



NAVAL HISTORY AND
HERITAGE COMMAND

U.S. (SHIP)YARD SALE

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

In the summer of 1940, it became clear that Great Britain was in trouble. Adolf Hitler's Nazi army was running wild in Europe and its navy was stifling the flow of food and material to the British Isles. What Britain needed was ships — and they needed them *right now*.

The United States wasn't yet a part of the new world war just yet and it was trying to stay neutral. But luckily, the U.S. had a bunch of leftover destroyers it wasn't using.

The U.K. struck a deal with the U.S. for those vessels on Sept. 2, 1940 — 85 years ago.

TRYING TO STAY NEUTRAL AS WORLD WAR EXPANDED

Even as another world war ignited in 1939, the political climate in the United States was one of isolationism. Neither Congress nor the American people had forgotten "the Great War" in Europe and they had no wish to get involved in another one.

Aware that Britain, the Soviet Union and other U.S. allies needed supplies, President Franklin D. Roosevelt negotiated around various Neutrality Acts to sell military supplies to allies on a cash-and-carry basis.

By the summer of 1940, the British had evacuated Dunkirk and the mainland of Europe and it was clear France would fall soon. The U.K. was also losing military vessels — ships it needed for convoy duty — to the

relentless German U-boat attacks.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill asked Roosevelt for help. FDR offered surplus ammo. Churchill made it clear he needed more than that.

In August, the U.S. ambassador to Britain, Joe Kennedy, reported to Roosevelt that a British surrender was "inevitable." It was clear something had to be done — and sooner, rather than later.



Winston Churchill



Cordell Hull

Discussion in the administration turned to what the world might look like if Britain did surrender to Germany. Right away, the Nazis would gain access to British possessions in the

West Indies — close to the American mainland. How might the U.S. defend against an enemy attack from such forward locations?

One answer could be for the U.S. to build naval and air bases on or near

those British territories.

Negotiations took place with great speed. Churchill wanted the bases to be gifts to the American people. FDR, on the other hand, needed any exchange to be a quid pro quo.

A deal was signed by Secretary of State Cordell Hull and announced by Roosevelt on Sept. 2, 1940. The next day, U.S. Admiral Harold Stark assured the American people that the 50 destroyers were "not vital to U.S. security."

This war surplus yard sale — which came to be known as "destroyers for bases" — would set the tone for more assistance to allies that would come later.

WHAT GREAT BRITAIN GOT ...



WARFARE HISTORY NETWORK

The U.S. gave Great Britain 50 mothballed World War I-vintage destroyers — 20% of America's entire inventory of destroyers at the time. These were 1,200-ton vessels, referred to as "four pipers," because of the number of smokestacks they had.

The destroyers were outdated and had poor handling qualities, but were still serviceable convoy escorts.

Built in 1917

Built in 1918

Built in 1919

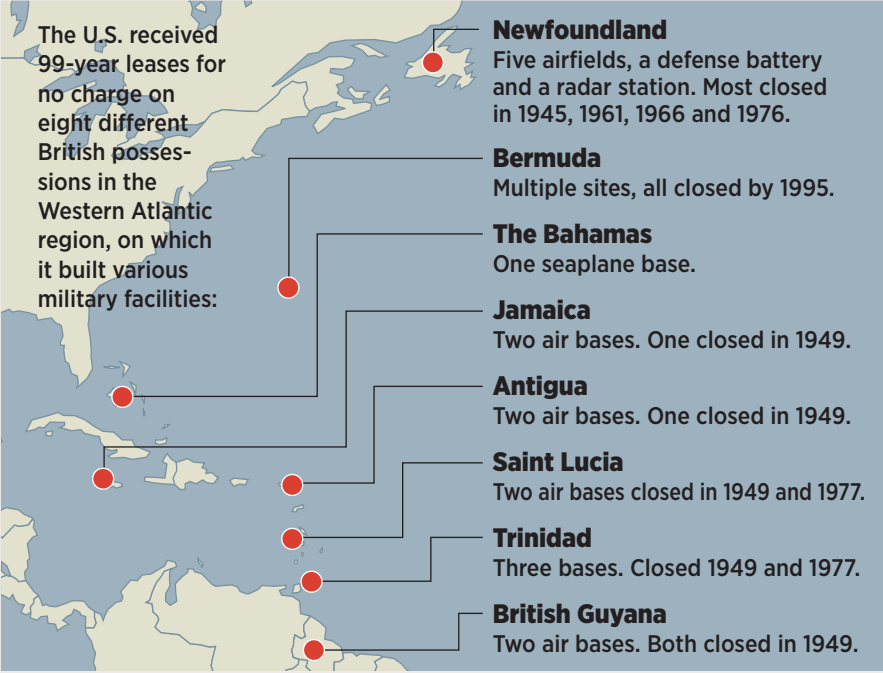
Built in 1920

Britain took possession of the first six vessels on Sept. 6 — just four days after Roosevelt announced the deal. By the end of 1940, 40 ships had arrived in the U.K.

Six of the destroyers were manned by Canadian crews. The rest were operated by the Royal Navy.

Later, the U.S. would send 10 Coast Guard cutters to the Royal Navy and nine destroyers to the Soviet Navy.

... AND WHAT THE U.S. GOT IN RETURN



THE NEXT STEP: LEND-LEASE

On Nov. 23, 1940, Britain's ambassador to the U.S., Lord Lothian, arrived at New York City's La Guardia airport. "Well boys," he told the journalists waiting for him there. "Britain's broke. It's your money we want."

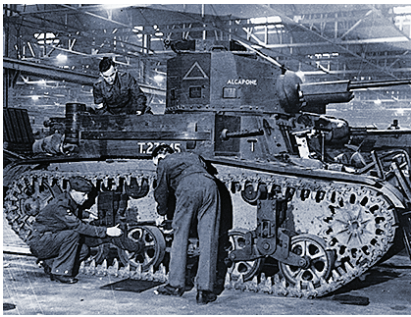
Churchill questioned Lothian's diplomatic tact, but it was no exaggeration. The war had exhausted the country's reserves of money and gold. It would have trouble buying the American war supplies it needed to fend off Nazi Germany.

Roosevelt was determined to not let Britain fall. A few months later, his



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Roosevelt signs the Lend-Lease Act on March 11, 1941.



FDR PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY & MUSEUM

Fitters assemble a U.S. light tank that was shipped to England.

administration proposed what came to be called Lend-Lease. In a radio "Fireside Chat" on Dec. 29, 1940, Roosevelt told the nation it needed to serve as the "arsenal of democracy."

Despite continued political opposition, FDR's plan was passed on March 8, 1941. He signed it into law three days later.

Britain was the first ally to receive support via Lend-Lease. Roosevelt would, over the next few years, expand this to other countries and would include food, clothing and industrial equipment.

\$14.30 b
Great Britain

WHO GOT
WHAT VIA
LEND-LEASE

\$5.52 b
Soviet Union

\$2.04 b
France

\$1.73 b
China

\$327.0 m
American
countries

\$239.4 m
Not distributed

\$193.3 m
Other countries

\$169.8 m
Canada

Out of every 100 tanks that came off assembly lines between March 11, 1941 and June 1944 ...

Lend-leased 41
Sold to allies for cash 3

56
Delivered to U.S. armed forces

Of every 100 planes manufactured ...

Sold to allies for cash 3
Lend-leased 15

82
Delivered to U.S. armed forces