

The Etappe Kanaren: A case study about the secret supply of the German Navy in Spain during the Second World War*

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Abstract

The secret supply of the German Navy during the Second World War has scarcely been studied until now. The goal of this article is to study one of the more active supply areas of the Etappendienst at the beginning of the war, the one known as *Etappe Kanaren*, as part of the Grossetappe Spanien-Portugal. In this research primary sources from German Naval War Command have been consulted. Among the main conclusions, it should be pointed out, on the one hand, the intense activity to support the Kriegsmarine during the first years of the war, despite the distance from Mainland Spain and the British pressure, which finally stopped the supply operations. On the other hand, we have confirmed the active role of the Spanish Government in relation to the Etappendienst: Spanish authorities allowed the supply operations, but the Allies' pressure forced the Spanish Government to impede these activities.

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Introduction

The study of intelligence services during the Second World War has centred on Great Britain and the United States. The Third Reich has been relegated to a second tier. Despite the research of David Kahn and a small number of German historians, the history of the intelligence services in Germany has received little attention due to the lack of interest and reticence of German historiography.² The circumstances are no better in Spain, where restrictions have been placed on documentation that is more difficult to understand than in other Western countries.³ However, these difficulties have not impeded several recent studies, such as the dossier coordinated by Emilio Grandío Seoane on the intelligence networks of the Allies and the Axis in Spain during the war.⁴

The incipient development of the study of German intelligence services in Spain during those years has not sufficiently examined one of the questions that most concerned the Allies in relation to the questioned Spanish neutrality: the Etappendienst (secret supply service) of the Kriegsmarine (German Navy). The historians who have studied this issue, primarily Charles B. Burdick and Manuel Ros Agudo, have focused on the supply of provisions and fuel to German submarines in the ports of Vigo, Ferrol, Cádiz and La

² David Kahn, *Hitler's Spies: German Military Intelligence in World War II* (New York, 2000).

Wolfgang Krieger, 'German Intelligence History: A Field in Search of Scholars', *Intelligence and National Security*, 19, No. 2 (2004), 185-198.

³ Carmen Molinero, 'El acceso a los archivos y la investigación histórica', *Ayer: Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 81 (2011), 285-297. Antonio Niño and Carlos Sanz, 'Los archivos, la intimidad de las personas y los secretos de Estado', *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, 34 (2012), 309-342.

⁴ Emilio Grandío Seoane, 'Presentación dossier: Guerra de silencios. Redes de inteligencia en España durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial', *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar*, 4, No. 8 (2015), 8-14. Rodríguez González, J., 'Los servicios secretos en el Norte de España durante la II Guerra Mundial: el Abwehr alemán y el SOE inglés', *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar*, 4, No. 8 (2015), 75-100. Emilio Grandío Seoane, 'No solo Wolframio: Galicia, campo de juego de las redes de inteligencia durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial', *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar*, 4, No. 8 (2015), 101-117.

Luz (Gran Canaria).⁵ However, other issues remain unaddressed, such as the preparation of supply ships for auxiliary cruisers and large surface warships, the support of blockade runners or the difficulties caused by Allied pressure on the Spanish government to impede these activities.

This study aims to alleviate this historiographical deficit by examining one of the supply services, the Etappe Kanaren, for two reasons. On the one hand, a study on the Etappe Kanaren facilitates an in-depth analysis of the Grossetappe Spanien-Portugal, one of the most active such supply services during the Second World War and to which this service belonged. On the other hand, the geostrategic position of the Etappe Kanaren northwest of Africa and far from the Iberian Peninsula conferred upon it a special importance in the preparation of supply ships and blockade runners, although this distance and the British control of navigation posed two difficulties for its operations. In developing this study, documents of the Seekriegsleitung (German Naval War Command; Skl) were consulted, particularly its correspondence with the Ausland/Abwehr section of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (High Command of the German Armed Forces; OKW) and the German naval attaché in Madrid, military chief of the Grossetappe Spanien-Portugal.

Based on these sources, this article aims to support three hypotheses. First, the presence of the Etappendienst in the Canary Islands dates to the First World War, after which it was dissolved and re-established in the 1930s. Second, the period of greatest activity of the Etappe Kanaren began in August 1939 and was concentrated between June 1940 and

⁵ Charles B. Burdick, 'Moro: The Resupply of German Submarines in Spain, 1939-1942', *Central European History*, 3, No. 3 (1970), 256-284. Manuel Ros Agudo, *La Guerra secreta de Franco (1939-1945)* (Barcelona, 2002), 72-117.

