



Virginia 4-H MAKING the Future

*18 U.S.C. 707

The History of Water Travel (4H-763NP)

The History Behind it . . .

What is the history of water travel?

The presence of ships can be traced to Egypt as early as 4000 BC. These early ships were made of reeds from the papyrus plant and used for fishing or moving along the Nile river. They moved through the water by both human-paddled oars and wind-powered sails.

The steam engine was first used to power boats in the late 1700s and the early boats travelled much faster than paddle or sail boats, at a speed of up to 5 miles an hour! With the invention of other modes of transportation such as cars, trains, and airplanes, steamboats became obsolete and today's ships are powered by either diesel electric engines or gas turbines and travel at average speeds of up to 35 miles an hour.

World War I

Prior to our entry into World War I the Germans had been very effective with their submarines, sinking much needed supplies to support the allies. They were sinking nearly 900,000 tons of shipping each month.

We became skilled at antisubmarine patrolling and escort service, placing all our destroyers in service, supplemented by private yachts, smaller gunboats and cruisers. On May 4, 1917 the first American military, a division of destroyers, arrived in Europe.

When the U.S. entered the war on April 6, 1917 many believed that we would primarily send supplies to support our allies and provide protection of shipping against German submarine attacks. It was quickly realized that we would also need to transport fighting troops which nearly all would require an escort against submarine attacks. Over the 18 months of the war, a total of 18,653 ships were escorted. These ships carried much needed supplies and more than 2,000,000 troops. During these escorts, they made 183 attacks on submarines, 24 submarines were damaged and 2 were destroyed.

World War I was a period of rapid growth for the U.S. Navy. At the start of the war there were 70,000 men and officers in the Navy, and by the end of the war the total number was 538,000.

Did you know?

- In WWI the Navy ships were painted in bold patterns and colors to make it more difficult for the German U-Boats to determine their direction. This type of camouflage was called *Razzle Dazzle*.

Sources

- ⇒ Encyclopedia Britannica: www.britannica.com/technology/ship/History-of-ships
- ⇒ Naval History and Heritage Command: www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-i.html
- ⇒ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: www.sam.usace.army.mil

