



Smugglers Surprise

By

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Chapter 1

German Submarine U-140

August 23, 1943

Resupply visit - Gdansk Poland

U-140 could well have been one of the most feared submarines in the German Kriegsmarine fleet. But the Allied sailors who died at her hand never even saw her. Her commander Captain Otto Rumpff was a short, balding, middle aged submariner and he knew this would be his last command. If they made it home in one piece, he would be turning over the boat to a younger supposedly more capable new captain. He believed that he was still at the top of his games, and he had decided that his crew and their performance would be nothing short of perfect, and he drilled them to the point of exhaustion. In return, the crew hated him to a man, but respected his abilities and hoped he would return them to their families safe and sound after their rotation. The German High Command however, saw him as an exemplary commander with an impressive record against Allied shipping. Torpedo chief second class Dieter Braun had received a hand written note from the captain a little earlier in the day. The Captain had passed it to him when nobody else was around, and he pushed his index finger to his lips to show secrecy. The note explained that they would be on a top secret mission and that 3 extra torpedoes were to be loaded and gave explicit instructions on what needed to be done. Still, funny things do happen in wartime Dieter thought to himself at the time.

“Prepare to load 3 more torpedoes Dieter,” Braun yelled down to torpedo mate junior Gerhard Von Kowalski.

“But sir, we already have a full complement.” The weapons weighed in at more than 3000 pounds, and at 23 feet long were difficult to manoeuvre.

“Shut up and lower this one down we still have some room in the racks, it is already in the sling.”

The deck hatch was quite small, and the torpedoes needed to be carefully balanced in the sling so they could be lowered propeller end first. The junior rating began hauling on the chain to take the weight of the sinister looking black tube. It seemed much heavier than those loaded earlier in the day. Eventually it was clear of the deck then the rope connected to the tail fin was pulled by the chief below and the torpedo’s nose rose vertically as the tail dipped towards the hatch. But the balance was all wrong. Usually torpedoes are read heavy because of the engine, but this one took all of the chief’s weight on the rope to point it in the right direction. When it was pointing down, the sling around the body slipped and the unit fell two feet before Dieter could get it under control by frantically pulling on the chain. Eventually they got the new fish loaded. The others were easier than the first, since they knew where to place the sling to get the balance right.

When the torpedoes were finally below decks and Von Kowalski had joined Braun in the torpedo room, Braun explained “It gets worse! The captain has ordered us to restack all the torpedoes, these ones are to be used last. Something about rotating the stock with fresh supplies he said. It is some new policy that is supposed to be a secret,” Braun explained quietly.

“We can hardly move down here already with all the torpedoes in the racks. How are we going to move them around with the cramped space down here?” asked Von Kowalski. He was a very slightly built young man, and he was not looking forward to shuffling torpedoes.

“Easy! First just lower them into the top of the racks and we will take it from there.”

“But..” questioned Von Kowalski.

“Captain’s orders, just do it!” shouted the Chief.

It took ninety minutes to get those three fish loaded into the racks as ordered.

Chief Braun arrived back in the torpedo room just as Von Kowalski was lowering the final fish.

“Sir, with all due respect, how are we going to swap places to get these torpedoes to the bottom of the torpedo racks?”

“We just load these into the tubes right away, forget the racks” ordered Braun.

“But that is not safe!”

“Don’t worry, I will not use the key to arm them until we need them, they are quite safe.

Remember, do as you are told!”

Forty five minutes later, tubes 4,5 & 6 on the starboard side were loaded with the new torpedoes.

“Kowalski, not a word about these extra torpedoes to anyone. The Captain has sworn us to secrecy“ noted Chief Braun with a conspiratorial wink.

Next, the Chief grabbed a can of paint from a locker, and placed a small red dot on 3 of the torpedoes in the very bottom of the rack.

“There they are down the bottom. I marked them for you so you do not get confused. That took a lot of work.”

A little while after they left the dock at Gdansk, the public address system burst to life.

“This is the captain speaking. Our mission this time is a little different. We have been ordered to Southern France as quickly as possible for a special cargo run. This is a very

long trip, and we will need at least one refueling stop. We have been ordered to remain undetected, but if we come across any Allied shipping along the way, I intend to sink them anyway. Stay sharp, that is all.”

