

**Barry on the frontline: To what extent did the civilians of a Welsh town participate in the total war effort of the Second World war?**

A dissertation by

Andrew Watkins

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## **Table of contents**

- Introduction
- Chapter one: The defence of Barry
- Chapter two: Barry's merchant seamen at total war
- Conclusion
- References

## Introduction

“The whole of the warring nations are engaged, not only soldiers, but the entire population, men, women and children. The fronts are everywhere to be seen. The trenches are dug in the towns and streets. Every village is fortified. Every road is barred. The front line runs through the factories. The workmen are soldiers with different weapons but the same courage.” (National Churchill Museum n.d.).

The above quote, taken from a speech given to the House of Commons by Winston Churchill in the summer of 1940, sums up the totality of the Second World War. With these words Britain's wartime leader captured the total war ideal of driving every member of society, both civil and military, towards a single goal of conflict; this dissertation will take a focused look at what conventions of the total war ideal applied to the south Wales port of Barry. The people of this modest town, like the majority of British towns, served in every aspect of Britain's military; what is significant about Barry's civil contribution to Britain's war effort is that it reflects the the important role that south Wales played in the Second World War. How the civilians of the town reacted to the threat of invasion will be explored by focusing on their role in its defence, followed by an overview of the crucial role Barry's merchant sailors played in the War as well the experiences they endured.

Unlike the Great War of 1914-18, Wales in this conflict was very much on the frontline; advancement in German air and submarine technology, combined with a doctrine of total war that made entire populations protagonists, and therefore a target, dictated this. The fall of France in the early part of the War closed off Britain's eastern and southern ports as viable safe destinations for the vast amount of merchant shipping that Britain relied on to supply food and materials to continue the war effort. This put the western ports of Britain, Barry included, in to a position of importance as the “principle termini for the

merchant shipping” (Edwards,2013.p.218); this was not overlooked by the strategic command of Nazi Germany's Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine. As a major Welsh port Barry was involved in the preparation for defence, the importation of supplies to continue the war and, eventually, the prosecution of hostilities to achieve victory. Barry men served in every branch of Britain's armed forces and fought in nearly every major campaign of the Second World War, this commitment in itself was similar to the First World War; what had an even greater impact on the port town was the Battle of the Atlantic in which over five hundred Barry civilians lost their lives as merchant sailors. This Battle raged from the very outset of the war until the final days of the Nazi regime; as a port Barry was fully involved, the town's population witnessed ships arriving damaged, ship wrecked crews rescued and landed, and casualties mounting as ships were lost to attacks from the air and sea. The high loss of life from Barry in the merchant navy service reflects the horrific toll on Welsh registered merchant ships; from a fleet of 164 the Second World War saw 123 sunk (Edwards, 1987). The transformation of Barry from a struggling Welsh port, that was hit as hard by the previous decade's economic slump as the Welsh valley mining towns were, to a busy war port, that would help keep Britain in the war, was as sudden and dramatic as the Nazi Blitzkrieg that swept through Europe. Unlike the First Great War of 1914-18, that was fought by Welsh men in distant French and Belgium fields, the total war doctrine of the Second World War made the Welsh population combatants and south Wales ports a Battle field. From defence mobilization to invasion preparation the whole of Wales was involved; a snapshot of Barry's response and reaction to this will shed light on how “total” the War was in Wales.

Although the Second World War has been described as “an under-researched area in Welsh historiography” (Preston,2017) some invaluable, but limited, work has been written that is relevant to the total war topic of this dissertation. A chapter titled “Barry since 1939: War-time prosperity and post-war uncertainty”, written by Peter Stead for *The Barry*

*Centenary Book*, discusses some of the major issues the Welsh town faced in the Second World War, such as the military efforts of individuals, civilian recruitment for air and land defence and the merchant navy contribution; although a valuable resource the chapter fails to address how deeply Barry's population were structured on to a total war footing. Stead's work on Barry argues that the Second World War brought brief economic relief and permanent political change to the port. The economic and political ramifications of the Second World War are also prevalent in work by Mari A. Williams in which she briefly discusses total war by describing it as having an "unprecedented impact" on daily life "which placed every member of Welsh society on the front line" (Williams, 1999, p.16). Williams strongly suggests a link between the Second World War's restructuring of the Welsh economy and society, and the success of the Labour party in the post war election, which in turn created profound social changes such as the national health service and the welfare state. The important social changes brought about by the post war election Labour victories, that are linked to the outcome of the Second World War by Stead and Williams, warrant a closer look at the Second World War Welsh effort to define what that effort was and how committed the Welsh nation was to "the waging of this total war" (Williams, 1999, p.15).

