

BOEMRE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM: ONGOING STUDIES

Region: Atlantic

Planning Area: Atlantic

Title: Battle of the Atlantic Expedition 2010, 2011 (AT-10-04)

Total Cost: \$200,000

Period of Performance: FY 2010-2015

Conducting Organization: NOAA

BOEMRE Contact: David Ball

Description:

Background: In July 2008 BOEMRE participated in Phase I of a cooperative expedition, led by Monitor NMS, to begin documenting the remains of vessels lost off the North Carolina coast during World War II (<http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/missions/battleoftheatlantic/>). In addition to Monitor NMS, participants in Phase I included NOAA's Maritime Heritage Program, the National Park Service Submerged Resources Center, BOEMRE, the University of North Carolina Coastal Studies Institute, and the East Carolina University Maritime Heritage Program. This project received national media attention; interviews were carried on National Public Radio and The Discovery Channel News, among others.

Part of the Battle of the Atlantic, this area was the closest theater of war to the continental United States. The 2008 Expedition successfully documented the remains of the German U-boats U-85, U-352, and U-701, all in federal waters. Monitor NMS is committed to a multi-year project to document the full story of the Battle of the Atlantic by conducting archaeological investigations on both Axis and Allied losses during the war, and wishes to continue the partnerships that were formed during the 2008 expedition.

Objectives: Phase II of the project in 2009 will investigate Allied losses in the Graveyard of the Atlantic including US and British naval vessels, as well as US Merchant Marine ships. Many of these wrecks have undergone illegal salvage, especially those at depths shallower than 130 feet. The deeper Allied shipwrecks are in a much better state of preservation due to the challenges of technical diving and working in strong currents. These shipwrecks lie in a near exact state from when they sank, and as such, truly reflect the battlefield that raged above and below during WWII.

Investigations carried out off North Carolina will be combined with the efforts BOEMRE has already completed on WW II casualties in the Gulf of Mexico, which serves as the foundation for this project. The objectives of this project are to collect detailed documentation of these vessels. Fieldwork will include site mapping, photo-mosaics, video/photo documentation, corrosion potential studies, and an evaluation of the artificial reef effect at each of the sites. Results from this project will include a cumulative report on fieldwork and historical significance; a joint Battle of the Atlantic nomination with BOEMRE on the U-166 and Gulf of Mexico WW II merchant vessel losses to the National Register of Historic Places; and outreach products, including a Battle of the Atlantic web site, posters, and educational materials. Additionally, this project will strengthen existing federal and state partnerships, as well as create new ones.

Methods: The objectives of the study will be obtained through investigating up to six historic shipwrecks during the 2009 field season. These sites will be selected by BOEMRE and NOAA archaeologists. Testing would be performed by marine archaeologists applying a variety of techniques including remote sensing, diving, and ROV inspection. The investigations will likely consist of extensive remote sensing, photographic documentation and mapping of exposed features.

Importance to BOEMRE: Currently, there are over 125 known losses from the Battle of the Atlantic located in federal waters off the North Carolina coast. These consist primarily of Allied losses, but included in this number are at least four, and possibly five, German U-boats (the fifth sub was lost along the Virginia/North Carolina border). These sites are recognized as non-renewable cultural, historical, and archaeological resources.

With recent interest in renewable energy sources and new leasing activity planned for the Atlantic Region, development in this area will increase. Therefore, a current assessment of World War II vessel losses will be crucial for mitigating adverse affects to these resources as required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Executive Order 11593, which require that Federal agencies must apply the National Register Criteria to properties that may be affected by an undertaking.

The NOAA Monitor National Marine Sanctuary (Monitor NMS) is committed to a multi-year investigation of vessel losses from the Battle of the Atlantic. BOEMRE continued participation and partial funding of this project will increase our role in the overall direction and scope of this project. It will also help to fulfill our responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Executive Order 11593 by providing vital information on the current condition of these wrecks in order to determine potential adverse affects from BOEMRE-permitted activities.

Current Status: Awarded and in progress

Final Report Due: May 17, 2015

Publications:

Affiliated WWW Sites: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/missions/battleoftheatlantic/>

Revised Date: January 12, 2011