

The War Offshore: German Submarines in the Waters off of Palm Beach County & Other Parts of Southeast Florida

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If you were living on the resort area of Jupiter Island along southern Florida's Treasure Coast on February 21, 1942, you might have been partying at the local drinking hole, relaxing in your living room, or asleep in bed. All of a sudden, you would have felt the ground beneath you vibrate. You would have heard a boom in the distance so powerful it rattled dishes and windows and even broke some. Far off at sea, you might have seen a dull white glow. A short time later, you might see two lifeboats pull up to the beach behind your house. Several men would stagger off, coated in oil.

You would then discover that living on America's coast had suddenly come with a price.

If you lived in America's heartland, you knew the war all too well; you sent your sons and husbands, and some did not come back. But you never really felt that you were in danger. The war was in strange lands far across the sea.

But if you lived on the coast of Florida or across coastal America from Maine to South Texas, you could see the war glowing on the horizon. You could see its smoke billowing and feel its heat. You could encounter its dead tangled in seaweed on the beach. And you went to bed every night wondering if a shell would crash down on you while you slept.

In those first few weeks after Pearl Harbor pulled America headlong into a two-front war, the *untersee boots* of Adolf Hitler's navy worked with

virtual impunity. Off Florida alone, they sank twenty-four ships. Sixteen went down in a 150-mile stretch of Florida coastline from Cape Canaveral to Boca Raton between February and May 1942. With little or no resistance, the U-Boats could leisurely stalk the lumbering tankers and freighters. Their periscope sights would spot their prey silhouetted in the lights of the oceanfront hotels that drew tourists in droves to Florida.¹

The commanders were under strict orders to sink ships—nothing more. Hitler's plans at that point did not include massacring civilians in American cities. But South Floridians did not know that. They painted their headlights black, took part in blackouts and drills, patrolled beaches on foot or on horseback. Jumpy authorities rounded up virtually anyone with a German-sounding accent or Asian features. Rumors spread like fire on an oil slick. And some of the very features that attracted tourists to Florida made it the logical place for soldiers as well.

The state, a strategic asset for its geography and climate, became an armed camp. Its hotels turned into barracks. Hospitals, bases and airfields sprang up, increasing from eight in 1940 to 172 in 1943.² The influx of soldiers led to the boom that changed Florida's population from about two million in 1940 to nearly three million a decade later. The sleepy southern locale became one of the nation's most important and fastest-growing states. Florida would never be the same.

'Hanging Like A Pall'

"Don't strike matches or show a light in any way. Don't light a cigarette...take refuge in a nearby building and stay there until the all-clear signal."³

Authorities weren't kidding around when they conducted a practice blackout January 11, 1942, that threw into darkness a 300-mile stretch of South Florida coastline from Stuart to Key West. At 10:15 that night, city lights switched off in sweeping waves.

"It was an impressive and sobering sight," wrote one reporter as he stood on a rooftop and watched the twin tourist towns of West Palm Beach and Palm Beach enveloped in black, "to see these two large municipalities as dark as a pocket when the huge observation plane soared over the resorts, its throbbing motors breaking the stillness, which seemed to hang like a pall over everything."⁴

Beachfront hotels and restaurants, worried about business, initially resisted orders for coastal cities to dim lights so ships wouldn't be backlit.

It was not until April 11, 1942, that Gov. Spessard Holland ordered a dimming of lights facing the sea. Streetlights were hooded to cast only a small circle of light directly down. Ten donated station wagons were fitted with blankets as emergency standby ambulances.⁵

“We witnessed several encounters offshore—flares, rockets, gunfire,”

recalled Joy S. Kissam of North Palm Beach. “Since security was tight, we never knew exactly what we were seeing.”⁶

“We had a manual telephone switchboard in Lake Worth, the kind where the operator said, ‘Number please. Thank you,’” recalled Florence B. Schnopp of Lake Worth. About four o’clock one morning a man in the luxurious oceanfront community of Manalapan, south of Palm Beach, called the switchboard, she recalled. “He said, ‘Operator, there’s a ship on fire.’”⁷



A ship torpedoed by a submarine, 1942.
HASF 1998-011-18402.

Round Up the Usual Suspects

Paranoia led authorities to detain people on the slightest suspicion of subterfuge. In the first days following the attack on Pearl Harbor, FBI agents and local police were under strict orders to pick up any Japanese. “Loafers” unknown to police were to be run off and any aliens held for questioning. The FBI searched a Japanese-owned import-export shop on Palm Beach’s ritzy Worth Avenue and posted an armed sailor out front who answered no questions of nosy reporters. FBI agents picked up I. H. Okamoto of the Nippon Dry Goods Company, Los Angeles, after a Chinese cook at his hotel advised police.⁸

The former Countess Erica von Haacke of the Silesia region of Germany was “taken into custody” in Palm Beach while wintering from New Jersey with her family. A newspaper story appeared to identify the countess as one of two unnamed people arrested in South Florida. The story said the FBI detained the two—one Italian, one German, both members of their homeland’s nobility and both

prominent in the social circles of South Florida's winter residents—in a nationwide sweep. The story said agents found shortwave radios, camera equipment, and cameras in the detainees' homes, one in Palm Beach and one in Miami. And the FBI arrested Baron Fritz von Opel—yachtsman, scion of the Opel carmaker family, and inventor of the rocket-propelled car—on February 26, 1942, at his Palm Beach residence along with his wife and two Hungarians. Authorities labeled them “potential dangerous aliens.”⁹ By late February 1942, news reports showed that FBI agents made fifty-five raids in the West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale areas, arresting twenty-nine suspected enemy aliens and confiscating guns and cameras.¹⁰