Roger Chickering and Stig Förster address the definitions of total war that have dictated the areas of research in this work; these definitions are also supported in the work of Jeremy Black. Chickering and Förster argue that although the Second World War represented the ultimate ideal of total war, the degree to which the war was waged had varying limits between countries; these limits could be set by geographic, economic and political objectives or could be set by a moral value. It is clear that in the Second World war "this entailed different consequences in different states" (Black, 2010.p.13); this leads to the question of this work that asks what those limits were in Wales. The dominant features of total war are the combined use of the military and civilians towards war,

described as “the commitment of massive armed forces” and the “mobilization of industrial economies” (Chickering and Förster, 2004, p.2). This combined effort of a nations civilians and military called for “disciplined organization of civilians” (Chickering and Förster, 2004.p.2) in line with military standards. The civilian effort in total war is “no less significant” (Chickering and Förster, 2004.p.2) than the military effort, therefore this doctrine in the Second World War made the people of Wales, who were engaged in the war effort, a “legitimate if not preferred target of military violence” (Chickering and Förster, 2004.p.2). The two main areas that demanded the largest commitment to a total war effort in Barry were home defence and merchant shipping.

These two areas, that will be explored in this dissertation, represent the part of the war in Barry that most involved the civilian population; these areas also represent the greatest civilian loss of life to Barry. This dissertation will consist of two chapters titled “The defence of Barry” and “Barry's merchant seamen at total war”. The first chapter will examine the mobilization of Barry on to a war footing from early 1939 onwards. How the national and local government used the local press to prepare the people of Barry for total war will be seen with a review of articles and ever increasingly war oriented adverts. The response of Barry's population to war demands, from the organisation of the local A.R.P. to the assembling of the town home guard, will be shown. How deeply Barry was involved in the war towards its end will be presented with a look at its involvement in the D-day invasion. This will be achieved through combining analysis of Peter Stead's work with a selection of primary source war time pieces from the Barry and district newspaper. The second chapter will show the extent to which the men of Barry serving in the merchant navy were at total war. Hunted from the first day of the War to last by the Kriegsmarine U-boat fleet, this group of Barry men probably represented more than most in Wales the total war ideal of civilians being targeted by a military force because they were essential to a total war effort. The ordeal of the Barry men at sea will be looked at in detail as well as

how important their fate was to the people of their home port; the merchant ships that delivered the materiel, men and food in to Barry to carry on the war represented progress to victory but were also a reminder of the four thousand Barry men, approximately twenty percent of Barry's war time male population, in danger serving in the merchant fleet (Stead,1984). This second chapter will see analysis of work by J.D. Davies and Bernard Edwards to paint a view of the Welsh merchant contribution to total war, as well as analysis of a Holger H. Herwig essay to discover the extent of total war waged by the Kriegsmarine U-boats. These will be combined with analysis of primary source articles covering merchant sailor accounts from the local press.

This exploration of Barry's civilian involvement in the Second World War will reveal concise answers to the question of their total war participation. How deeply Barry's population were involved in total war will be shown, as well as the limits of the total war waged against them. It is the intention of this dissertation that a brief view of total war in Wales, shown through a window focused on Barry, will add to the body of work that already exists that addresses Wales and the Second World War.

### **Chapter one:The defence of Barry**

The principle element that defines a total war ideal is the combining effort of every aspect of a nation's military, civilians and economy towards waging war. To explore this ideal in Wales this chapter will present a brief analysis of work written on the mobilization and economic impact of the Second World War in Barry; the chapter's main aim is to look at "hallmarks of total war [that] have proved more difficult to measure" (Chickering and Förster, 2004.p.2) through a review of the organisation and mobilization of the civilians of Barry. Major aspects of total war that are not easily measured are the efforts of the authorities, both local and national, to "sustain popular commitment to the war effort"

(Chickering and Förster, 2004.p.2). Through reviewing articles and adverts in the local press, that were designed to increase obligation to war, this chapter will show how the “limits on the size and scope of the war effort” (Chickering and Förster, 2004.p.2) were eroded by the progressive demonisation of the enemy and militarization of Barry's civilians.

