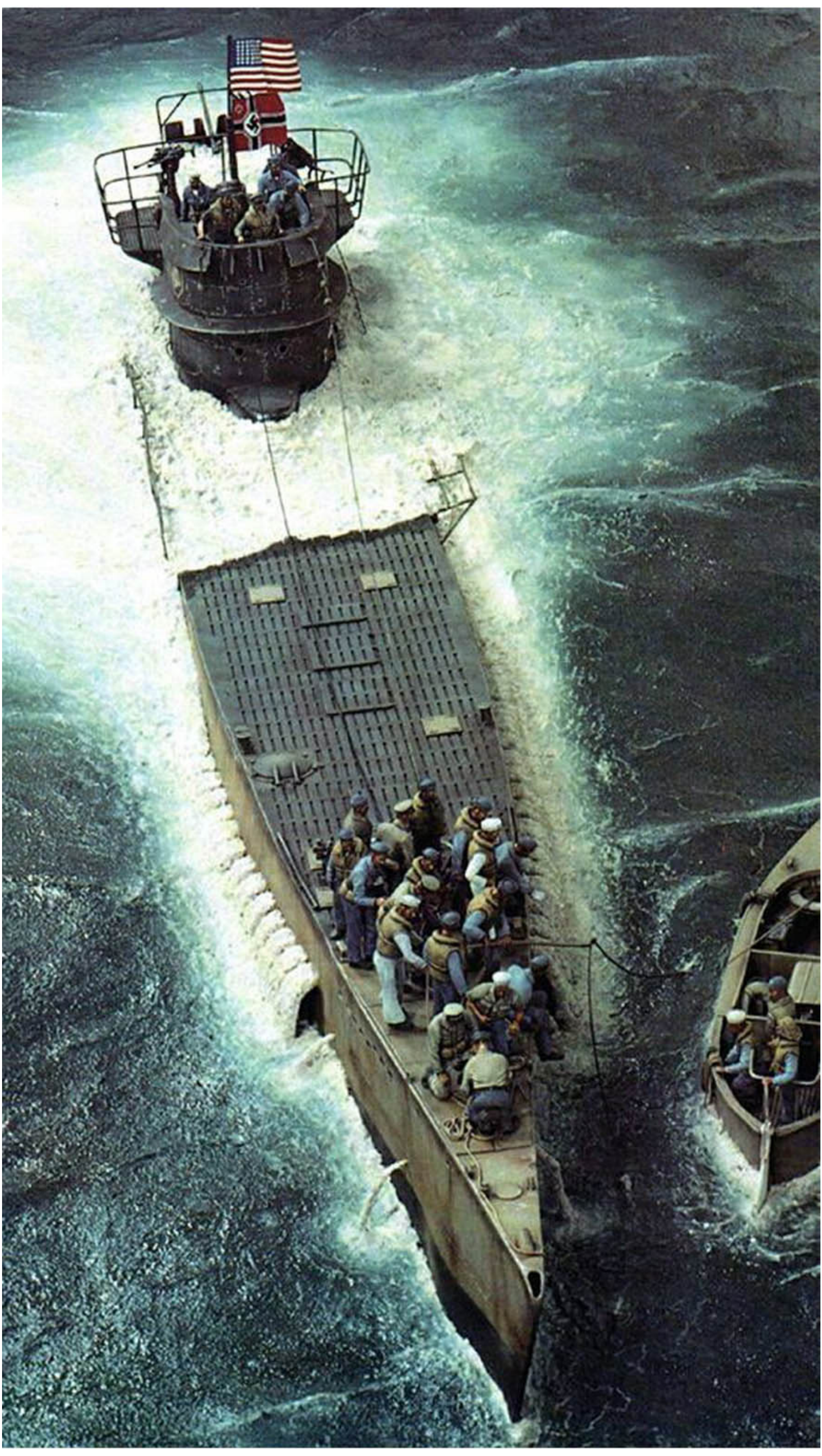
Our Navy

Mid-July, 1945

Epic of the U-505

A Navy Task Force Captures an Undersea Raider



ONE of the best kept secrets of the war was revealed by a recent Navy Department report that, on June 4, 1944, an escort carrier task group hounded a Nazi sub through the waters some 150 miles off the coast of French West Africa near Cape Blanco, forced it to the surface, boarded it, and took the Nazi over. The group then towed their prize, U-505, about 2,500 miles to Bermuda. This, according to official spokesmen, is the first time a U.S. naval boarding party has climbed over the rail and captured a foreign enemy man-of-war in battle on the high seas since 1815.

The Task Group consisted of the flat-top-jr., USS GUADALCANAL, commanded by Capt. Daniel V. Gallery, and her five escort destroyers: PILLSBURY (Lt. Cmdr. George W. Casselman), CHATELAIN (Lt. Cmdr. Dudley S. Knox), POPE (Lt. Cmdr. Edwin H. Headland, Jr.), FLAHERTY (Lt. Cmdr. Means Johnson, Jr.), JENKS (Lt. Cmdr. Julius F. Way), Lt. Norman D. Hodson commanded the aircraft from the GUADALCANAL while the destroyer escort division was commanded by Cmdr. Frederick S. Hall.

The capture occurred while the U-boat was returning to her base in Brest after an 80-day commerce-destroying raid in

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Members of the first boarding party from the Pillsbury: (Left to right)—C. A. Mocarski, GM1c; W. R. Riendeau, EM2c; G. W. Jacobson, CMoMM; Z. B. Lukosius, MoMM1c; Gordon Hohne, SM2c; Wayne M. Pickles, Jr., BM2c; S. E. Wdowiak, RM2c; and Art Knipsel, TM2c. They dared death to capture the sub.

the Gulf of Guinea; the raider was running completely submerged and was in perfect position to attack the carrier when first detected by the sound gear of the CHATELAIN.

