

# Casualties of War

All of the more than 70 vessels built in Duluth-Superior shipyards from 1917 to 1920 were intended for service on the Atlantic Ocean in the war against imperial Germany. Many of them, however, were completed after the November 1918 Armistice. The bulk of the Frederickstad-type ships and the "Lakers" that followed them were used as ocean-going cargo carriers during the 1920s and 1930s, flying the flags of the U.S. merchant marine fleet, as well as the flags of many other nations.



*(Above) Most "Frederickstad Lakers," built in Duluth-Superior shipyards and originally intended for World War I service, were eventually converted to commercial service, but many were also employed during World War II. The King, part of the Minnesota-Atlantic Line and a member of "Poker Fleet," loads general cargo in about 1930 at Commerce Slip, site of today's Duluth Entertainment & Convention Center. (Lake Superior Marine Museum Association Archives, Lake Superior Maritime Collection at University of Wisconsin-Superior)*

*(Below) The pre-mechanized era of "package freight" required the employment of thousands of Duluth-Superior and Great Lakes longshoremen carrying, pushing or pulling cargoes up and down gangways. (Lake Superior Marine Museum Association Archives, Lake Superior Maritime Collection at University of Wisconsin-Superior)*



Only three of the vessels were lost to combat action during World War I. *Maski*, the first of the Frederickstad ships built by McDougall-Duluth Company, was also the first of the locally-built vessels to fall prey to enemy action. Completed in early 1917, she was turned over to the U.S. Shipping Board, the operating arm of the Emergency Fleet Corporation, and renamed *Lakemoor*. On her first trans-Atlantic crossing in April 1918, *Lakemoor* was carrying a cargo of war materials when she was torpedoed by the German submarine *U-73* off Corsewell Light in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Less than two weeks later, the *Poitiers*, which had been built by Superior Shipbuilding Company in 1917 for the French, met her end at the hands of an

unidentified German U-boat in the Bristol Channel off Great Britain.<sup>2</sup> The final victim during World War I was the *Lake Portage*, built by McDougall-Duluth and sunk by a German U-boat in the Bay of Biscay on August 3, 1918.<sup>3</sup>

Once the war was over, all of the ocean ships built in Duluth-Superior were sold to private interests, most in the early 1920s. All underwent numerous name changes during the 1920s and 1930s, and most saw long service carrying general cargo for the world's merchant marine fleets. American, European, Chinese, Japanese and Soviet fleets sailed the Duluth- and Superior-built cargo ships on the seven seas in the years between the wars.

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 made the world's merchant marine fleet fair game for the belligerents. The ocean ships built in the Twin Ports between 1917 and 1920 paid a fearsome price in the years between 1939 and 1945. Perhaps the greatest irony was that several ships built in Duluth and Superior during World War I ended up under the Japanese flag in World War II and were sunk by American naval forces. No fewer than four Japanese cargo ships originally built in the Twin Ports ended their days the victims of U.S. Navy torpedoes or mines. The steel in those torpedoes and mines likely started as rich red iron ore mined on the Mesabi Range.<sup>4</sup>

A total of eight of the Frederickstad-type ships fell to German submarines in the spring of 1942 off the East Coast of the United States. Following American entry into the war in December 1941, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz of the German "Kriegsmarine" shifted his submarine wolfpacks west from the blockade against England to menace the sea lanes between the United States and Great Britain. German U-Boat commanders were absolutely astounded by the easy pickings off the U.S. and Canadian East Coast, the Gulf of Mexico and in the Caribbean. U-Boats sank hundreds of U.S. and allied cargo ships and tankers during the late winter and spring of 1942. They called it the "American hunting season" and the "American turkey shoot," and the carnage got so bad that North Carolinians could sometimes read newspapers by the light of blazing ships just offshore.

