

The Royal Navy's operations in home waters are initially hampered by the loss of the use of Scapa Flow. Previously considered impregnable the base's vulnerability becomes apparent when a lone German submarine penetrates its defences. Forced to abandon the 'Flow' the Home Fleet returns in March when its defences are considerably stronger.



On 14 October 1939 the German submarine, U-47 sails undetected into Scapa Flow and sinks the battleship Royal Oak.

In early January 1940 No 950 Squadron, a RAF balloon squadron establishes its HQ in Lyness and commences to erect balloon sites across the islands.

Mail bearing the Type R1 RAF Censor No 123 together with a 'Received from HM Ships' cancel, according to Colley & Garrard (1993), emanated from RAF Lyness.



On 21 November 1939 Orkney and Shetland, due to their strategic importance, become the first 'Protected Areas' under the 1939 Defence Regulations. As a consequence mail originating from this and similar designated areas attract censorship.

Mail from naval personnel serving on ships of the Home Fleet in Scapa Flow went through the civil post office at Kirkwall.



The battleship HMS Nelson, with Admiral Sir Charles Forbes on board, becomes the Home Fleet Flagship in September 1939. While she is at Portsmouth undergoing repairs between 1 January and 24 July HMS Rodney holds this position.



Sealed with an Army censor label and tied with an Army censor cachet (first used in the UK during October) this 'Honour' cover was probably sent by a soldier defending 'Scapa' Deerness was the site of a Royal Artillery gun battery.

Stromness, the second largest town in Orkney, houses the headquarters of the Orkney and Shetland Defences (OSDef). The initialled 'Sea Transport Office / Stromness' cachet is possibly being used here as a substitute for an official censor cachet.



Mine-sweeping and anti-submarine trawlers constantly sweep the seas around Scapa Flow while Walrus from RNAS Hatston undertake routine anti-submarine patrols. Hurricanes stationed at Wick intercept enemy bombers attacking the 'Flow'.



The battle-cruisers HMS Hood and Renown serve with the Home Fleet, Hood being away in the Mediterranean during June-July while Renown departs for Gibraltar in August to join Force H.



2.4 ..... and defend Britain's maritime trade ....

Keeping the sea lanes around Britain free from German incursions is essential, any significant disruption to coastal transportation or international trade potentially having dire consequences for the country's survival. The North Sea is particularly vulnerable to attack.



The letter contained in this cover, dated 27 August 1940, is written on HMS Aquamarine headed notepaper. At this time the requisitioned trawler is on North Sea anti-submarine duties. Mail landed ashore from Naval vessels was usually franked with a 'RECEIVED FROM / H.M. SHIPS' slogan cancel with a town die in place, but early in 1940 the die was removed for security reasons.



The Port of London handles 1/5 of Britain's foreign trade, nearly all London bound shipping using the east coast route.



Large numbers of cargo vessels transporting heavy goods, particularly coal, sail in convoy between home ports.



Royal Navy destroyers and submarines constantly patrol the North Sea while Coastal Command Ansons fly search and reconnaissance missions seeking German surface vessels and U-boats.



Convoys ranging from 5 to 80 ships hug the coast escorted by Royal Navy stoops, including HMS Lowestoft and Black Swan.



Fast moving German torpedo boats frequently attack convoys sailing along the east coast.



Heinkel III bombers target east coast convoys and lone ships in the North Sea and English Channel.



Fishing boats are continually targeted in the belief they are spying.



On the night of 6/7 January the Freickridt IIn, accompanied by two other destroyers lays 170 magnetic mines in the Thames Estuary. The destroyer HMS Grenville and six merchant ships are lost to this minefield. Feldpost number 20333 was allotted to Z-14, the code for the German destroyer Freickridt IIn.



It is a two-way fight. On 26 January Durham Castle is torpedoed and sunk by U-57. The stoop HMS Westcott sinks U-13 with depth charges off Newcastle on 31 May.



U-boats are a constant threat. U-30, commanded by Fritz-Julius Lemp, attacking coastal convoys and fishing boats in the North Sea.

In the Atlantic the Royal Navy struggles to protect Allied shipping bringing essential cargoes to Britain. The convoy system is quickly adopted in a bid to counter the threat of German attack, merchant ships being grouped together and escorted across the Atlantic by Royal Navy and Canadian warships.



Ships are given designated stations within the convoy.



British and Canadian warships supported by AMCs, including HMCS Saguenay, the cruiser HMS Nigeria and the AMC Esperance Bay, escort convoys across the North Atlantic.



Following the fall of France the main North Atlantic convoy routes pass through the Western Approaches.