Fighter planes from the carrier spotted the deep running sub from the air and guided the destroyers to the attack by firing their fixed guns into the water and zooming over the spot directly above the submerged sub. Following directions given from the air by two fighter pilots from the GUADALCANAL, Lt. W. W. Roberts and Lt. John W. Cadle, Jr., the CHATELAIN delivered a damaging depth charge attack which forced the sub to the surface right in the middle of the task group. The gang immediately poured it on the raider. In accordance with a previously planned move, only anti-personnel ammo was used. The Germans tried to man their own guns but the hail of lead drove them over the side into the water. They ditched their U-boat completely leaving it circling at full speed on the surface and rapidly filling with water through the scuttling valves they had opened.

All the ships dropped over their whale boats and started in pursuit; the boat from the PILLSBURY caught up with the sub first and the men jumped aboard. They hit the deck running and none stopped until they had reached the interior with machine guns primed and grenades ready. A single corpse greeted them.

While one group of men aboard the baby flattop maneuvered the ship to escape a single torpedo their mates caught up with the sub and joined the crew from the PILLSBURY. Racing against time the boarding parties performed numerous super-men tests to keep their prize intact. They took over the U-boat in foundering condition, with the sea pouring in from all sides. Most of the men had never set foot on a sub. But ignoring the possibility of booby traps they plugged all leaks, then closed the scuttling valves. The inflow was checked just a hair short of the sinking stage. If the sub had gone down it would have taken the boarders with her.

After the flooding had been stopped the U-boat was taken in tow by the flattop. Because the task group was in submarine waters the GUADALCANAL had to maintain continuous air patrols, conduct-

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ing flight operations day and night with her prize tugging at a line in the rear. Four days after the capture, the Fleet Tug ABNAKI was rushed to the scene by orders from Admiral Ingersoll.

