

Picture Bruno Borelli

An underwater photograph showing a diver with two bright lights swimming above a large, heavily encrusted metal wreck. The water is clear blue, and many small fish are visible swimming around the wreck. The diver is positioned in the upper center of the frame, looking down at the wreck. The wreck itself is a large, rectangular structure covered in a thick layer of coral and other marine life, extending from the middle of the frame down towards the bottom.

**THE HISTORY OF THE EROS (II), THE HENRI de
ROTSCHILD YACHT.**

Or

**HOW A TECH 2 CLASS WRECK DIVE TRIGGERED ME TO READ UP AND
RESEARCH A WELL KNOWN MEDITERRANEAN WRECK.**

Portofino: Thursday 14 June 2016 DAY 3 of the T2 course and 2nd Trimix dive of the course:



I'm jumping in the water trying to look as cool as Mario Arena does...yeah right. When my head pops up after the jump I reference the boat, the buoy, put on my 2nd fin and start swimming towards the descend line. In the meanwhile, looking at my buddy Rudy jumping in, I pull up my leash and try to take the 2nd stage to attach it to my front left D-ring.

"Oh shit, that leash is too light..." I look at it, and notice that there's only 1 stage attached and my O₂ bottle has disappeared beneath the waves.

Thinking to myself: *"Man... I recovered a O₂ stage just weeks ago on the Vis wreck in Croatia, and now I lose one myself...you got to be kidding, shit!"*

I call out to Mario who's still on the Portofino Divers boat being driven by Stephan Patiente. *"GUYS, I fucked up...my O₂ stage dropped from the leash"*

Mario shouts back to stay put while he arranges stuff, while Rudy remarks that it's going to be an expensive trip, if I keep losing stuff on dives. A minute later Mario comes back holding a lead-weight in his hand attached to his reel and drops it off the side of the boat. When it settles a bumper is recuperated and attached and he drops it in the water. *"Gentlemen, we drop down on this line instead of the descend line, let's see if we can recuperate your stage Wannas. We keep the dive as planned guys, but we'll need to adjust deco maybe a bit, I'll give you a compass heading toward the wreck when we reach the bottom and find the stage, let's go!"*

So we give the thumbs down and start ascending this makeshift descend line. During descend I make a mental note to really keep track of the average depth, because we would start deeper than planned. After a couple of min descend the bottom appears and I see the lead weight AND the O₂ stage on its head valve down, 1 meter away. Lucky me, the water is quite murky at 57m depth, not at all the deep blue Mediterranean color we all expect. I collect the stage and Mario directs us to the wreck which appears out of the gloom a few minutes of swimming later.

We arrive on the starboard bow section of the wreck, and I lead the team towards the bow, where a double flak gun appears out of the mist. We don't get used to the quite though, because I suddenly hear bubbles. It's not me but Rudy who has a "failure" and is signaling me while he turns off his left post. He tries to breath it down but doesn't realize that he's on his bottom stage which creates a funny moment where he has big question marks in his eyes. A complex failure solved later, Rudy does a flow check and we continue on the side of the ship. I can still see some wooden planking. I look up and can see the mast beautiful encrusted.



Picture Bruno Borelli

“let’s not make life too easy for Mario... we probably still have some failures to go” I direct Rudy towards the narrow starboard corridor of the ship... we pass it and next to the bigger AA gun platform after this superstructure I hear again bubbles, this time on my right post. The scenario repeats itself but to be honest having gone through so many of these in our GUE live it’s no longer a point of stress, just something to manage. I’m more worried about the gas sharing ascend that is sure to happen in a few minutes.

After the failure and another post failure for Rudy (to make up for the question marks in his eyes during his first failure) we cross over the destroyed stern section of the ship. I look back and visibility is a tad better. *“This really is a very beautiful wreck, laying straight up on its keel, with the guns still pointing in all directions.”* Too bad vis is not up to big blue Mediterranean standards but I’m hoping I can return here.

Mario is signaling to us letting us know we should drop back down again behind the stern section to the bottom at 57m, so we can start a gas shared ascend. We do the drill and start the ascent and end up leaving the bottom at 25ish minutes in with an average depth of round about 53-54m. During the ascent I’m frankly too busy monitoring the gas consumption (I’m the donator) and our ascend rate to care about anything else.

