



## Navigation

[Home](#)  
[Countries](#)  
[Fleets](#)  
[War-time Stories](#)  
[Survivor Stories](#)  
[Shipping News](#)  
[Sitemap](#)

[Fleets](#) > [The Anglo Saxon Petroleum Company \(Shell\)](#) >

## San Eliseo



**San Eliseo** Captain Peter Johnson The 12,000 ton tanker was attacked off Barbados May 1942, one torpedo struck under the bridge accommodation extensively damaging the ship. The gun crew with 4.7 inch shells fired at the U-boat's periscope. Meanwhile **San Eliseo** listing badly was brought onto an even keel by topping up the tanks with sea-water. Speed was reduced from thirteen to eleven knots. Preparations to shell the tanker by the Germans now surfaced were abandoned hastily, when they realised the tanker loomed in the darkness fearing being rammed the U-boat crash dived amid a great flurry of foam.

The **San Eliseo** was not molested again, she reached Barbados after many anxious hours, during which compressed air pressure was maintained continually on all compartments, by the equipment developed by Mr W. Lynn Nelson as previously told in the narratives of the War stories of the Shell Tankers and the men who manned them. The research for salvage and saving of life at sea by using compressed air to drive out the sea in damaged cargo tanks was claimed as one of the great inventions of WW2 briefly explained in the story of San Delfino.

Atlantic Raiders. The early months of 1941 were no better on the Atlantic. The U-boats and long range bombers of the Luftwaffe hunted over the ocean routes. All the vigilance of the Royal Navy and Allied sea patrols could not prevent the surface raiders from roaming the seas to the detriment of the merchant shipping and loss of life of merchant seamen. The loss of our former naval bases in Eire and the acquisition by the Germans of the ports in Brittany gave U-boats direct access to the Atlantic, and in March of the critical year of 1941, German attacks were calamitous to merchant shipping and the tankers of the Shell group. Two of the ships Eagle Oil's San Casimiroof 12,000 tons Under command of Captain Shotton, and the Anglo-Saxon companies Simnia of 9,000 tons both bound for Curacao in ballast, unaware that two of Germany's formidable Surface Raiders were between them and

their destination.

15 March at 11am the control tower of the battleship was sighted. The first shot from the Raider enabled a wireless message to be transmitted before being blotted out by the Raider, now steaming fast, soon closed the distance, the enemy fired again with her heavy guns, holing the engine room, smashing lifeboats, main aerial and destroying the wireless room. The warship closed the distance to two miles and was recognised as the Pocket Battleship 'Gneisenau' the tanker had no chance. The German could have laid off at nine miles and hammered her into wreckage with impunity. Captain Shotton accepted the inevitable, stopped his ship to save needless loss of life, nothing more could be done except dispose of all confidential documents and hoist the signal 'My engines are stopped'. The British tanker crew stood by ready to take to the boats, all knew that the Raiders guns were trained on the tanker. 'Geisenau' sent a message 'I am sending a motor boat boarding party' Two German Officers and thirty armed marines with revolvers, machine guns, and grenades were set guard over vital parts of the ship. The Germans took an inventory, of bunker tonnage and other particulars regarding the ship, Captain Shotton and the two DEMS gunners were removed from the ship as prisoners. San Casimiro with fourteen Germans on board as prize crew though damaged was got underway with the tanker crew confined to their accommodation. She proceeded in a northerly direction. Early afternoon on the fifth day three R.A.F aircraft approached the ship and kept the tanker under observation for some time. At four pm San Casimiro was stopped and the order 'abandon ship' was given by the Germans, the prisoners were released and ship was being scuttled, RAF planes flew in and began machinegunning the ship, in retaliation to the bursts of fire from the Nazi's, having lighted the demolition charges the incendiary fire was taking hold. Racing up astern in the distance were two warships. They were the Battle Cruiser 'H.M.S. Renown' and the Aircraft Carrier 'H.M.S. Ark Royal' Launching the lifeboats proceeded smoothly. The San Casimiro crew were mostly Newfoundland men the German Boarding party were now very anxious being prisoners, the only casualty was the Chief Engineer who had received a serious bullet wound to the leg. The warships had little time to spare as the position of 'Gneisenau' and 'Scharndhorst' were known roughly. The elation of rescue was dampened by the explosions in the tanker and sheets of flame as fire spread, salvage was now out of the question and 'Renown' gave the 'coup de grace' with her six-inch gun batteries. The survivors were landed at Gibraltara and repatriated to the United Kingdom on the transport 'Empire trooper'.

Captain Shotton and the two Gunners from San Casimiro aboard the German 'Gneisenau' and officers from the Norwegian vessel 'Bianca' It was the misfortune of another Shell Group tanker in the path steaming northward on an independent course of the German.