Among the many amazing and ingenious feats performed by the salvage parties was that of recharging the sub's batteries; Cmdr. Earl Trosino, who commanded the crew from the GUADALCANAL, disconnected the sub's diesels from her motors in order to allow the propellers to turn the shafts when the sub was being towed. Ens. Fred Middaugh traced out the submarine's electric wiring and set the main switches for charging all batteries. The carrier then towed the U-505 at high speed thus turning the electric motors over and causing them to operate as generators and recharge the cells. This enabled the salvage parties to run all the electric machinery in the boat and to use her own pumps and air compressors to bring her up to full surface trim.

The ABNAKI, escorted by the task group, towed the U-boat 2,500 miles to Bermuda where she was turned over to experts from the Office of Naval Intelligence; the technical and operational information obtained as a result of this capture are said to have played an important part in clinching the Battle of the Atlantic and shortening the war by some months. The U-505, according to the reports is now in the service of the U.S. Navy manned by Yanks. Fifty-eight survivors, including the skipper, out of the sub's crew of 59 were rescued and imprisoned in the United States.

For the record, the only other German sub ever captured at sea in this war or in World War I was a U-boat which was beached on the south coast of Iceland in 1941 after her surrender. The sub had been crippled by an RAF plane and gave in to a British trawler in a storm several hundred miles south of Iceland. The crew of this sub cooperated with the British in towing the submarine to the spot where she was beached after the surrender; they were in full control of the ship while she was being towed and were able to destroy nearly all material which had any intelligence value. The U-505 was taken intact just as her crew left her, believing that they had scuttled her.

Said Capt. Gallery, "I consider this capture to be proof for posterity of the versatility and courage of the present-day American sailor. All ships in this task group were less than a year old and 80 percent of the officers and men were serving in their first seagoing ship. All hands did their stuff like veteran sea dogs and airplane mechanics became submarine experts in a hurry when the chips were down. I'm sure John Paul Jones and his men were proud of these lads and of the day's work when the U.S. colors went up on the U-505."

Capt. Gallery was awarded a Distinguished Service Medal for his services in the Atlantic anti-submarine warfare. Lt. Albert L. David, who led the boarding party from the PILLSBURY received a Navy Cross. In his party, according to the Navy Department, were the following men who were included in the citation awarded to the Task Group by

