

LONG NIGHT OF THE TANKERS: HITLER'S WAR AGAINST CARIBBEAN OIL

David J. Bercuson and Holger H. Herwig

ISBN 978-1-55238-760-3

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence.

This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU **MAY**:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU **MAY NOT**:

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.

LONG NIGHT OF THE TANKERS

Kapitänleutnant Jürgen von Rosenstiel had taken *U-502* well out into the Caribbean Sea, close to the Venezuelan shore. It proved to be a target-rich environment. At 2:05 a.m. on February 16, some ten miles off Point Macolla, he spied a bright flame in the direction of Aruba: Hartenstein's attack on the two tankers at San Nicolas. "Free to attack," Rosenstiel noted in the war diary.¹ Two hours later, the lookouts reported a tanker as well as what they took to be a Venezuelan gunboat at a distance of 1,000 meters. At 3:44 a.m., Rosenstiel fired.

The "eel" slammed into the tanker. "High column of fire, the entire ship is aflame under a developing cloud of strong smoke and sinks." He watched intensely as its boilers exploded. The ship heeled over on its side and then sank. It was the 2,650-ton British lake tanker *Monagas* en route from Maracaibo to Aruba with a full load of crude. Twenty-one survivors were later picked up by the Dutch tanker *Felipa*.

The *Monagas* was not alone in the waters off the Paraguana Peninsula in the early hours of February 16. The previous evening four lake tankers had left Maracaibo at regular intervals: *Monagas* was followed by the 2,395-ton British *Tia Juana*; close behind came the 2,391-ton *San Nicolas*, also British-flagged; and the last ship in line, leaving about four hours after the others, was the British *Yamonota*, about 2,300 tons.

Less than an hour after attacking *Monagas*, Rosenstiel spied the *Tia Juana* at a range of 1,400 meters – as well as a dark shadow just behind the brightly lit tanker. That shadow was *San Nicolas*. As Rosenstiel closed in, his radio operator picked up a distress call from Aruba: "To all ships. U-boat in vicinity of Aruba." This was no time to be timid. Rosenstiel was determined to sink both tankers as quickly as possible. At 4:28 a.m., he

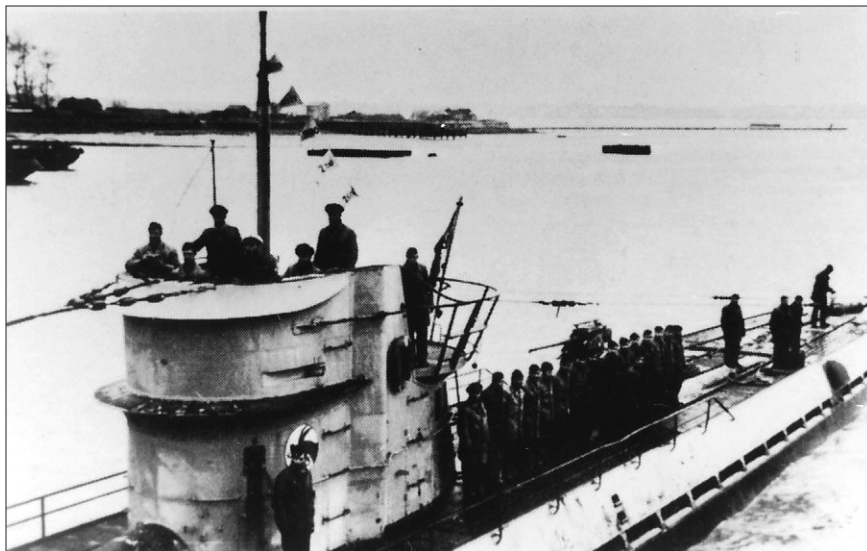
attacked. The torpedo struck *Tia Juana* amidships, in the engine room. But it refused to go under. Fourteen minutes after the first torpedo, Rosenstiel decided to deliver the *coup de grâce* for fear that the approaching dawn would deny him a clear shot at the third tanker. The torpedo ran true for 300 meters, and then suddenly veered off to the left. It struck *Tia Juana* in the stern. Looking through the periscope, the Kaleu thought the tanker was staying afloat, but in fact, it was not.

