

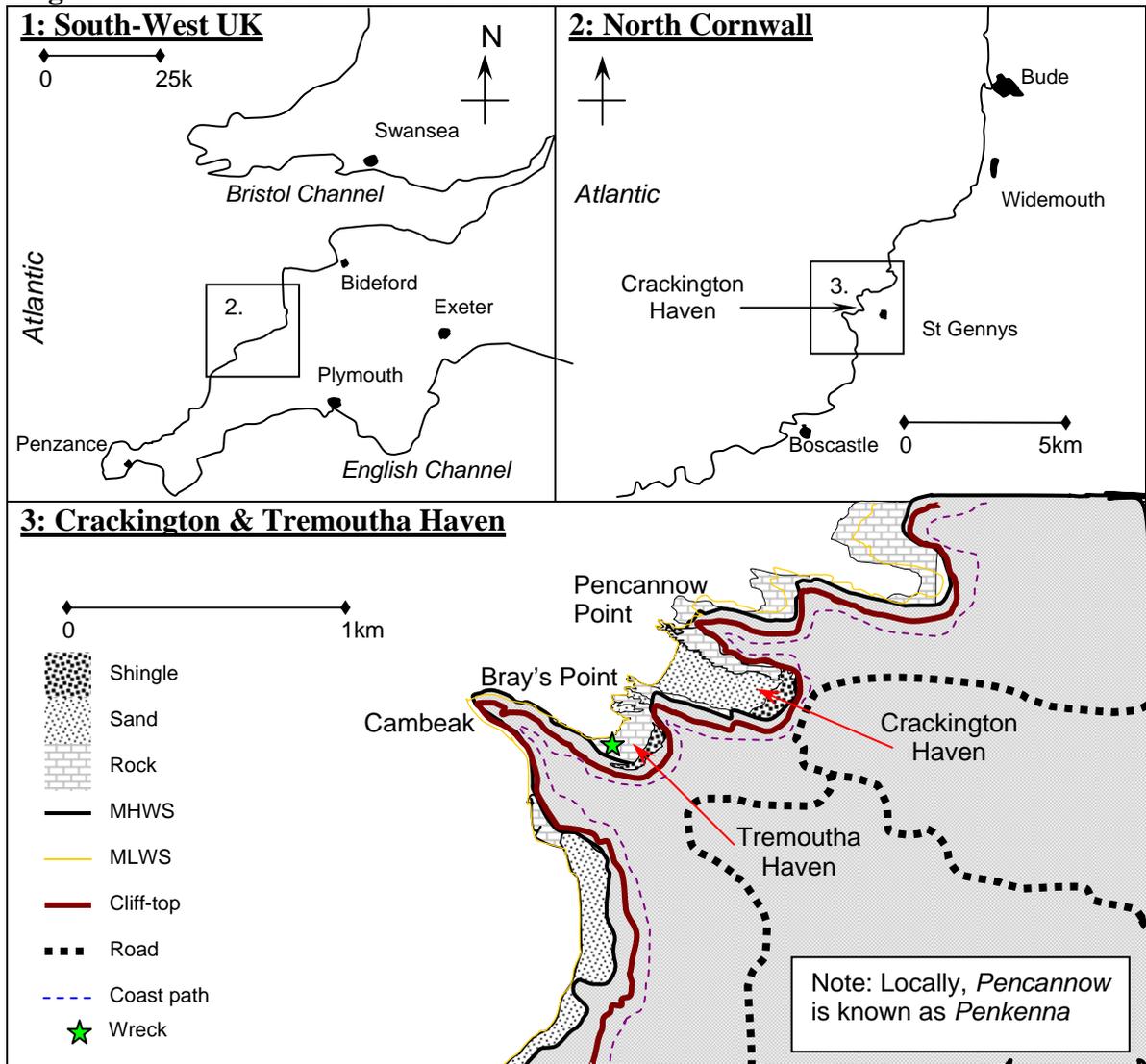
The Crackington E-Boat – An Interim Report

By J. Putley, 11 Turner's Close, Highnam, Gloucester, GL2 8EH, June 2003

Introduction: A brief report and description of the wreck of a German S-boat – better known to the Allies as an *E-boat* (a generic term for *Enemy Boats*) – that was lost on the coast of North Cornwall in October 1946.