July 1941, during which period it was protected by the Spanish non-belligerency policy and the German occupation of the French Atlantic coast. Third, the submarine supply operations concluded in July 1941 after British protest, whereupon beginning in 1942, the infrastructure in the Canary Islands was reduced until the Etappe Kanaren was finally dissolved in 1944.

Origin of the Etappe Kanaren

The Canary Islands, located northwest of Africa and more than 1,000 kilometres from the Iberian Peninsula, have held great value over the centuries for the maritime routes that connect Europe with Africa and the Americas. This geostrategic importance increased towards the end of the 19th century thanks to two factors: 1) the development of steamships during the second industrial revolution, which presented a need for coaling stations along the major maritime routes; and 2) the imperialist race for Africa, in which the archipelago found itself on the route to the new colonies.⁶ This renewed importance of the islands resulted in the expansion of the Port of Santa Cruz de Tenerife and the construction of the Port of La Luz (in the city of Las Palmas on the island of Gran Canaria). The value of the islands as international ports of call was not unnoticed by British companies, which quickly installed themselves in La Luz and controlled port services there. The presence of these companies was accompanied by the development of export agriculture, primarily aimed at the British market.⁷

⁶ Javier Márquez Quevedo, *Canarias y la crisis finisecular española (1890-1907): del desastre ultramarino a la garantía de seguridad exterior* (Madrid, 2005), 193-201.

⁷ Francisco Quintana Navarro, *Barcos, negocios y burgueses en el Puerto de La Luz (1883-1913)* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 2009), 79-103.

The value of the Canarian ports of call also attracted the attention of German companies. After 1886, the ships of the Woermann Linie called at La Luz, where this company installed itself in 1906, although the German interests in the archipelago were not as significant as those of the British.⁸ However, this presence encouraged the establishment of the Etappendienst, which was created in 1911 to supply the ships of the German Navy overseas. The Etappen, or supply areas, were controlled in each country by the corresponding German naval attaché. German consuls were assigned to the areas, and local German residents worked in them. When the Great War began, there was an Etappe in Las Palmas, which was the most significant of the eastern Atlantic and directed by the Kapitanleutnant Leonhardi, and an auxiliary Etappe in Tenerife. Between August 1914 and March 1915, eight steamships (*Walhalla*, *Professor Woermann*, *Duala*, *Slawentzitz*, *Betania*, *Arucas*, *Magdeburg* and *Macedonia*) set sail from the Etappen to supply coal to the auxiliary cruisers *Kronprinz Wilhelm* and *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*.⁹

The Canarian Etappen were dissolved after the war and re-established in the 1930s, when the Etappendienst, or Etappenorganisation (EO), was reconstructed. The reconstruction of this service began in 1930 as part of the Abwehr although, in June 1938, it was transferred to the Ausland Branch (OKW/Ausl.), where it remained until July 1944, when it was again changed to fall directly under the supervision of the Kriegsmarine. The missions of the EO consisted of supplying warships heading overseas, collecting information, and supporting the economic war. The EO began to

⁸ Francisco Javier Ponce Marrero, *Canarias en la Gran Guerra, 1914-1918: estrategia y diplomacia. Un estudio sobre la política exterior de España* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2006), 48-83. Quintana Navarro, *Barcos, negocios y burgueses*, 87.

⁹ Ponce Marrero, *Canarias en la Gran Guerra*, 130-154.

expand in 1934 and the following year entered into an accord with the German Foreign Office (Auswartiges Amt; AA) to receive support for its activities from diplomatic personnel.¹⁰ The OKW/Ausl. was directed by Captain Leopold Bürkner, and among other missions, it served as a link with the attachés of the German Armed Forces overseas,¹¹ including the naval attachés who worked for the EO.