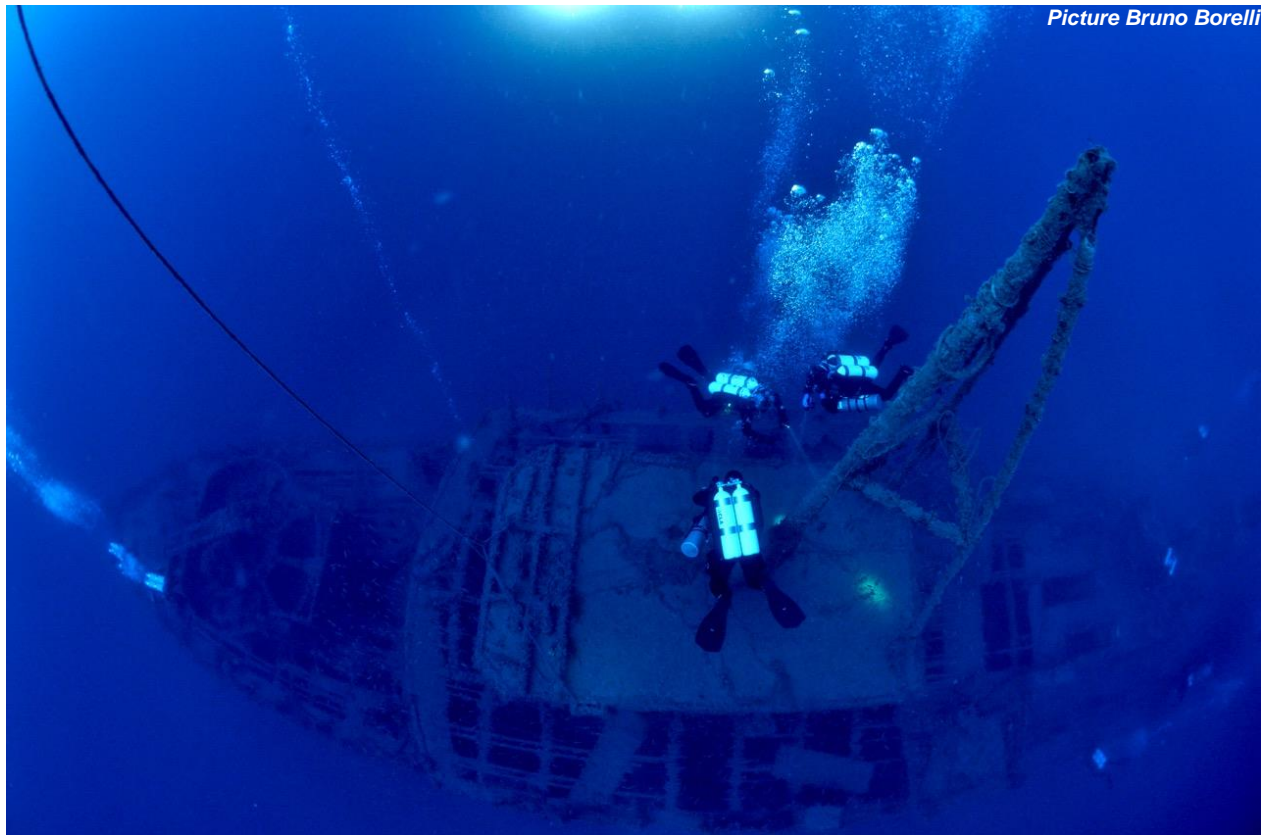
Arriving to 21m, Rudy switches first being out of gas... After the switch I mentally reset the clock for the 21-9m deco part and we continue our ascent. At 15m Rudy runs a bottle rotation, I follow suit at 12m and things go quite smoothly. None of that cross clipping malarkey. Back to backgas at 9m and ready for the switch to the O² stage at 6. Then the longer wait starts and I’ve got some time available. I try not to zone out but my mind goes back to the wreck and the dive. I’m a bit

sorry that we couldn't see it in its full glory, visibility only allowed me to see segments of it. But these did look very very promising.

Back on board, Stephan is very happy that we found the stage with Mario's trick. We start back to Santa Margarita, and between the noise of the wind I shout to Mario "*Mario, what can you tell me about this wreck*"... we start talking and he tells me that it's a Rotschild yacht that was bombed or torpedoed, but maybe we can find out some more.....I'm already interested ☺

The course continues of course but back home I start searching on the internet and start mailing organizations and people. Times have changed since I studied History and although you can get in touch with a lot of people and find a lot of information, actual sources are still not easy to get.

Then I got lucky and one thing lead to another, but let's leave that for the final part of this report.



The true story of the EROS (II), the yacht ordered by Henri de Rothschild sunk on the night of 13-14 September 1944 near Sestri Levante.



The yacht was ordered by Henri de Rothschild in 1924 as a replacement of his previous yacht that burned down (also named Eros).

She was launched in 1926 by Ramage Construction and Ferguson of Leith. The construction was followed by Captain H.J Evrard who took command. The Eros was a very well build, two-masted ship, extremely luxurious with 2 x 900 HP engines for a total tonnage of only 26 T meant she was quite fast and agile at 14 knots. She was 65.1m long with a beam of 9.78 m and had a displacement of 914 tons. **(6)**

The story of this ship becomes a bit misty after her delivery. I've contacted the Rothschild foundation and the Rothschild family but they haven't responded positively to my inquiry. In any case a lot has been discovered by both Mr Corti and Mr Krellenberg after she became part of the French Navy in 1939 respectively part of the Kriegsmarine at the end of 1942.

With the Tchechoslovakian crisis brewing up the French Navy was in need of more support vessels. Since the Rothschild Family had already lended the first Eros out to the French Navy in WW1 nothing else was expected this time. She was assigned to Ajaccio base with the hull number AD227 on April 1939. Curiously enough on May 4th 1939, she was returned to her civil owners but three months later when France declared war on Germany she is was requisitioned as a navy vessel with hull number AD196.