It was “miraculous that so much was achieved” (Stead, 1984. p. 430) by the rapid mobilization of Barry's civilians in the early part of the war. Stead's chapter in *The Barry Centenary Book* describes in detail the frenetic, and sometimes complex, activity that took place on the outbreak of war: barrage balloons were raised across the docks to deter low level air attack, a dummy fort was assembled on a beach front to distract from the real fort that was built on Barry island, an information bureau appeared on the main shopping road and people with gardens and allotments began to dig for victory by growing their own food. People that did not join the forces volunteered for the Air Raid Precaution group, as auxiliary fireman and for the Local Defence Volunteers; work was suddenly widespread with jobs on the railways, docks, merchant ships and munition factories supplying a wage for all. This transformation in Barry, from a town that was struggling with its economic interwar problems to a frontline port with a clear purpose, is an example of how the Second World War was a paradox in Wales that could bring prosperity alongside the horrors of air raids and tragedy of loss.

The Historian Peter Stead's focus, on how the Second World War rekindled the commercial prosperity of Barry, points to how involved in the war the town was; the decades of “commercial decline” (Stead,1984.p.429) that preceded 1939 were turned around with the new found significance that the tides of war brought. The ports of south Wales had a weakness of being reliant on exporting coal; the decline of the coal industry showed this weakness, especially in Barry, as the port's economy fared as badly as south Wales mining communities during the inter war years. The danger posed to the eastern and southern importing docks of England, due to the fall of France in 1940, pushed Barry



forward as a safer destination for merchant shipping. This put the civilian population of Barry directly in to the total war effort: it “gave the people of Barry important jobs to do” (Stead,1984.p.429.) in organising the defence of the port, it gave ownership of the War to the people of Barry “out of the novel experience of being both busy and important” (Stead,1984.p.429.). The changing fortunes of the port were being felt even before the German victories on the continent as “new cargoes” (Stead,1984.p.434.) were being shipped to France within days of the war starting. Unemployment rapidly declined as the railway and dock workforce came under “unprecedented government control” (Stead,1984.p.434.).

Economically it was “apparent that a new era was beginning” (Stead,1984.p.434.) and could be the reason that there was a strong drive for war saving bonds in Barry; the campaign for war bonds, and Barry town's reaction to it, are an example of how the Second World War Welsh population were orientated towards militarization. This campaign took the form of regular adverts in the local press, Barry's citizens reacted to this with organised drives that looked to supply specific war material. The adverts were placed in the local *Barry and District News* by the National Savings Committee; the purpose of the National Savings Committee was to encourage civilians to effectively lend their surplus money to the government in order to bolster the war time economy. The first of these adverts appeared in the *Barry and District News* on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1940 and remained a constant feature in every issue of that local news paper throughout the war. This first advert had a slogan that read “Shopping for the WHOLE Family!”, in large text, above a picture of a shopping basket that contained regular shopping items as well as guns and a toy aircraft.; this shows that the intended audience and aim of the advert is the average family and their household budget. Rather than being just an attempt to ask for money the text below the slogan and picture made it clear that every family was involved in the War; the tone is not of persuasion but of stated fact that the family budget has to now take in to

account a portion that will contribute towards buying weapons for the defence of “the Family of Britain”. By using language that mixed the family budget with weapons, and demanded sacrifice of individual needs for national needs, the savings advert was a strong tool that helped orientate the psyche of Barry's population on to a total war footing. The National Savings Committee target audience and message became more specific as the war rolled on; adverts would show a picture of a housewife or a business man or a shopkeeper accompanied with slogans such as “...she chases Messerschmitts!” or “...that's the man that bombed Kiel!”. These adverts represent an example of the totality of the Second World War in Wales by showing a convention that blurred the lines between non-combatant civilians and the military, they are a clear “systematic implication of civilians in war” (Chickering and Förster, 2004.p.5).