According to a report by the OKW/Ausland IX in November of 1938, there were eight large supply areas (Grossetappen), 17 individual supply areas (Einzel-Etappen) and seven independent stations (Selbständige Etappen-Stationen). These stopover points were serviced by 178 people who clandestinely performed their logistics and information work. Eight of them were the naval attachés charged with the great stages, and another 30 consisted of stage chiefs (L (BE)), who were subordinate to the naval attachés in the large stages or who depended directly on the OKW/Ausl. (IX), in the loose stages. The stage chiefs were in charge of coordinating the 49 trusted men (Vertrauensmänner) who handled the supply activities (Vm (BE)) and the 91 informers (BE). These personnel consisted of Germans residing abroad with a good economic position and a social and professional situation suited to this type of service. Some of them were also reserve naval officers, although the majority of them were representatives of the large German shipping lines. The L (BE) were particularly successful people among the Germans residing abroad. The Vm instruction had improved compared to previous years, but there remained difficulties in acquiring the

¹⁰ Freedom of Information Act, Electronic Reading Room, German Intelligence Service (WWII), vol. 3, Military Intelligence 5 (MI-5), report 'Etappenorganisation der Kriegsmarine', 30 July 1946, accessed 27 June 2015.

[http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGENCE%20SERVICE%20\(WWII\).%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGENCE%20SERVICE%20(WWII).%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf)

¹¹ Kahn, *Hitler's Spies*, 233.

necessary personnel in the countries of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, especially after the Sudeten Crisis, which had reinforced the need for these personnel to be German.¹²

The Grossetappen Spanien-Portugal had four sub-units, which were coordinated by Commander Kurt Meyer Döhner, the German naval attaché in Madrid: Spain, Portugal, Spanish Morocco and the Canary Islands. The L (BE) of the Etappe Kanaren in 1938 was Jacob Ahlers, honorary consul in Santa Cruz de Tenerife. His business, which represented German shipping companies and participated in the banking sector, was one of the oldest and most important in the archipelago. Ahlers had collaborated with his partners to supply German auxiliary cruisers during the Great War and maintained one million marks in foreign currency. Such was his importance for the EO that faced with his disagreements with the local chief of the Auslandorganisation (AO), who was also his commercial rival, the Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine (German High Command of the Navy, OKM) intervened on his behalf before the AA.¹³ In April 1939, Wilhelm Rahn, an employee of Ahlers, was the provisional L (BE) of the Etappe Kanaren, a position in which he continued although Military Intelligence 5 (MI-5) didn't include Ahlers on the repatriation list of EO members in 1946.¹⁴

In Las Palmas, the EO acted through the Woermann Linie. Its director, Walter Vogel, and his employees Alfred Oehrens and Johann von Thun were all Vm (BE). Other members included the radio operator Herbert Mertens in Tenerife, the honorary consul

¹² Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA), RM 7/2503, Wilhelm Canaris to Skl, 15 Nov. 1938.

¹³ BA-MA, RM 7/1100, Captain Leopold Bürkner (OKW/Ausl IV) to OKM/M.Att., 31 Dec. 1938.

¹⁴ BA-MA, RM 7/1100, German naval attaché in Spain (M. Att.) to OKW/Ausl., 2 May 1939. Freedom of Information Act, Electronic Reading Room, German Intelligence Service (WWII), vol. 3, MI-5, report 'Etappenorganisation der Kriegsmarine', 30 July 1946, accessed 27 June 2015.

[http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGENCE%20SERVICE%20\(WWII\),%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGENCE%20SERVICE%20(WWII),%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf)

in Las Palmas Walter Sauermann, who was recruited as Vm (BE) in 1942, and the Vm (BE) Otto Bertram in Las Palmas.¹⁵ The latter had moved to the city in 1933 as the director of Deutsche Lufthansa for the district of the south Atlantic, where the military uprising against the republican government surprised him in the summer of 1936.¹⁶ Bertram repeatedly refused to allow an aeroplane from the German airline to fly in the service of the insurrectionists. Therefore, the latter ultimately requisitioned one along with its crew.¹⁷ At first, Bertram did not appear to be part of the EO. However, it actively collaborated with and was integrated into the EO during the war.

After 1940, the Vm were considered members of the Kriegsmarine and therefore subject to its service regulations and exempt from military service in Germany. As a result, the Vm (BE) were considered to hold the rank of lieutenant (Kapitänleutnant), whereas the L (BE) was equivalent to a lieutenant commander (Korveten Kapitän). The classified information that they used (e.g., instructions, codes) was guarded in peacetime by the naval attaché or a consul who was a career diplomat. In wartime, these individuals received monthly salaries of up to 500 RM for the L (BE) and 300 RM for the Vm (BE), which was paid to a blocked account in Germany. The operational costs could be drawn from the Kriegsmaterialfonds.¹⁸

¹⁵ Freedom of Information Act, Electronic Reading Room, German Intelligence Service (WWII), vol. 3, MI-5, report 'Etappenorganisation der Kriegsmarine', 30 July 1946, accessed 27 June 2015. [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGENCE%20SERVICE%20\(WWII\),%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGENCE%20SERVICE%20(WWII),%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf)

¹⁶ Archivo Histórico Provincial de Las Palmas (AHPLP), Gobierno, Varios, 1946, Otto Bertram to the civil gouverneur of Las Palmas, 3 June 1946.

