



## The Spanish merchant navy's covert involvement in the Second World War: the case of the Aline

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### ABSTRACT

This article is an investigation into a potential connection between the ship Aline and other types of activity related to logistics or warfare during the second world war, based on research derived from both physical artifacts (found aboard) and personal histories (from crew members), and secondary source materials. The author's own experiences as a member of the crew of the ship in 2000 served as the basis for collecting both physical objects associated with German symbols, and testimony from previous crew members about whether or not the ship had been used militarily. In order to provide context for the hypothesis presented here, the article presents an overview of Spain's participation in World War II through the merchant marine service, specifically through secret operations and front companies, and provides logistical support for Nazi Germany. Following this section is an examination of the history of the Aline, which includes multiple name changes, different owners, entries in Lloyd's Register, and technical specifications, such as the possibility of having installed engines manufactured by MWM, which have associations with German wartime technologies. The results of these examinations indicate that there was an indirect and covert level of Spanish merchant shipping involved in World War II, however it does not provide conclusive proof of the Aline's role in military action. As such, the authors conclude that the case they present serves as a major area of ongoing research into history; although it is limited due to insufficient documentation at the time, and also because there are missing records from that time.

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### 1. Introduction.

The inspiration for this article stems from a personal experience I had in 2000 as a crew member on a boat called the Aline, which at the time was used for tourist excursions. Due to the physical evidence found on board, which was the catalyst that led me to investigate the history of this unique ship in greater depth, I conducted personal interviews with the ship's two most senior crew members: the skipper and the chief engineer (who, sadly, have since passed away).

This led me to raise certain questions and, consequently, to formulate a hypothesis, seeking information about the Span-

ish merchant navy's involvement in the conflicts of the Second World War and, more specifically, regarding this ship.

The methodology I have decided to follow in an attempt to prove this hypothesis is as follows: to divide the research into two parts. First, to demonstrate in general terms that the Spanish merchant navy did indeed participate in the Second World War, whether covertly or directly, and then to investigate, specifically, the aforementioned ship on which I served as a crew member.

### 2. The Spanish merchant navy in the Second World War.

Having begun the search for evidence of the involvement of Spanish merchant ships in the Second World War, it can be conclusively stated that such involvement took place through Operation ?Hetze? (1), which involved the purchase of Spanish shipping companies such as the Compañía Naviera Lev-

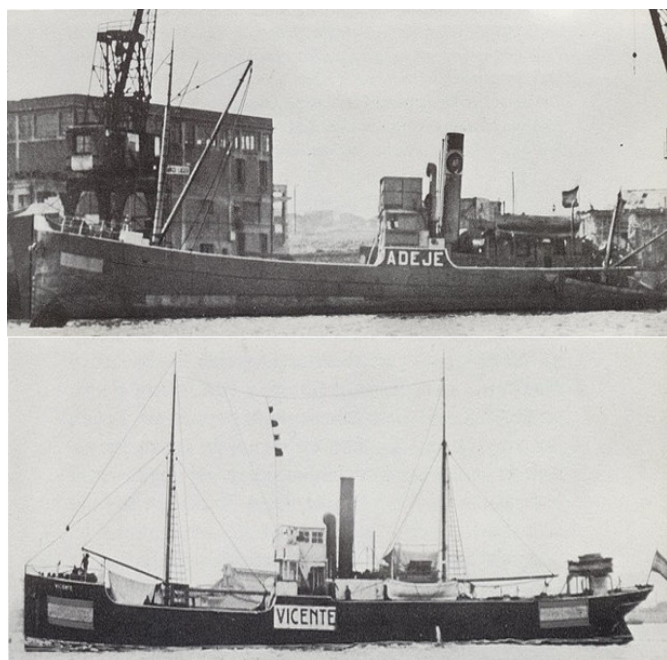
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antina, with ten ships (Alma, Celsius, San Juan II, San Isidro Labrador, Vicente, Adeje?), or the Basque shipping company Bachi (Bartolo, Bachi, Kauldi?), through a series of front companies with German capital and headquarters in South America (SOFINDUS) (2).