Being assigned to the Tangier base she was used in a representational role with a visit to Gibraltar.

After this visit the AD196 was assigned to "Marine Marne" and sent to Tangier, where she was further used in a representational role, her first missions being mainly diplomatic, the stature of a Rothschild yacht worthy. After these missions she was reassigned as an escort and received a 100mm gun and other equipment before being again reclassified as P140.

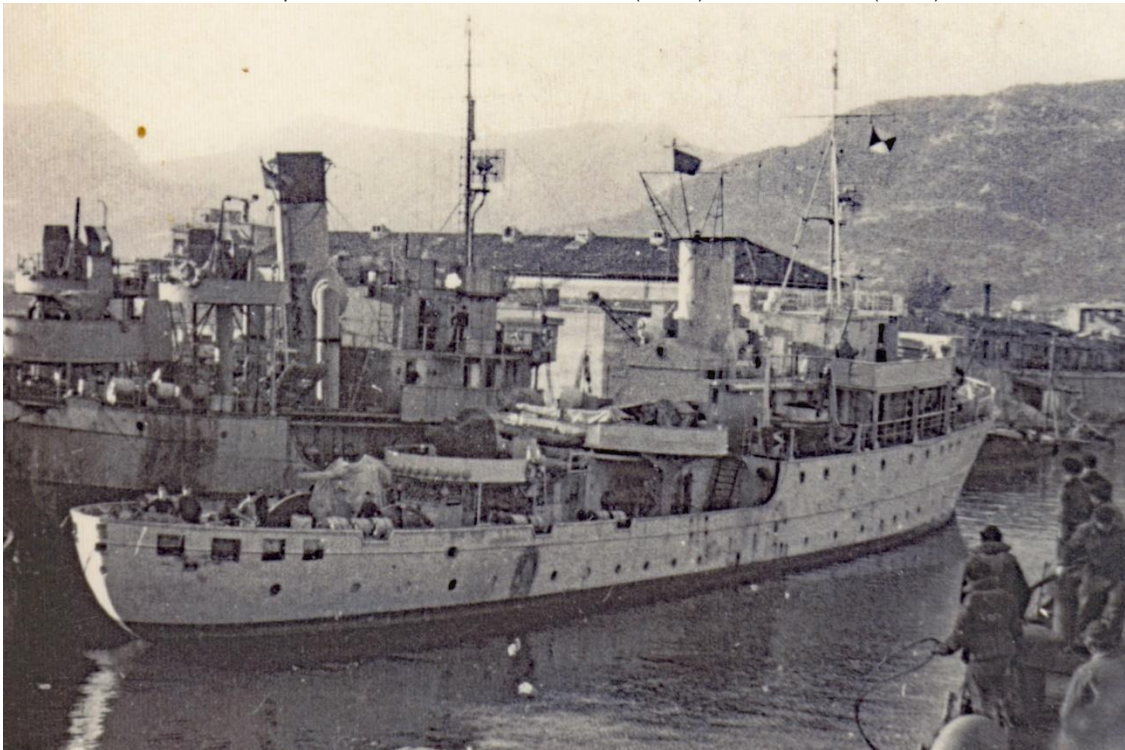
Having receiving these armament, she escorted submarine "Ariadne" in December 1939, escorted submarine "Espadon" in 1940, and served as a convoy escort carrying troops in March 1940. After France surrendered in June 1940, she reached Casablanca on June 26, with the staff of the naval mission to Gibraltar.

The next 2 years she spend in Morocco, before being assigned to the main French naval base at Toulon in 1942. Her name was changed again to "l'incomprise II" (the misunderstood). Fortunately during the occupation of Toulon by the German Wehrmacht in November 1942 she was one of

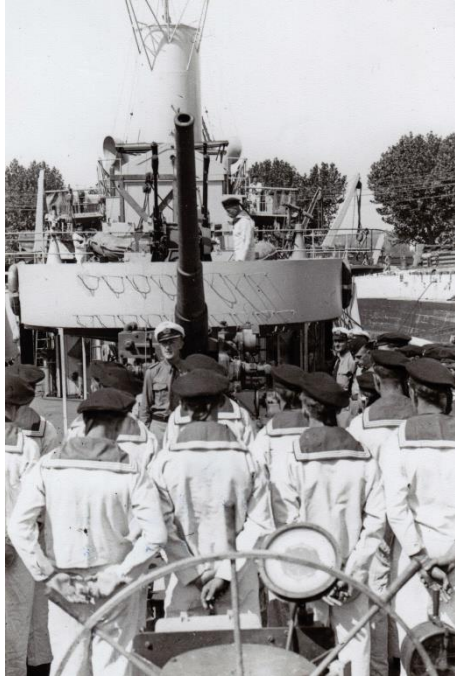
the only ships to remain unscathed and deemed worthy of further service . She was transferred to the Kriegsmarine by the Vichy government. The Misunderstood was assigned to be reconstructed as a U-Jäger (submarine chaser) in Toulon. *While visiting Toulon, the commander of 22 Ujagd Flottille (Korvetten K apitan Grossmann) was so delighted by the yacht that he specifically asked it to be assigned to his command. (4)*



The Incomprise in Toulon harbor before rebuild (above) and after rebuild (below).