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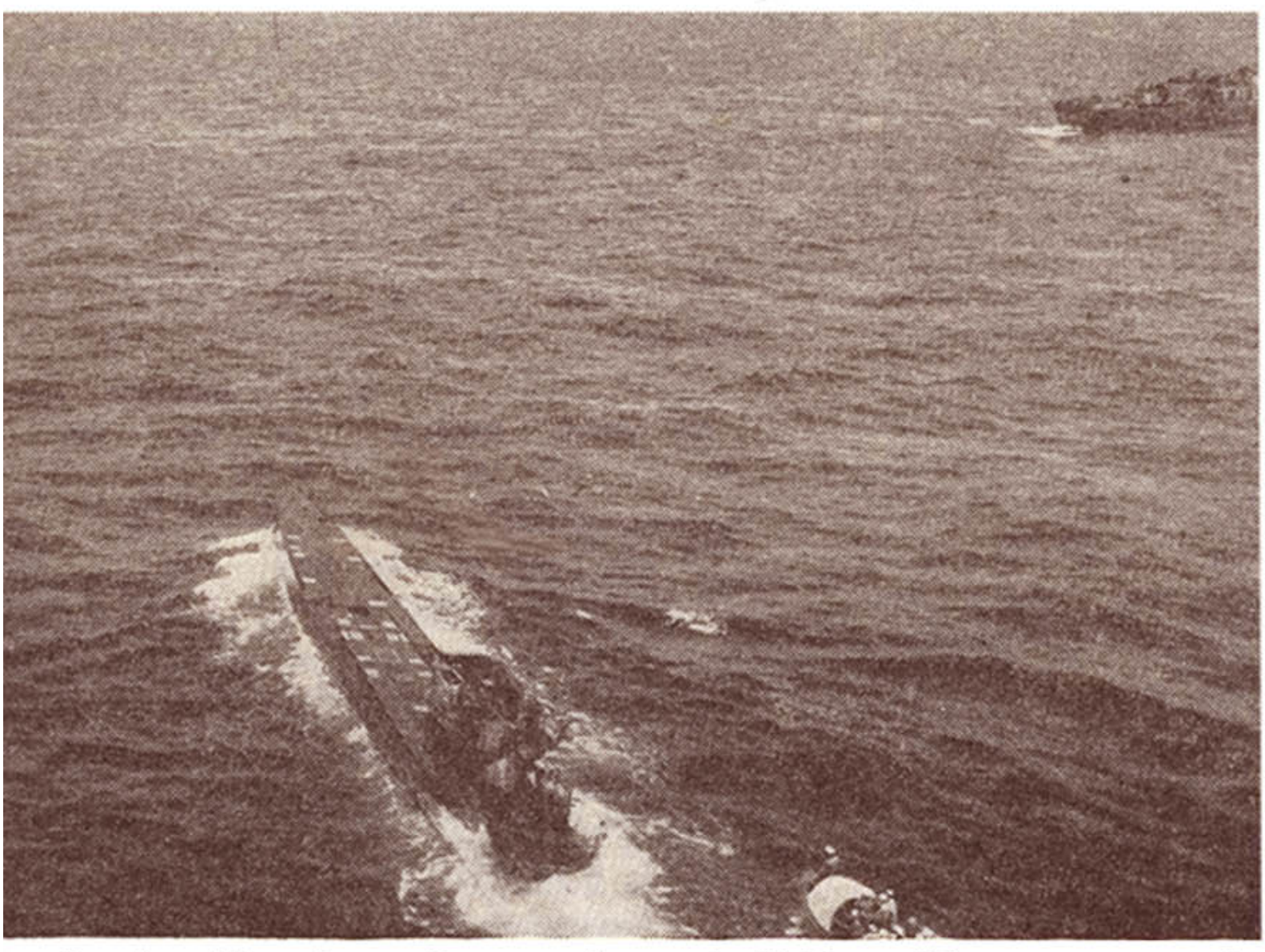
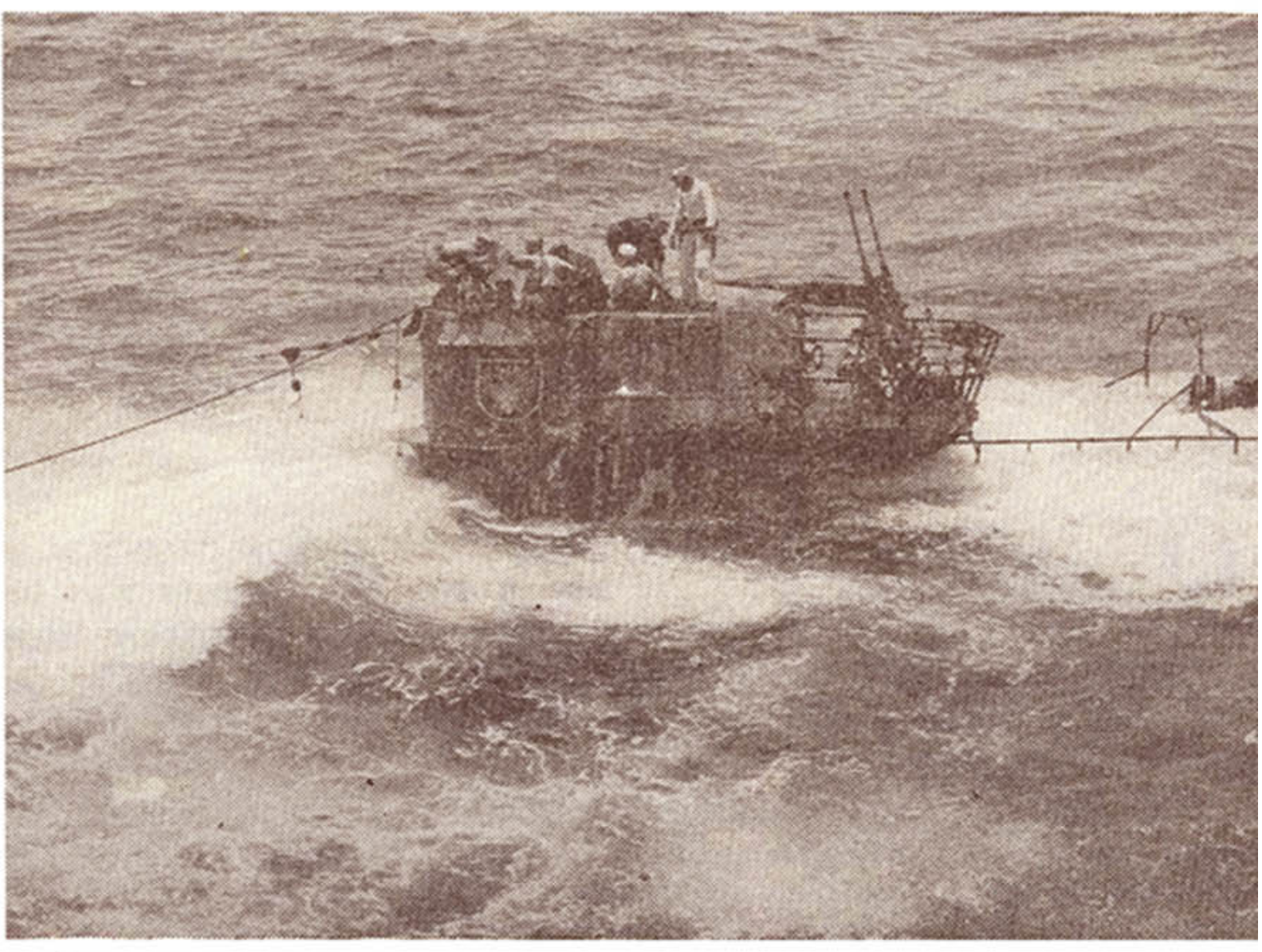
U-505