Liverpool becomes the principle destination for Atlantic convoys, over 30% of imports entering the country through the port. The 'OFFICIAL PAID / LIVERPOOL' skeleton handstamp was applied to mail landed at Liverpool from Royal Navy escorts on Atlantic convoy duties.

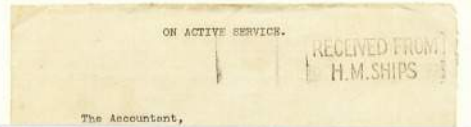


North Atlantic convoys sail from Halifax, Canada.



Mail from Royal Canadian Navy ships received the 'From H.M.C. SHIP' censor cachet.

The AMC HMS Maloja, formerly a P&O liner, undertakes convoy escort duties with Western Approaches Command, the Freetown Escort Force and Bermuda and Halifax Escort Force. According to Daynes (1986) this unusual red boxed censor cachet was used on board the Maloja.



Front reduced

The Accountant,



Naval personnel on convoy escort duties were able to have their mail put ashore locally.



Ships sailing from South America and around the 'Cape' rendezvous at Freetown, Sierra Leone before sailing north in convoy to British ports.



The sloop HMS Milford and AMC HMS Cilicia are among Royal Navy vessels undertaking convoy escort duties in the South Atlantic.



It is the Merchant Navy's task to carry the goods upon which Britain depends. The importation of raw materials and foodstuffs is essential to sustain the war effort. Income from foreign exports is equally important to help finance the ever increasing cost of the war.



Although exports are down by 30% at the end of 1940 companies like Rambone, Petersen continue in business.



SS *Umtata*, sailing in Convoy OG40F, carries a general cargo to Capetown in May.



All merchant ships come under state control immediately upon the outbreak of war. Ships are taken into service regardless of their age or condition, with crews often including men in their sixties and lads as young as 14. The poignant words of Erskine Childers quoted on this 2013 prestige booklet cover have a resonance in 1940.



During July, in Convoy OA184, SS *Umtata* carries steel from Middlesbrough to Capetown.



Jamaican slogan cancel emphasising the colony's awareness of the importance of British exports.



Imports include oil and its derivatives, iron, bauxite, lumber and food to supplement home grown produce.



Britain's colonies are the source of many raw materials and food stuffs.



Requisitioned in 1939 the *Avila Star* transports personnel and provisions, frequently carrying frozen meat from Buenos Aires.

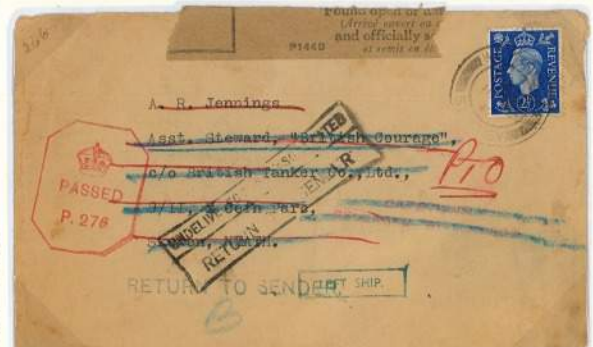
It is unusual by this time for merchant ships to be still using cachets identifying the ship.



The Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Darkdale* is one of ten oil tankers built for the RFA to deliver much needed fuel oil to the Fleet.

Merchant seamen are able to transfer to different ships at the end of a voyage. The 'Left Ship' cachet appears to indicate J S Jennings has taken advantage of this.

The tanker *British Courage* sails in 12 convoys during 1940 carrying fuel oil from the West Indies to Britain.



The Royal Navy, supported by RAF Coastal Command, strenuously endeavours to frustrate the Kriegsmarine's intention of wreaking havoc on Allied shipping and ultimately forcing Britain into submission. In an attempt to achieve their objective the Kriegsmarine despatch surface warships, submarines and commerce raiders into the World's oceans.



The battleship HMS Hood and aircraft carrier HMS Furious are engaged in Atlantic patrols. Walrus seaplanes flying from patrolling Royal Navy ships act as their overhead eyes.

Land based Sunderlands fly frequent reconnaissance missions over vast areas of ocean. In July No 210 Squadron move to Oban to fly Atlantic patrols.



In February the light cruiser, HMS Ceres leaves British waters for the China Station. From Singapore she undertakes ocean patrols and trade defence in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea. The cover is cancelled with an Edinburgh 'RECEIVED FROM / H.M. SHIPS' cancel dated 6 JAN 1940. By early 1940 the anonymous 'tombstone' censor cachet was used by all Royal Navy ships. Occasionally a cover's origin can be identified from the sender's details on the back flap.

Germany's surface warships, although small in number, are a potent weapon when they penetrate the oceans' sea lanes.



The German cruiser Admiral Hipper breaks into the Atlantic in December, but following an ineffective attack on troop convoy WSSA returns to Brest.