February 28, 1942, was the deadline for “enemy aliens” to register with the federal government; failure brought the threat of internment for the duration of the war.¹¹ Unlike their west coast counterparts, Japanese residents of Florida—the state's 1940 census listed only two hundred and seventeen statewide—were not subject to the mass relocation to government-run camps. But that did not protect them from FBI investigations or other restrictions meant to prevent espionage.¹²

The government froze the assets of George Morikami, former member of the Yamato agricultural colony in Boca Raton. It ran his farm and lodged servicemen in his home. He had to get permission to travel outside the county. The government also confiscated land owned by the Yamato colony family of Hideo Kobayashi for the Boca Raton Army Air Field. To avoid the wartime regulations that would not permit them to cross a county line to conduct their landscaping business, the Kobayashis moved twenty miles south to Fort Lauderdale.¹³

The Coast Watch

The Coast Guard set up observation towers every three miles at places like the Lake Worth casino. Instructions were specific and grim. If an airplane was spotted, the watcher was to dash to the phone: “When the central operator hears the words ‘Army-Flash,’ she immediately starts to put through a high priority, Government collect, long-distance call to the Army Filter Center...”¹⁴

A polo grounds held barracks for about two hundred and eighty U.S. Coast Guard beach watchers. The men, each armed with a .38-caliber pistol strapped to his waist and a rifle in his boot, rode

horses shipped in from Fort Riley, Kansas. The horses initially rode up to sixteen miles a night before a leader devised a plan to ship the horses to strategic points to cut the riding to six miles. Teenagers who had never been in a saddle were drafted for their local knowledge and rode eight to ten hours a night. Where horses couldn't maneuver, thirty trained dogs took over.¹⁵

"I have many memories of walking dogs on the beach with sand flies biting under my leggings and making it very uncomfortable to say the least," recalled Fran Wagner of Okeechobee, who was a Coast Guard spotter in Fort Pierce.¹⁶

Motorists along the coast reported submarine sightings. Excited residents jammed the switchboards; authorities forwarded sighting reports to Washington. By the time authority was given to scramble a plane, any U-Boats were long gone. The paranoia was mostly unnecessary although citizens could not have known that, Florida historian Michael Gannon said.

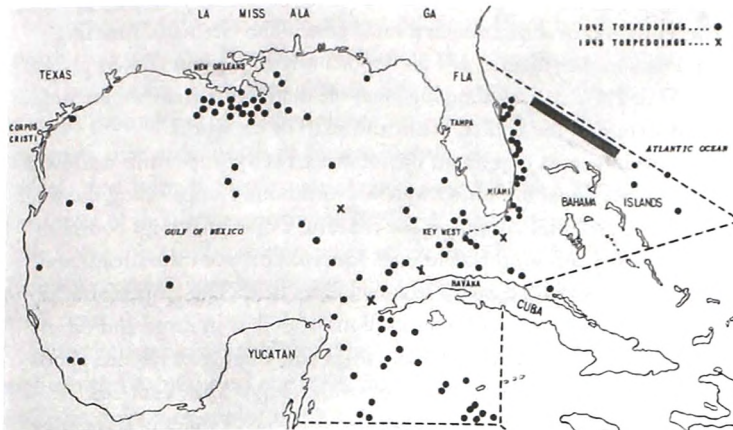
"Nowhere in German U-Boat operations do you find the U-Boat force shelling civilian targets to create terror or fear," Gannon said. "They lacked the weapons to do any substantial military damage, so what was the point? They were not given to that kind of behavior."¹⁷

Authorities got a break in early 1942 when a big winter storm blocked Jupiter Inlet, about 25 miles north of West Palm Beach, for the duration of the war, enabling horseback and Jeep patrols to negotiate most of the coastline.¹⁸

The nation's third Civil Air Patrol squadron formed at Morrison Field.¹⁹ The "Coastal Picket Patrol" and the "Mosquito Fleet"—rag-tag flotillas of pleasure and charter boats—patrolled for submarines and rescued survivors from torpedoed ships.²⁰

At "The Hill," the complex just west of downtown West Palm Beach that housed Palm Beach High School, Junior High, and Elementary, stories of sinkings, attacks, and Germans coming ashore flew through classrooms. Teachers would hush students, saying, "If you didn't see it, don't talk about it. The enemy might be listening."²¹

Patrol dogs ran people off the beaches at night. And anyone crossing the bridges between West Palm Beach and Palm Beach encountered an armed sentry who shined his flashlight, demanded identification, and sometimes searched cars. Just to cross the bridges, residents had to be fingerprinted and photographed for an ID card.



Seventh Naval Map showing locations of ships sunk by German submarines in 1942 and 1943. HASF 1989-011-24409.