How this advertising effected the population of Barry can be seen with the money saving drives that were organised on a local level, the first of which began in November 1940 shortly after the first national savings adverts appeared in the local press. An advert on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 1940 in the *Barry and District News*, that was sponsored by the local business of Dan Evans and Co, declares a “Barry war weapons week” that has a specific aim of raising £150,000 to purchase eight bombers. The Barry Conservative club and institute also sponsor an advert in the *Barry and District News* that backs the same war weapons week, this time stating that “pence pound the way to victory!”. The fact that these adverts were sponsored by local well known businesses and social clubs shows how the war effort in 1940 was being embraced in the town with all sectors of Barry's society becoming deeply involved. These saving drives in Wales were an indicator of how total the commitment of the population was with a staggering contribution of “£19,432,589 from “warships week” by June 1942” (Davies,2013.p.222); the destroyer HMS *Vanessa* was adopted by Barry in September 1942 as a result. The success of the saving schemes is a strong indicator that the economy of Barry during the War had rapidly accelerated; this was

a consequence of total war convention that saw the economy in Wales being “massively reorientated” (Chickering and Förster, 2004.p.2), and a prosperous civilian workforce that was on a large scale being “absorbed...into producing and and delivering the tools of destruction” (Chickering and Förster, 2004.p.3).

Economic prosperity was not the principle motivating reason why “the people of Wales supported the aims of this conflict and remained firmly committed to the war effort” (Williams, 1999.p.14). The main motivation can be explained with the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930's; a look at articles published in the local Barry press shows the public sentiment against this rising political entity and, as the war progressed, the erosion of the enemy's humanity in order to demonise them in the eyes of the Welsh public. A constant feature in the *Barry and District News*, both before and during the Second World War, was the reporting of talks given at local social clubs or group meetings in Barry; these talks were given by either prominent members of Welsh society or refugees from Nazi occupied Europe. Talks reported in these articles could be about opinion of foreign policy such as an article published on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1939 titled “Hitler an international gangster”, in which a Mr. H. West of the Conservative Central Office for Wales gave a talk to the combined Barry Conservative Clubs about the German invasion of Czechoslovakia; in this piece Mr. West argued that Hitler had proved himself to be dishonest in relation to the Neville Chamberlain appeasement policy and labelled the dictator a “gangster”. This echoes the sentiment that was already made in Wales towards fascism, when twenty Welsh MP's voted against the Munich agreement made by Chamberlain, who saw it as a “betrayal of the Czech people” (Williams, 1999.p.13). Another talk reported in the *Barry and District News* on May 16<sup>th</sup> 1941 was given by a Mr Camille Huysmans, a Belgium refugee and former speaker of the Belgium parliament. This talk was organised by the Ministry of information and directed at the whole population of Barry as it was held in the town's large Memorial Hall. Mr Huysmans explained that the current conflict had risen out of fascist successes in the

Spanish Civil War but would be won by British and American industrial power. This is an interesting comment as America had not entered the war at this stage but were supplying Britain both financially and materially; this shows that the Ministry of Information were keen to support a civilian focus on victory. The Ministry of Information were also keen to make clear the totality of the fight with the enemy as Mr Huysmans goes on to explain the horrors that the people of Nazi occupied countries were suffering such as assassinations, rape and theft; this is explained as the reason why the struggle against the Nazis was a "fight to the bitter end". The Ministry of Information were promoting the conflict to the people of Barry as having no limits or compromise: it was a fight to the death.

In order to further diminish the threat and humanity of Britain's enemies short articles would appear in the *Barry and District News* during the War. A short story published on November 15<sup>th</sup> 1940 titled "Nazi Gratitude" explains that a survivor of an enemy plane brought down near Hastings was only fifteen years old ; he was said to have spat in his rescuers face and had to be restrained. The question of how truthful this story was is less important than why the Nazis were being portrayed as wild adolescents; the answer could be that Britain at this stage of the War was struggling alone against a Germany that was at the peak of its military power, and therefore belittling the enemy was important to bolster morale. Dehumanising the enemy was more obvious in the case of the war against Japan with a look at another short article published on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1942 titled "Japanese Barbarities". This striking piece explains that a letter from a south Wales prisoner of war spoke well of his treatment by the Japanese and that the stamp on the letter might be worth some money; the article goes on to say that the prisoners family steamed off the stamp and discovered that underneath, printed in very small letters, were the words "I am sorry I can't talk any more for I have had my tongue cut out". Again the truth of this article is less important than the reason for its printing, which was to diminish the humanity of the Japanese. These articles contributed to the totality of the Second

World War in Wales by eroding the acceptable limits of destruction to be directed at an inhuman enemy.

