

In reply,
address Commandant, U. S.
Naval Operating Base,
Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDANT
UNITED STATES NAVAL OPERATING BASE
GUANTANAMO BAY, CUBA

Refer to
File No. 116-3/98-(078)

10a

DECLASSIFIED
CONFIDENTIAL

April 2, 1942

From: Commandant.
To: Chief of Naval Operations.
Subject: Enemy submarine attacks on allied nations
shipping during period February 28 - March
12, 1942 - Caribbean area.
Reference: (a) Intelligence reports on form NNI 142.

1. Reports of the subject matter on forms NNI 142 have been submitted on each individual enemy submarine attack for the vessels involved. This report attempts to summarize some of the details of the attacks which are not readily apparent in the previous reports.

2. The following named vessels were subject to enemy attack at the time and place indicated:

(1)	SS OREGON	0420	Feb. 28	} <u>150 miles north of Mona Passage.</u> These attacks were in the vicinity of <u>Windward Passage.</u>
(2)	SS BARBARA	0230	Mar. 7	
(3)	SS CARDONIA	0355	Mar. 7	
(4)	SS ESSO BOLIVAR	2030	Mar. 8	
(5)	SS HANSEAT	0555	Mar. 9	} These attacks were close off the north Cuban coast just east of Old Bahama Channel.
(6)	SS TEXAN	2035	Mar. 11	
(7)	SS OLGA	0014	Mar. 12	
(8)	SS COLABEE	2140	Mar. 12	

3. The following points are revealed from the information received:

(a) The OREGON was sunk by gunfire; the BARBARA, OLGA, and COLABEE were attacked by torpedo, the first two sinking, and the latter later salvaged. The remaining vessels were attacked by both torpedo and gunfire, all being sunk but the ESSO BOLIVAR which was rescued, temporarily repaired by Naval Operating Base forces and later escorted to Mobile, Ala.

(b) The distance between the positions of attack of the BARBARA and the CARDONIA was 35 miles and occurred one hour and twenty-five minutes apart. This fact indicates that at least two submarines were present in the area.

(c) The ESSO BOLIVAR and the HANSEAT were attacked in positions 55 miles apart and nine hours elapsed between the

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two attacks. One submarine could have made both attacks. The same holds true as between the TEXAN and the OLGA, which were separated by 32 miles and four hours in time.

(d) No warnings were given nor was a submarine seen prior to the attacks, and in the sinking of the BARBARA the submarine was never seen, while witnesses saw the attacking ship after the first shot in all other cases. As the BARBARA was sunk in over 500 fathoms of water, it is assumed that the vessel was torpedoed and not sunk by mine.

(e) Two ships report that two submarines were engaged in the attack, and in the case of the OREGON, witnesses stated that one was large and painted light gray, but no description was offered for the other submarine. Witnesses from the ESSO BOLIVAR report one large black and one small gray submarine attacked that vessel. The CARDONIA which was sunk some 18 hours before the ESSO BOLIVAR reports the submarine to be large and painted black. In view of the seven days between the attacks on the OREGON by a large gray submarine and the CARDONIA by a large black one, the submarine might well have been repainted. Again we find a change of color in the large submarine, from black to gray, as reported by the HANSEAT and the OLGA. The three days elapsing between these two attacks was sufficient time to again repaint the vessel.

(f) In two cases conversation was passed between the crew of the submarine and members of the victims crew. The OLGA reports German, Italian, and French were spoken by members of the submarine crew, while the COLABEE reports German but that several engaged in excellent English. In fact, one witness who was picked out of the water and placed on a raft by the submarine stated that the commanding officer who questioned him in English remarked that he had lived in the United States for over ten years. This witness further stated that no questions of importance were asked him.

(g) The shell holes in the ESSO BOLIVAR clearly indicates that two size guns were employed. That vessel also reports the attack by two submarines. A visual inspection of this ship shows very large shell holes in the port side and somewhat smaller ones on the starboard side. However, during the attack the ship was changing course which might have accounted for the belief that two submarines engaged that vessel.

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Considering all of the testimony, and the fact that the BARBARA and the CARDONIA could not have been sunk by the same submarine, if the sinking positions and times are correct, it might be well assumed that two submarines were engaged in the Caribbean area during 7 to 12 March.

(h) In view of the fact that the HANSEAT crew, without loss of life or injury, abandoned the ship at the request of the submarine commander prior to the attack, and the further fact that the ship was not torpedoed until three hours after shelling, leads one to suspect collusion. Also the statements made by the survivors, who were fully dressed, upon landing at Baracoa and statements made to an investigating officer from this Base by the same survivors are so at variance that collusion seems adequately substantiated. The HANSEAT was believed to be boarded by officers of the submarine and that two confidential publications were compromised, which fact was immediately forwarded to the Department. On the other vessels, all publications not in safes were weighted and thrown overboard. It is interesting to note that one member of the HANSEAT crew told reporters in Havana that the HANSEAT was the third ship this crew had manned and lost by submarine attack.

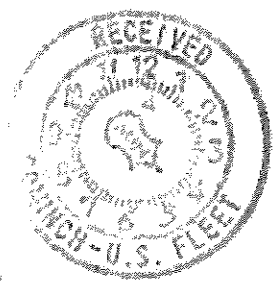
(i) Witnesses described the larger submarine seen as having a rather high conning tower, streamlined, with a perceptible flare forward, a high bow, mounting two guns, one forward and one aft of but close to the conning tower. This description does not fit the descriptions of German and Italian submarines contained in Information Bulletin No. 9, Elementary Notes on submarines. The smaller submarine is described as having a conning tower whose sides are perpendicular to the deck, with two "pom-pom" guns, one forward and one aft of the tower.

(j) Zig-zag courses were not steered by any of the ships involved, but they were all running darkened. In two cases, CARDONIA and ESSO BOLIVAR, life boats were fired upon by machine gun while being lowered, and in the cases of the OREGON and ESSO BOLIVAR men in the water were machine gunned. Six of the ships flew the United States flag and two the Panamanian flag. The OREGON had a cargo of fuel oil and the other vessels a general cargo except two being in ballast.

The ESSO BOLIVAR, the only vessel armed, carried a four-inch gun with an armed guard of six members. While the

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2263



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gun was loaded after the attack started no shots were fired for the reason, as stated by the gun captain, that the submarine was not visible. The gun captain did not actually man his station but was in the vicinity of the gun and refused to give the order to fire although asked to do so by members of the gun crew. It is believed that nine shots were fired by the submarine before the ship was hit. One of the first hits destroyed the galley oil tank and started a fire that prevented the gun crew from remaining at their stations.

It is noted that in all these sinkings the merchant ships failed to maintain lookouts in the after part of the ship, and in the cases under consideration the submarine opened the attack from abaft the beam.

4. During the period of these attacks one plane, a J2F-4 armed with 2 depth charges, was available at this Base, which was of no value during darkness. On 10 March 31-F-5 and 31-F-7, both radar equipped, were made available. On the nights of 10, 11, and 12 March weather conditions with greatly reduced visibility and low ceiling reduced the effectiveness of these two planes. No submarines were sighted or located by forces assigned to this Base. No surface craft were available.

Geo. L. Weyler.

Copy to:
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LantFit AntiSubWarfare Officer.

HANSEAT

A report from the Commandant, U.S. Naval Operating Base
Guantanamo Bay, Cuba contained data on the following ships:

SS OREGON - Correspondence filed in "O" file.

SS BARBARA

SS CARDONIA

SS ESSO BOLIVAR

SS HANSEAT

SS TEXAN

SS OLGA

SS COLABEE