“Access to the beaches in the daytime was hardly interrupted during this time, so long as one wore the badge,” recalled Persis Haas Newman, then a junior at Palm Beach High School and now living in Indiana. “Night access was out of the question,” Newman said. “No more beach parties with the bonfire.” Instead, the light came from ships burning at sea.²²

‘A Massacre’

In the first half-year of war, the Germans sank three hundred and ninety-seven ships and killed some five thousand people, about twice as many as died in Hawaii on December 7, 1941. Historian Gannon, in his 1990 book *Operation Drumbeat*, called it “a six-months long massacre, compared with which the defeat at Pearl Harbor was but a rap on the knuckles.” Gannon alleges monumental incompetence and delay by American authorities. He said they knew the subs’ locations from British intelligence but weren’t prepared to fight them and were too focused on the war in the Pacific. The German strategy was to interrupt the flow of supplies along the United States coast and to England, lay waste to the Allies’ merchant fleet and strike a propaganda blow by letting Americans watch burning ships from their beaches.²³

“The Axis submarine campaign was well planned,” a U.S. Navy report stated at the time. “Nowhere else in the world could (Germany) find such

a concentration of ships in such a small area.” The Germans, smarting from losses in the Atlantic, saw an opportunity to prey on tankers plying the crowded and narrow shipping lanes off the Florida coast, where traffic ranked second in the United States and sixth in the world.²⁴

Reports indicated that about one of every twelve ships sunk worldwide in 1942 went down in Florida waters. Northbound ships riding the Gulf Stream, the powerful current in the Atlantic Ocean that hugs Southern Florida’s coast, and southbound ones squeezed between the stream and the coast were funneled into a narrow killing field. The Florida attacks killed hundreds of men and sent millions of dollars in cargo and oil to the bottom. Coast Guard and Navy ships and volunteers rescued about five hundred seamen and saved some of the cargo. The “Gulf Sea Frontier” defensive force was responsible for 45,814 miles of serpentine coastline from Maine to the Texas-Mexico border, a distance nearly equal to two trips around the world. But it was ill-equipped to fight the roving bulldogs of the sea. Many ships had been given to the British, and the United States Navy had focused on escorts across the Atlantic. As a result, defenders had six ships, four under repair; fifteen unarmed planes; fourteen planes with machine guns; and three ancient B-18 bombers that spent more time in the shop than in the air.²⁵

The brash U-Boat commanders enjoyed the luxury of selecting their targets, holding fire on empty boats and waiting for those heavy with cargo and low in the water.

“Sy’s Men’s Store did a big business dressing the survivors,” recalled Dora Digby of Palm Beach. “At the local night spots, they were usually celebrating the survivors—on the house, of course.”²⁶

Emergency workers at Good Samaritan Hospital in West Palm Beach saw as many as fifty seamen in a night, some foreigners unable to describe injuries. Many who could speak English were too busy screaming in agony. One night, a loud boom shook Carolyn Beaty Darr’s water pitcher in a back room of the hospital, where Darr was a supervisor on the 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift. Two hours later, the injured started arriving.

“These men were all European, spoke no English and were so burned and swollen we could not even tell what they looked like,” Darr recalled.²⁷

‘The War Was Right There!’

The first Floridian victim of Operation Drumbeat was the twenty-three-year-old, 8,200-ton *Pan Massachusetts*, hit in broad daylight by

two torpedoes off Cape Canaveral on February 19. It had been heading north from Texas to New York with more than four million gallons of oil. The attacker: submarine *U-128*. Twenty of thirty-eight crewmen died. A passing British tanker picked up survivors. The ship broke up and sank fifty miles north of Jupiter Lighthouse.²⁸

Two days later, at 11 p.m., the *Republic* was hit three and a half miles northeast of the lighthouse by submarine *U-504*. The twenty-two-year-old, 5,882-ton tanker, sailing empty south from New Jersey for Texas, had been recently fitted with guns but the attack was so sudden they were never used.²⁹

Stuart insurance agent Ralph Hartman recalled that night. It was his eighteenth birthday and one week away from his brother's sixteenth birthday, reason enough for the gang to drive the few miles up from Stuart to Jensen Beach to celebrate. As Hartman dropped a nickel in the jukebox, the pilings sunk into the Indian River began vibrating. The tremors moved up the floor of Seymour's Inn and right up Hartman's legs. There was a dull boom. The building shook and windows rattled. Ralph and his pals dashed outside. Far out at sea, they saw a dull white glow.

"It was the first time," recalled Hartman, "that we knew the war was coming home to us."³⁰

"After one hundred and fifty seconds, two detonations, under the bridge and astern in the engine room, where the sparks fly around the air," *U-504* commander Fritz Poske noted in German in his war diary, later translated by historians.³¹

The engine room blast killed five of the thirty-four crewmen. Within minutes the crew was in two lifeboats, so quickly one left his false teeth behind. Residents later determined that the powerful shock wave on land, the one that shook people in their beds on Jupiter Island, had come from a torpedo that missed the *Republic* and slammed into the reef.

The sub approached a lifeboat, apparently determined it was not signaling anyone, and slipped away. One lifeboat was picked up by a ship. About three hours later, the other boat came ashore at Jupiter Island. Neighbors gave survivors dry clothes and food and drink. They filed onto waiting U.S. Navy trucks for a West Palm Beach hotel.³²

The ship settled a short distance from where it was hit, on a reef in about forty feet of water about five miles east of Hobe Sound. Its

stern sat on the bottom and its bow jutted high above the surface. It leaned forty degrees on one side, too dangerous an angle for salvage. Two Jupiter residents boarded the *Republic* the next day and found a terrified wire-haired terrier named Dolly.³³ It was later reunited with its owner, the ship's quartermaster. Two days after it was hit, the ship broke up and disappeared. The U-Boat was sunk seventeen months later off Spain with no survivors.