Admiral Ingersoll: Arthur W. Knipsel, TM2c; Stanley E. Wdowiak, RM2c; Chester A. Mocarski, GM1c; Wayne M. Pickles, Jr., BM2c; George W. Jacobson, CMoMM; Zenon B. Lukosius, MoMM1c; William R. Riendeau, EM2c; Gordon F. Hohne, SM2c; Philip N. Trusheim, Cox; Robert R. Jenkins, MoMM3c; James E. Beaver, Jr., S1c.

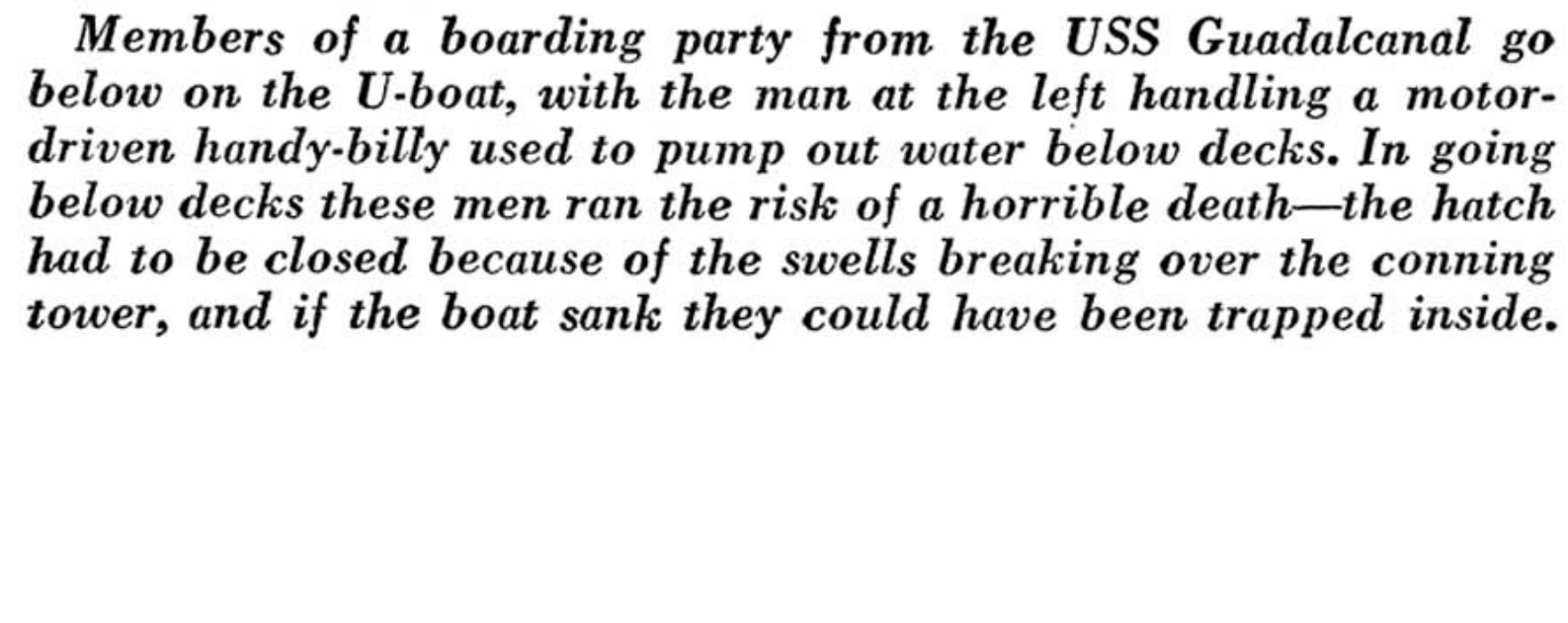
The names of the men from the GUADALCANAL who joined their mates aboard the sub have not yet been made available.



In the historic action on June 4, 1944, a Navy escort task group attacked, boarded, and captured the U-Boat 505, the first time in U.S. history since 1815 that a foreign enemy man-of-war had been boarded and captured on the high seas. In this picture the first boarding boat, from the USS Pillsbury, approaches the U-505. They faced the prospect of being blown up with the U-boat.



Members of a boarding party from the USS Guadalcanal go below on the U-boat, with the man at the left handling a motor-driven handy-billy used to pump out water below decks. In going below decks these men ran the risk of a horrible death—the hatch had to be closed because of the swells breaking over the conning tower, and if the boat sank they could have been trapped inside.



A Navy Avenger circles about overhead as the boarding party works on the U-boat. In the background is the destroyer escort Chatelain, which dropped the depth charge that forced the sub to the surface. When the raider surfaced, Navy planes strafed the decks with machine-gun fire, but according to prearranged plans, held back their attack so that the sub could be captured.

