



Across the Dark Waters: Life and Death in the U.S. Army Air Forces 2nd Antisubmarine Squadron

James Pontolillo

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From January – August 1942 German U-boats operated with near impunity off the U.S. Eastern Seaboard. It has been called “America’s Second Pearl Harbor” – but the losses inflicted were much worse. During this period, the Germans sank 609 ships totaling 3.1 million tons and the loss of thousands of lives, mainly those of merchant mariners, against a loss of only 22 of their U-boats. The U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) began flying antisubmarine patrols along the Atlantic coast immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Beginning in late 1942, its most experienced personnel were formed into the 1st and 2nd Antisubmarine Squadrons. They were then sent together overseas as the 480th Antisubmarine Group, operating first out of St. Eval, England and later out of Port Lyautey, Morocco. The crews of the 480th Antisubmarine Group were the first to be equipped with the B-24D “Liberator” and the revolutionary SCT-517C radar set. Over the course of its organizational lifetime, the 480th would fly twice as many missions as any other component of the USAAF Antisubmarine Command. They were responsible for one-third of all U-boats sunk and damaged during the height of the Battle of the Atlantic. Equally impressive was the 480th’s ability to suffer grievous losses (50 % of its combat strength and 70% of its original aircraft) while maintaining a high level of morale. Although they have been largely forgotten to history, the 480th played a crucial role in turning the tide against the German U-boats and in winning the Battle of the Atlantic. Drawing on archival records and the testimony of surviving airmen, *Across the Dark Waters* provides a unique never-before published look at daily life in the 2nd Antisubmarine Squadron. It also examines in detail a previously unreported chain of events that led to the tragic loss of several of the squadron’s most experienced aircrews over a six-day time period in late August to early September 1943. The text is enhanced by the inclusion of original wartime documents, as well as nearly 200 illustrations.

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Katherine Holt:

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