

The Dutchman's Log



Stephen Graham, center, looks on as Gord Laco demos the plotting action.

Photo: Apple TV Plus, Niko Tavernise

The Battle of the Atlantic: Making the Movie Real

from *Greyhound*

By Tom Hanks

Based on *The Good Shepherd* by C.S. Forester

Scene: 8

INT. Bridge of the USS *Keeling*, codename Greyhound
The destroyer is running down a German U-Boat that is on-course to attack a convoy of Allied supply ships in WWII.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER CHARLIE COLE
(moves from sonar scope to intercom)

Target's disappeared, sir. Fell off the radar about six miles out.

COMMANDER ERNIE KRAUSE

What's this, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Looks like he's dived, sir, by the way the pips faded out.

LIEUTENANT WATSON

He must've seen us, sir. Got his air and dove.
Pips had him on course for us and the convoy, sir.

ERNIE

Give me a course to intercept if the target maintains this course at six knots.

CHARLIE

Aye, aye, sir.

(flurry of action as he plots courses on the plotting board)

Conn, Combat. Course to intercept is oh-nine-six.

ERNIE

Warn me two miles out from this intercept.

Realism. Film is a visual medium and it must ring true.

In the Apple TV+ movie *Greyhound*, Tom Hanks plays Cmdr. Krause, captaining the USS *Keeling* (codename Greyhound), part of the US-Canadian naval escort for a large convoy of supply ships en route to England in 1942. This is the Battle of the Atlantic, the deadly, cat-and-mouse game between the merchant ships' guardians and the wolf pack of German submarines.

The screenplay excerpt above finds LtCdr. Cole calculating the course the destroyer must take to face off with the stalking U-boat. Playing that role is Stephen Graham, a fine actor, a true professional. But Aaron Schneider, the film's director, stepped in and asked the technical advisor to do the interception plotting in close up saying, "They're being too precise. I want this to look like they've done it a thousand times and are in a hurry."

You'll see that closeup of hands on the plotting board, in the ship's darkened Combat Information Center, at 15:24 in the final cut. They belong to Lt. Gordon Laco, R.C.N., (Ret.) whose vast knowledge of naval history has polished the reality on more than 60 motion pictures including *Master and Commander*, *The Far Side of the World*.

Gord happens also to be a high-ranking member and yacht varnishing and painting authority on the crew at Epifanes.

Realism in the actor's lines adds drama to the fight but demands authenticity, as well. Capturing in naval terms what Gord refers to as "Bridge Resource Management" was critical to the film's depiction of this lesser known but no less harrowing WWII battle zone.

Words matter. Getting that chatter accurately conveys the discipline with which the destroyer's crew works as one: each man contributing to the attack while never diluting the captain's authority—the commanding officer relying on the skills and judgement of every crewmember even as he alone bears the burden of making correct decisions and owning the consequences.

Getting it right; that's the technical advisor's job—to see to it that the action is true, that the commands and replies are genuine. But something else was amiss. The water, which was simulated using computer generated imagery (CGI), wasn't completely convincing.

With realism held in the balance, all the rest of the film's painstakingly created authenticity would be completely sunk if the ocean looked fake. As Gord says, "Let's not turn this drama into an accidental comedy."

But he had a fix. He rang up one of his Royal Canadian Navy colleagues to ask if they had any ships heading out into the Atlantic for work ups—shakedown cruises—and could Hollywood tag along. They did. So Schneider sent a video crew to sea in January aboard

HMCS *Montréal* to capture scenes of raw ocean sliced by a fast ship at flank speed. Then a team of digital artists blended those undulating waves, wakes, and crashing seas and dropped computerized replicas of actual ships into that watery video.

In the end, all of that dedication to telling a technically true story, an honest story, knits the whole together. What that realism creates is believability. Everything rings true, holding the audience's attention from fade up to fade out.

“What matters most is that there's a patina of realism that elevates the whole movie and helps the director tell a story.”

Gord got it—all of it—right. He brings the same passion for perfection when it comes to varnishing, too. In Canada and beyond.

If you want to see Gord's hands in action and the exacting brand of verisimilitude all of the players bring to the film, don't miss *Greyhound* on Apple TV+.

TECH TALK

While We're Talking Steel Vessels...

Painting a steel vessel is not much different than painting a fiberglass one. You just need to be a little more aggressive in the prep stage.



Make sure the steel surface is dry and remove all dirt, wax, and any other contamination. Clean off any rust and mill scale, preferably by sandblasting to SA 2.5. If sandblasting's not an option, sand the entire surface manually or by machine using 60-80 grit dry abrasive paper. All welding spots/drops must be removed and sharp edges must be rounded with a grinder. Where rust removal is difficult, prep with a dependable rust remover. And prior to priming, fill any irregularities with Epifanes Epoxy Filler, and sand with 220 grit dry.

After all of that, apply a thinned primer coat as soon as possible to ward off any additional oxidation. The temperature of the steel must at least be 6°F/3°C above the dew point. Your paint system can be either one-part or two-part products. For one-part, prime with Epifanes Multi Marine Primer followed by Epifanes Mono-urethane as the top coat. If two-part, use Epifanes Epoxy Primer and top coat with Epifanes Poly-urethane. Either way, thin the first primer coat by 25%. Aside from that, follow the standard directions per product going forward from the first primer coat. Steel is the real deal.

THE OLD SALT'S SAY

Mail Buoy. Or Walk the Prank.

In the navy, you can sail the seven seas. But if you're the new sailor on board, you

may get stuck with lookout duty for the Mail Buoy. Do not fail. The mail buoy is a watertight container air-dropped further up the line. It's got all of the crew's mail. Huge responsibility for a greenie. So now you're the poor sap up on the bow, drenched and freezing, with a life jacket, harness, foul weather gear, ear phones, binoculars, and a boat hook. Until the deck officer comes down to chew you out 'cause you missed it. And then, "Nah, we were just messing with ya." It's the mail buoy prank, a navy classic.



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