Subsequently, the company Transcomar was set up, using Spanish front men, to covertly place the ships at the service of the Third Reich, thereby attempting to circumvent the Allied blockades under false pretences and supply Rommel's Afrika Korps.

Figure 1: The merchant ship Adeje, sunk on 23 November 1943, and the merchant ship Vicente, sunk on 10 October 1943.



Source: Stephen Maturin, 2010.

The ships Adeje (259 GRT) and Vicente (533 GRT). Both were sunk in the Aegean Sea by the Allies. In the image of the Vicente, the Spanish flag can be seen clearly painted, alongside the name, as a symbol of the Spanish flag's neutrality.

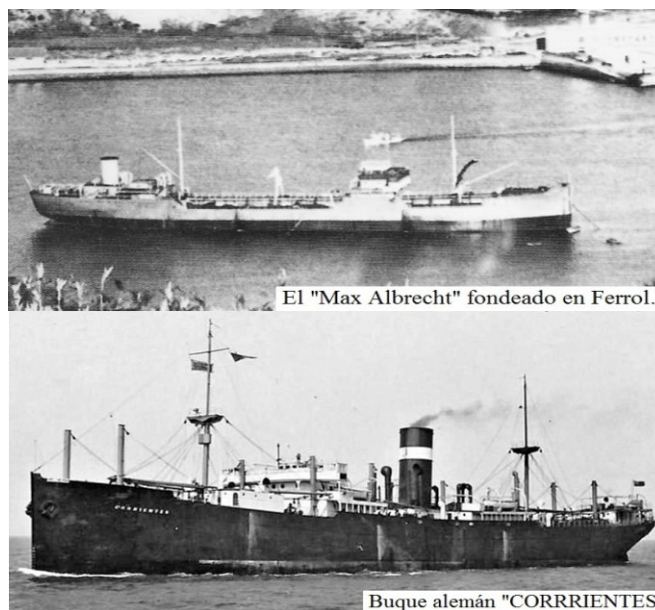
But it was not only Spanish merchant ships that were involved in the Second World War; there were also many sailors who, at the end of the Spanish Civil War, were sent by Franco's government-as part of a return of favour for the assistance provided during the national conflict-to fight on German warships (3).

As for Spanish participation on the Allied side, it was practically non-existent. Only a few exiled sailors and former Republicans fought under the British and French flags against fascism (4).

It is worth noting that not only were ships and sailors used covertly, but also facilities and logistics. The government of the time allowed the supply of provisions and fuel to the U-boats of the Battle of the Atlantic via supply ships stationed in strategic ports across Spain. For example, the oil tanker Max Albrecht in Ferrol, the Bessel in Vigo, the Thalia in Cádiz, or even, in

the Port of La Luz in the Canary Islands itself, the Corrientes, an oil tanker which was the target in May 1940 of an attack or attempted sabotage by British and French intelligence (5).

Figure 2: German ships that played a significant role during the war.



Source: mve2gm.com, 2012.

In the wake of these events, and fearing that Spain might enter the war on the side of the Axis powers, the Canary Islands-and more specifically the ports of La Luz and Las Palmas- due to their geostrategic position and the risk of losing the colony of Gibraltar-so necessary and important to the Allied nations-British intelligence planned a series of operations that would ultimately culminate in the Allied occupation of Gran Canaria through 'Operation Pilgrim'.

Not to mention that the island itself was a hotbed of spies due to the two large foreign communities in the city, from both sides of the conflict, including businessmen whose names were historically well known on the island, such as Harald Flick and Walter Sauermann on the German side, and, on the British side, Mr Yeoward and Gerald Miller (6).

### 3. The 'Aline' Ship.

It was the 68th vessel built by the Matagorda shipyard and was delivered in 1934 to the company Vapores La Punta de Europa, christened Aline II, a name it retained until 1949, when it was renamed simply Aline until 2008. From then on, and until it was scrapped in Málaga in 2013, it was called Atlantiss.