Rosenstiel immediately went after his third kill in less than four hours: the *San Nicolas*. His KTB recorded the action at 5:34 a.m. "Tube V ... Fire! Inexplicable miss, assume it went under the target." He loosed a shot from Tube IV. This time the torpedo ran true. "Hit admidships. Tanker flies completely into the air." The torpedo sliced through the ship's sides and exploded in the engine room. Seven of its crew of 26 died instantly. Witnesses on the *San Nicolas* later reported:

About 3:00 A.M.² February 16th, the S.S. *Tia Juana* (British) which was immediately ahead, received two torpedoes in her engine room, exploding the after end of the ship. The ship sank immediately. We were picking up survivors of the SS *Tia Juana* when at 4:00 A.M. February 16th, we were struck by two torpedoes.

The *Yamonota* was still somewhere behind in the dark. The ship's captain recorded: "[A]t about 4:00 A.M. February 16th ... I observed a red flare immediately ahead and on coming closer I saw that a ship was on fire. I realized probable cause of the fire and immediately veered off to the west." Three hours later, *Yamonota* returned to the scene and found the bow of the *San Nicolas* protruding from the water. They picked up four of the crew while a "Venezuelan Government craft was searching the area for survivors." *Yamonota* steamed for Aruba, arriving at 4:00 p.m.³

As the first rays of sunlight were breaking over the horizon, Rosenstiel decided to break off the kill. About an hour later, *U-502* was running on the surface when one of the patrolling American A-20 light bombers spotted it and attacked. The Havoc dropped four 300-lb. demolition bombs – completely unsuited for antisubmarine operations – which fell into the sea and exploded about 100 meters from the submarine. No



U-502. Commanded by Kapitaenleutnant Juergen von Rosenstiel, the Type IX C *U-502* was part of the initial German assault on Caribbean oil off Aruba; it was lost in the Bay of Biscay due to depth charges from a UK Wellington aircraft in July 1942. Source: Deutsches U-Boot-Museum, Cuxhaven-Altenbruch, Germany.

damage was done. Returning to the surface just before 10 a.m., Rosenstiel spotted another tanker, this one empty and on its way to Maracaibo. He worked his way to within 800 meters of the target and then fired. Another “Inexplicable miss. Assume [torpedo] ran under the target.” A Venezuelan gunboat suddenly appeared and fired five shells, all well off target. It was time to dive. And to learn first lessons. “Decide not to fire any more eels at empty tankers. Artillery of little use during daytime due to aerial reconnaissance.”⁴

* * *

While Rosenstiel was picking off lake tankers, Hartenstein’s *U-156* was the subject of intense air activity – most of it in the wrong direction. When the American A-20, which had been dispatched to the vicinity of the



Juergen von Rosenstiel. Kapitaenleutnant von Rosenstiel fought in the light cruiser *Karlsruhe* during the Spanish Civil War, and in March 1940 transferred to the U-Boat service. He commanded *U-502* on three war patrols, sinking 14 Allied ships of 78,843 tons, mostly off Aruba in the Caribbean Sea. On 6 July 1942, returning from his third patrol, Rosenstiel and *U-502* were sunk with all hands by an aircraft in the Bay of Biscay. Source: Deutsches U-Boot-Museum, Cuxhaven-Altenbruch, Germany.

sinking *Monagas* at around 3:00 a.m., began to return to Aruba, a radio message from Dakota Field informed it that a long-range SCR-268 radar, hastily set up on the south coast of the island, had detected a submarine about 20 miles due south of Aruba. The pilot turned in the direction of the contact report and, after a few minutes, dropped a flare. He and his copilot thought they saw a submarine, but the bombardier saw nothing; with nothing to aim at, the bomb run was aborted. In fact, Hartenstein was nowhere near the spot. With the shore defenses alerted and aircraft buzzing about in the night sky, he decided to quickly leave San Nicolas harbor and head up the coast. *U-156*'s crew was amazed by their skipper's tenacity and coolness under fire. From now on, their nickname for him was "Crazy Dog."

