



**USS Erie PG-50
1936-1942**

Distinguished guests,

Around this time on this day, 70 years ago, just a few hundred yards away on this very part of the sea, a torpedo coming from the U-163 hit the USS Erie in the starboard aft quarters, causing a deafening explosion and leaving a 45 by 5 feet gap just below the waterline of the hull of the Erie. This was at 5.33 pm.

The USS Erie, had been only six years in commission with 180 men aboard, was the lead patrol ship in the convoy TAG-20, coming from Trinidad, bound for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

In the late afternoon a subsidiary convoy, just out of the Willemstad harbor joined the main convoy and was steaming on the base course. The Erie was on station starboard bow of the convoy, well out, when the battle look-out on the USS Erie noticed the spray being thrown up by something moving at high speed towards the Erie and breaking the surface.

"Torpedo.....starboard side" "Hard left Captain."

"Hard left", but seconds later the torpedo struck the Erie.

The fierce explosion heeled the ship over to port about 15 degrees. Some men were knocked down and various things on the bridge were broken and scattered about. For a few seconds the ship came to an abrupt and complete standstill.

The torpedo explosion was immediately followed by another explosion and then again another, followed by fire in the effected area due to the diesel fuel tanks that had ruptured and the flaming oil was spreading rapidly.

Two men on the after deck and seconds later a few more men, were blown overboard. They were pickup by the Dutch Navy Ship, HRMS Van Kinsbergen, who rushed to the aid of the stricken Erie.

It was apparent that the ship was unable to attempt any counter offensive against the German submarine, except by gunfire. Even though battle-stations were manned immediately after the Erie had been hit, all efforts were concentrated towards fighting the fire and trying to save the ship.

There were men still on the after deck, very close to the hot blazing flames, throwing depth charges and other explosives overboard to avoid the worse. Others continued fighting the fire But it was obvious that the fire was out of control.

The sea was slightly choppy then, with light swells from the SE with a light SE breeze.

But the Erie was taking on water and now listing by 15.20 degrees to starboard. The port engine was out but the starboard engine regained power and immediate action must be undertaken to avoid the ship from sinking and prevent possible casualties. If the ship could be beached and the fire overcome, the damage would be kept to a minimum.

After a hurried consultation with the ship's navigator, it was agreed to set the Erie ashore at the nearest point at Piscadera, which was well clear of the harbor of Willemstad.

Meanwhile, a complete sea-battle was taken place near the Erie with the USS Spry, USS Biddle, the Queen Wilhelmina and the HRMS Van Kinsbergen, throwing depth charges and 2 bomber aircraft from the HATO Airfield, Army Air Force, arrived within minutes and assisted overhead in searching for the U-boot, which took to extreme depths to avoid the barrage and escaped without harm.

The Erie took a 40-degree turn and with full speed headed for the nearest point available and was beached smoothly, right here, where we are now, standing.

At this point the fire was engulfing the ship, and the order, "abandon ship on the port side" was given. All hands, who were still bravely busy fighting the fires, proceeded, in spite of the threat of the burning oil, in a calmly and unhurried order to the bow helping each other and taking care of the wounded first and then jumped overboard, half swimming, half walking to reach the shore. Several men whose rubber shoe-soles melted on the heated deck, got to shore bare feet, suffering rather painful wounds on their feet and hands crawling over the sharp coral reef filled with sea urchins.

After the ship was abandoned, a muster was held on the beach and it became clear that 6 officers were missing. There were 17 seriously wounded of which 1 died (a day later) and there were 35 light wounded, who were treated in the Army Hospital at Camp Suffisant.

The 7 men who lost their lives while serving on the USS Erie at that ill-fated moment of the torpedo attack on the USS Erie were:

Lt. USNR. George Owen KUNKLE-Engineering Officer

Lt. USN. Ernest Carl PETERSON-Aviator

Lt. USNR. Frank GREENWOOD-Asst.Gunnery Officer

Lt.USN. Gilbert Franklin GORSUCH-Dental Officer

Lt.CMDR. USNR.Albert Lincoln LLOYD-Supply Officer

Lt. USN. Ned James WENTZ-Supply Officer
Sailor USN. Gavino ENRIQUEZ-US NAVY Enlisted Man.

I would like to read a few lines from a poem by an unknown author:

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there.

When you awaken in the morning's hush,
I am the swift uplifting rush.

Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there;

I did not die in vain,
as long as my sacrifice is not forgotten.

Let us please have a minute of silence in remembrance of these men who lost their lives and of all the other men, who served on the USS Erie.

Signal by Boatswain whistle- Quiet aboard

1 minute of silence.

Signal by Boatswain whistle- Go ahead.

Distinguished guests, I thank you for attending this ceremony commemorating the torpedo attack on the USS Erie on November 12, 1942 here at this historical site.

For a farewell salute, you may throw a flower into sea.

Thank you very much.

Allan D.van der Ree-Chairman
Battle-Station Blaauw, Force Curacao 1942,
For the commemoration of the USS Erie.