The Wreck of S89: The remains of S89 are in position 50° 45.6'N 004° 38.3'W (OS Map Ref. SX138966) in the inter-tidal zone of Tremoutha Haven, a small bay of situated immediately south of Crackington Haven (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Location of the Wreck of S89

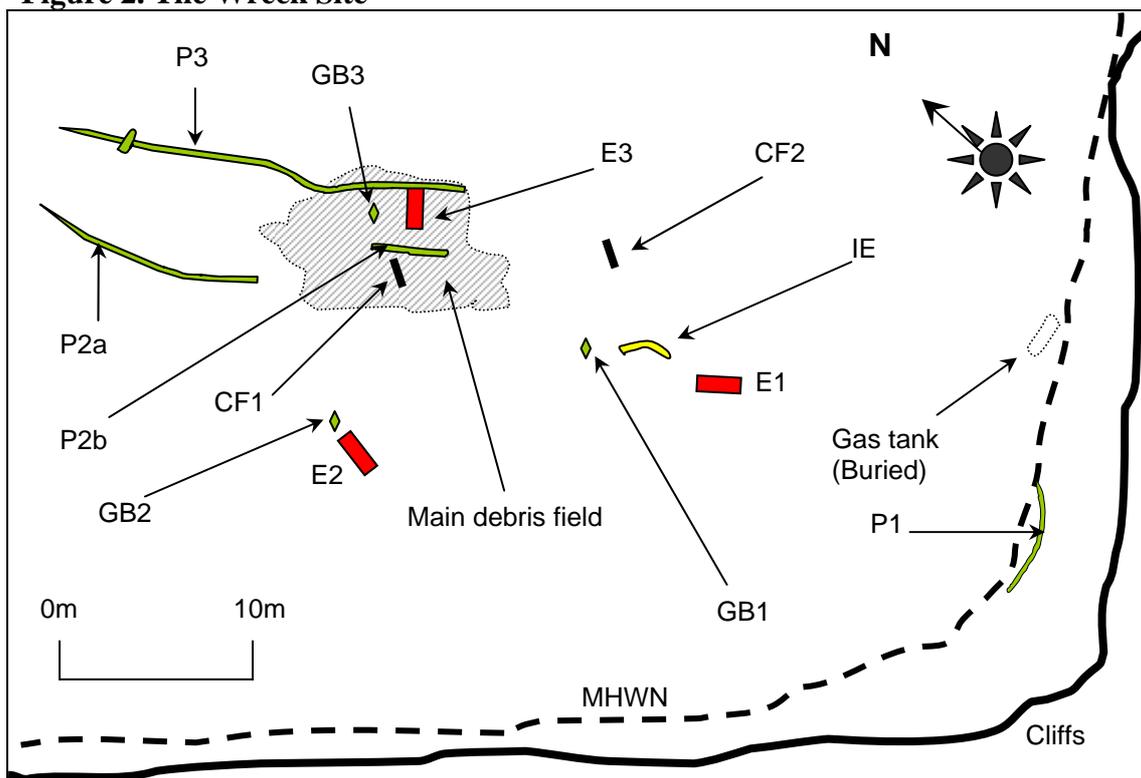


The wreck is relatively inaccessible as there is no longer a path down the cliffs to the beach at Tremoutha and because of a channel on the Tremoutha side of *Bray's Point* that does not dry except for an hour and a half either side of low water on tides larger than neap tides. Though not deep, this channel limits the time that access to Tremoutha and the wreck can be gained. The wreck of S89 is app. 4m above MLWS and the wreck-site dries on every tidal cycle, except for periods of MLWN with a NW

wind. On average, the wreck-site is exposed for three to four hours every low water, although at MLWN not all of the wreck itself dries.

Fieldwork has identified thirteen major components of S89 present on the wreck-site. These comprise three engines, three propeller shafts, three gearboxes, two auxiliary crankshaft assemblies, one section of an intake/exhaust assembly and a broken cylinder head. The author also knows of one other component from the wreck, a gas reservoir (app. 2m long and 0.5m in diameter) that is present on the MHW line, but is usually buried under the shingle/sand. More remains may well exist in this state. A rough plan of the wreck site is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The Wreck Site



Number	Identification	Dimensions
P1	Propeller Shaft 1	6 x 0.13m (Φ)
P2a	Propeller Shaft 2	9.16 x 0.13m (Φ)
P2b	Propeller Shaft 2	5.8 x 0.13m (Φ)
P3	Propeller Shaft 3	21 x 0.13m (Φ)
E1	Engine 1	2.8 x 1.25 x 1m
E2	Engine 2	Ditto
E3	Engine 3	Ditto
GB1	Gearbox assembly 1	1 x 0.5m (Φ)
GB2	Gearbox assembly 2	Ditto
GB3	Gearbox assembly 3	Ditto
CF1	Crankshaft assembly	1.62 x 0.7m (Φ)
CF2	Crankshaft assembly	Ditto
IE	Intake/Exhaust assembly	1.8 x 0.7m (av.)
Debris Field	Assorted metallic remains	Various, largest approx 1 x 0.5m