The dark of night, the dense smoke from the burning tankers, and plain bad luck denied Hartenstein two further "kills." For inside San Nicolas harbor was the *Henry Gibbons*, a US Army ship loaded with 3,000 tons of TNT. Its crew had insisted on taking a coffee break before sailing, and, by the time the ship finally eased away from the pier shortly after 2:00 a.m., the sky was lit up by the explosion on the *Pedernales*. While the *Henry Gibbons*' skipper wanted to continue full ahead, the Aruban pilot refused the command and instead returned the ship to its berth.⁵

U-156 now steamed northwest to Oranjestad. Perhaps new targets had arrived from Maracaibo. The submarine slid past the tanker *Hooiberg* in the last remaining dark, unaware of its proximity. Hartenstein disappeared below deck to check on the two injured men. There was little hope for Seaman Heinrich Büssinger; the 19-year-old died 45 minutes later without ever regaining consciousness. Lieutenant Dietrich von dem Borne presented a grisly sight.⁶ His right knee and leg had a large open wound with multiple splinters. Blood spurted from the arteries. There was no choice but to amputate. Borne was given some of the Old Man's special cognac, and, while four sailors held him down, one of the wireless operators, on temporary sick-bay duty, began to saw just above the knee. The leg, with its shoe and sock still attached, fell into a bloody pail.

At 3:16 a.m., Hartenstein maneuvered *U-156* into the opening in the reef just outside Oranjestad harbor. He was in luck. A tanker lay at the Eagle Refinery pier. Range: 600 meters. It would be a simple surface shot from Tube III. Executive Officer Paul Just slammed down the firing knob.

Once more, the boatswain's mate counted off the seconds. Nothing. After sixty seconds, Hartenstein noted the obvious in the war diary: "No detonation. Inexplicable miss." Had the contact pistol failed again? Or had the depth-keeping mechanism malfunctioned?

Cool as at San Nicolas, Hartenstein left the harbor and prepared for a second attack approach. At 3:30 a.m., he fired his last bow torpedo at the seemingly hapless tanker. Yet again, the boatswain's mate called out the seconds. Yet again: Silence. "No detonation. Inexplicable." Furious and with all bow "eels" expended, Hartenstein ordered *U-156* to come about for a stern shot. At 3:43 a.m., he fired a third torpedo at the tanker. The crew waited anxiously for the sound of a detonation. Again: Silence. Ruefully, Hartenstein entered into the war diary: "Miss. After 1 min. 29.5 [seconds] detonation on the beach." At 70,000 Reichsmark per torpedo, this was a costly misadventure. Morale in the boat, Executive Office Just recorded, had "plummeted to zero." Unbeknown to Hartenstein, not all three "eels" had missed their target. One had struck the side of the empty and degaussed 6,452-ton American tanker *Arkansas*, formerly the *Aryan* and hastily renamed in 1940, which suffered only the force of the explosion of the torpedo's 600 pound warhead.⁷ Four Dutch demolition experts died on Eagle Beach two days later when they tried to disarm the beached "eel."

The bridge watch suddenly heard the sound of an aircraft approaching from nearby Dakota Field. It was time to leave Oranjestad. Staying on the surface, Hartenstein shaped a course for the northern end of Aruba and then headed out to sea to raid the traffic bound for Mona Island, off Puerto Rico. At 6:28 a.m., he informed Vice Admiral Karl Dönitz of his actions:

Sank 2 tankers 5800 tons, 2 misses at tankers at the pier.
Explosion in the bore, 2 men seriously injured, including
Second Watch Officer. May I head for Martinique to hand over
[Borne]? 159 cbm [fuel oil]. v. Hartenstein.

