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## San Alberto



San Alberto 11,000 tons under command Captain George Waite after San Alberto was also in command of San Demetrio and the equally ill fated San Ernesto Early morning 9 december 150 miles south of Fastnet Rock, off the south-east coast of Ireland 'en-route' to Trinidad in ballast.

The time was 6.15am when a volcanic eruption abaft San Alberto bridge blew the interior of the ship clean through the tank deck leaving only six feet of the ships side intact, she had been torpedoed by a U-boat' remarkably not a member of the crew was killed. Captain Waite lost no time in ordering all remaining boats and rafts to be lowered. Launching was difficult in darkness, high sea and a wintry gale. The Boatswain was swept overboard and drowned, one boat with four crew aboard capsized with four men aboard who were picked up four days later by one of the convoy escorts. San Alberto broke in two under the heavy sea and swell, the forward end of the ship from the engine room sank beneath the waves. The aft end remained afloat, the Captain watched intently, and saw no sign of the stern part settling deeper. Half a ship was better than no ship, He said "Come on lads let's get back aboard and get some dry clothing and a feed".

One day adrift in an open boat in the North Atlantic, with high seas, a wintry gale blowing, was enough, all were ready to take the gamble. Captain Waite then attempted to bring his half ship back to port, the lifeboats were made fast alongside for a quick getaway if required. The Chief Engineer and two juniors went into the engine room, raised steam in the boilers, and started the main engines. What was left of the San Alberto began to slowly move stern on to the sea. With steam on the auxiliaries, and cooking facilities in the galley, with light, hot food, hot drink and a rum issue everyone felt better. With the rising heavy seas the lifeboats were smashed to pieces against the ships side. The lives of all aboard, the 38 seamen, now depended on the battered wreck remaining afloat.

The weather worsened the wreck remained afloat and the wintry dawn

brought help in the shape of a Belgian Tanker the Alexandre Andre, the Belgian stood by during the day with heavy seas running and possibility of U-boat attack, it was impossible to get a boat alongside with the dangerous seas, the Belgian sent out distress signals and departed the scene. The wreck was later closed by H.M.S. Mackay on receipt of Distress Signals, the 35 officers and ratings of the half tanker requested attempts to abandon ship be made at daylight, when it would be less hazardous. Lines were made fast between both ships, cork lifebouys, and two Carley floats capable of holding 5 men each were passed between both ships, and ten at a time were tranferred safely to HMS Mackay. The decision to leave San Alberto was taken when it was seen that plates were tearing away and bulkheads collapsing. Shortly after the rescue San Alberto filled and sank. Survivors were landed at Liverpool on 14 December.