During the next months she received numerous military equipment to replace the primitive armament previously installed by the French Navy. Her upper deck was completely dismantled, all luxury cabinets replaced by a clean main deck. A back platform was installed with a 88mm AA/multipurpose gun (8,8cm FLAK), 2 other platforms were constructed to house a 37mm double AA gun (3,7cm DoppelFlak) and a 20mm AA quad gun. (2cm VierlingGeschutz), next to 4 separate 20mm guns installed on each side before and behind the gateway and finally 8 launchers for anti-



submarine depth charges, 4 on each side of the stern.

To get the ship ready for service again took a long time. The in meanwhile almost 20 year old engines (Burmeister & Wain 6 cylinder diesel engine) had to be fully de-assembled and reconstructed. Spare parts were not easy to find and they had to order them from Copenhagen.

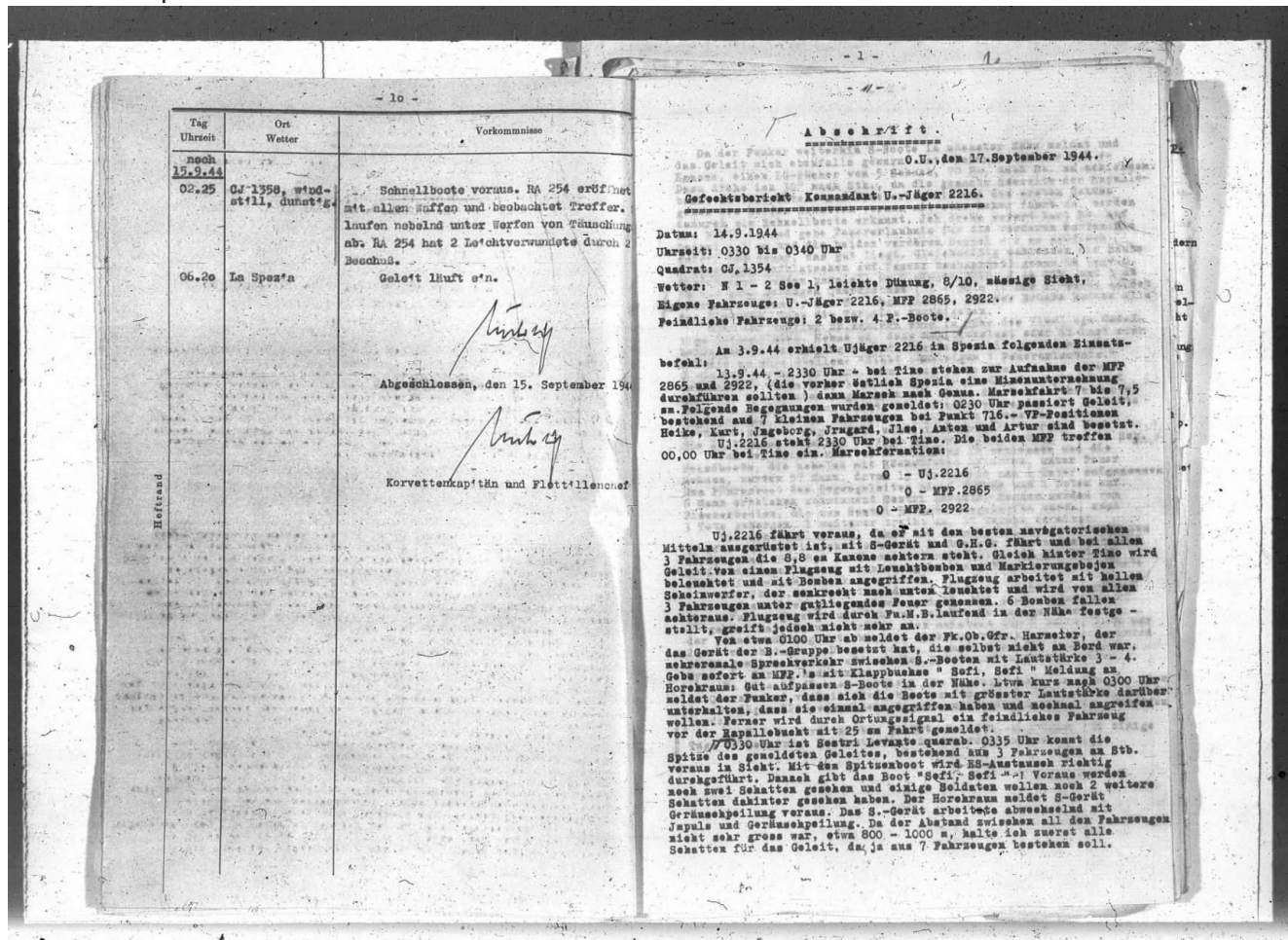
Finally on 30 September 1943 she was ready for her first operational mission under command of Oberleutnant s.Z Hanekamp. The flotilla engineer Seyer states: *"The lines were dropped and the command was given: port engine slow ahead starboard engine slow astern, but even though the engineers did their utmost, the engines didn't turn on".* (3) After examination, it seemed the engines had major problems and the fastest way to get the ship in action would be to replace the existing engines by new ones. New 800hp compressor-less engines were ordered and build in and finally the now baptized UJ2216 was ready for action in April 1944. (left the commisioning of the UJ2216)