Once well out to sea, Hartenstein ordered Büssinger's corpse sewn into a canvas sheet, brought up on deck, and covered with the navy's battle flag. The skipper intoned the *Lord's Prayer*; the crew sang the traditional

lament, *I Had a Comrade*; and then the corpse was quietly delivered into the waters of the Caribbean. At Kernével, Dönitz's staff investigated the legality of landing Borne on the Vichy-French island of Martinique. *U-156* received permission to do so around midnight on February 17.

* * *

As *U-156* and *U-502* carried out their attacks off Aruba, Oberleutnant Günter Müller-Stöckheim's *U-67*, another of the large Type IXC boats, had been sizing up the port facilities on Curaçao. There, Maracaibo tankers offloaded their crude at Caracasbaai, a deep-water terminal on the southeast coast of the island, from where it was carried by pipelines to the Santa Anna refinery at Willemstad. The latter was a daunting target. A menacing coral reef guarded the waters off the Curaçao capital and a long, narrow channel, Santa Anna's Bay, connected the Caribbean Sea to the inner harbor, the Schottegat, where the Royal Dutch Shell refinery and a fleet of tankers were located. It would be suicide to attempt to enter the inner harbor, guarded by three forts. Thus, Müller-Stöckheim made the only decision possible: to attack the fully laden tankers anchored about a mile off Willemstad.⁸

As he approached the targets at 2 a.m. on February 16, Müller-Stöckheim saw a flickering tongue of flame 290 degrees on the horizon. "Apparently Hartenstein is active there," he noted in the war diary. At 3:52 a.m., he fired a double spread at the nearest tanker, a mere 500 meters away. "Inexplicable miss." Caracas radio was broadcasting warnings to all shipping concerning U-boats. "Not clear to me why, because they cannot possibly see me from there," he wrote in the KTB. Obviously, the radio reports pertained to Rosenstiel's *U-502*. Müller-Stöckheim pursued the tanker, which remained oblivious to the danger lurking nearby. At 4:11 a.m., he fired a third torpedo. The crew on the bridge counted off the seconds. Silence. Then they heard several slight rings, like those of bells. Duds. Again, the "eel" had struck its target but had not exploded. The chronic problem with the contact pistols on the G7e electric torpedoes continued to dog the U-boats.

Another loaded tanker hove into sight. Angrily, the skipper turned *U-67* until its stern pointed at the new target. This time he fired one of



U-67. One of 54 commissioned 1200-ton ocean-going boats, *U-67* was commanded by Korvettenkapitaen Guenther Mueller-Stoeckheim off Curacao. It was sunk by aircraft in the Sargasso Sea in July 1943. Source: Deutsches U-Boot-Museum, Cuxhaven-Altenbruch, Germany.

the older “Ato” torpedoes. Time: 4:30 a.m. The torpedo ran true. “After 22 seconds hit just abaft midships. Column of fire and smoke. Tanker ... breaks in half, up 15–20 degrees by the bow and stern. Slowly tanker begins to sink. Fires on deck are extinguished after 15 minutes.” Müller-Stöckheim decided to deliver the *coup de grâce*. “Nothing.” The tanker had run aground near one of the forts guarding the entrance to the harbor. He was mystified why the “eel,” even if it missed the target, did not explode “against the coast or the bottom of the channel.” Then the crew on the bridge heard a tremendous explosion: the 3,177-ton Dutch tanker *Rafaela* burst into flames, lighting up other tankers as well as *U-67*.

Shells from the shore batteries began to splash all around *U-67*. Its hydrophone operators reported the sound of rapidly approaching “high-pitched propellers.” Warships. His six tubes empty, Müller-Stöckheim decided to leave the scene of destruction. But then, the Enigma machine lit up. The “Great Lion” from France ordered him to shell the Royal Dutch

Shell refinery with the deck gun. Müller-Stöckheim could not maneuver *U-67* close enough to attack because of the warships buzzing all around the harbor. A second order next morning to attempt again to shell the refinery likewise foundered on enemy warship activity. This would later earn Müller-Stöckheim a stinging rebuke from Dönitz. "The commander should have pursued more energetically the attempt to attack the oil refineries on Curaçao."⁹ Still, the tally for the first morning of Operation Neuland now stood at six tankers. Refinery authorities on Aruba and Curaçao immediately ordered a temporary halt to all further shipments of crude from Venezuela. The Associated Press reported that 14 lake tankers had been recalled to Maracaibo.