Chapter 2

German Submarine U-140

August 23, 1943

The boat was making good time, and had stayed submerged for more than a day. However a consequence, the air inside was foul. It stank of sweat and diesel fuel, and the carbon dioxide partial pressure was reaching dangerous levels. The captain had ordered the crew to limit all unnecessary physical activities to extend their submerged time. Allied aircraft, particularly American Liberator bombers were becoming more and more adept at identifying surfaced submarines and the captain wanted to take no unnecessary chances. “Come to periscope depth” ordered captain Rumpff. The planes officer angled the wheel back a few degrees, and the ballast officer pumped some water out of the pressure hull to help the boat rise to 15 ft below the surface. “Periscope depth” announced the Officer of the Watch.

“Up scope.”

The crew were silently praying that the area was clear so they could surface.

Captain Rumpff scanned the horizon looking for allied merchant ships, but saw nothing.

“Snorkel fresh air” he commanded. A valve opened on the periscope and a pump activated.

The sailors below instantly felt the quality of their air supply sweeten for a brief 15 minutes. He did not want to risk a full surface.

“Down scope, maintain course, speed 5 knots, remain at periscope depth.”

Chapter 3

German Submarine U-140

August 23, 1943

“Captain this is Engineering Chief Wolfe. We have been shipping some extra water from the propeller shaft seal. If we stop for 15 minutes, we can tighten it.”

“Go ahead chief, we have no one to sink right now. But keep it quiet, we are in hiding.”

“Neutral buoyancy, all stop” was the command from the bridge.

“Dieter, go ahead captain says we have time to fix the gland,” they already felt the boat slowing, and the propeller shaft was disengaged.

“Ok, can you pass that large wrench after I lower myself down to the lower bulkhead?”

Chief Wolfe got both hands to the wrench, but his hands were wet with sweat, and he could not keep his grip on the heavy tool. It slipped away from him, caroming off the propeller shaft and banging loudly against the inner pressure hull as it came to rest.

“What the fuck was that?” shouted the distraught Captain over the intercom.

“Sorry Captain, Chief must have dropped the wrench.”

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British Submarine HMS/M Thorn

Bay of Biscay August 14 1942.

Captain, sonar, I have just picked up a strange noise bearing 075, 3000 yards, definitely man made, possible submarine contact.

“Can you confirm? Are there any ships in the area?”

“None they we have acquired so far. I could try active sonar to get a better idea.”

“Permission granted, range it.”

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German Sub

“Orders Captain?” asked the Exec officer, the captain seemed stunned, but was just deep in thought.

“Hold tight Exec, nobody knows we are here.”

A few minutes later, the whole submarine was shaken by a large ping, which could only have come from the sonar of another submarine.

“Captain to engine room, forget the leaky seal, we need full power immediately,” the captain yelled forcefully.

“Captain, the Chief is still in the propeller shaft bay, we cannot engage the shaft while he is down there. He will be killed by the shaft.”

“Junior, if you do not give me full power immediately, we will all be dead anyway.”

The sound of the propeller shaft engaging was drowned out by a terrifying scream from the Chief.

Almost immediately the dripping seal was showing red arterial blood mixed with the spray of cold salt water, as the diesel engine came to full revolutions.

“Come right to course 170, make your depth 120.”

“Weapons, make ready starboard tubes 4, 5 and 6. When complete, load 1, 2 and 3 on the port side.”

Chief Braun could not believe their luck, since the tubes were already full with the new torpedoes. He waited a reasonable period, then announced “Tubes loaded.”

“Sonar, Where is that submarine?”

“Captain, submarine confirmed bearing 190”

“Helm, full right rudder come to course 160. Don’t confirm, just tell me when we are there.”

“Weapons, open outer doors, flood tubes.”

“Course 160” shouted the helmsman.

“FIRE 4”

“4 Away”

“FIRE 5”

“5 Away”

“FIRE 6”

“6 Away”

Everyone on board felt the hammer as the compressed air blast drove the torpedos into the water.

“Sonar, no torpedo engines detected, 3 duds.”

The captain had a sinking feeling in his stomach. Misfires were not that uncommon, but three in a row was unheard of. He hoped his luck was not an omen of things to come.

“Incoming torpedoes in the water!”

“Helm 20 degrees right rudder, engine room, emergency full ahead.”

The captain was steering them directly toward the enemy submarine.

“Torpedoes 1000 yards”

“Hold course”

“Torpedoes 500 yards”

“Full left rudder. Blow emergency ballast, full stop.”

The submarine surfaced like a cork, and the crew were thrown around mercilessly.

“Where are those torpedoes?” shouted the Captain.

There was silence for what seemed an eternity.

“Torpedoes have passed under us sir.”

