



# DAS BOOT

DAY #5

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## MATERIALS

**NEEDED:** Video (*Segment #4: 11 minutes*)  
Photocopies of pp. 26-27 from:

**Humble, Richard, Fighting Ships: U-Boat, (*children's book*)**  
Franklin Watts, New York  
1990  
ISBN 0-531-14023-7

Attached: pp.131-133 from *The U-Boats* by D. Botting

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## PREVIEW / REVIEW FOR TODAY'S SEGMENT

1. Unlike her first run-in with a destroyer, the U-96's second encounter with a warship caused very significant damage. Unable to escape the sonar pings, the submarine is crippled by depth-charge attacks and goes down.

## VIDEO SEGMENT #4: (*11 minutes*)

### Viewing Summary

\*The sub is hit by depth charges and starts going down in an uncontrolled dive. "We're sinking!" (*This is the point where we stopped on Day #4*)

\*"After six hours submerged, we are sure that the destroyer has lost us."

\*Submarine surfaces to view the ship they had torpedoed before they themselves were attacked. Hellish, surreal images. Decision made to finish off the burning ship that refuses to sink. Only after the torpedo is fired do they realize that there are still men on board.

\*The commander gives the order to retreat, and the submarine pulls away from the nightmarish scene, leaving the men from the ship to drown/burn as their ship sinks

\*Johann, the submarine's master diesel mechanic, approaches the commander to ask pardon for his previous behavior.

\*The decision is made to return to base in France. **STOP THE VIDEO RIGHT AFTER ENTRY IS MADE IN JOURNAL.**

**AFTER THE VIDEO SEGMENT:**

1. Pass out copies of pp.26-27 , one to each student
  - A. Instruct them to silently read pp.26-27: *"Helping Survivors"*

**Note: While students are reading, put the following information on the overhead:**

**HELPING SURVIVORS**

1. **What type of assistance did U-Boot crews at the beginning of the war often offer survivors of their attacks?**
2. **What conditions made it difficult for U-Boats to take prisoners of war?**
3. **Why were U-Boot crews forbidden to offer assistance to survivors after the “Happy Time?”**
4. **Who issued the comman forbidding U-Boot crews to help survivors after an attack? What rank did he hold in the German Navy?**

2. "In what you just read, it stated that it was commonplace for U-Boat men to give survivors all they help they could, as between fellow seamen. When possible, they would offer food, water, medical treatment - even their position and sailing instructions." Why then, did the crew of the U-96 in the movie move away from the drowning sailors without offering any help at all?
  - A. Invite students to sit back and listen to the true story of a German submarine which had tried valiantly to rescue survivors....
  - B. Reminder to students: There will be a test over DAS BOOT, and you are responsible for not only the 16 pre-viewing questions / answers, but also any information discussed as a class before and/or after the various video segments. You may use the questions on the transparency as a general guide to listening & note-taking. We will not be going over and answering each question individually.
  - C. Read the attached material

**Students may use remaining time to work the unit NETKARTE;  
will need internet access**

**Botting, Douglas** and the editors of *Time-Life Books*, **The U-Boats**,  
Time-Life Books, Inc.  
1979 / ISBN 0-8094-2675-7

Notes:

- **Karl Dönitz – Commander of submarine arm of the German Navy.**
- Do students know who the Vichy French were?

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...Contrary to Allied wartime propaganda that portrayed U-boat captains and crews as war criminals who gloatingly machine-gunned helpless merchant sailors, atrocities had in fact been extremely rare in World War II....

No one made a more heroic effort to give mercy than Lieutenant Commander Werner Hartenstein, the 32-year-old captain of the *U-156*. On the night of September 12, Hartenstein torpedoed the British troopship *Laconia*, which was evacuating British servicemen and their families, together with some prisoners of war, from British Africa. On board were 463 British crewmen, 286 British servicemen, 80 civilians (some of them women and children), 1800 Italian prisoners-of-war and 103 Polish guards. Hartenstein no sooner heard shouts for help than he began to pick the victims out of the water. SO FAR 90 RESCUED, he radioed to U-boat headquarters. REQUEST INSTRUCTIONS. Dönitz knew that torpedoing Italian soldiers could have a serious effect on Germany's relations with her Axis partner. He diverted two U-boats from off Freetown, Sierra Leone, to the scene; the Italians sent one of their own submarines, and the Vichy French in Dakar dispatched three warships to help pick up survivors.

For the moment, however, the *U-156* was alone. All through the night the boat cruised about, fishing people from the sea without regard for their nationality. Submarines were woefully unequipped for coping with such situations: There was hardly enough room below to handle the crew, much less extra passengers; moreover, survivors placed on the deck would be drowned if the submarine were suddenly forced to dive. At 4 a.m. the next day, Hartenstein sent out a radio message in English on the 25-meter international shipping distress band and the 600-meter commercial wavelength: IF ANY SHIP WILL ASSIST THE SHIPWRECKED *LACONIA* CREW, I WILL NOT ATTACK HER PROVIDED I AM NOT BEING ATTACKED BY SEA OR AIR FORCES. I HAVE PICK UP 193 MEN. 4 DEGREES, 52' S., 11 DEGREES, 26' W. GERMAN SUBMARINE. No ship came. But now the enemy knew the *U-156*'s position.

