



U-46 and the “Lumineach” 1940

In 1922 the Limerick Steam Ship Company purchased the steamer *Fairfield* and renamed her *Luimneach*. She saw action during the Spanish Civil War enduring twelve air raids in five days in Valencia in October 1938. In the last attack the ship was hit and one man killed. The 4th September 1940 found her in the Bay of Biscay bound from Huelva, Spain to Drogheda with a cargo of iron pyrites commanded by Captain Eric Jones. Shortly after 7 p.m. a submarine was sighted astern, rapidly overtaking the Limerick ship. What happened next is recorded in Captain Jones's logbook;

“4th September 7.30 p.m. sighted submarine, warning shot across bows, hoisted name and destination. Nationality plainly marked on vessel's side. Second shot fired, vessel stopped. All hands manned starboard lifeboat and pulled clear. Submarine hailed me, told me to return for second boat, this done, pulled clear with nine men in each boat. Vessel sunk by gunfire”.

The submarine that sank her was the U-46 commanded by Oberleutnant Engelbert Endrass who recorded dismissively in his war diary, that the *Luimneach* had been flying a “British or Irish flag”. Two days later the captain's boat was sighted by the French fishing boat *St. Pierre*, which transferred them to a Spanish boat that a week later landed them near San Sebastian. A French fishing boat also rescued the other boat but they were brought to Lorient in German occupied France.

Although Ireland was neutral during the second world war this did not ensure the safety of its merchant trading fleet. In February 1940, the passenger ferry *Munster*, on charter to the Belfast Steamship Company but flying the Tricolour, was mined in Liverpool Bay. Then in August, the *Kerry Head*, a Limerick collier, was subjected to a more deliberate assault and attacked by an unidentified aircraft off the Old Head of Kinsale. Several bombs fell around her but the crew were unhurt. In the same month, another mine destroyed the Irish livestock carrier *Meath*. All Irish vessels sailed under their neutral flag. Up to four huge Tricolours were painted on the sides of each ship together with the word “Eire” in letters 20 feet high, but Allied and Axis aircraft and submarines sometimes mistook Irish ships for French, British or German vessels and the crews suffered accordingly.



U-46 returns from patrol



Oblt. Engelbert Endraß on board U-46



Engelbert Endraß (left) & Erich Top May 1941