Between April and her final voyage on the night of September 13-14 1944 she took part in numerous missions. Submarine chase, anti aircraft, (even shooting some airplanes down), many of these missions joined by UJ 2220. (4)



For her final and faithful mission we can look at the after action report written by Oberleutnant zur See Hanekamp, Fighting message (Gefechtsbericht) F2865, the memories of Machine Mate Erwin Höfling, the final statement of both the commander of the 22. U-Jagdflotille and the German Navy command Italy, and on the allied side the official squadron history of PT boat RON 29 (USN).

Some excerpts out of the AAR with some comments.



UJ 2216 AAR: 17 September 1944 Commander Hanekamp

Date: 14.9.1944

Hour: 330-340

Quadrant: CJ.1354

Weather: N1-2 Seastate, light swell, moderate visibility

Own vessels: Ujager 2216, MFP (Minen-Fährprähmen) 2865, 2922

Enemy vessels: 2 to 4 PT boats

On 3.9.44 UJ2216 gets following Mission order in La Spezia:

13.9.44 - 2330 h - Move to point Tino to rendez-vous with MFP 2865 and 2922 (who are returning from a mining laying mission east of La Spezia), to escort to Genoa (Specified in fighting message F2865 as Harbor of Santa Margharita), convoy speed 7 to 7,5 knots.

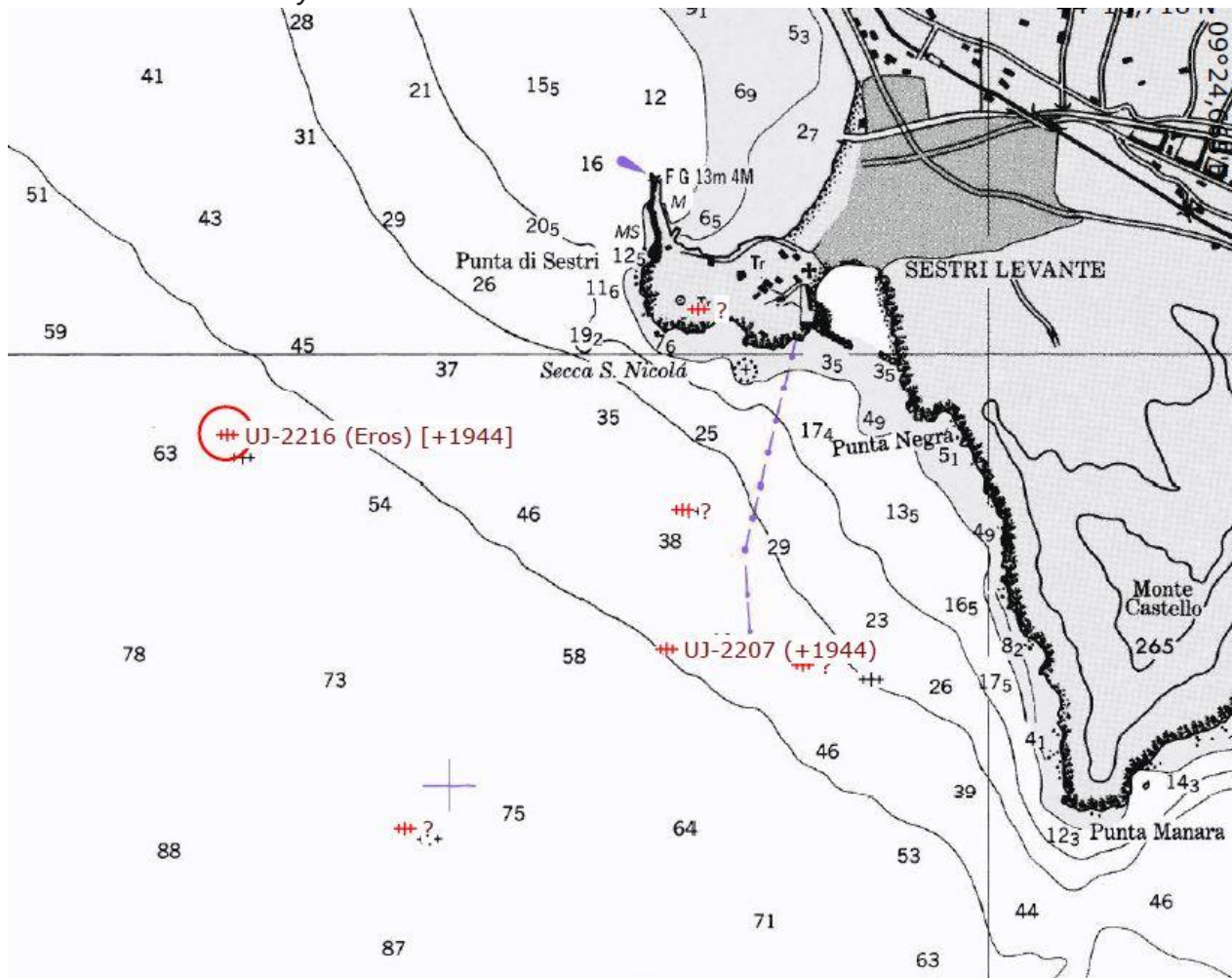
UJ2216 arrives at point Tino at 2330 and encounters both MFP's at midnight (00.00h).