Its history is rather unclear due to changes in its name and owners, and because the owners themselves would change the names of their shipping companies.

Primarily, during its early years, up until around 1980, it operated in the Strait on routes such as Algeciras-Tangier-Ceuta and, later, following the closure of the La Línea border crossing, Algeciras-Gibraltar.

Figure 3: Registros del 'Aline'.

9475	Aline	11	P	Turkey	1440	100A1	Gib	1934	Soc. Española de Const. Naval	Cádiz	118-5'23"-1	9'	Algeciras	Oil Engines 28 C.S.A.	10 x 6
				1440	100A1	Gib	1934	Soc. Española de Const. Naval	Cádiz	118-5'23"-1	9'	Algeciras	Oil Engines 28 C.S.A.	10 x 6	10 x 6

Source: Lloyd's Register.

In the final stage of its service life, and from around that year onwards, it moved to the Canary Islands to operate tourist cruises until 2012, when it was transported to Málaga, where it was finally scrapped in 2013.

Figure 4: 'Aline' Ship in Canary Islands.



Source: Author.

During the time I worked as a crew member on that ship, I was able to see for myself some evidence that, as both the chief engineer and the captain had told me -both agreeing on this point without offering any further explanation- 'the ship was once used to transport military troops during the Spanish Civil War or the Second World War', without specifying clearly which of the two.

It is true that the port anchor (cast in iron) of that vessel bore the German swastika, as can be seen in the following image, which was the initial trigger for the investigation.

Figure 5: 'Aline's' close-up of the anchor.



Source: Author.

Although I have no visual evidence to back this up, I can confirm that in one part of the hold-more specifically, in a locker-there were life jackets stored away. They were in rather poor condition and had turned a yellowish colour, but the dark-coloured German swastika was clearly visible on them.

Part of my daily routine was to go to the engine room to grease the engine rocker arms alongside the chief engineer. Engines which, according to the information he possessed, were

the same as those fitted to German submarines during the Second World War. This, a priori, would be another thread to pursue in the investigation.

In 1955, Spain's diplomatic isolation from the rest of the world came to an end, and it was from around this date that the records of Spanish ships began to be updated (let us not forget that Lloyd's Register is British). It was in 1958 that MWM (Motoren Werke Mannheim) engines began to appear in the records, matching the number of cylinders and bore and stroke dimensions of those used by the U-boats (7).

At this point, due to the lack of available information, I am struck by the doubt as to whether this type of engine was fitted to the ship during the Second World War, subsequently due to existing stock, or from 1950 onwards.

It is most likely that this occurred during the war, as the company's construction and assembly plant was destroyed before the end of the Second World War, with production resuming in Brazil from 1950 onwards, though without ever manufacturing this type of engine again (8).

Figure 6: Details of the vessel and its machinery.

01 7 40 4			
\$ 12/55	TM	10-1934	2 Oil Engines 4SA each 6Cy,
-Alge-	Soc. Española de Const. Nav.	Cdz	250x30mm
g, Tan-	129° 5'	23° 4'	6' 6"
FLMC	133° 9'	24° 0'	
SPARS			

Source: Lloyd's Register of Shipping.

**Conclusions.**

The active -and one might say covert-involvement of the Spanish merchant navy in the Second World War, which has not been officially acknowledged, has been demonstrated.

Perhaps the key to understanding the term 'covert' lies in the various roles assumed by the Spanish government during the conflict:

1. Firstly, in 1939: neutral.
2. In 1940: non-belligerent.
3. And by 1943, as the war progressed: neutral once again.

As for the second part of the investigation, concerning the participation of the ship Aline in the Second World War as a military transport, despite the physical evidence found on board, the similarity in tonnage of the ship to those used for this purpose by front companies, and the comments of the crew, it has not been possible to prove its direct or indirect participation in any campaign.

It is true that there are many gaps in the records due to the war period. Similarly, some articles insist on denying its involvement as a dark chapter in its history. Although the physical evidence was there, it could not be proven.

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