At about 5:25 a.m. February 22, about twenty miles off Melbourne as the twenty-four-year-old, 8,103-ton *Cities Service Empire* hauled nearly four million gallons of Texas crude north toward Philadelphia without lights, one crewman invited another out of the radio room for a cup of coffee on deck. That saved both their lives. The submarine *U-128*, captained by Lt. Comdr. Ulrich Heyse and fresh off its kill of the *Pan Massachusetts*, surfaced and fired three torpedoes. All missed. Two more missed. The infuriated captain charged toward the tanker, which was drawing away. Two more torpedoes were fired.

Crew members tried to reach a five-inch gun mounted for security but the flames drove them back. Fourteen of the crew of fifty died, including the captain, crushed between the hull and a lifeboat while trying to rescue another man. The survivors, some in shorts, waited three and a half hours in the cold for help. Survivors were eventually picked up by a Navy destroyer, the *Biddle*, and a Coast Guard cutter.³⁴

"That evening about dusk, we got orders to unload the wounded and dead at Fort Pierce," recalled *Biddle* crew member Herbert Goeler, now living in Boynton Beach, south of West Palm Beach. "You could see the buildings and the beaches, and the war was right there."³⁵

The 465-foot-long *Empire*, torn in two, went 250 feet to the bottom thirty-three miles east of the entrance to Port Canaveral. The U-Boat was sunk off Brazil fifteen months later.

'My First Trip To Florida'

At seven that same night, February 22, the twenty-one-year-old, 10,277-ton *W. D. Anderson* was heading north twelve miles north of Jupiter with a cargo of crude oil. The crew was at chow. Two men had already eaten and were on watch at the back of the five-hundred-foot ship, swapping tales. One was Frank Leonard Terry, twenty-three. He was sipping coffee when a torpedo hit the engine room with a dull thud. It was from *U-504*, killer of the *Republic*.³⁶

"The ship stood, in a fraction of a second, from forward to astern in flames," German commander Poske wrote. "After twelve seconds, second (torpedo) hits in the stern; the rear part broke off."³⁷

Terry jumped over a railing and dove into the water.

"I was in the air when the second torpedo hit," recalled Terry, now a retired steelworker and part-time security guard in Parkersburg, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. "I thought my insides were going to fall out."

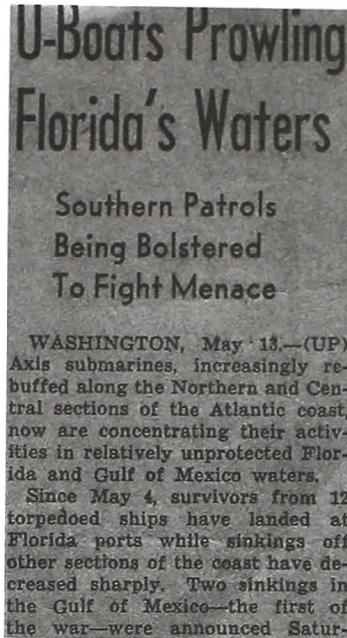
The second strike sprayed oil that coated the plummeting Terry and covered the surface when he came up for air.

"There was heavy smoke all 'round and fire. I heard a lot of screaming and hollering. I could feel heat and smoke. I tried to get away from it."

Terry dragged a shipmate through the water, and then had to let him go. He yelled for the man to follow him away from the flame and swam as fast as he could.

"All I heard was a big scream. He was on fire. Poor guy burned up."

Terry swam under the inferno until he thought his lungs would burst, finally surfacing clear. He could see the ship begin to sink in 240 feet of water. He was in the freezing water with no shirt or shoes, only his pants. He could find nothing to hang onto and treaded water for three hours, coated in oil. He shouted in vain into the dark and empty night. He saw only the light of the burning ship and heard the sounds of five separate explosions. Then, just when he feared he couldn't last five minutes more, a rescue boat loomed. Terry yelled and waved, terrified it would miss him in the darkness. Finally, its spotlight fell on him. Terry insisted to rescuers that sharks had bitten off his legs until they showed him his numb limbs. He was taken to Stuart, the only survivor out of thirty-six men.



Newspaper clipping telling of the U-Boat menace, 1942. HASE.

“It was my first trip to Florida. I didn’t like the experience. When I finally thought of my pals, they were in my prayers. I was a nervous wreck. The Germans? I figure it was war. It was their duty.”³⁸

Local media covered the sinkings of the *Empire* and *Republic* but had to wait two days for the federal Office of Censorship to clear publication. A note assured *Palm Beach Post* readers the paper was on the job but hampered by government, reminding them, “If it’s anything we can’t print, you shouldn’t be talking about it.”³⁹

A Deadly May

On April 3, the *Gulf State* was sunk off Key West. The tanker, taking crude oil from Corpus Christi, Texas, to Portland, Maine, took torpedoes in rapid order—one under the bridge and one in the engine room—at about 3:15 a.m. The fire broke out so quickly there was no time to break out boats or rafts. The ship sank in five minutes. Only eighteen of the crew of forty-eight was saved; survivors jumped off and swam through debris and flaming oil; some survivors clung to a raft that had been thrown free. Rescuers picked up survivors and some dead about noon and took them to Key West.⁴⁰

On April 10, the *Gulf America* went down off Jacksonville. The ship, carrying furnace oil, was hit at approximately 10:20 p.m. by two torpedoes. The captain immediately gave the order to abandon ship. As the crew did so, the sub surfaced and began to shell the *Gulf America*, throwing the evacuation into chaos. Of the crew of thirty-eight, twenty-nine survivors were picked up in lifeboats several hours later and brought to a base at Mayport, near Jacksonville. The ship settled on the bottom and some papers were retrieved; six days later it turned over and sank from sight.⁴¹

Two more ships would go down in April. On April 12, the *Leslie*, a freighter hauling 3,300 tons of sugar from Cuba to New York, was sunk by *U-123* five to fifteen miles off Cape Canaveral. Four of thirty-two crew members died. On April 13, the *Korsholm*, a freighter with 4,953 tons of phosphate, was hit by gunfire from *U-123* four miles from the *Leslie*. Nine of twenty-six crew members died.⁴²

But the deadliest stretch came in May, when ten ships sank in ten days.