14.9.44 - 0000 - UJ2216 steams ahead, because she was equipped with the most advanced navigational equipment of the escort (including Sonar equipment and GHG). Just after point Tino the escort was attacked by a bomber who dropped bombs and marking buoys. 6 bombs fall just after the vessel, the bomber kept in the neighborhood but didn't attack again.

0100 - At 1 'o clock Fk. Ob.Gefreiter Harmeier reports that he can hear radio traffic between s-boten (pt boats). "Keep a good watch out, PT boats in the neighborhood!"

0300 - At 0300h the radioman reports that the signals are getting stronger, the origin of the signal coming from the bight of Rapallo and they are heading our way.

0330 – The little convoy crosses Sestri Levante.



0335 – The first of 3 reported enemy boats appears off the starboard bow. The commander orders to open fire with the 37mm and 20mm guns. 2 more shadows are reported and some sailors reports another 2 shadows. The sonar room reported "S-Gerät" (sonar) both with ping and listening ahead, because the distance between all reported vessels was not great, 800-1000m, they believed to have 7 enemy vessels ahead. 5 torpedoes are launched (the sound of them dropping in the water was heard). The torpedoes ran parallel to the UJ2216, with very little distance between them (3-20m). The Sonar device (reports torpedoes ahead, the GHG device reports nothing. On the bridge everybody is relieved that the torpedoes pass by.



0340 – Hit on starboard stern close to the AA quad gun. Tremendous explosion. The ship rocks hard. Order to everybody “Do not abandon ship, fire approved”. Guns start firing again at the enemy vessels, and keep firing until the final moment. The enemy vessels are recognized as P boats, being at least twice as big as “S-boote”. UJ2216 starts sinking very fast from the stern. Timespan between hit and sinking is only 15 seconds. (2)

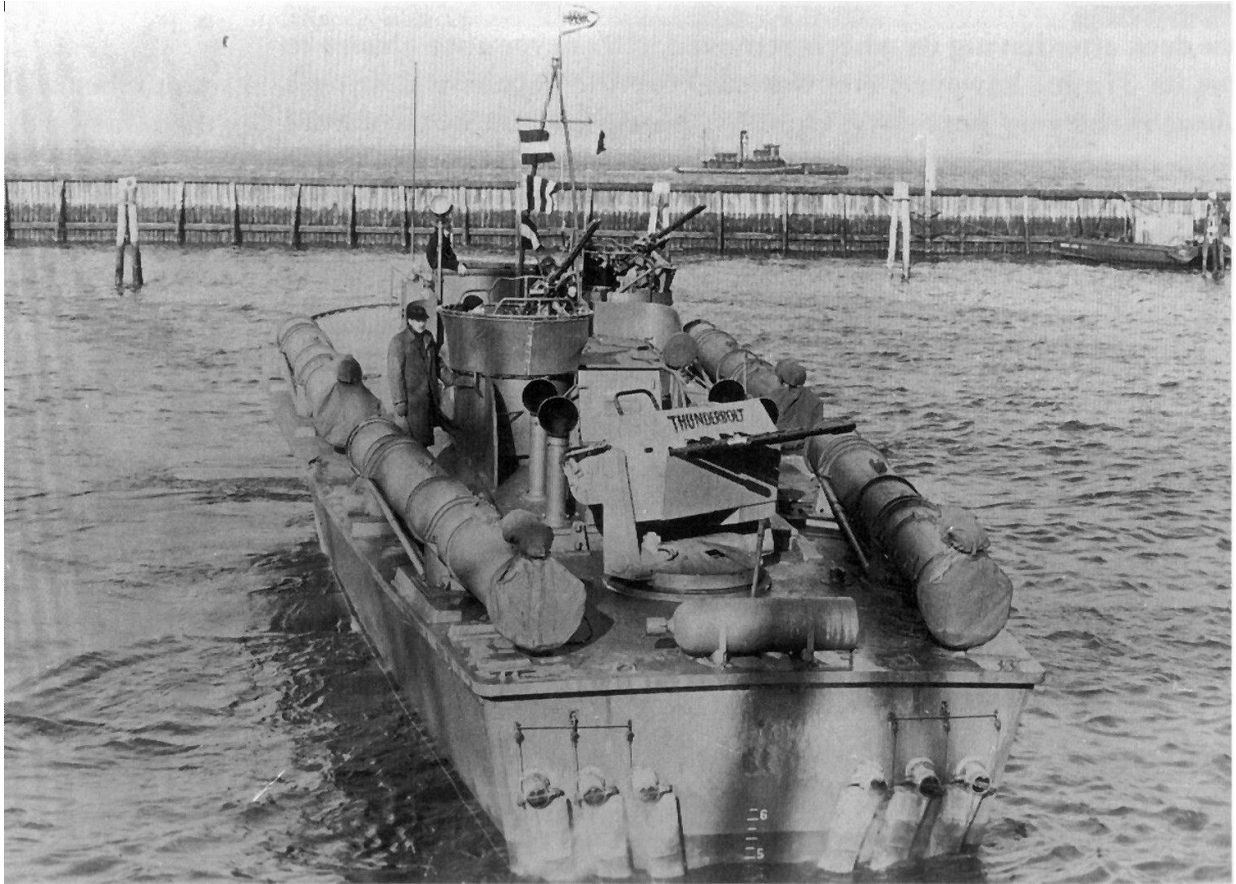
Engineersmate Erwin Höffling (picture left on the UJ2216) remembers: “On 13 Sept 1944 we were anchored in La Spezia harbor. Before we returned to Genoa, we watched a movie “Der weisse Traum” in a bunker. Shortly after leaving the La Spezia harbor we were attacked by an enemy aircraft. Even though I was working in the engine room, was I notified of this by topside friends who would inform us in the engine room. After my watch I would normally go to the stern back platform, to rest a bit, but this evening I went to the radio room to get more information on what had happened. When the boat was hit by the torpedo, I felt the hit shaking through my legs. Then I saw mates jump of the bridge, and could hear the engines