History

S89 was one of a batch of 16 S-boats ordered by the German Navy on 3 January 1941 from the German shipbuilding concern *Friedrick Lürssen of Vegesack* in Bremen. She was completed in November 1942 and commissioned into service at the Lürssen yard on 28 November 1942. S89

After commissioning, she was assigned to the 2nd S-boat Flotilla, which she joined in the spring of 1943 after a period of working-up in the Baltic. Her commander at this time was Oberleutnant zur See Braune. The flotilla operated mainly out of Ijmuiden, but also out of Ostend and occasionally Cherbourg. Unfortunately, little detail is known about S89's operational career, but she took part in numerous minelaying and torpedo strike operations, when reached a peak in late 1943. On the night of 24/25th October 1943, while temporarily attached to the 4th Flotilla for a mass torpedo strike against Convoy FN160 off Cromer, S89 was damaged along with S120, S122 and S87 were damaged when the S-boats were engaged by the destroyer HMS *Worcester*. The S-boats evaded the destroyer by running eastwards only to run into more British forces in the shape of MGB439 and MGB442, which had put out from Yarmouth when news of the S-boat attack had reached the port. A further brief action followed in which MGB442 was seriously damaged. The damage that S89 sustained was not serious however and she was fully repaired within 10 days for on the night of 4/5th November, she had re-joined her 'home' flotilla and, along with the 6th and 8th Flotillas, carried out a minelaying operation off Smiths Knoll and the Humber. After laying their mines, the 2nd Flotilla encountered Convoy FN1170 between Cromer and Yarmouth and made an impromptu torpedo attack. The S-boats were eventually driven off by the destroyers HMS' *Eglinton* and *Fearney* and claimed several ships sunk (including one of the destroyer escorts) but only two vessels in the convoy, the *Firelight* (2,820 tons) and the *British Progress* (4,581 tons) had been hit and both were towed into port safely (although the latter was declared a total loss).

On the 21st March 1944, S89 – along with S86, S92 and S98 - was transferred from the 2nd Flotilla to the 10th Flotilla, which was a new flotilla that was then in the process of forming. Her commander, Ob.z.S Braune relinquished command but no new CO was appointed and instead, S89 was transferred to the 1st Training Flotilla based at Kiel. However when S89 reached Wilhelmshaven on the 7th April 1944, she was immediately paid-off and ordered to Hamburg for a special mission. Three months previously, in November 1943, Admiral Dönitz had ordered that six new S-boats were to be sent to the Black Sea to bolster the German naval forces present in this theatre. The Führer der S-Boote (FdS), Kommodore Petersen, had objected to this, arguing that it would weaken his North Sea and Channel forces and obtained a compromise whereby 3 new boats were to be transferred immediately and that four other older craft would be dispatched in early 1944. The four older S-boats selected were S86, S92, S98 and S89 and, after being paid-off at Wilhelmshaven, they proceeded to Hamburg, where preparations for the transfer - which was to involve a mammoth journey by river and land – began.

Making the S-boats ready for the journey mainly revolved around removing their main equipment and engines and once this had been completed, the S-boats left Hamburg under tow and proceeded up the River Elbe bound for Dresden. At Dresden, they were slipped and taken out of the water whereupon they were lifted

onto *Kuhlmeier* eight-axle trailers¹ in order to undertake a 450km overland transfer via Autobahn to Ingolstadt in southern Germany. This usually took around 56 hours and involved special clearance teams being sent ahead to clear obstacles and remove bridges. Once at Ingolstadt, the boats were returned to the water on the River Danube and then towed downstream to a shipyard at Linz in Austria, where some of the equipment - including the engines and most if not all of the gun armament (that had been sent down by rail) – was refitted by local personnel and a team from the S-boat builders, Lürssen. The first boats of the four to make the trip were *S89* and *S86*, and they arrived in Linz sometime in late June 1944. By early July, the refitting work had been completed and the two S-boats left the river port to begin the 1,250km journey down the Danube to the port of Sulina on the Black Sea. This was not without some danger because by this time, the RAF had commenced mining the Danube in an effort to disrupt the flow of Romanian oil into Germany (in just 18 sorties, the RAF dropped some 1,382 mines).