May 1: the *La Paz*, a freighter, was hit by *U-109* off Cape Canaveral. All fifty-seven aboard survived.

May 3, 2:15 a.m.: the *Ocean Venus*, a freighter hauling lead and lumber, was sunk by *U-564* off Melbourne. The crew fired on the sub, then abandoned ship. Five of forty-seven crew members died. About an hour and a half later, at 4:55 a.m. on May 3, the *Laertes*, a freighter hauling 5,020 tons of airplanes, tanks, and trucks, was hit twice in four minutes off Cape Canaveral by *U-109*. Eighteen of sixty-six crew members died. The same day, *U-506* struck the *Sami*.

Then, at 1 p.m. on May 4, the British tanker *Eclipse*, bearing aviation fuel, was southbound for Texas a mile off Boynton Inlet, about halfway between West Palm Beach and Boca Raton. It never expected a torpedo from the direction of land, but *U-564* had maneuvered between it and the coast a few hundred yards away. The second officer saw the torpedo's wake. "Hard a-starboard!" he shouted. Five seconds later, the ship was lifted six feet by the blast. Two men below were killed. Twenty-nine boarded lifeboats and were taken by rescue ships to Boynton Inlet. Sixteen stayed with the *Eclipse*, which was later towed to Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale. The ship's master, a veteran of three previous attacks, was grateful to have cheated death again.⁴³

At 11 that night, near Jupiter Island, as the freighter *DeLisle* headed south from Baltimore to Puerto Rico with two thousand tons of cargo, much of it camouflage paint, *U-564* struck again. A crewman spotted the torpedo heading from shore three hundred feet away. Seconds later there was a forty-foot hole in the ship's side and two dead men in the engine room. Thirty crew members and four Puerto Rican stowaways later rowed ashore.⁴⁴ The *DeLisle* rested near shore, not far from the Republic. A Jupiter man stood watch on the ship for five lonely nights. On the second night, he looked below and saw a white form float back and forth as the ship rocked. It was the body of one of the two engine room crewmen. The second body was recovered the next day.⁴⁵

At 11:45 p.m. on May 5, *U-333* commander Peter Cremer targeted the *Java Arrow*, silhouetted by the moon off Fort Pierce as the twenty-one-year-old, 8,327-ton ship sailed south for South Africa with fourteen hundred tons of oil and drinking water. Two torpedoes struck a minute apart, leading to speculation there were two subs. The first hit below the bridge; the second entered the engine room, killing two officers. In all, five men were killed. The forty-five survivors were taken to Fort Pierce and Miami.⁴⁶

“Twelve hours later, we still saw smoke all across the horizon,” Cremer wrote.⁴⁷

The burned hulk was towed ninety hours to Port Everglades and was later salvaged.

Four hours after sinking the *Java Arrow*, *U-333* found another victim. The Dutch freighter *Amazone* was off Hobe Sound at 3:40 a.m. May 6, northbound to New York on a moonlit night with nine hundred tons of coffee, sisal fiber, orange peel, oil burners, and mail. Two officers on the deck saw a dark shape behind them. A torpedo ripped into the ship, sending flames to the top of the mast. Fourteen men went down with the ship in minutes in eighty feet of water.⁴⁸

“The boat sank like a stone,” Cremer wrote.⁴⁹ The wreck remains in seventy-five to one hundred feet of water about ten miles off the St. Lucie Nuclear Power Plant near Fort Pierce. Nine men clung to a capsized lifeboat; another eleven grabbed rafts and debris. Drifting with the current, they passed the ominous shadow of the U-Boat. Three hours after the attack, they were picked up and taken to Miami.⁵⁰

At 4:55 a.m., *U-333* claimed its third kill in a little more than five hours. The U-Boat had moved just offshore near Jupiter Island so merchant ships would not see it silhouetted against the moon or the sunrise. It sent two torpedoes out to the 7,000-ton *Halsey*, northbound to New York with nearly three and a half million gallons of oil. At least one torpedo ripped a sixty-foot hole in the ship. Within fifteen minutes, the crew of thirty-two, swooning from oil fumes and terrified of an explosion, had taken to the lifeboats. A tanker that came alongside to pick them up fell into *U-333*'s site, but the torpedo jammed in the tube, robbing Cremer of a fourth kill. Two U.S. ships flung depth charges and chased the U-Boat, but it outran them. The *Halsey*'s survivors were taken to Gilbert's Bar House of Refuge on Hutchinson Island near Stuart. At 6 a.m., the ship, water breaking over its bridge, was suddenly torn in half by a horrific explosion in its middle, caused perhaps by a flare on a lifeboat. It sank in fifty feet sixteen miles north of Jupiter and eight miles offshore, its mast visible and flames still spewing from it and roiling on the surface.⁵¹