* * *

Back off San Nicolas, the grisly rescue attempts proceeded in fits and starts in the darkness. Within an hour of being torpedoed, the *Oranjestad* started its final descent to the bottom of the sea. Its skipper, Herbert Morgan, and a small group of three officers and sailors had huddled until the last moment on a section of the bow not yet on fire. They waved pieces of clothing for nearly an hour in hopes of attracting attention on shore. No one saw them. They all had lifejackets, except the second officer. As the bow slipped beneath the waves, they were washed off their safe haven. For nearly an hour, Morgan and his group drifted through the burning oil. Finally, at 3:30 a.m., they and the remaining six others of the 25-man crew were fished out of the oily waters by a Dutch patrol boat and a local fishing boat. The careless second officer had drowned.

The *Pedernales* continued to burn, but remained on the surface. The torpedo's explosion had broken its back and both stern and bow stuck out of the water at 20-degree angles. Herbert McCall, the ship's master, gathered up a small group of five sailors and guided them to the *Pedernales'* port lifeboat. They lowered it, but at an uneven keel, with the result that the boat's oars were lost. Once in the burning waters, they ripped up some floor boards to use as paddles. To no avail. The boat drifted out to sea, northward off Oranjestad, where they were sighted by a fishing boat and towed to shore. Eight of the crew of 26 had died that night.

Still, the *Pedernales* refused to go down. “Charred, twisted and crumpled,” it lay in the waters off San Nicolas.¹⁰ By late morning, the fires had burned themselves out. Tugs towed the hulk to Oranjestad and grounded it on the beach. Thereafter, shipyard crews dynamited it in two and tugs towed the bow and stern sections back to San Nicolas. Lago shipyard crews fitted the two sections together and the plucky *Pedernales*, now 124 feet shorter, steamed to Baltimore. There it again was cut in half, a new extended mid-ship section was floated in, and the three parts were re-connected. *Pedernales* returned to service, just in time to take part in the Allied assault on North Africa in late 1942.

For the residents of the 600 Lago Colony bungalows at San Nicolas, it had been a night of sheer terror. Who was the intruder? Was it just a submarine or a warship? Had the Germans mounted a full-scale invasion of the island? Or had the refinery staff simply been careless in handling the highly volatile aviation fuel? Only one thing was certain: these could not have been the acts of fifth-columnists, for Dutch authorities had removed all Germans from Aruba back in May 1940 and interned them on nearby Bonaire Island.

At first, few could believe the fiery hell that spread before their eyes just off the reef. The war was thousands of miles away, in Europe and in Asia. Surely, they were not in harm’s way! As the noise of the explosions rattled windows and shook some of the bungalows near the refinery, and as the bright light of the burning tankers flickered through their windows, most residents of Seroe Colorado reacted with both curiosity and indifference. A case in point was the Fred C. Eaton family in waterfront Bungalow 12.¹¹ The glow of the burning *Pedernales* awakened Mrs. Eaton who, in turn, roused her husband from his sleep. Someone must have been careless, he reassured her, it must have been an accident. When the *Oranjestad* also exploded, Fred Eaton reassured his spouse that the brisk Trade Winds must have blown a spark across the water and ignited the second lake tanker. As streaks of white light flashed across the refinery compound, he was certain that the flares in one of the rocket boxes on the tankers had ignited. Then reality hit home: those were not flares but tracer shells fired by some enemy lying offshore. Eaton gathered the family in his car to take them to the shelter of the Lago Community Church. The only

injury that the family suffered came when Fred's blacked-out car collided with another vehicle en route to the sanctuary.

