

***NEW FLORIDA: U-BOAT COAST***  
**SEGMENT SCRIPT**  
**PRODUCER: JAIME GEORGE**  
**(WPBT)**

-----Parts 1 and 2-----

(MUSIC)

**OWEN SOT:** “For 31 solid days, there were ships to be seen burning day or night.”

**JOHN SOT:** “My cousin, she told me, she couldn’t believe that it happened so close to the shore.”

**CAROLYN SOT:** “I remember...seeing men jumping off the ship into the water, which some of it was on fire.”

**VO 1:** These words and images could describe Pearl Harbor, but they don’t. They’re memories of another devastating attack on America that began only weeks after Pearl Harbor, in January 1942. The Germans called it “Operation Drumbeat.”

(DRUMS)

**GARY MORMINO, HISTORIAN:** “Unbeknownst to us, the Germans had been sending out U-Boats to the Atlantic. And, for about two or three months, the Germans had a field day from Maine to the Gulf of Mexico. I’ve talked to many Floridians who remember the explosions, who remember the life jackets washing up to shore...”

**VO 2:** U-Boats were German naval submarines armed with torpedoes, deck guns, and the will to cripple the Allied war effort.

**MICHAEL GANNON, AUTHOR OF *OPERATION DRUMBEAT*:** “They were capable of traversing the Atlantic from the German bases on the West Coast of France across three thousand nautical miles of open sea, reach the North American coast and still have enough fuel to maneuver – that is to carry out attack operations against freighters and tankers along the American shore – and return back to base.”

**VO 3:** The freighters and tankers – heavy with oil, ammunition, and other war supplies – made easy targets...especially at night.

**GARY MORMINO:** “If you could imagine a U-Boat lurking in the Gulf, on the Atlantic Coast. And, if a single light bulb were on in Melbourne or St. Augustine, it would provide a perfect silhouette in case an oil tanker was passing by.”

**JOHN SIMS, MERCHANT MARINE VETERAN:** “When ships sailed alone, why they were sitting ducks.”

**VO 4:** John Simms would know. He was an able-bodied seaman aboard the S.S. Cranford when it entered the Caribbean carrying a load of cotton and chromium ore on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1942.

**JOHN SIMMS:** “Just, suddenly, in the afternoon, we had a terrific explosion. And, it went into number two and three hold, and the ship began sinking right away. Most of us had to dive overboard to save our lives. As the submarine came up, I tried to get up behind a bale of cotton. And, from there, I went over to a raft. I drifted against the submarine and I held it off with my bare feet and looking up at them, at the coning tower. They were all in shorts and blonde-headed fellows and tanned from the sun. They didn’t harm us...”

**VO 5A:** After the U-Boat disappeared, a Spanish tanker rescued Simms and the other survivors.

(SHIP HORN)

**VO 5B:** The Cranford went down in the Eastern Caribbean, but many ships met their end within sight of the American coastline.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** “Sometimes, a tanker would be hit and set afire and people in beachfront cottages along the Florida beaches could see the flames. And, in the morning, they could find oil in the surf and various other signs of the death of a ship. Occasionally, there were bodies.”

**VO 6:** For those who witnessed these tragedies, the war became much more real than a ration card or blackout curtain could ever make it.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** “This is something that people could see happening before their eyes. This was WWII live and in deathly color.”

**CAROLYN TRESIZE:** “I was probably 11 or 12 years old when the war started, and we were living in Palm Beach. It was early one morning, and my father, being an air raid warden, got a call.”

(1940’S PHONE RING)

**CAROLYN TRESIZE:** “There was a small ship off the coast, very close in. And, it was burning, and we could see the men jumping off the ship and into the water and trying to get to shore.”

**VO 7:** Initially, the U.S. military guarded the details of U-Boat attacks.

**JOHN LOCKHART:** “It was not put out in the news very much. I mean, the Navy and everyone was censoring it. They didn’t want us to get all upset about it.”

**VO 8A:** But, as more and more ships sank close to shore, accounts did appear in newspapers.

(MUSIC)

**VO 8B:** As this *St. Petersburg Times* editorial indicates, some Americans began to question the effectiveness of the country’s defenses against U-Boats.

**VO 9 – ANNOUNCER’S VOICE:** “Don’t conclude that your Navy is not taking effective counter-measures. For it is. But what these are, and how effective they are proving, must remain for the duration a naval secret.”

**VO 10A:** The secret was that the U.S. Navy had committed nearly all its resources to the war effort in the North Atlantic and the Pacific, leaving the shipping lanes near the nation’s coastlines vulnerable to U-Boats..