“Dive, make our depth 180, come to course 290” barked Captain Rumpff.

“Weapons, what the fuck happened to those torpedoes?”

“I don’t know Sir. Hopefully tubes 1, 2 and 3 are ok”

“They better be sailor, or we will all die today.”

“Fire 1”

“1 Away.”

“Fire 2”

“2 Away”

Once again the hull shuddered as the compressed air ejected the explosive cargo.

“Sonar, torpedoes active.”

The captain breathed a huge sigh of relief. It was just numbers now as he imagined the 440 pound explosive payload at the front of the 23 foot torpedo flashing through the water at 30 knots.

“Sonar, time to impact 2 minutes.”

“Make your depth 450 ft, and rig for silent running.”

There was absolute silence on board, followed by the unmistakable sound of an explosion.

“Sonar, explosion confirmed. Enemy submarine is taking water and sinking.”

Everyone on board was elated that they were safe, but at the same time were melancholy, knowing that the dead crew could well have been them.

“Sonar, target has passed crush depth and imploded.”

“Make your depth 400, course 080, speed 8 knots, let’s get out of here.”

Chapter 4

Marseilles France

September 08, 1943

No sooner had they secured the hawsers to the dock bollards, then 2 officers in long coats with the unmistakable Gestapo SS Eagles on their collars stepped aboard.

“Captain, I am Colonel Frederix, this is Major Speer. We are taking command of this submarine until we take delivery of the special torpedoes loaded at Gdansk.”

“Of course gentlemen, I will get them unloaded when we have the ship fully secured.”

“Frederix unclipped the shiny black luger from his holster, toggled the action loading a 9mm parabellum round into the chamber, and aimed it at the Captain’s head. You will do it immediately, or you will be shot.”

The Captain was a cool customer, but his legs started to wobble “Of course, gentlemen.”

The captain picked up the microphone “This is the Captain. Two gentlemen from the SS have taken command of the boat. Follow their instructions.” Discretion being the better part of valour, the Captain stepped off his boat. He sensed danger, and decided to supervise the docking from the safety of the pier.

Frederix pointed to the Officer of the watch, “You! Take me to the torpedo room immediately.”

The two SS men tried to follow the officer, but kept bumping into pipes and valves in the narrow confines of the boat. Finally, they made it to the torpedo room.

“Who is the senior man here?” Shultz asked the 2 men who were busily securing thick ropes around their precious cargo.

“I am Chief Braun, at your service Sir.”

“Where are the last 3 torpedoes you loaded, the special ones?”

“In the bottom rack sir, I marked them with red dots” he answered nervously.

“Excellent work Braun!” The SS man knelt down and checked the serial numbers, then stood up briskly bumping his head on a steam pipe.

“What is the meaning of this? These are not the torpedoes” shouted the Colonel in such rage that he was spitting saliva everywhere.

The Colonel asked the other more junior man, “What happened to the new torpedoes?”

“Perhaps I mixed them up sir, it was my fault” said seaman Von Kowalski accepting the blame for something he did not do, but hoping to gain the gratitude of his chief.

“Where are the fucking torpedoes?” he spat again.

“We came under attack. I am afraid we had to fire them.”

“You did WHAT? They could not be fired!” shouted the exasperated SS man.

“We fired them clear of the tubes with compressed air, but their engines did not start, and they sank.”

“Of course the engines did not start, they had no fucking engines you idiots! They were filled with gold bars!”

“Wait here you morons” said the Major who clicked his heels and left the torpedo room, grabbing one of the loose ropes as he left.

Ten minutes later the worried torpedo men received a page, “torpedo crew to the sail”.

They looked at each other and rushed through the submarine, and climbed the ladder up to the top of the conning tower. They were surprised to see the whole ships company on deck.

“Handcuff those men” said the junior officer, and they were soon restrained.

The senior SS man pushed them backwards towards the conning tower.

“For gross disobedience and incompetence, I have a surprise for you. Let’s call it *Smugglers Surprise*” the Colonel announced.

The colonel nodded and a noose was slipped over the head of each sailor by the other SS man who was standing behind them.

“Up periscope!” the Colonel yelled to the control room below and the periscope quickly slid up from inside the sail with the two sailors firmly attached by their necks and kicking their feet trying to find a foothold, but they were 5 metres clear of the ground. The ships company watched on in complete silence.

In a few minutes the kicking stopped and dripping began from the soft-soled shoes of each man.

“Find the Captain and have him bring me the ship’s log immediately” shouted Colonel Frederix to the Executive Officer.