John B. Teagle watched the inferno from Bungalow 77. "I had a front row seat to watch the burning of the three [*sic*] Lake Tankers."¹² His son Lenny also recalled: "We had a full view of the burning ships. At 10 years of age this left an everlasting impression." A neighbor, Nancy MacEachern, was witness to one of *U-156*'s errant 3.7-cm shells slamming into the radiator of a car parked at Bachelor Quarters. Another neighbor, Jane Andringa, remembered what she called a "conspiracy of silence" immediately after the attack. "I do not remember any discussion at school, from teachers or students. [Parents] discouraged questions."

Most residents of Seroe Colorado were intensely curious. Something big was happening on their little island and they wanted to be part of it. They turned on the lights in their bungalows and then piled into their Fords and Chevrolets and drove down to the lagoon area, lights blazing. Only slowly did they realize that what they saw was no accidental fire at the refinery, but an act of war against two ships off the reef. Most extinguished their car's headlights and went home to pack up their most precious belongings in order to head out for relatives in other, more tranquil, parts of Aruba. They were spurred on by the sound of aircraft engines droning high above. Were they friendly or hostile?

Countless others, panicked with fear, had but one thought: out into the *cunucu*, the Papiamento term for "countryside." Quickly, a mass exodus ensued. It was a poor decision. The *cunucu* was a rock-strewn desert punctuated by dry, nasty forests of kadushi, yatu and prickly pear cacti, aloe, and small, wind-bent Divi-divi trees. It was a dangerous place to be. Ankles turned and cacti needles punctured arms and legs. In the morning, more than two dozen residents sheepishly returned to San Nicolas to be treated for minor wounds in the Lago hospital. There had even been talk of seeking refuge in the many caves on the north side of the island, but thankfully no one opted for this course of action.

One of the few who kept their head was the refinery's general manager, Lloyd G. Smith.¹³ In horror, he discovered that there was no way to switch off the row of lights that illuminated the boardwalk that ran from the Main Dock to the Lake Tanker Dock. It provided perfect lighting for whoever lurked out there beyond the reef. With cool resolve, Smith

walked the length of the boardwalk and doused the lights one by one by throwing rocks at them. Today, the main street of Oranjestad bears his name.

At around 8:00 a.m., Caribbean Defense Command finally reacted. It dispatched two flights of B-18 bombers to Dakota Field, one from Puerto Rico and the other from Trinidad. They arrived at about 1:30 p.m. After refueling, the planes took off again to patrol the approaches to the island. The B-18s spotted and attacked one submarine at 10:15 a.m. and another an hour later, but in neither case did they do any damage. Two A-20s of 59th Squadron already had attacked a submarine at about 11:33 a.m. some 100 kilometers southwest of Dakota Field. They had dropped eight bombs and seen “an oil slick and air bubbles,” leading Squadron Headquarters to conclude that a U-boat had been destroyed. Neither Hartenstein nor Rosenstiel recorded any such attack in their KTBs. At the end of a very busy day, 59th Squadron’s war log recorded ruefully:

This unit was not notified of enemy action for sometime after it started, slowing down the attack of this unit. The submarine shelling the refinery would have been an easy target with proper notification. The lack of depth bombs caused this unit to be very uncertain of the damage done to submarines attacked with three hundred (300) lb. demolition bombs.¹⁴

* * *

Some semblance of normality returned to San Nicolas late on February 16. Lago Hospital took in 27 sailors fished from the burning seas, while San Pedro Hospital at Oranjestad cared for others. The fires at Lago Refinery were kept low until sheet-iron blackout shields could be rigged up for the furnaces. The lake tankers resumed their Maracaibo runs several days after Hartenstein’s assault. US Navy warships and Army Air Force planes escorted the Maracaibo-to-Aruba runs, which were temporarily diverted through Amuay Bay on the Paraguana Peninsula. About 140 women and children (from 58 families) elected to return to the United States, leaving their husbands to work at the Lago Refinery. Just to be on the safe side, for almost a year following the attacks the US government

refused to issue passports for family members to travel to Aruba. Full censorship was introduced. In its February 21, 1942, issue, the *Pan Aruban* informed its readers with “regrets” that it could not report on the week’s big news.¹⁵ Nor did the island’s other paper, the *Aruba Post*, report on the San Nicolas attack.