The fate of Globe's *Lake Glaucus* was typical of the carnage during the "American hunting season." Renamed the *Norlindo* in 1941, she was proceeding from Pensacola to Mexico on the night of May 4, 1942, when her path crossed that of the *U-507*. Captain Harro Schacht ordered one torpedo fired, which hit its mark. The 2,700-ton *Norlindo* sank stern-first three minutes later.<sup>5</sup>

The *Frances Salman* met her end in the icy waters off St. John's, Newfoundland, on January 18, 1942. Launched at McDougall-Duluth in the fall of 1919 as the *Lake Flambeau*, she spent 20 years sailing the East Coast for the Seaboard & Gulf Line and the Philadelphia & Norfolk Steamship Company before her 1939 sale to the Canadian Gulf Line. Captain Erich Topp of *U-552* fired five torpedoes at the *Salman* before the last found its

mark. The 2,700-ton vessel went down with all hands in eight minutes.<sup>6</sup>

Other World War I vessels built at Duluth-Superior were torpedoed or bombed flying the flag of combatants on both sides. The *Else Marie* was carrying a load of Norwegian iron ore to north Germany when she was attacked and sunk by Soviet aircraft off Norway in July 1942. Originally the *Cleveland*, she had been one of the first Frederickstad ships built by Superior Shipbuilding in the spring of 1917.<sup>7</sup> Superior Shipbuilding's *Toulouse*, another of the 1917 Frederickstad hulls, came to grief in the Russo-German war six months later. Renamed the *Ufa* and flying Soviet colors, she departed Kola Inlet on the White Sea in January 1943 bound for Iceland. *U-255* sent her to the bottom of the Barents Sea with all hands less than a week later.<sup>8</sup> McDougall-Duluth's *Chappell*, launched in March 1919, eventually wound up flying the Italian flag. Renamed *Elice*, she succumbed to British bombs off Civitavecchia, Italy, on May 14, 1943.<sup>9</sup>

Some 20 percent of the more than 70 hulls built in Duluth-Superior during World War I became casualties of the second world war. It is a powerful reminder of the horrendous price that the world's maritime commerce paid in the 1940s.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilterding, "Duluth-Superior Shipbuilding, 1917-1918: The Pre-War Frederickstad Ships," p.2. The "U" designation for German submarines stood for *Unterseeboot*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.4. The *Poitier* was one of the few Frederickstad ships built at the Head of the Lakes not requisitioned by the Emergency Fleet Corporation.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.3

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp.2, 4. Globe Shipbuilding's *Lake Washburn* was eventually renamed the *Toyo Maru* in 1925 and was torpedoed off Shingu, Japan by the U.S. Navy Submarine *Plunger* in February 1944. Superior Shipbuilding's *Lake Champlain* met a similar fate. Sold to the Japanese in 1927 and renamed the *Meisei Maru*, she was torpedoed by the American submarine *Flying Fish* off Manchuria in June 1945. Two other Twin Ports-built ships flying the Japanese flag were lost to mines off Japan in the summer of 1945. Superior Shipbuilding's *Lake Farrar*, renamed the *Nissyo Maru*, struck a mine and sank on July 16, and one week later, McDougall-Duluth's *Chamblee*, renamed the *Syoko Maru*, tore her bottom out on a mine. McDougall-Duluth's *Lake Farmingdale* sailed as *Florence D* for a lumber company in the Philippines for 17 years until she was bombed and sunk by Japanese aircraft off Mindanao in February 1942. The only one of the five ships built in the Twin Ports and flying a Japanese flag to survive World War II was the *Soan Maru*, which came down the ways at McDougall-Duluth as the *Cerro Gardo* in 1919.

<sup>5</sup> Wilterding, "Duluth-Superior Shipbuilding, 1918-1920: The American 'Lakers,'" p.4. Ten members of the crew went down with the ship. Captain Schacht provided the 20 survivors with 40 packs of cigarettes, a cake and 10 gallons of lime pulp and wished them luck in getting ashore safely in their lifeboat. See Clay Blair, Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunters, 1939-1942 (New York: Random House, 1996), p.579

<sup>6</sup> Wilterding, "Duluth-Superior Shipbuilding, 1918-1920: The American 'Lakers,'" p.5. The wolfpacks operating in Canadian waters in early 1942 had a much more difficult time sinking ships because of ice conditions and the better coordinated reaction of the Canadian and British Navies. Getting torpedoed off Newfoundland in the winter, however, was a death sentence for any survivors, given the frigid water. See Blair, Hitler's U-Boat War, p.471

<sup>7</sup> Wilterding, "Duluth-Superior Shipbuilding, 1917-1918: The Pre-War Frederickstad Ships," p.4

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.4

<sup>9</sup> Wilterding, "Duluth-Superior Shipbuilding, 1918-1920: The American 'Lakers,'" p.3

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