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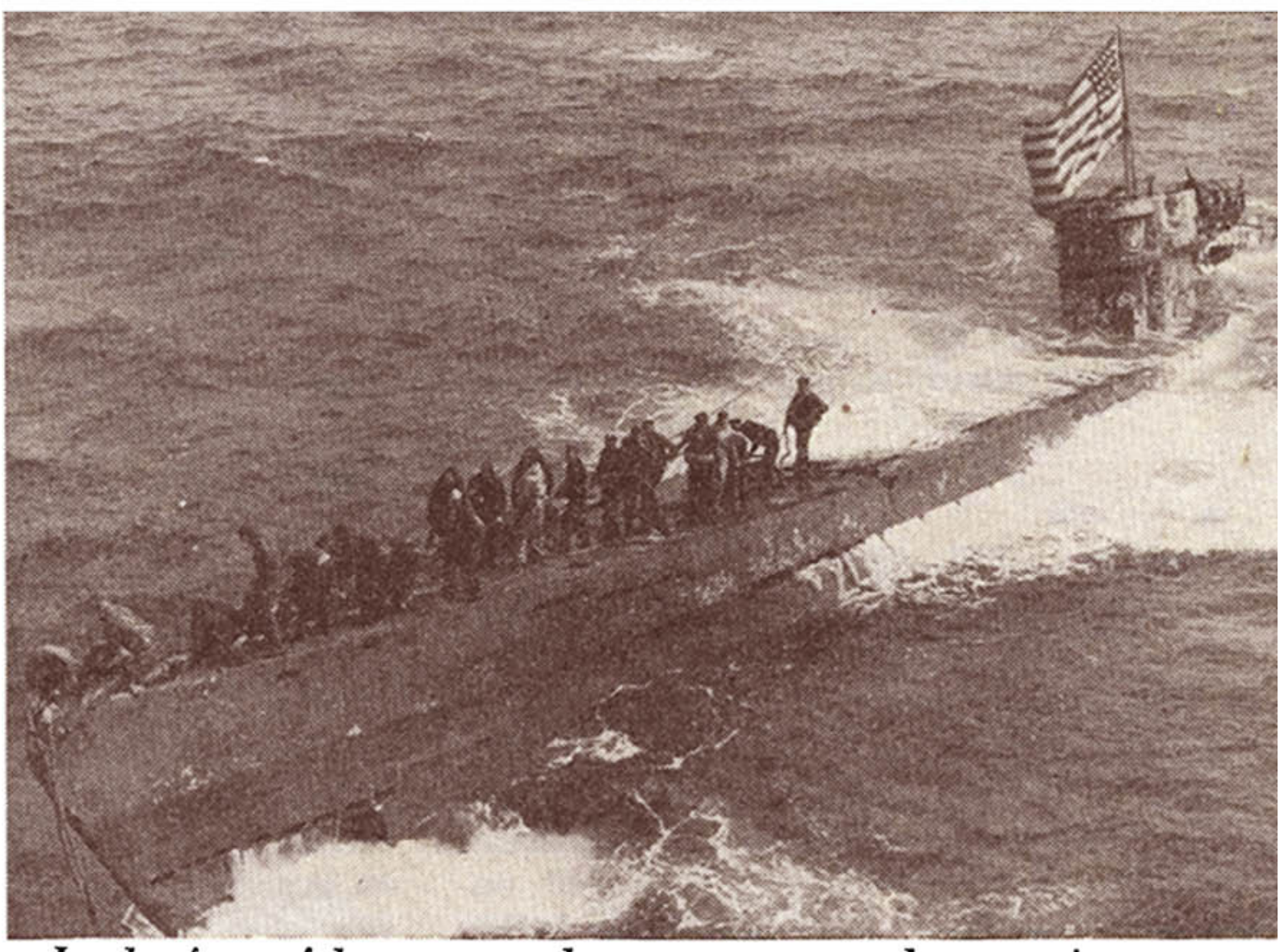
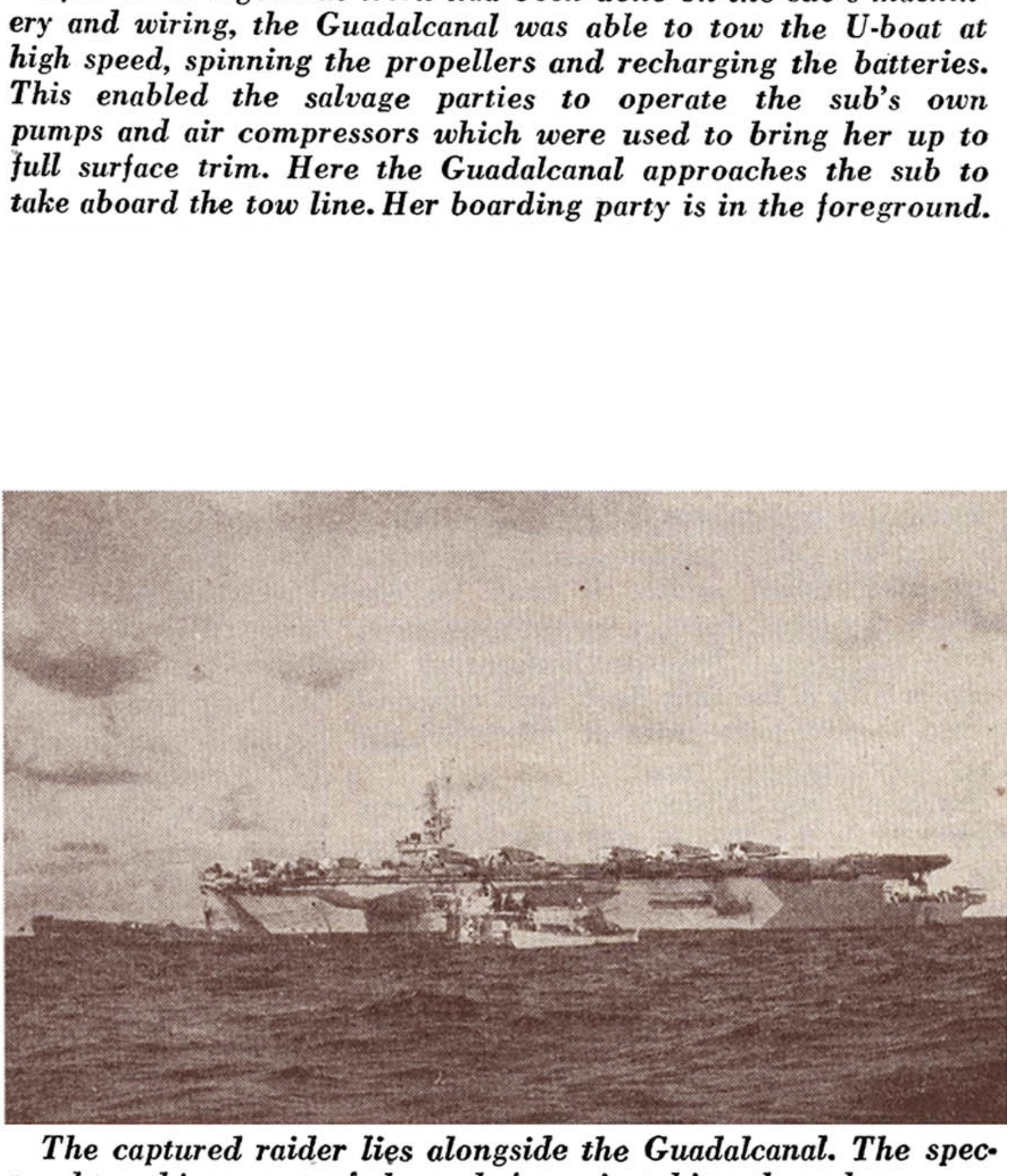
U-505



In the face of heavy seas that were constantly sweeping across the decks of the captured sub, the boarding party was forced to cling to a guy wire running forward from the conning tower when they moved about topside. Here the boarders secure the tow line to the bow of the U-boat after the scuttling valves had been closed just short of the sinking point in a race against time.

After some ingenious work had been done on the sub's machinery and wiring, the Guadalcanal was able to tow the U-boat at high speed, spinning the propellers and recharging the batteries. This enabled the salvage parties to operate the sub's own pumps and air compressors which were used to bring her up to full surface trim. Here the Guadalcanal approaches the sub to take aboard the tow line. Her boarding party is in the foreground.



The captured raider lies alongside the Guadalcanal. The spectacular achievement of the task force in taking the sub was one of the Navy's most carefully concealed secrets for the better part of a year. It was important that the Nazi High Command be kept ignorant of the fact that we had one of their boats to examine for technical and operational information. With the surrender of Germany it was no longer important to keep the secret.

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