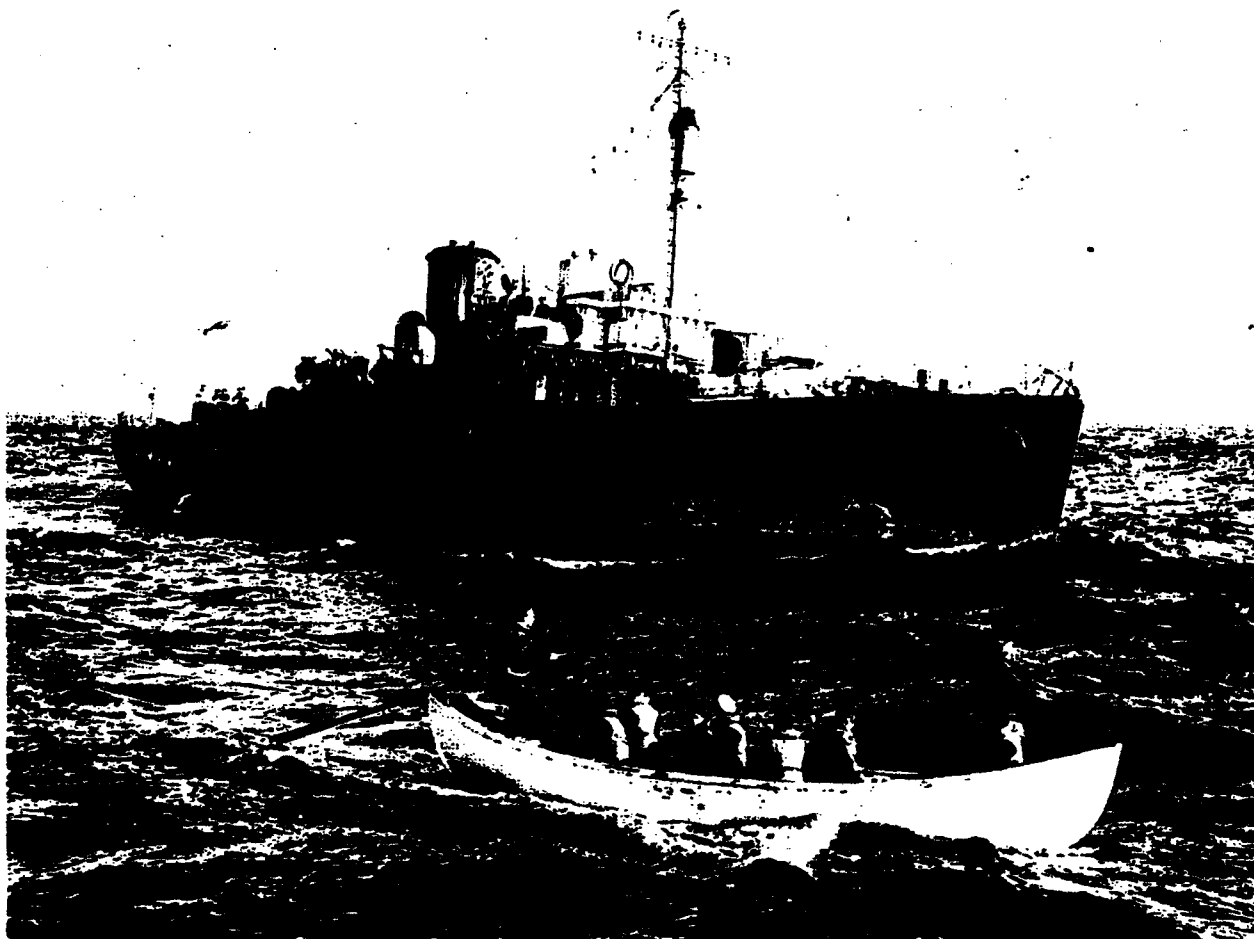




HMCS *Trillium* about to receive a boat with a medical officer from USCGC *Spencer*. Central Negative Library at the Canadian Armed Forces Photographic Unit, CN 6142 (USCG photograph).

groups and ordered to chase, intercept, and attack SC-121.¹¹ U-405, in spite of the poor visibility, continued with some interruptions to maintain contact with the Allied convoy.¹² At 2137 hours, the BdU informed the U-boats that the convoy's course was "northeasterly," and ordered the vessels to search for the Allied ships in that direction.¹³

The Allies had a general knowledge of the deployment of the U-boats in the North Atlantic from communications intelligence. In fact, the British, having broken the codes used by the BdU and the U-boats, had been reading their command radio communications since December 1942.¹⁴ However, there were delays and lags in the decoding process which, at the beginning of March 1943, resulted in the Allies reading German radio messages some six or seven days after

their transmission. For example, the BdU's order to U-405 to shadow SC-121 was not decoded by the Allies until 0446 on 12 March.¹⁵

Convoy SC-121 sailed from New York at 0800 hours on 23 February, proceeded northeast along the North American coast, and made a rendezvous with Escort Group A3 in approximately 49°58'N 47°13'W for the voyage across the North Atlantic to Great Britain.¹⁶ When SC-121 was joined by Escort Group A3, under the command of Captain P. R. Heineman, USN, the whole Allied force consisted of 56 merchant ships, including the rescue ship *Melrose Abbey* (HF/DF)¹⁷ escorted by the USCGC *Spencer* (HF/DF), the destroyer USS *Greer* (HF/DF), and the corvettes HMS *Dianthus*, HMCS *Rosthern*, and HMCS *Trillium*. The convoy and her escorts, pushed by "Continuous Southwesterly and West-