Submarines present a far greater threat to Allied shipping, German U-boats operating mainly in the Atlantic being used to devastating effect.



The heavy cruiser Admiral Sheer slips through the Denmark Strait into the North Atlantic on the 31 October. Her Arado Ar 196 reconnaissance seaplane locates convoy HX84 sailing from Halifax. On 5 November while attempting to protect the convoy its lone escort, AMC Jervis Bay is sunk. Sheer goes on to sink five more ships from the convoy.

Feldpost number M 10149 was allocated to the heavy cruiser Admiral Sheer.



Initially operating from bases at Wilhelmshaven and Kiel, following the fall of France bases, including La Rochelle, provide the U-boats with easy access into the Atlantic.



The Type VII is the most numerous and widely used U-boat during the Battle of the Atlantic.



Italy's declaration of war further exacerbates the situation. From their base in Bordeaux Italian submarines, including Brin, join their German allies in forays into the Atlantic. In 1943 Italy's 1942 War Propaganda issue is overprinted 'Italia Repubblicana Fascista Base Atlantica' for use on mail being sent from their Bordeaux base. (C)



Initially patrolling as lone predators, U-boats are soon hunting in massed 'wolf packs'. Despite the efforts of escorting warships and AMCs this new tactic quickly achieves significant results, 520 Allied and neutral ships succumbing to U-boat attack by the end of 1940.



U-boat captain's keep a constant look out for potential prey, long range Focke-Wulf Fw 200 Condors often directing U-boats to their quarry. For the unsuspecting merchant ships there is little chance of escape.

HMS Dundee is sunk by U-48 on 15 September while escorting convoy SC3.

The Italian submarine Ammiraglio Cagni sinks the Dagomba in the Atlantic.



Mail is occasionally rescued from sinking ships, this cover being carried by the British freighter SS Eros when she is torpedoed and damaged off the Irish coast by U-48 on 7 June.



Royal Naval ships escorting Atlantic convoys are sometimes effective. On 5 February U-41, while attacking an outward-bound convoy in the South West Approaches, is sunk by HMS Antelope.



The Kormoran, originally the merchant vessel Steiermark, leaves Gotehafen on 3 December disguised as the Soviet freighter Vyacheslav Molotov and avoids detection as she enters the Atlantic. Having sunk eleven merchant ships while sailing in the South Atlantic and Pacific she is finally sunk by HMAS Sydney to the west of Australia on 19 November 1941.

Feldpost number M 26623 was allocated to the Hilfskreuzer Kormoran.

Commerce Raiders (Hilfskreuzers) sailing alone roam the oceans in search of unescorted Allied ships. These converted merchant ships disguised as neutral cargo vessels are heavily armed and prove elusive to detect due to subterfuge and their range of operation.



The AMC HMNZS Monowai patrols the southern Pacific while the threat of German raiders exist.



On 19 June off New Zealand the cargo ship Niagara strikes a mine laid by the Hilfskreuzer Orion.



Having previously sunk four merchant ships, on 8 December the commerce raider Kornet forces the scuttling of three British freighters, including Triadic, off the Pacific island of Nauru.



The routing of this cover is clearly recorded and illustrates the recognised threat to shipping as far from the European theatre of war as New Zealand, the steamer service sailing between North and South Island having been suspended due to the threat of attack by German commerce raiders.

The German invasion of Denmark and Norway, Operation "Weserübung", commences on 9 April effectively bringing the 'Phoney War' to an end. While Britain vacillates over the mining of Norwegian waters Germany takes decisive pre-emptive action.

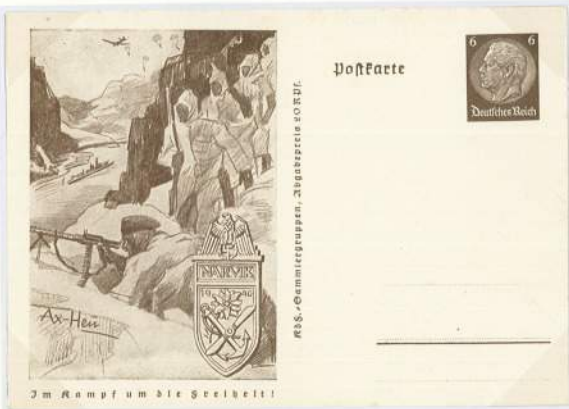


In a bid to prevent the export of Swedish iron ore to Germany via Narvik the mining of the Norwegian coast by Royal Navy ships, including HMS *Greyhound*, commences on 9 April. The sighting of German ships heading for Norway by RAF reconnaissance aircraft forces a halt to these operations.

