

Interrogation of ... Otto SALMAN

14, 18

by ... Lt.(j.g.) John B. Martin

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Salman was questioned at length with regard to his career as Commander of U-Boat 52. He held this command from 15 November 1939 to May 1941 during which period he made eight operational trips and sank a total of 98000 tons of Allied shipping, principally British ships, as a result of which he was awarded the highest decoration ever given a submarine commander. He states that in the early stages of his operations it was customary to give whatever help was possible to the survivors from ships sunk, even going so far as to tow lifeboats into sight of shore. Subsequently, however, the attacks by airplanes on U-Boats made this impossible and Salman states that the U-Boat Commanders were orally instructed by Admiral Doenitz not to take any steps with regard to the rescue of personnel from torpedoed ships which would endanger their craft. He says that this was not a written order but was communicated directly by Admiral Doenitz himself to a group of U-Boat commanders of whom he was one at a conference with Doenitz. He says further, that the policy of sinking ships without warning was in effect at the time he first took U-52 to sea. This accords with a document (C-12) existing on the subject which indicates that the policy was developed and orders given during December 1939 and January 1940.

The first actual trip of U-52 took place at about the end of January 1940. U-Boat commanders were given detailed operation orders for each trip specifying the area in which they were to attack and in some cases specifying the ships. Certain Blockade Zones were established in which commanders were directed to sink all ships without warning. Salman states that whenever encountered a neutral ship but that he followed scrupulously the policy of sinking at sight with regard to those ships torpedoed by U-52 which included merchant men and warships, both in convoy and out of convoy. He states that an effort was made to determine whether these ships were armed but this was solely for the purpose of advising the Admiralty as to the character of arms carried on such ships and not for the purpose of determining whether an attack was being made on an unarmed ship. His orders when operating in such Blockade Zones were explicit and clear to the effect that it was not necessary to determine whether a ship was armed before sinking, and it was not necessary to give any warning to such ships, provided they were in the Zone in question. He states, however, that it was not permitted to fire and torpedo an unseen ship, whose location alone was known by means of listening devices. The reason for this, according to Salman, was that such ships might be hospital ships or other German submarines. The only exception to this general rule was that ships once observed might be subsequently torpedoed despite the fact that they could not be observed at the time of the shot because of smoke screens and bad weather. In no case was the submarine expected to surface, although Salman states that occasionally shots might have been fired from submarines which had surfaced during the night and were lying on the water in wait for enemy shipping. In such cases the surfacing of the submarine had nothing to do with the question of warning the ship to be sunk.

Salman has no knowledge of the order for shooting of Commandos which he referred to as a matter for the Army rather than the Navy.

He was not able to give any information with regard to departures from the ordinary Rules of Sea Warfare necessitated by the development of RADAR.

Subsequent to May 1941 Salman was in charge of U-Boat training, but the training supervised by him did not concern itself with instructions on the Rules of Sea Warfare.