For two days Hartenstein struggled to keep the boats and survivors together. As far as he was concerned, the rescue operation was not a matter of military expediency but of humanitarian service. By now, 310 people were jammed on the *U-156* – Germans, Italians, British and Poles. An Italian doctor treated the sick and wounded, using the Germans' bandages, medicines and opium. Some of the Italians had suffered bayonet wounds in fighting with their Polish guards to escape the prison holds of the *Laconia*. Other people had severe injuries from shark bites.

At last the Freetown boats, the *U-506* and the *U-507*, arrived. They took some of the survivors from the *U-156* and removed others from lifeboats. Hartenstein now had 55 Italian and 55 British on board, including five women, and had saved the lives of some 400 people. The crews of the other boats behaved with equal concern, dispensing soup and coffee, giving up their berths to the women and the wounded. The U-boats began to gather lifeboats for the rendezvous with the Vichy French warships. While the *U-156* was thus engaged on the fourth day after the *Laconia* was torpedoed, disaster struck out of a clear blue sky.

At 11.25 a.m., while the *U-156*'s decks were crowded with survivors and many more were in tow in four lifeboats, a lookout reported hearing aircraft. A four-engine B-24 *Liberator* bomber with American markings was sighted approaching from the northeast. Hartenstein, anxious to show his peaceful intentions to the pilot, ordered a large improvised Red Cross flag to be spread over the 105-mm gun and told the German crew at the anti-aircraft gun behind the bridge to lie flat. At the same time, he ordered a signalman to send a Morse message to the plane in English: HERE GERMAN SUBMARINE WITH BRITISH SHIPWRECKED ON BOARD. IS THERE RESUCE SHIP IN SIGHT? When the pilot did not answer, a British officer asked Hartenstein if he could send a message with the signal lamp, since it might be understood better. The request was granted and the signal was duly flashed to the American pilot: RAF OFFICE SPEAKING FROM GERMAN SUBMARINE. *LACONIA* SURVIVORS ON BOARD, SOLDIERS, CIVILIANS, WOMEN, CHILDREN.

One British sailor recalled the scene with horror. "The most shortsighted of pilots could not have failed to appreciate the facts," he said. "Here was a submarine with four boats full of survivors in tow, the rest about 20 yards from her." But again the pilot did not reply, then flew away – as was learned later, to pick up depth charges in Freetown.

At 12.32 the *Liberator* returned and made a low approach. As it swooped down, Hartenstein was dumbfounded to see the bomb bay open. Two bombs dropped into the sea close by. Germans, British, Italians and Poles, momentarily united by a common, if unexpected, enemy, shouts execrations at the American plane.

On the *Liberator's* second approach, a German sailor severed the lifeboats' towrope with one blow of an ax. It was too late. A bomb blew up one of the boats, killing a number of passengers. By now, German crewmen were making for the anti-aircraft gun, but Hartenstein shouted: "Not a man goes near the gun."

The plane was coming at them again. One depth charge exploded directly under the control room. Women and children were screaming, and the control room and bow compartment were said to be taking on water. Hartenstein had no choice: He must save his boat. "All British to leave the submarine at once!" shouted. Then it was reported that the batteries were giving off chlorine gas; to clear the vessel of all but crew who could handle the emergency, he had to order the Italians off as well.

By now, the plane had spent all its bombs and left the scene. The *U-156* was so badly damaged that Hartenstein decided he had to break off the rescue and head back to base. Not until September 17, five days after the sinking, when two of the Vichy French warships finally arrived at the rendezvous, were the last survivors picked up from all the lifeboats.

Thus ended one of the most remarkable episodes in the U-boat campaign of World War II.... Years later it was learned that the American pilot had rightly interpreted the rescue scene around the *U-156*, but that the USAAF antisubmarine base on Ascension Island had ordered him to carry out the attack anyhow, on grounds that the U-boat remained a danger to ships in the area.

All too clearly, humaneness was no longer possible in the U-boat war. As a result of the *Liberator* attack on the *U-156*, Dönitz came to a far-reaching decision. "Never again," he vowed, "must submarines be exposed to the dangers of a rescue operation." To all U-boats he radioed an order that was to become notorious:

ALL ATTEMPTS TO RESCUE THE CREWS OF SUNKEN SHIPS WILL CEASE FORTHWITH. THIS PROHIBITION APPLIES EQUALLY TO THE PICKING UP OF MEN IN THE WATER AND PUTTING THEM ABOARD A LIFEBOAT, TO THE RIGHTING OF CAPSIZED LIFEBOATS AND TO THE SUPPLY OF FOOD AND WATER. SUCH ACTIVITIES ARE A CONTRADICTION OF THE PRIMARY OBJECT OF WAR, NAMELY, THE DESTRUCTION OF ENEMY SHIPS AND THEIR CREWS.