stopping. The petty officer (bootsmann) shouted. We are flooding, get out! I wanted to throw one of the dingies (dingern) overboard. Suddenly I was caught on something. Luckily I could free myself just when the ship went down. Both my mates and my pal Schneider, who had stayed on the back deck, were among the deads.” (4)

So who were these attackers? These “7” reported ships, that charged in and lay waste to the once marvelous Eros (II). I did not find any trace whether they were signed in by the bomber that attacked the convoy some hours before. But a very interesting read on the history of PT boats did give me some clues and a reference to the actual attack.

PT boats were designed in different countries as very small attack craft, for coastal operation or blue water (if based on a support tender), to use primary in anti-ship operations. In UK these were called MTBs (Motor Torpedo Boats), the Germans called them Schnell-Boote (fast boats) and the Italians MAS (Motoscafo Armato Silurante or Torpedo armed motorboat).

The USN PT boats were typically wooden or aluminium hulled ships build by Elco Naval Division, Higgins Industries or Huckings yacht corporation, powered by 2 or 3 Packard 3A-2500 V12 Liquid cooled gasoline fueled aircraft engines. Generating between 1200-1500 HP per engine. Fuel consumption was very high (292 gallons per hour at 24knots), and they carried a lot of it (typically 3000 gallons), good for about 12 hours of operation. They were lightly armored (only the bridge against small arms fire) and carrying so much aviation fuel a direct hit by any type of gun would be catastrophic.



PT 559, involved on the attack on UJ2216.

They were armed with 2 to 4 MK8 torpedoes (containing a 500 pound TNT warhead) being launched by Mark 18 launchers. These were later replaced by MK13 lightweight airplane torpedoes on lightweight MK1 roll off type launchers. This was a big improvement because the old MK18 launchers used black powder to launch the torpedoes which could ignite the grease/oil used on the torpedo in the tube, exposing the PT during night operations.

Early boats were armed with twin M2 .50 cal machine guns, as war progressed the vessels were upgraded with 20mm Oerlikon cannons both at the bow and stern or even 40mm guns, this to accommodate gun attacks against transport barges which could not be attacked with torpedoes because of their shallow draft.

Finally later during the war they were equipped with Raytheon SO radar, with a 17 nautical mile range. This greatly improved night time operations

The boats were organized in PT boat squadrons (RONs), with most being assigned to the Pacific theatre of operations. There are many great actions documented involving USN PT boats, the most famous being PT-109 which was commanded by LTJG John F. Kennedy (later President of the United States)... but I digress this is about the attack on the UJ2216. Who attacked our UJ2216 close to Siestri Levante?

3 RON's were assigned for Mediterranean operations. RONs 15, 22 and 29. All operated as a unit of the British Coastal Forces.



Squadron (RON) 29 (the 3rd USN PT squadron to operate in the Mediterranean) under Lt. Commander Stephen Daunis, was assigned to station in Calvi, Corsica in the spring of 1944 to interdict shipping traffic. From which point (being closer) it was believed to pose more threat to shipping traffic between the French Riviera and Italian Genoa and La Spezia.

The PT's of RON29 were already equipped with the newer MK XIII torpedoes which proved to be lighter with better performance than the older MK VIII type.

During the actions of '44 RN MTB (motortorpedo boats, types Higgins and Vosper) of the Royal Navy Coastal force worked closely together with the USN PT boats. Although tactically speaking there was a disadvantage using different types and procedures between services, in practice they complemented each other well. The RN MTBs having better torpedoes and more experience in the area, while the USN PT's had radar improving night operations. (5)

Below PT boat of RON 29 in Calvi harbor 1944.