On the opposite side of these propaganda tools were articles in the *Barry and District News* that bestowed the American forces in Barry with a character that was defined by religion, hospitality and a larger than life status. These had titles such as “American day of Thanksgiving” that extolled American Christian virtues or “U.S.A. Commander in Sicily” that praised the conduct of General Patton, an American army leader that wore “two pearl handled revolvers” and had the nick name of “Old Blood and Guts”. Perhaps the most touching of these articles is one titled “Yankees entertain” that told of a Christmas show given by the American forces in Barry to entertain the local children in 1943. These would have eased any tensions felt by Barry's population as they witnessed the massive D-day invasion force build up over two years with men and war materials flowing through the port. Barry was used by the American forces as “one of their main cargo ports” (Stead,1984.p.439.); a huge U.S. Army vehicle depot was deployed in the local Porthkerry park and therefore a cohesive atmosphere between Barry's civilian population and the U.S. military can be seen as an essential element of the total war effort in the town.

The preparation of Barry's defences and orientation of its civilians towards the needs of total war culminated in its important contribution towards the invasion of Nazi occupied Europe on D-day. By June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944 Barry was an efficient frontline war port that helped embark an American force of “21 vessels [that] transported over 15,000 tons of military equipment, including 1269 vehicles as well as 4000 U.S.A. troops” (Stead,1984.p.439.) towards the beaches of Normandy. By this stage of the War the threat of German bombing had waned, the civilians of Barry had survived the minimal bombing attention it had received from the Luftwaffe mostly as a result of its larger neighbouring ports of Cardiff and Swansea taking the brunt of the major air raids in Wales; only “one person was killed and eighteen injured” (Luxton,1990) from a total of seven raids on the

port between July 1940 and July 1941. Never the less Barry is an example of how important the Welsh ports were to the British total war effort, and how successful the national and local government was in mobilizing an entire Welsh community towards waging war.

## **Chapter two: Barry's merchant seamen at total war**

The only fatal casualty from a Luftwaffe air raid on Barry was that of a merchant seaman on watch of the *SS Highgate*, a merchant ship that suffered damage from an aerial mine while moored at the graving dock of the port (Luxton, 1990); this small fact ironically reflects the civilian group of Barry's population that suffered the most from the total war effort of the enemy: Barry's merchant seaman. Barry was first and foremost a port and therefore it was only natural that working on the merchant ships, that could be seen sailing off to possibly exotic faraway countries, attracted one in five of Barry's male population. This chapter will explore the experiences Barry's civilian sailors had from being the target of violence of a German Kriegsmarine that adopted an ever increasing totality as its war doctrine. How important it was these civilian sailors should prevail is evident by Winston Churchill writing after the War that "The Battle of the Atlantic was the dominating factor all through the war. Never for one moment could we forget that everything happening elsewhere, on land, at sea, or in the air, depended ultimately on its outcome" (Churchill, 1948-52, cited in Edwards, 1987.p.5. ); the merchant sailors of Barry were crucial to the total war effort of the Allies.

The merchant ships that left Barry during the War were fed in to a convoy and defence system that was controlled by the Rear-Admiral R.H.L. Bevan's Royal navy command which was based in Mountstuart Square in Cardiff; this command was called HMS *Lucifer* and covered the south Wales ports from Newport to as far west as the Tywi

Estuary. Barry was included in this command and the sea of the Bristol channel outside of the port, called Barry Roads, was where ships gathered in to protective convoys; these convoys would accumulate more ships as they sailed along the Bristol channel to eventually embark from Milford haven. To protect these ships various “mine countermeasures vessels” (Davies, 2013.p.217) were based in Swansea that were supplemented by “depth charge equipped yachts and motor launches” (Davies, 2013.p.217) based in Barry. The scale of this operation was enormous with 530 convoys “containing over 6000 merchant ships” (Davies, 2013.p.219) sailing from Barry Roads to ports on the south coast of England during the War; this was only a small part of the total of “17,000 convoys ,with an aggregate displacement of of over 63 million tons” (Davies, 2013.p.219) that sailed from south Wales on ocean-going convoys.