* * *

Hartenstein and *U-156* resumed their war patrol. The skipper was still furious over the “Ato” torpedoes that had run errant at Oranjestad. En route to Fort-de-France, Martinique, the bloody “eels” continued to bedevil him. At 10:35 a.m. on February 19, two-thirds of the way on his northeasterly course from Aruba to Martinique, he sighted what he estimated to be a 3,500-ton freighter.¹⁶ Given that a Force 5 fresh breeze and three-foot waves were buffeting his slender craft, he opted for a submerged shot. “Missed! Checked targeting data! Probably fired under him!” He at once launched a second torpedo at the freighter. Same result. “Missed! Not clear why!” Angrily, he noted in the war diary: “That is now the 3rd inexplicable miss, after 2 torpedoes had already found their targets.” Both of the “misses” were “Eto” electric torpedoes. The first failed to detonate under the freighter; the second simply missed the target. He cursed the Torpedo Directorate.

In the first dawn light of February 20, west of Martinique, *U-156* came across another lone freighter.¹⁷ Course: 300 degrees. Range: 5,000 meters. Hartenstein ordered battle stations and approached the target submerged. At 6 a.m., he fired a first “eel.” The “Eto” struck the freighter amidships, but apparently did little damage. It stopped and opened fire with its stern gun. As it was then almost full daylight, Hartenstein had but one choice: to attack submerged. He fired another “Eto” at the enemy. “Miss! Inexplicable!” Livid, he ordered a third shot, this time with the older, more reliable “Ato” torpedo. “Miss! Freighters turn off to the left!” Hartenstein then switched back to the electric “eels.” The fourth torpedo ran for 35 seconds and seemingly struck the target, but the Kaleu was not able to see the explosion because the hostile kept firing at his periscope.

Hartenstein had emptied all four bow tubes. By now in a towering rage, he repositioned *U-156* and fired a fifth “Eto” torpedo, this one from

the stern tubes. "Miss! Inexplicable!" The freighter continued to fire at the U-boat's periscope and it put out SOS calls. In short order, an unidentified PBY flying boat dropped four depth charges near *U-156*, but well off target. The Catalina dogged *U-156* for the next seven hours. "Can't seem to shake this character!" With Borne slipping in and out of consciousness and vomiting up all food offered him, Hartenstein decided to shape course for Martinique. An Enigma message, "A son born, mother and child healthy!" brought little joy to *U-156*'s executive officer, Lieutenant Just.

* * *

The German assault on Aruba ended on a note of mystery and suspense. According to panicky local reports, a submarine surfaced in the still waters of Oranjestad's side harbor, just inside the reef, the day after Hartenstein's attack at San Nicolas.¹⁸ Soldiers guarding the piers at first took it to be an American craft. But residents near the shore could clearly make out the intruder: it was German and there were men on its bridge looking at the city and its protective fort through binoculars. At once, the cry of "Nazi submarine" went around the capital. Much of the population, including the students returning to Juliana School after lunch, flocked down to the docks to get a closer look at the invader; others headed out of town for the safety of the *cunucu*. It was *U-502*, coming to Aruba to have a look. But the schoolchildren were not the only ones to spot *U-502* – which had run aground not more than 400 meters from the end of Dakota Field.¹⁹

Rosenstiel was certainly brazen. Using the Hooiberg as his reference point, he maneuvered *U-502* half submerged into Oranjestad roads. It was 10:30 a.m. Well aware of the reefs that guarded the port, he rang up "Dead Slow." But the strong current was driving him off course. "Hit bottom. Boat rises quickly. Full speed reverse!" For two hours, *U-502* refused to budge. Rosenstiel peered through his sky periscope. "Precisely at the entrance of Oranjestad. Impossible drift due to the current." He ordered the hatch to the bridge opened and the diving tanks blown. From the bridge, he barked out, "Hard a-starboard, Full speed head!" Both diesels roared up to full power. Slowly, *U-502* began to move off the sandbank. The current drove the boat into a harbor buoy. Rosenstiel ordered the machine-gun crews up on deck in case of hostile air attack. He took a look

around the harbor. “No escorts in sight. Harbor empty. My first somewhat involuntary view of Aruba,” he cheekily noted in the war diary.