By the 20th August, *S89* and *S 86* were somewhere between Linz and Sulina when the Russians renewed their offensive against the German and Rumanian forces, launching an attack which broke through the German lines towards Galati from the north and northwest. Three days later, Rumania capitulated and on the 24th, the German Naval Command OKM recalled all four S-boats, ordering their transfer back north. Although *S92* and *S98* had not yet left Linz and so could be relatively easily retrieved, the FdS considered it unlikely that *S89* and *S86* the other pair would ever get back, especially as it seems that (possibly on the initiative of their own commanders) they had joined with the German Army's Danube Flotilla to assist in the rearguard fighting delaying actions. This however came to a halt on the 28th August when *S86* was mined and damaged south of the Km950 mark. The damage was not too serious however and she was taken in tow by *S89*, reach succeeded in getting both boats safely back to Linz. After repairs, the two S-boats headed back up river to Ingolstadt, where they were slipped and again loaded onto the eight-axle trailers for the overland transfer to the Elbe. By November, both vessels were apparently back in the water at Hamburg and on the 1st January 1945, *S89* was recommissioned at Swinemunde under the command of Ob.z.S Osterloh and rejoined the 1st Training Flotilla.

The remainder of *S89*'s life is rather hazy. It is likely that for the remainder of the war she served in the Baltic operating out of Swinemünde. However in the last few months of the war, the 1st Training Flotilla frequently operated alongside the operational 5th, 1st and 8th Flotillas. As a result it is possible that *S89* operated occasionally out of Windau (now Ventspils) in Latvia and as well as seeing some combat, took part in the evacuation of German troops and civilians ahead of the advancing Russians.

It is not clear exactly where she was at the surrender. Most of S-boats operating in the Baltic surrendered at Geltinger Bay but, some appear to have been able to retreat westwards to Wilhelmshaven and surrendered there. However, in common with 33 other S-boats, *S89* was allocated to Britain as part of the Tripartite Naval Commission Agreement. It is not known exactly when *S89* came to Britain but it was before February 1946. This is surmised because a monthly progress report of the Naval

¹ The German-American Petroleum Company (DAPG) and not the German military owned these specialised road trailers. Only two trailers were available and the company took responsibility for the overland transfer.

Division of the Control Commission for Germany (British Element) stated that there were still S-boats belonging to Britain in Germany. As a result, the Admiralty ordered that the engines of these craft were to be removed and the hulks were to be towed over to the UK. As S89 was wrecked with her engines, this could not have occurred and so by this date she would have already crossed the North Sea under her own power and with her own crew to HMS Hornet, which was acting as a central depot for these craft.

On 11 September 1946, S89 was listed in a Special Military Branch Acquaint as having been allocated with 22 other S-boats to the Ship Target Trials Committee. This document has yet to be located, but presumably stated that S89 was to be sunk as a target rather than scrapped. It was whilst she was on tow from HMS Hornet to another shore establishment that she was wrecked off the North Cornish Coast. The only other mention in Naval records is a further Special Military Branch Acquaint, pointing out that S89 was to be removed from the list of ships intended to be used by the Ship Target Trials Committee as she had sunk. Although a team of salvage workers – presumably naval as the Salvage Association have no knowledge of the wreck - visit the wreck site, before S89 can be refloated, more heavy weather turns her 180° around and pushes her further up the beach, where she starts to break up. The S-boat is later abandoned as a total loss and no salvage is ever carried out.

Details of S89

Type: 'Large' S26 Class Schnellboote or S-boat

Displacement: 112 tonnes (full load); 92.5 tonnes (standard)

Length: 34.94m (oa) **Beam:** 5.28m **Draught:** 1.67m (max)

Construction: Composite timber (pine)/aluminium (Al-Cu-Mg) alloy framing with timber hull skin (double-diagonal round-chine of cedar or larch under mahogany), pine decking. Steel on oak bulkheads and engine beds.

Machinery: 3 Daimler-Benz BOF8 MB501/511 diesel engines (20 cylinder Vee arrangement with 10 cylinders per bank and shell-bearings as opposed to roller-bearings on crankshaft), each engine developing 2,050hp, resulting in total power output of 6,150hp. Three shafts.

Speed: 39kts (max); 20kts cruise

Fuel/Range: 13.5 tonnes diesel, 700nm
@ 35kts

Armament:

- a) **Torpedoes:** four 53.3cm G7a torpedoes fired by compressed air from forecastle tubes.
- b) **Guns:** Originally two 2cm MgC/38 or MgC/30 single guns, one in bow and one aft. Later augmented to one 2cm in bow, one 2cm LMK44 Twin amidships and one 3.7cm SKC/30 semi-automatic or 4cm Flak 28 (Bofors) aft, with two 7.92mm MG34/MG42 'Spandau' MMGs on bridge.
- c) **Mines and other weapons:** two to six mines (six only if no torpedoes carried) on mine rails aft, six depth-charges (on two d/c rails aft), two chemical smoke-dischargers, one 8.6cm RAG M42 rocket-launcher with 30 R Sprgr 800 and 60

RLg rounds (for AA defence), thirty stick hand-grenades plus individual small arms (semi-automatic pistols, MP38 SMGs).

Crew: 24