

World War II Victory At Sea, Complete 26 Episodes

Victory at Sea was a documentary TV series about naval warfare during World War II that was originally aired by NBC in 26 half-hour segments on Sunday afternoons, starting October 26, 1952 and ending May 3, 1953. The series, which won an Emmy in 1954 as best public affairs program, played a major role in establishing historic documentaries as a viable television genre.

The project was conceived by Henry Salomon, who, while serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II, was a research assistant to historian Samuel Eliot Morison. Morison was then in the process of writing the 15-volume History of United States Naval Operations in World War II. During this period, Salomon learned of the large amounts of film that the warring navies had compiled. Salomon left the Navy in 1948, and eventually discussed his idea of a documentary series with one of his Harvard classmates, Robert Sarnoff, a rising executive at NBC television and the son of David Sarnoff, the chairman of RCA (then the owner of NBC).

NBC green lighted the project in 1951, with Salomon as producer and a budget of \$500,000 (very large for that era). His team, made up largely of newsreel veterans, scoured naval archives around the world, and received full cooperation from the U.S. Navy, which recognized the publicity value of the project. Salomon's team eventually compiled 60 million feet (18,300 km) of film, which was edited to about 61,000 feet for broadcast. Salomon also signed Richard Rodgers, fresh off several hit Broadway musicals, to compose the musical score for the series. Rodgers would contribute twelve "themes"--short piano compositions a minute or two in length. Robert Russell Bennett did the scoring, transforming Rodgers's themes to fit a variety of moods, and composing much more original material than Rodgers. Nonetheless, Bennett received credit only for "arranging" the score and conducting NBC Symphony Orchestra members on the soundtrack recording sessions, and many writers still refer onerously to Rodgers's thirteen-hour score.

After the series' original run, NBC syndicated it to local stations, where it proved highly successful financially through the mid-1960s. NBC also marketed the series overseas; by 1964, it had aired in 40 foreign markets. In the meantime, NBC sold the theatrical rights to United Artists, which created a feature-length movie that was released in 1954; NBC aired the movie twice in the 1960s. RCA's record division also sold the Rodgers-Bennett musical score in four different album versions.

Hailed as a groundbreaking production in the early era of television, the series retains its appeal half a century later. Though the score, script, and narration (by Leonard Graves) retain their appeal, much of the film editing is criticized by knowledgeable viewers for anachronistic sequences: 1943-45 ships and aircraft in 1941-42 segments, for instance.

Password: Capt_Jack

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