Two days later, at thirteen minutes past noon on May 8, *U-564* made a daring daylight attack on the *Ohioan*. The ship was northbound several miles off Boca Raton with six thousand tons of ore, thirteen hundred tons of licorice root, and three hundred tons of wool. There was no time to take to lifeboats, which were torn from the ship as it sank. It went

down in two minutes in 550 feet of water, sucking several seamen down with it. Fifteen of the thirty-seven were lost; survivors swam to the scattered boats and were later picked up and taken to West Palm Beach.⁵²

At 3:20 a.m. on May 9, three and a half miles east of Delray Beach, *U-564* made another strike. *The Lubrafol*, sailing north from Aruba to New York with two and a half million gallons of fuel oil, took a torpedo, perhaps two. A fuel tank burst into flame and a mast toppled. Two were killed. The remaining forty-two dashed to lifeboats; one boat caught fire and panicked seamen jumped into the water and were lost. Thirteen of the forty-four crewmen were dead or missing. The ship drifted away and eventually sank.⁵³

The killing continued: May 1: *The Worden*, off Melbourne. May 3: *The Sama*, east of Hollywood. May 4: *The Norlindo*, off Key West.⁵⁴

Also May 4: *The Munger T. Ball*, torpedoed twice in thirty seconds, at 6:40 p.m. about one hundred miles northwest of the Dry Tortugas. The American tanker was believed to be hauling gasoline from Port Arthur, Texas, to Wilmington, North Carolina. The ship sank within fifty minutes. The first explosion hit the port side, and the ship burst into flames. After the second torpedo struck, the U-Boat surfaced and began to machine-gun the tanker from end to end. The crew tried to free lifeboats, but the fire had stuck their latches tight, and the men shimmied down ropes into the water. Four men were picked up by another ship and brought to Key West. The remaining twenty-nine were presumed lost.⁵⁵

Nine miles north of the Ball, the crew of the *Joseph M. Cudahy* saw the ship burst into flame and tried to steer clear of danger. Crew members said they believed a sub was tailing them; at about 9:30, the conning tower of a U-Boat was spotted five hundred feet off starboard. Seconds later, a torpedo slammed into the ship, and fire broke out immediately. The ship's master steered into the wind; he and eight others climbed into a boat. The nine and another plucked from the water were taken at about 9 a.m. to Key West. Three days later, the tanker, gutted and still burning, was spotted by another ship. Because the *Cudahy* was a threat to other vessels, the second ship sank it with gunfire.⁵⁶

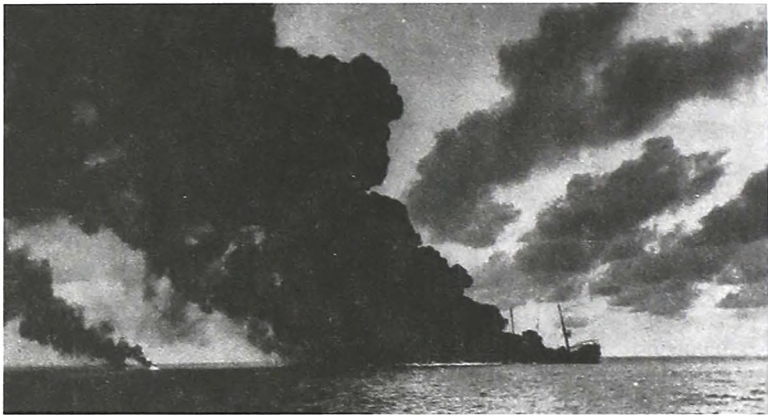
U-564 wasn't done. *The Portero Del Llano*, eight miles off Miami Beach, went down May 13. As historian Gary Mormino has recounted, "thousands of shocked Miami-ians watched the smoldering ship belch smoke and oil" as it limped along the area's coastline. Thirteen crewmen died in the attack. On July 7, 1942, *U-571* struck the *Umtata*.⁵⁷

The *J.A. Moffett Jr.* was moving in twenty-four feet of water, about six miles southwest of Long Key, south of Key Largo, just after midnight on July 8. When the first torpedo hit, the ship nosed into the reef and grounded. A second torpedo hit near the engine room. One died; the surviving forty-three crew members got into lifeboats. About 1 a.m., the U-Boat surfaced and shelled the boat; it was gutted by fire. The crew was picked up at about 3 a.m. and taken to Craig Key. The *Moffett* was later pulled off the reef and towed to Galveston, Texas, for repairs.⁵⁸

At about 1:30 a.m. on July 15, the *Pennsylvania Sun* was west of the Dry Tortugas when a patrol plane flew over it, brightly lighting it—probably to spot it for its attacker. Within minutes, the first torpedo struck, instantly killing two lookouts and spraying oil, which caught fire. The remaining fifty-seven crew members were picked up three and a half hours later and taken to Key West. The next day, four officers returned to the *Sun* with a salvage tug and put out the last stubborn fires. The ship was towed to Key West and eventually moved to Pennsylvania for an overhaul.⁵⁹

Tapering Off

By mid-May of 1942, the United States had finally instituted convoys. Destroyers, sub chasers and other small military boats escorted the ships, their gray shapes moving slowly and silently across the horizon. The attacks tapered off. There were only four off Florida in 1943 and none in 1944 and 1945.⁶⁰



Burning torpedoed tanker. Most likely the *Portero del Llano*, torpedoed on May 13, 1942, in the waters off of Miami Beach. HASF 198-091-17.