Many of Barry's merchant sailors were on these convoys and despite the well organised protection around the south Wales coast “for almost four years the battle did not go well for the merchant ships” (Edwards, 1987.p.5). The flower class corvettes that protected the convoys had limited range which meant that there was “a gap of 1,700 miles in mid-Atlantic” (Edwards, 1987.p.5) where the unprotected merchant ships were most vulnerable. Because of this merchant ships were armed with 4-inch, 12-pounder deck guns for protection. How ineffective these could be can be seen from an article published in the *Barry and District News* on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1941 titled “Great courage was shown”; in this an account was given of how a merchant ship, largely manned by Barry sailors, was “sunk in flames” after a dual with a U-boat that was using its 88mm deck gun and 3 anti-aircraft cannons. The article tells of how the Barry sailors put up a brave “battle for over two hours” before being forced to abandon ship. The poor protection given to the merchant convoys continued until Churchill and Roosevelt agreed in 1943 “to give top priority... to securing the sea lanes across the Atlantic” (Herwig, 2004.p.82); it was only after this agreement that the Allies fought a total war in the Atlantic by combining all

possible resources that included “radar, Ultra, HD/DF...and U.S. Navy “hunter-killer” groups” (Herwig, 2004.p.82). The losses to merchant ships after 1943 were much reduced because of this total effort. Regardless of this late commitment by the Allies the civilian sailors of Barry were part of the British merchant fleet which made them a priority target of the German Kriegsmarine for the entire war.

The Kriegsmarine, that the Barry's civilian sailors faced, began the Second World War under the command of Grand Admiral Erich Raeder who planned to fight the War with a traditional surface battle fleet that was to be primarily used to raid merchant shipping. The loss of the Battleship *Bismark* in May 1941 ended this surface strategy and shifted the focus of the Kriegsmarine to the U-boat fleet; the commander of the U-boat fleet, and eventual commander and chief of the entire German fleet, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, oversaw the “process of radicalization” (Herwig, 2004.p.84) that incrementally made the Kriegsmarine effort in the Battle of the Atlantic a total war campaign. The Historian Holger H. Herwig argues that Dönitz, throughout the War, sought more manpower and material to increase the size of his U-boat fleet in order to pursue his tonnage war strategy; this *Tonnagekrieg* was a simple war of attrition in which Dönitz planned to sink more merchant shipping per month than the Allies could produce. Herwig goes on to argue “that there never was the slightest doubt in Karl Dönitz's mind that he was conducting a total war” (Herwig, 2004.p.86); the realities of German manpower and material availability confined the limits of the totality of the U-boat campaign, but the Battle of the Atlantic was fought with an escalation that culminated in Dönitz using “the National Socialist rhetoric of total war” (Herwig, 2004.p.84) to shape Kriegsmarine combat policy. The sinking of the *Athenia* ocean liner without warning on the first day of the war, in which 118 people lost their lives, saw a German cover up in order to comply with “Hague Convention Prize Rules that demanded the skipper place passengers and crew in safety before dispatching a vessel” (Herwig, 2004.p.84). These rules were formally dispensed with by Dönitz early in the War



when he ordered his U-boat skippers to “Rescue no one and take no one with you. You have no care for the ships' boats” (Padfield, 1984, cited in Herwig, 2004, p.74). Eventually the harsh tone of Nazi doctrine became evident in a radio order sent to U-boat captains in September 1942 in which Dönitz demanded that “No attempt of any kind must be made at rescuing the crews of ships sunk...Rescue remains contrary to the primary demands of warfare for the destruction of enemy ships and their crews” (Mulligan, 1999, cited in Herwig, 2004,p.86).