Denmark is overwhelmed, within a day of German troops crossing the Danish border, the country's king, Christian X, ordering the cessation of all resistance.



In response to the German invasion postal services from Britain to Denmark, were immediately suspended.



At Narvik German troops quickly overpower the Norwegian defenders.

In response Britain immediately despatches the Home Fleet from Scapa Flow together with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Cruiser Squadrons from Rosyth, their objective, to hinder or thwart the German invasion fleet.



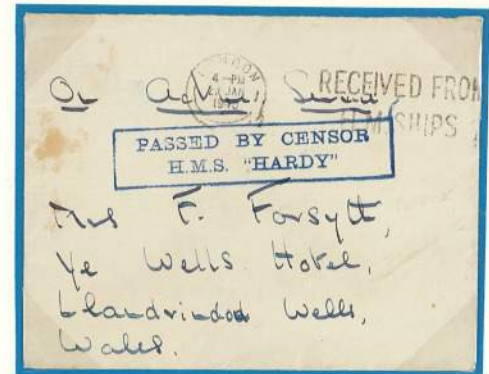
Things do not go well. HMS *Rodney* becomes the target of Luftwaffe attack while *Renown* is drawn into a fruitless pursuit of *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst*. On 8 April the Polish submarine *Orzel* sinks the German troopship *Rio de Janeiro* heading for Norway.

On 10 April British destroyers enter Ofofjord sinking two German destroyers and a number of merchant ships. Two days later *Warspite*, with her destroyer escort press home the attack sinking a further eight destroyers.

A well co-ordinated invasion of Norway sees the Germans making successful sea-borne landings at Kristiansand, Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and Narvik and an airborne assault on Stavanger airfield.



Troops quickly disembark and seize pre-planned strategic objectives including the capital and airfields to which supporting troops can be flown in.



While participating in this action HMS *Hardy* is lost. HMS *Hardy* is one of only a very small number of Royal Navy ships still using an identifying censor cachet at the beginning of 1940.

3.2 ..... Britain's failed Norwegian campaign ....

British troops belatedly land in Norway, disembarking at Harstad, Namsos and Aandalsnes between 14 and 18 April. Ill-prepared and inadequately equipped, they are soon forced to evacuate southern Norway and by 8 June the remaining British troops withdraw from Narvik. The Norwegian campaign has lasted barely eight weeks.



The battle-cruiser HMS *Repulse* with other naval escorts protects troopships, including the *Empress of Australia*, sailing for Norway.



Harsted



Fighting in inhospitable terrain British forces are unable to prevent German forces making strategic advances.

"All civilization seems to have come to an end. I cannot understand how such terrible things can happen."  
— King Haakon VII April, 1940



FPO 115 is used at the British base at Harsted on the Lofoten Islands from 20 April until 30 May. The base is evacuated on 7 June.

Taking of Narvik is an isolated success. Captured by the Germans on the first day of their invasion, it remains vulnerable to Allied attack because of its northerly location. On 28 May Allied forces retake the town, but due to failures further south are compelled to evacuate the town by 8 June.

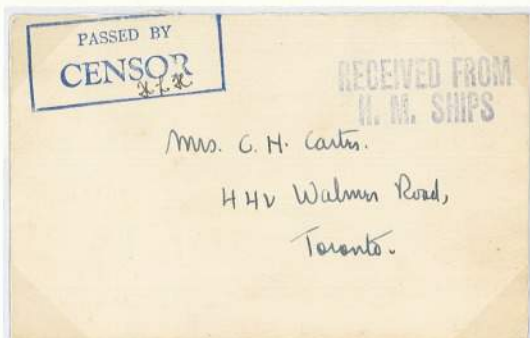


The 1/5 Battalion Royal Leicestershire Regiment lands in Norway on 18 April. Following action around Aandalsnes in central Norway they are evacuated on 30 April. Not all escape as the 'REPORTED MISSING' cachet indicates.



Wellingtons bomb Stavanger-Sola airfield to little effect.

Outnumbered RAF Gladiators flying from frozen lakes provide air cover but they are no match for modern German fighters.



Royal Naval ships, including the destroyer HMS *Firedrake* bombard German defences at Narvik during the Allied assault. According to Daynes (1996) the boxed 'PASSED BY / CENSOR' cachet was in use on board HMS *Firedrake*.



Norwegian troops are supported by British, French and Polish units during the assault on Narvik. General Bohusz-Szyszko is in command of the Polish troops.



'Internierten-Post' and 'Ilag XIII' censor cachets indicate the sender, Edward Johnson, is a civilian. Johnson is aboard S.S. *Salmonpool* when it is seized by German forces in Narvik harbour. Ilags are camps for civilian internees, Ilag XIII being situated in the Bavarian town of Wülzburg.