Ironically, the deadliest disaster of the war was caused only indirectly by the Germans. Two ships under wartime orders to travel without lights collided off Jupiter Inlet just before 11 p.m. on Oct. 20, 1943. The empty *Gulf Bell*, torpedoed once before and salvaged, rammed the *Gulfland*, filled with gasoline. Of one hundred and sixteen seamen on the two ships, eighty-eight died. The *Gulf Bell* ran aground. As in the *Republic*, rescuers later found a singed dog aboard. The *Gulfland* burned off Hobe Sound for a remarkable seven weeks. It lit the night sky as authorities watched helplessly, held back by flames that singed their hair and curled paint on the ship. Later, workers were able to poke holes in the *Gulfland* and it sank in thirty feet of water. A year after the accident, salvagers made a grim discovery on the *Gulfland*: the bones of fifteen men who had desperately sought refuge in a shower. The stern was moved off but the bow remains at the bottom, where it is a popular diving spot.⁶¹

By war's end, the Allies had sunk many U-Boats, but apparently none off Florida. A 1945 U.S. Navy report said the Coast Guard cutter *Nike* "probably" sank a U-Boat off the Jupiter lighthouse on May 18, 1942. The cutter dropped depth charges that sent geysers of water and foam high in the air. The sub surfaced and headed south, under full power but badly damaged.

"A continuing oil slick gave evidence of the probable destruction of the enemy vessel," said a citation recognizing the cutter for its actions. But neither U.S. nor German reports documented any such sinking.⁶²

Legacy of Death

Operation Drumbeat had left its legacy: a line of ships lying on the bottom, cargo strewn on the ocean floor and oil oozing from ruptured tanks. The success of the U-Boats spurred a new push for the Cross-Florida Barge Canal, a route across the northern peninsula that was finally started in the 1960s and later abandoned as an environmental disaster. The militarization of Florida also left its mark. Many bases were transformed to public use. Soldiers heading home from the front got heroes' welcomes as their trains passed through West Palm Beach and other cities in Florida.

"Our mayor called me and asked me to rush down to the West Palm Beach train station and tell a train full of servicemen coming from Miami that the war was over and we had won!" recalled Frances

Stambaugh, who was Miss West Palm Beach of 1945. A newspaper photograph shows her, an American flag at her shoulder, displaying a newspaper with “PEACE!” in a gigantic headline. A beaming soldier holding a bottle hangs out a train window.⁶³

Those men, and those who had been stationed in South Florida, went home with stories of the paradise they had left. Many later returned for good. That boom continues today. New residents in their condominiums and beach chairs gaze at a peaceful sea. They are unaware that not so long ago, it was a place of terror and death.

Notes

- 1 Office of Chief of Naval Operations, official ship sinking reports Navy Yard Operations Archives, Washington, D.C.; Arthur Moore R., *A Careless Word—a Needless Sinking* (New York: American Merchant Marine Museum, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, 1983); Mark Madano, *A Divers Guide to Shipwrecks: Cape Canaveral to Jupiter Light* (Vero Beach: privately published, 1992); German U-Boat sinkings summary, German Archives, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina.
- 2 Interview with Michael Gannon, January 1992.
- 3 *Palm Beach Post*, 12 January 1942, 1a.
- 4 *Palm Beach Post*, 4 January 1942, 1a.
- 5 *Palm Beach Post*, 12 April 1942, 1a.
- 6 Correspondence to *Palm Beach Post* from Joy Kissam, December 1991.
- 7 Correspondence to *Palm Beach Post* from Florence B. Schnopp, December 1991.
- 8 *Palm Beach Post*, 28 February 1942.
- 9 *Palm Beach Post*, 27 February 1942.
- 10 *Palm Beach Post*, 28 February 1942.
- 11 “Today is Deadline for Alien Registry,” *Palm Beach Post*, 28 February 1942, 1a.
- 12 1940 U.S. Census.
- 13 Telephone interview with Kobayashi family by *Post* reporter Betsy Aoki, January 1992.
- 14 “Instructions for Observers,” World War II files, Historical Society of Palm Beach County.
- 15 *Palm Beach Post*, 9 December 1976.
- 16 Correspondence to *Palm Beach Post* from Fran Wagner, December 1991.
- 17 Telephone interview with Michael Gannon, January 1992.
- 18 Bessie Wilson DuBois, *Shipwrecks In the Vicinity of Jupiter Inlet* (Hobe Sound: Florida Classics Library, 1981).
- 19 *Palm Beach Post*, 1 December 1991, 1b.
- 20 Charlton Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, University of Miami Press, 1971), 419.
- 21 Bessie Wilson DuBois, *Shipwrecks In the Vicinity of Jupiter Inlet* (Hobe Sound: Florida Classics Library, 1981).

