

Divers find First World War 'iron coffin' U-boat wrecks

David Garner

TWO First World War German U-boats missing for 86 years have been found by divers off Scarborough – with their crews still entombed on board.

The German government is now seeking to have them declared official war graves of the 58 submariners who went down with them.

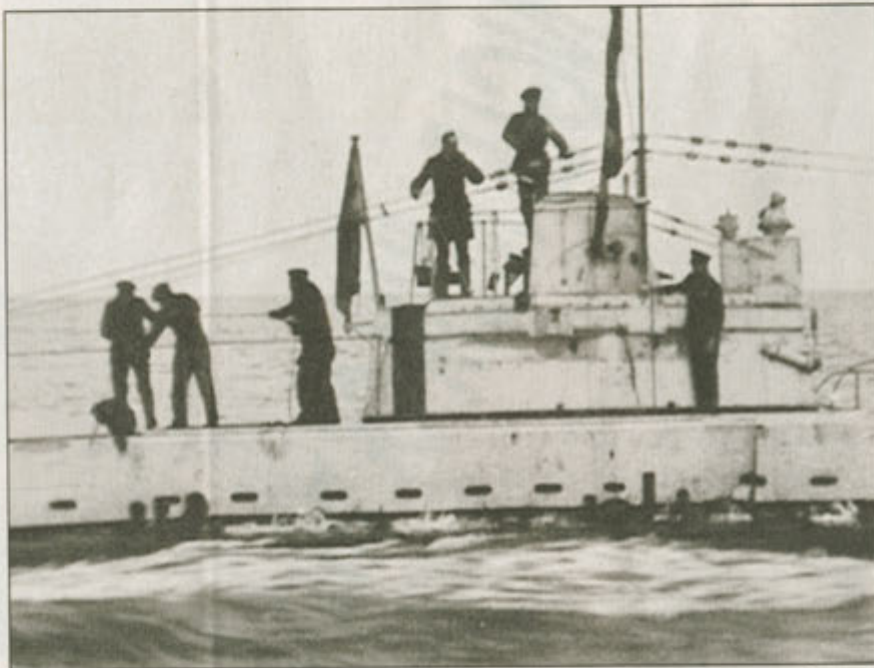
For the last decade teams of divers have been scouring the waters off the Yorkshire coast for traces of the eight U-boats sunk in the area in 1917 and 1918 and by last August all but two had been located.

Then two Scarborough Sub Aqua Club members, Andrew Jackson and Carl Racey, came across the remaining two wrecks within the space of 48 hours.

And the grim secret of *UB41* and *UB75* was that both had sunk with all hands – the first without warning due to a huge explosion, possibly caused by a mine. But how *UB75* foundered is a mystery even though the official Admiralty records suggested she had hit a mine attached to anti-submarine nets off Flamborough Head.

But the wreck of *UB75* was found upright and virtually intact 30 miles away in nearly 200ft of water off Robin Hood's Bay with no evidence of an explosion.

When Mr Jackson and Mr Racey investigated a wreck off Robin Hood's Bay it turned out to be *UB41*. Because they did not have the necessary equipment to film it at that time, the divers turned their attention to a nearby wreck which they confirmed was *UB75*. The story of the discovery is told in *Inside Out* on BBC One tonight. *UB41*, whose last sighting was by



the *SS Melbourne* on October 5, 1917 off Scarborough, was badly damaged.

Mr Jackson said: "Though *UB41* was a very small submarine, just 30 metres long, and was always going to be difficult to find in the North Sea, we knew it was going to be in sight of Scarborough because people had seen the explosion from the Marine Drive."

Just two days later *UB75* was found virtually undamaged. She had left her home port of Borkum on November 29, 1917, heading for the Whitby area. Although she succeeded in sinking four ships she never made it home.

"She has lost no hatches and there are no holes in her. The chances are that she was lying on the seabed with most of the crew still alive and none of them able to get out," Mr Jackson said.

"The submariners of World War One were true pioneers of submarine warfare, especially on this scale. These vessels were hard mistresses to the crew and officers alike, often referred to as 'iron coffins' or 'sisters of sorrow'. You have to remember that we had just come out the sail era and these machines were still very basic."

Mr Racey added: "During World War One the North Sea was more

like what the Atlantic was to World War Two, a hunting ground for U-boats."

The locations of the wrecks are closely guarded secrets to protect them from further disturbance. But the details have been shared with the National U-boat Archive in Cuxhaven, Germany.

If the German ministers succeed in persuading the British Government to declare the wrecks war graves they will become the first German ships so designated in British waters.

Inside Out is on BBC-1 in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire at 7.30 tonight.



Sea graves: Scarborough divers Andrew Jackson and Carl Racey found the wrecks of two First World War U-boats similar to that pictured on the left.

