Unique vessel will mark Atlantic Convoy anniversary

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The former naval sloop HMS Wellington is the only vessel that served as a convoy escort throughout Second World War, still afloat, anywhere in the world. Moored in central London and re-christened HQS Wellington, she now serves as a floating museum, library and conference centre, and is the Livery Hall of The Honourable Company of Master Mariners.

A £74,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF means the ship's owners, The Wellington Trust, will be able to host the six-month exhibition that will pay tribute to the role of the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy in keeping vital supply lines open to Britain during the war.

The Wellington completed 103 Atlantic convoy protection patrols from 1939 to 1945 when more than 2000 merchant ships were sunk by German U-boats claiming the lives of over 20,000 British merchant seamen.

Her active service also included taking part in Operation Cycle, a week after Dunkirk in June 1940 when she was sent to help evacuate members of the 51st Highland Division from the French port of St Valery en Caux.

The Battle of the Atlantic exhibition will run from May to October 2013. It will include photographs, film, artefacts and recorded interviews with former Merchant Navy mariners. The interviewers will be a group of young people trained as part of the project.

School visits to the Wellington will also be increased and extended to include secondary as well as primary pupils. New learning materials will be created for teachers to use in studying the Battle of the Atlantic, the turning point of which came in May 1943 when the attacking German U-boats began to suffer substantial losses as a result of the improved capabilities of Allied naval and air forces and the breaking of the enemy's Enigma code.

Winston Churchill later stated that, throughout the war, the key issue that kept him awake at night was the threat to the supply chain across the Atlantic that was keeping Britain fed, fuelled and, re-armed.

Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: "We are pleased that this award will help make possible an exhibition to raise awareness of the bravery and amazing endurance of those who sailed in the Atlantic convoys. We are also pleased that young people will be involved in helping to preserve the memories of some of those who took part."

For The Wellington Trust , Captain Stephen Taylor, said: "We are most grateful to the HLF for supporting this treasure of a heritage vessel, and look forward to helping educate the nation on the vital role of sea trade and its protection, which is as relevant today as it has been in the past."

Notes to editors

- HMS Wellington was a Grimsby Class naval sloop built at Devonport Royal Dockyard in 1935. Her first posting was to New Zealand where she patrolled the South Pacific. In August 1939 she was recalled to the UK and

began convoy protection duty in the Atlantic. After the end of the war in 1946 the vessel was purchased by the Honourable Company of Master Mariners and converted for use as a City Livery Hall. Her hull and superstructure are basically original although the funnel was replaced and deck fittings removed. The engine and boiler rooms were removed to create internal space for her new role. The vessel has been moored at Temple Stairs on the Thames since 1948.

- The Wellington is the only surviving Grimsby class naval sloop in the world. She is also the only surviving naval vessel that saw active service for the entire period of Second World War.
- In 2005 the vessel was gifted to the Wellington Trust with the purpose of preserving the ship as part of the UK's national heritage and for the education of the nation on the history of Britain's Merchant Navy.

Further information

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