- ²² Correspondence from Persis Haas Newman to *Palm Beach Post*, December 1991.
- ²³ Telephone interview with Michael Gannon, January 1992.
- ²⁴ Michael Gannon, *Operation Drumbeat* (New York: Harper & Row, 1991).
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Correspondence from Dora Digby to *Palm Beach Post*, December 1991.
- ²⁷ Correspondence from Carolyn Beaty Darr to *Palm Beach Post*, December 1991.
- ²⁸ Office of Chief of Naval Operations, official ship sinking reports, Navy Yard Operations Archives, Washington, D.C.; Arthur R. Moore, *A Careless Word—a Needless Sinking* (New York: American Merchant Marine Museum, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, 1983); Mark Madano, *A Divers Guide to Shipwrecks: Cape Canaveral to Jupiter Light* (Vero Beach: privately published, 1992); German U-Boat sinkings summary, German Archives, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ Interview with Ralph Hartman, January 1942.
- ³¹ Logs of U-Boat commanders Peter Cremer and Ulrich Heyse, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina.
- ³² Bessie Wilson DuBois, *Shipwrecks In the Vicinity of Jupiter Inlet* (Hobe Sound: Florida Classics Library, 1981).
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Office of Chief of Naval Operations, official ship sinking reports, Navy Yard Operations Archives, Washington, D.C.; Arthur R. Moore, *A Careless Word—a Needless Sinking* (New York: American Merchant Marine Museum, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, 1983); Mark Madano, *A Divers Guide to Shipwrecks: Cape Canaveral to Jupiter Light* (Vero Beach: privately published, 1992); German U-Boat sinkings summary, German Archives, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina.
- ³⁵ Correspondence to *Palm Beach Post* from Herbert Goeler, December 1991
- ³⁶ Office of Chief of Naval Operations, official ship sinking reports, Navy Yard Operations Archives, Washington, D.C.; Arthur R. Moore, *A Careless Word—a Needless Sinking* (New York: American

- Merchant Marine Museum, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, 1983); Mark Madano, *A Divers Guide to Shipwrecks: Cape Canaveral to Jupiter Light* (Vero Beach: privately published, 1992); German U-Boat sinkings summary, German Archives, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina; *Palm Beach Post*, 28 February 1942, 1a; *Palm Beach Daily News*, 25 February 1942.
- ³⁷ Logs of U-Boat commanders Peter Cremer and Ulrich Heyse, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina.
- ³⁸ *Palm Beach Daily News*, 28 February 1942; telephone interview with Ralph Terry, January 1992.
- ³⁹ *Palm Beach Post*, 25 February 1942, 1a.
- ⁴⁰ Office of Chief of Naval Operations, official ship sinking reports, Navy Yard Operations Archives, Washington, D.C.; Arthur R. Moore, *A Careless Word—a Needless Sinking* (New York: American Merchant Marine Museum, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, 1983); Mark Madano, *A Divers Guide to Shipwrecks: Cape Canaveral to Jupiter Light* (Vero Beach: privately published, 1992); German U-Boat sinkings summary, German Archives, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ Bessie Wilson DuBois, *Shipwrecks in the Vicinity of Jupiter Inlet* (Hobe Sound: Florida Classics Library, 1981).
- ⁴⁶ Office of Chief of Naval Operations, official ship sinking reports, Navy Yard Operations Archives, Washington, D.C.; Arthur R. Moore, *A Careless Word—a Needless Sinking* (New York: American Merchant Marine Museum, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, 1983); Mark Madano, *A Divers Guide to Shipwrecks: Cape Canaveral to Jupiter Light* (Vero Beach: privately published, 1992); German U-Boat sinkings summary, German Archives, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina; Paul S. George, Lewis N. Wynne (editor), “Submarines and Sailors: Fort Lauderdale and World War II,” *Florida At War* (San Antonio, Florida: St. Leo College Press, 1993), 109.
- ⁴⁷ Logs of U-Boat commanders Peter Cremer and Ulrich Heyse, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina.

- ⁴⁸ Office of Chief of Naval Operations, official ship sinking reports, Navy Yard Operations Archives, Washington, D.C.; Arthur R. Moore, *A Careless Word—a Needless Sinking* (New York: American Merchant Marine Museum, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, 1983); Mark Madano, *A Divers Guide to Shipwrecks: Cape Canaveral to Jupiter Light* (Vero Beach: privately published, 1992); German U-Boat sinkings summary, German Archives, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina.
- ⁴⁹ Logs of U-Boat commanders Peter Cremer and Ulrich Heyse, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina.
- ⁵⁰ Office of Chief of Naval Operations, official ship sinking reports, Navy Yard Operations Archives, Washington, D.C.; Arthur R. Moore, *A Careless Word—a Needless Sinking* (New York: American Merchant Marine Museum, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, 1983); Mark Madano, *A Divers Guide to Shipwrecks: Cape Canaveral to Jupiter Light* (Vero Beach: privately published, 1992); German U-Boat sinkings summary, German Archives, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina.
- ⁵¹ Office of Chief of Naval Operations, official ship sinking reports, Navy Yard Operations Archives, Washington, D.C.; Arthur R. Moore, *A Careless Word—a Needless Sinking* (New York: American Merchant Marine Museum, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, 1983); Mark Madano, *A Divers Guide to Shipwrecks: Cape Canaveral to Jupiter Light* (Vero Beach: privately published, 1992); German U-Boat sinkings summary, German Archives, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina; Gary R. Mormino, "Midas Returns: Miami Goes to War, 1941-1945," *Tequesta*, LVII (1997), 8-9.
- ⁵² Office of Chief of Naval Operations, official ship sinking reports, Navy Yard Operations Archives, Washington, D.C.; Arthur R. Moore, *A Careless Word—a Needless Sinking* (New York: American Merchant Marine Museum, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, 1983); Mark Madano, *A Divers Guide to Shipwrecks: Cape Canaveral to Jupiter Light* (Vero Beach: privately published, 1992); German U-Boat sinkings summary, German Archives, courtesy Paul Branch, Morehead City, North Carolina.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Bessie Wilson DuBois, *Shipwrecks In the Vicinity of Jupiter Inlet* (Hobe Sound: Florida Classics Library, 1981).

⁶² U.S. Navy Archives.

⁶³ Correspondence to *Palm Beach Post* from Frances Stambaugh, December 1991.