

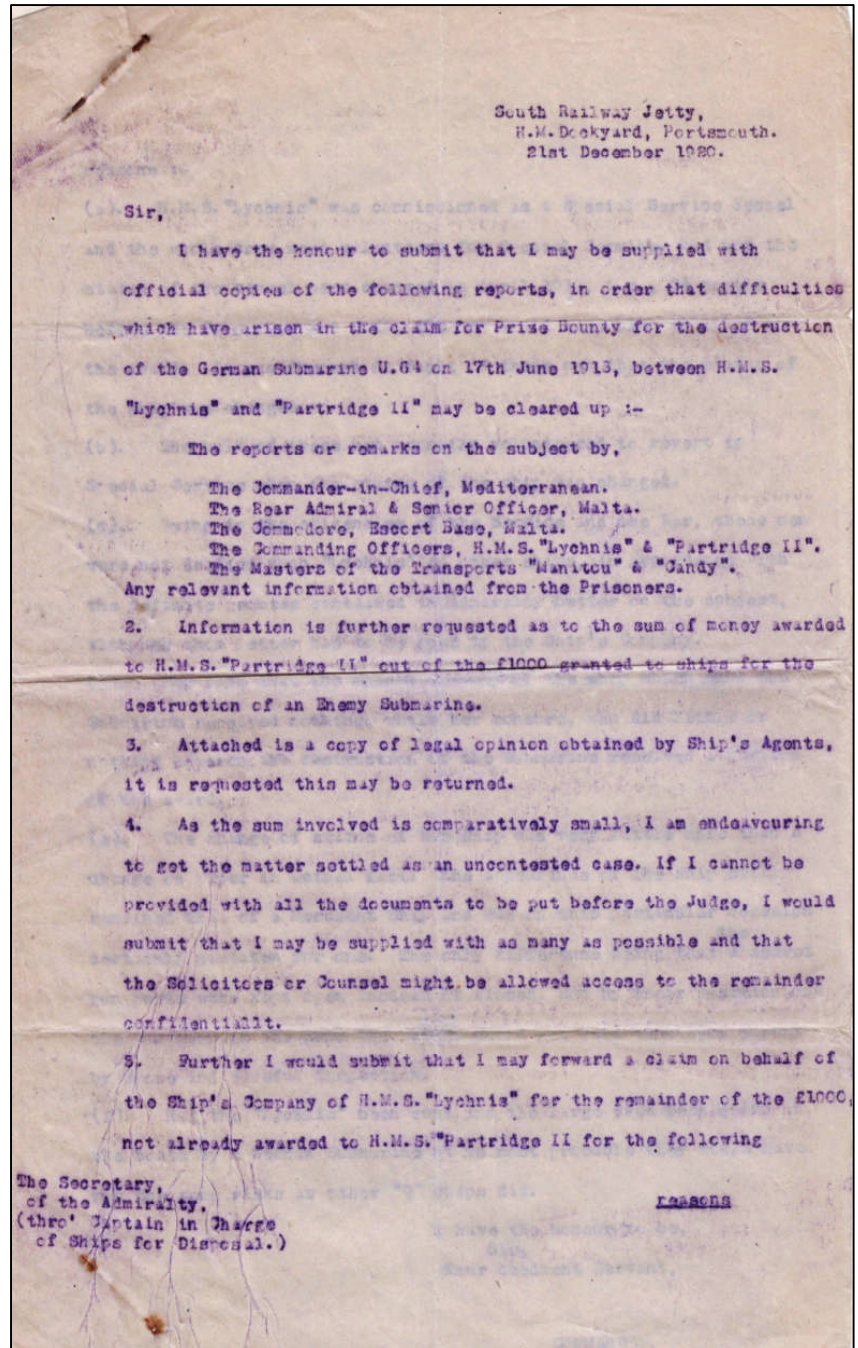
My Recent Philatelic Purchase: Q-ships by Harvey Edwards

One of my collecting interests is submarines. I have a 6-frame exhibit titled *Under Pressure* that I haven't updated in several years. With our local show (The Greater Reno Stamp & Cover Show) on hiatus next year it seems like a good time to work on the exhibit again.

One tool the British developed to counter the German submarine threat was the Q-ships. I recently purchased a 1920 letter from Lt. Commander Noakes of the Q-ship HMS *Lychnis* requesting his crew be allowed to share in the Prize Bounty for the June 1918 sinking of U-64. Reading the letter raised questions for me on Q-ship operations, the *Lychnis*, and U-64.

Prior to declaring unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1915, U-boat commanders would surface, warning a ship's crew to abandon ship before sinking it. U-boat commanders preferred to use their deck guns on smaller targets to save their torpedoes.

At the beginning of WWI anti-submarine countermeasures such as depth charges were relatively ineffective. Convoying was resource intensive and generally unwelcomed by the merchant ships. The Q-ships were a secret armed decoy merchant ship program intended to present "easy" targets to lure the U-boats to the surface to sink them. Introduced in late 1914, the Q-ships sailed under false names and flags. The ship's crew portrayed themselves as a civilian crew; the gunnery and panic boat crews were "passengers." A Q-ship would straggle from a convoy or travel on its own intending for the U-boat commander to see it as an easy target. The Q-ship ruse included "abandoning" ship to draw the U-



boat in before raising the white ensign, opening their gun ports and commencing fire. U-40 was the first U-boat to be sunk involving a Q-ship (June 1915); UC-29 was the last (June 1917). (Germany blamed unrestricted submarine warfare on the Q-ships, which took advantage of their chivalry to warn the merchant ships before attacking, and considered the Q-ship actions to violate international maritime laws.) Q-ships were responsible for sinking 10-15 German submarines and damaging many more. 44-61 Q-ships were sunk. (Sources vary on the numbers of U-boats and Q-ships sunk as well as the number of Q-ships deployed.) The Liberian stamp below shows the Q-ship HMS *Wonganella*.

The HMS Lychnis (pictured below) was commissioned as a Q-ship in November 1917. As a Q-ship she sailed under the names Kidner and Wilangil. The Lychnis was reclassified a convoy sloop in April 1918. Lychnis and HMS Partridge II engaged U-64 on June 17, 1918. U-64 forced to surface by depth charges and then sunk by gunfire leaving 38 dead and 5 survivors. Commander Noakes letter speaks of Lychnis being commissioned a Special Service Vessel [Q-ship], its appearance merchant ship, prize awards for sinking U-boats, secret gun ports, and panic boat crews.



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The U-64 was commissioned in April 1916 under the command of Kapitänleutnant Robert Moraht. Prior to being sunk on her 10th patrol, the U-64 had sunk 46 ships (total of almost 150,000 tons), damaged three (9,420 tons), and taken one as prize (186 tons). Moraht and four others in the conning tower survived U-64's sinking.

Harvey Edwards is a NSSS Director and the former Chair of the Stamp Show Committee. He is an award winning exhibitor and winner of the Chaloner Award in 2015. Harvey's current collecting interests include submarines and Nevada history which varies based on the exhibit he is working on. He also collected St Pierre et Miquelon and pictorial cancellations.