Suddenly, at 1:16 p.m., “Alarm!” A “warship” (in reality, a Dutch motor launch) had come out of nowhere and was driving for *U-502*. Rosenstiel ordered an emergency dive – just in time. At Dakota Field every available plane was scrambled. As the first A-20 Havoc took off, the onlookers at the airfield saw the submarine make a crash dive apparently with his diesel engines running judging from the blue smoke that followed the craft. The A-20 pulled into a tight turn and made its bombing run, followed by at least one other craft. Bombs suddenly began to explode near the U-boat: “2 depth charges in the vicinity. 2 closer. 1 relatively close. 1 really close. 1 far away,” the KTB recorded. The surface attacker crossed *U-502*’s wake, but then disappeared. Rosenstiel escaped without damage and shaped course for Los Monjes Islands, off Venezuela. His action proved to be the last German “attack” on Aruba for the duration of the war.

Yet, the island’s rumor mills could not be silenced. Dan Jensen recalls his father telling him how after the raid on the Lago Refinery, “neutral Spanish tankers” would put into San Nicolas and purchase fuel – to resell at great profit to German U-boats. And how French boat operators would buy diesel fuel on Aruba, fill 55-gallon drums at St. Barts Island, stow the drums on “fishing boats,” and take them out to sea – to sell to the German raiders in exchange for gold.²⁰ Other stories circulated about submarines pulling alongside inter-island schooners to take on supplies of fresh oranges, lemons, bananas, avocados, and bread fruit. And about daring U-boat officers coming on shore and attending local movie theaters.

The island defenders were so jittery that just before dark on the morning of February 19 “shell fire was heard and flares observed over the Lago Refinery.” The base defenders reported two star shells (illumination rounds) and explosive shells fired at the refinery. Three A-20s were dispatched and one reported spotting and attacking a submarine. In fact, the star shells had been mistakenly fired by the destroyer USS *Winslow*, newly arrived at San Nicolas after the attacks. Two of the “shells” did slight damage to some houses in the Lago Colony.²¹

* * *

The attacks that began on February 16, 1942, were but the opening rounds in the fight for Allied oil in the Caribbean. In the last twelve days of February, Hartenstein and his comrades sank *Monagas*, *West Ira*, *Tia Juana*, *San Nicolas*, *Oranjestad*, *Nordvangen*, *Delplata*, *Scottish Star*, *Kongsgaard*, *Circle Shell*, *J.N. Pew*, *Kennox*, *Thalia*, *West Zeda*, *Lihue*, *George L. Torrain*, *La Carriere*, *Esso Copenhagen*, *Cabadello*, *Macgregor*, *Everasma*, *Oregon*, and *Bayou* and damaged *Pedernales* as well. Seventeen Allied tankers or cargo vessels of 115,856 tons went to the bottom.²² Disaster loomed. Shares traded on the New York Stock Exchange dropped sharply as a result of the attacks, while President Franklin D. Roosevelt warned Americans that the Axis could hit the United States and that the shelling of New York or even Detroit was possible.²³ The all-important tanker traffic that was sustaining Britain and supplementing US stocks was in danger of complete paralysis. But the attacks had also galvanized the defenders. Venezuela abruptly granted the United States permission to use its airfields for ASW patrols and the Dutch government-in-exile placed its armed forces under American control. Ships, men, and aircraft headed to the Caribbean to bolster the local defenses. But for now, it was too little, too late. The U-boats were the masters of the Caribbean.