How much of Dönitz's vision of a brutal total war was put in to practice by the U-boat commanders can be seen through the analysis of accounts given by Barry merchant seamen to the local press. The tactic of firing torpedoes at merchant ships without warning, and the horrific experience of the sailors attacked, can be seen in an article printed in the *Barry and District News* on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1941 titled “Barry seaman's part in the Battle of the Atlantic”. The article explains that the account given is being printed in order that people could understand the extent of the sacrifices that were being made by Barry's “seafaring families”; a sacrifice made in order that the nation could have food and war materials to “continue the war against Nazi Germany”. This shows that the public of Barry were well aware of how key the involvement of their large contingent of merchant sailors, and the docks of the their town, were to the total war effort. The story recounted in the article was given by 19 year old merchant seamen Mr. Ron Seagrim of Lee road, Barry. Seagrim explained that he was in the galley of his ship when it was torpedoed at 10pm on a dark night; a graphic description was given of how he had to smash his way out of the stuck galley door as the ship immediately began to list. Once on deck the ship “turned turtle”; he was washed in to the sea and dragged down by the suction of the sinking ship. He managed to get to the surface where he floated by hanging on to a wooden ladder with a fellow Barry sailor named George Reynolds until they were luckily rescued by a corvette. Lee Seagrim's story is described as “typical of many” which

indicates that by 1941 the Dönitz order of ignoring the Hague Convention Prize Rules were in full effect; no accounts of Barry seamen being given prior warning to an attack could be found.

The civilian sailors of south Wales were undoubtedly the victims of total war violence but accounts given by Barry's merchant sailors also show that the U-boat captains did not always adhere to the same rhetoric of total destruction as their Nazi leader Karl Döntitz. Examples of U-boat captains approaching Barry sailors, who had abandoned their sinking torpedoed ships, to converse and even give help to the stricken Welshmen are many. An account titled "An epic drama of the sea", given to the *Barry and District News* on the 28<sup>th</sup> August 1942, that told of Barry merchant men surviving 26 days adrift before being rescued, also tells of how the U-boat that sank them approached their raft; its captain apologised for sinking them saying that "war is war and he was only doing his duty", and then gave the wrecked Barry sailors 20 potato and maize loaves. Another article printed on the 25<sup>th</sup> September 1942 titled "A smack of the old pirate days" tells the account of a torpedoed Barry crewman whose life raft was approached by the U-boat that put him in there; the U-boat captain asked the wrecked crew if they were "short of stores or water" and then gave them their position and direction to land. These accounts show that the limits of the total war against the merchantmen of Barry were not only restricted by German resources but could also be restrained by the fact that Kriegsmarine sailors recognised their foe not just as the British enemy but also as brethren sailors that shared the common enemy of the elements and sea.

### **Conclusion**

This brief examination of Barry's involvement in the Second World War has shown that Wales, and Welsh civilians, were involved to the highest levels of total war that Britain

committed to waging, and defending itself against. Barry's civilians, like much of the south Wales coastal port's population, found themselves suddenly put in to a position of crucial importance: their port and merchant sailors were keeping Britain in the fight. The techniques the authorities used to orientate the Welsh civilian workforce in to a disciplined, total war resource has been explored: the collective ethic demanded by the National Savings campaign put the importance of civilians on par with that of the military; the limit of the objective of the War was made clear in the Welsh press with the demand for total victory against a ruthless, criminal and barbaric foe that would understand nothing less. How efficient Barry was as a total war port has been shown with the arrival of American forces; they were accepted, organised and eventually embarked to take the fight to the enemy. The total War against the merchant sailors of Barry has been shown to have had a dichotomy between the Dönitz's ideal of a victorious brutal total war with no limits on extermination, and the reality of limited German resources and limited Nazi loyalty. It has been evident, from the local press accounts examined, that the reality of the U-boat campaign, against the merchant ships that Barry sailors manned, lay somewhere between this contrast. The Barry sailors had much in common with the Kriegsmarine sailors that hunted them: both were committed to a campaign that was eventually, in terms of limits of objectives and resources, one of the most total of the War; both suffered terrible losses because of this.

The limited exploration in this brief dissertation, of the extent to which a Welsh town participated in the Second World War, has shown that the fighting forces of Britain and its allies would probably have found achieving victory more difficult if it were not for the organisation, commitment and support of the Welsh civilian population. The civilians of Barry had a key role that could be said to have been of greater significance to the victory than that of its population that joined the fighting forces; this gives substance to the argument that "total war was historically not in the first instance about soldiers"

(Chickering and Förster, 2004.p.10).

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