

# Ss Cygnet: The Untold Story of a Tragic Shipwreck in the San Salvador Bahamas



In the annals of maritime history, there are countless tales of tragic shipwrecks that have captured our imaginations. One such tale, often overshadowed by more famous disasters, is the sinking of the Ss Cygnet in the beautiful San Salvador Bahamas. This heart-wrenching event, set against the backdrop of World War II, involves the harrowing encounter between the British cargo ship and the notorious Italian submarine Enrico Tazzoli. Join us on an unforgettable journey as we delve into the untold story of the Ss Cygnet and its fateful encounter with destiny.

## The Ss Cygnet: A Floating Legacy

Before the tragedy struck, the Ss Cygnet was a majestic cargo ship of considerable importance. Built in the early 1920s, it served as a reliable vessel for transporting goods across the vast Atlantic Ocean. As the war engulfed Europe, the Ss Cygnet was requisitioned by the British government for military purposes. Its final mission was to transport vital supplies to Allied forces in the Caribbean, including the San Salvador Bahamas.



## Swan Sinks: SS Cygnet Sunk by Italian Submarine Enrico Tazzoli, San Salvador, Bahamas in World

War II by Eric Wiberg(Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language	: English
File size	: 9109 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 155 pages
Paperback	: 132 pages
Item Weight	: 9 ounces
Dimensions	: 6 x 0.3 x 9 inches



### The Enrico Tazzoli: A Stealthy Predator

The Enrico Tazzoli, an Italian submarine feared by many, prowled the waters with deadly intent during World War II. Its highly skilled crew and superior technology allowed it to strike fear into the hearts of enemy vessels. With its torpedoes, the Enrico Tazzoli was responsible for sinking numerous ships, disrupting supply lines, and causing havoc for the Allies.

### The Encounter on that Fateful Day

It was a calm and sunny day when the Ss Cygnet approached the San Salvador Bahamas on its fateful journey. Unbeknownst to the crew, the Enrico Tazzoli had been lurking beneath the surface, waiting for an opportunity to strike. The Italian submarine, driven by a mix of desperation and determination, saw the Ss Cygnet as a prime target to disrupt crucial supply lines.

As the sun started its descent, the Enrico Tazzoli emerged from the depths, torpedo tubes ready to unleash destruction. The crew aboard the Ss Cygnet had just moments to process the impending danger before chaos engulfed the peaceful ocean. A deafening explosion rocked the cargo ship, tearing its hull and sending it to the icy depths.

## **The Tragic Aftermath**

With the Ss Cygnet now resting at the bottom of the ocean, tragedy befell its crew. Some managed to swim to safety, clutching onto debris for dear life, while others succumbed to the icy grip of the sea. The survivors, their lives forever changed, were left with the haunting memories of that dark day.

## **The Legacy of the Ss Cygnet**

Though the Ss Cygnet may be forgotten by many, its tragic sinking remains a significant event in maritime history. Remembering the lives lost and the bravery of those who survived is crucial in understanding the sacrifices made during times of war. The Ss Cygnet serves as a poignant reminder of the unpredictable and brutal nature of the sea, and the resilience of those who face its treacherous depths.

The sinking of the Ss Cygnet in the San Salvador Bahamas by the Italian submarine Enrico Tazzoli is a tale that deserves to be remembered. It is a testament to the lasting impact of war and the human stories that lie beneath the

surface. Although the Ss Cygnet may be lost to the sea, its memory lives on, reminding us of the destructive power that can be unleashed in the blink of an eye.

So next time you find yourself near the beautiful shores of the San Salvador Bahamas, take a moment to reflect on the Ss Cygnet, a ship that sailed into eternity, leaving behind a story that will never be forgotten.



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The human element of a relatively small incident like the loss of the relatively small, 3530-ton Cygnet, is both compelling and illustrative of the larger, global struggle. The ship itself had served the US government in World War I, and run between Europe and South America for decades. Built Dutch, she was owned and crewed mostly Greek, flagged to Panama, and trading for Canadians to and from South America and the Caribbean. Though the owners had a contract (charter party) stating no deck cargo was to be carried, a young Bahamian boy

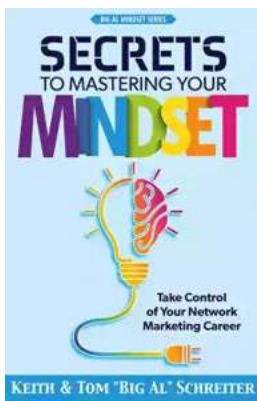
and his family retrieved bales of rubber which floated free after the sinking. The Cygnet men were the only Allied sailors rescued by the Monarch of Nassau, though on another Bahamian vessel, the Ena K., they shared space with survivors of other shipwrecks, and missed sailing with Sydney Poitier by mere weeks.

The attack itself was recorded for posterity live by the Italians, so that we can watch it online - even whilst on the move ourselves. The crew, mostly from small islands in the Greek archipelago (only two out of 28 Greeks were from Athens, and most were from Andros or Chios), were also from Romania and Spain. They were able to interact with their Italian attackers for roughly an hour, then encounter a one-legged white man in a rowboat who guided them between the reefs at 4 am, then accept a ride from Captain Roland Roberts aboard his British-built freighter, before meeting the Duke and Duchess of Windsor in the colony's capital, Nassau. Overall the men would travel by lifeboat, lorry, passenger ship, a motor sailor and train over two weeks before they reached a base, albeit in exile.

In Nassau the sailors were given an open-armed welcome from fellow Greeks from Kalymnos, living industriously in the Bahamas since the late 1800s when they had arrived for the prosperous sponge fishing trade, which had recently collapsed. They shared the island - and no doubt the pubs - with over 100 other cast-up sailors from other vessels. From there Captain Charles A. Pettee, master of a wooden freighter built in Harbour Island that was overcrowded with castaways and farmers, were cleared outwards by two American consuls from Minnesota, and interviewed by US Navy intelligence officers before being reunited with their employers in New York. They too had been forced by the war to move from Andros to Athens, London, then to New York. For most of the sailors, it would take years, until war's end, before they were able to reunite with

friends and family in Greece. Some of them would opt to stay in America, because of the Cygnet.

The loss of the Cygnet gave the men on both sides of the steel vessels involved plenty to photograph and film, talk and write about, and remember. There is a certain irony in the Cygnet skipper's letter of protest, filed in Nassau, when men on both sides admit that interactions between Italians and Greek were jocular and relaxed. Interestingly, it was the Greek, and not the Italian sailors, who lived to tell the tale. Within a year the Tazzoli, too, was at the sea floor, her commander dead by his own hand, his legacy only resurrected, with an Italian submarine named after him, long after the war.



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