They were involved in numerous attacks even entering the harbor of Genoa for a surprise night attack on September 10, '44. The same task force which encountered UJ2216 3 nights later.

A joint force consisting of PT 559 and MTBs 423 and 375 under command of RN LT. A.C.Blomfield and USNR LT. Robert Nagle attacked 4 F lighters (F lighters being heavily armed converted barges). After extending and hearing explosions they closed again in on the same formation half an hour later and discovered 2 F lighters. PT 559 was the only remaining boat with torpedoes. When Lt. Nagle was about to fire torpedoes on them they were surprised by an enemy Corvette closing rapidly in on them from starboard side. Nagle swung his boat and fired fast at 400 yds range. It hit the corvette's port side and a big explosion blasted through the stern of the ship, blasting the stern gun clear of the deck.



PT 559 fired its last torpedo at the F lighters and withdrew under fire from the F lighters and corvettes (?)(5)

What strikes me from this report is the fact that it's only PT 559 that fired a spread of torpedoes. Being loaded with max 4 MK13 torpedoes the initial spread of torpedoes, 2 passing on starboard and 3 on portside, reported by Oberleutnant Hanekamp may be erroneous.

What happened to the survivors of the UJ2216? Oberleutnant s.Z Hanekamp reported, that there were 57 survivors, of which 15 wounded, and 1 dead rescued by the convoy minelayers who continued their voyage to S. Margherita. 9 survivors, including 1 wounded, were saved by a vessel from Petsamo. Finally 6 swam to land, in Sestri Levante. The next morning fishermen found 6 dead bodies. (2)

In the end why didn't the UJ2216 notice the torpedo attack earlier? And why did the explosion cause so much harm and did she sink so fast?

Some of the remarks from the German Navy command and the Flotilla command on the attack are interesting to read (4):

- The S-device (sonar) worked and identified the torpedo attack, the GHG and NHG(?) did not work at all. (GHG "Gruppenhorchgerät" or group listening apparatus consisted of a series of hydrophones in the nose/bow of a ship), which is interesting because the GHG was considered to be very advanced (L.E.Holt *The German Use of Sonic Listening*, July 1947, USN underwater sound laboratory, Journal of acoustic society, vol 19).
- The time between detonation and sinking must have been more than 15 seconds taking into consideration what still happened after detonation.
- The command takes note that the gun ammunition and depth charges on UJ2216 were stored together on the stern. The experience with UJ1708, a submarine chaser, that sank in the North Sea, points out the danger of storing gun ammunition and depth charges together. This was taken into consideration during rebuild of UJ2216 in Toulon. A depth charge storage space had been ordered to be built at the bow section of the UJ2216. The 22 Ujagd flotille needed to report to Navy command why this decision was not followed.
- Recovering the victims on the minelayers was not that easy, the wide stern area (minelaying rails) prohibit rescue on that side meaning only the higher bow could be used. In future ladders should be taken on board to help with rescue.



The stern of the UJ2216. Note the 8,8cm FLAK gun and depth charges in front.

Sources:

- 1) "Journal "Sub" no. 69", July 1990. Claudio Corti
- 2) Kriegsmarine Archive (after action report U-jagdflotille 22)
- 3) "U-Boot-Jagd im Mittelmeer: Der Einsatz der 22. U-Jagdflotille", ISBN: 978-3813208016
- 4) Further research by Manfred Krellenberg, author of Uboot-Jagd in Mittelmeer. (mkrelle@t-online.de)
- 5) "At close quarters, PT boats in USN." 1962, ISBN: 978-1591140955
- 6) EU wrecksite (www.wrecksite.eu)
- 7) Bruno Borelli (www.portofinodivers.com)
- 8) "Some hardly known aspects of the GHG", Arthur. O. Bauer, Jan 2005.
- 9) PT boats forum (www.ptboats.org)

When I started out on this research I send out emails to the Rotschild foundation, I contacted some forums, and finally the kriegsmarine archive. I got a mail back from the marine archive with the after action report of this specific battle, which of course gave me a lot of leads to follow. One of them leading to a book written on the subject by Mr. Krellenberg ("U-Boot-Jagd im Mittelmeer: Der Einsatz der 22. U-Jagdflotille", ISBN: 978-3813208016), which is a good read but unfortunately only available in German. We got in touch and he was willing to share much of his research on this submarine chaser, including interviews with some of the crew, and many interesting pictures of the era. The only thing he wanted in return was some high resolution underwater pictures. I contacted Bruno Borelli, because he has made some incredible pictures over the years diving this wreck. He was more than willing to share some of his pictures.

A good source on the subject of torpedo boats from American perspective is "At close quarters, PT boats in the USN". It's an entertaining read going into much detail on the actual pre war organisation of these ships, the trails done, the different squadrons and their actions in both the pacific and European theaters of operation.

In the end I want to specifically thank Mr. Krellenberg in providing details and sharing some of his historical research, pictures and interviews and Mr. Borelli for the nice underwater pictures he so kindly shared.