(NATS or MUSIC)

**VO 10B:** A loose team of Coast Guard Auxiliary boats and Civil Air Patrol planes worked to reduce some of that vulnerability.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** “The coast guard learned, as the US Navy had learned from the British, that U-Boats tend to dive whenever they are sighted or in danger of being sighted. So, if a plane appears overhead or a cabin cruiser is sighted in the distance, the U-Boat dives automatically because its principal virtue as a weapon of war is its invisibility.”

**VO 11:** A Civil Air Patrol crew snapped this photograph of a U-Boat submerging off the east coast of Florida just after it spotted their Stinson 10-A flying overhead. Charles Weeks piloted that airplane.

**CHARLES WEEKS, CIVIL AIR PATROL PILOT:** “I was very young and ambitious and wanted to build a lot of flying time, which I did. We had to fly a four hour mission. We would leave Lantana and fly up to what was then the Banana River Airport – the naval airport. And, then two hours back.”

**NAT SOT OVER RADIO:** “Are you going to go on the evening patrol? How about the morning patrol?”

**VO 12:** David Thompson filled the observer’s seat on a number of Civil Air Patrol missions. He remembers one flight in particular.

**DAVID THOMPSON, CIVIL AIR PATROL RADIO OPERATOR:** “We took off here and the sun was just lighting up. It looks like a fireball. It was about a quarter up. Beautiful sight. Beautiful sight. And we see this silhouette of this tanker. Beautiful ship. We went out there to see if we could chase somebody off. We stayed out there 25 minutes circling that thing and wondering what in the world is this guy doing out here by himself. He’s going to get sunk.”

(MUSIC)

**VO 13:** One of the most spectacular sinkings happened off Jacksonville Beach on April 12, 1942.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** “It was a Friday evening and Jacksonville Beach, at that time, had a huge amusement park with a roller coaster and lots of restaurants and bars.”

(AMUSEMENT PARK SOUNDS)

**JOHN LOCKHART:** “One of my cousins was dating a Naval ensign who was down here learning to fly in the yellow barrels. And, they were attending a dance at the beach on the pier and they heard the explosions.”

(EXPLOSIONS)

**JOHN LOCKHART:** “Everybody ran out from inside, and they could see two pools of fire burning out there. And they thought it was two ships that had been sunk, but actually it was just the GulfAmerica.”

**VO 14:** U-123 fired the torpedoes that slammed into the S.S. GulfAmerica. The U-Boat's commander, Reinhard Hardegen, wrote about the successful attack.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** "This was in his war diary that he kept on board, quote, 'All the vacationers had seen an impressive special performance at Roosevelt's expense – a burning tanker, artillery fire, the silhouette of a U-Boat – how often had all of that been seen in America?'"

**VO 15:** In June 1942, buoyed by the continued success of "Operation Drumbeat," the Germans attempted something even more daring.

**GARY MORMINO:** "Only twice since the war of 1812 has America been invaded. Everyone knows of course 9/11 in 2001. Less known is the invasion of 1942."

**VO 16:** The Germans used U-Boats to sneak saboteurs ashore in Long Island, New York and Ponte Vedra, Florida.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** That U-Boat came in close to shore about 4 miles south of Ponte Vedra, which was a very tiny community at that time. And, a dingy rode by submarine crew members brought four saboteurs ashore. They were dressed in swimming trunks and military hats. They were wearing that as a token uniform in the event that they were seen and captured right away. They could claim that they were military people on a military mission..."

**VO 17:** The New York Team of saboteurs was spotted and captured right away. Two of the men told the FBI where to find the Florida team of saboteurs.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** "So, when the group landed at Ponte Vedra, FBI men were right there behind the sand dunes, waiting for them and watching them. They watched them take two large boxes, which later it was discovered contained explosives and detonators, and shovel them into the sand dunes. They saw them put on American style clothing and then proceed to walk up to the beach throwing a rubber ball back and forth."

**VO 18:** The FBI trailed the saboteurs from Ponte Vedra to Jacksonville to New York, where they were arrested along with their contacts.

**GARY MORMINO:** "So, they never blew-up any power plants or aluminum factories – their intended targets."

**MICHAEL GANNON:** “If they had not been caught, who knows how much damage they would have done.”

**VO 19:** The Germans never attempted another U-Boat sabotage mission in America. If they had, success would have been even more difficult to achieve because, in June of 1942, the U.S. Navy shifted its resources to support convoys along the Atlantic Coast and the Caribbean.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** “Ships were grouped closely together and protected by destroyers, frigates, and patrol craft. And, that caused the U-Boats to back off. By August, almost all of the U-Boats had withdrawn from the maritime lanes off the east coast of the United States.”

**VO 20A:** In only eight months, the Germans had sunk 397 ships and killed more than five thousand merchant marines.

(FIRE CRACKLES)

**VO 20B:** The flames of Operation Drumbeat had definitely burned bright before America rose to snuff them out.

(FIRE OR CANDLE BLOWN OUT)

(MUSIC OUT)

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