¹⁷ Ángel Viñas, *Franco, Hitler y el estallido de la Guerra Civil: Antecedentes y consecuencias* (Madrid, 2001), 338-343.

¹⁸ Freedom of Information Act, Electronic Reading Room, German Intelligence Service (WWII), vol. 3, MI-5, report 'Etappenorganisation der Kriegsmarine', 30 July 1946, accessed 27 June 2015. [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGENCE%20SERVICE%20\(WWII\),%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGENCE%20SERVICE%20(WWII),%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf)

In addition to the EO, two other German secret services were located in the Canary Islands during the 1930s. One was the Beobachtung-Dienst (the Kriegsmarine's signal intelligence service; B-Dienst), which in 1935 visited the islands to open stations there. The Civil War impeded this objective although, during the struggle, small detachments in Las Palmas and Cádiz observed the Royal Navy in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, respectively. Because it was difficult to integrate these stations into the B-Dienst network, the results did not meet expectations. Therefore, instead, it was planned to use the EO network,¹⁹ which also supplied information of naval interest. The other secret service was the Kriegsorganisation (KO) of the Abwehr, with stations of the Ab-I-Marine (naval intelligence) subsection in Las Palmas and Santa Cruz de Tenerife, according to a declaration by the agent Wilhelm Simmross in the interrogation he underwent in 1946.²⁰ That same year, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) suspected that there had been a radio station in Gran Canaria, which would have been part of the Büro Plankert and manned by 20 specialists,²¹ a figure that seems excessive. In any case, the Abwehr continued to transmit naval information from the Canary Islands in 1944, years after it ceased the supply operations of the EO.²²

Supply service in the Etappe Kanaren, 1939-41

On 15 August 1939, the OKW/Ausl. ordered the German naval attaché in Madrid to prepare to supply German submarines in various Spanish ports, including Las Palmas

¹⁹ Faulkner, M., 'The Kriegsmarine, Signals Intelligence and the Development of the B-Dienst before the Second World War', *Intelligence and National Security* 25, No. 4 (2010), 521-546 (540-541).

²⁰ Rodríguez González, 'Los servicios secretos', 89.

²¹ Ros Agudo, *La guerra secreta*, 216 and 367.

²² Werner Rahn and Gerhard Schreiber (eds), *Kriegstagebuch der Seekriegsleitung 1939-1945*, Teil A (Bonn, 1995), vol. 54, 341 (15 Feb.1944).

and Santa Cruz de Tenerife.²³ The measure had been ordered in anticipation of the attack on Poland and the consequent intervention of France and Great Britain. For the same reason, many German ships were diverted towards friendly countries, such as Spain, including the ten ships that found themselves in the Canarian ports on 14 September 1939 (Table 1), to which should be added the steamship *Kersten Miles*, which arrived at Santa Cruz de La Palma on 26 October.²⁴ Among the ships were four oil tankers, with 21,810 tonnes of gasoil and 16,100 tonnes of fuel: the *Charlotte Schliemann* and the *Winnetou* in Las Palmas and the *Rekum* and the *Gedania* in Tenerife.²⁵ The first three remained at the disposition of the naval attaché to prepare two supply units for German submarines. In the ports of Ferrol and Vigo, the naval attaché had an additional five oil tankers, which represented six units of provisions for submarines and one for cruisers.²⁶

Table 1. German ships in the Canary Islands at 14 September 1939.

Harbour	Cargo ships	Tankers	Lufthansa ship
La Luz (Las Palmas, Gran Canaria)	<i>Corrientes</i>	<i>Charlotte Schliemann</i>	<i>Ostmark</i>
	<i>Chemnitz</i>	<i>Winnetou</i>	
	<i>Madrid</i>		
Santa Cruz de Tenerife	<i>Baden</i>	<i>Gedania</i>	
		<i>Rekum</i>	
Santa Cruz de La Palma	<i>Biscaya</i>		

Source: BA-MA, RM 7/2480, OKW/Ausl. to OKM/Skl., 14 Sept. 1939.

However, these preparations faltered on encountering the lack of cooperation from the Spanish government headed by General Franco. Despite the debt owed to Germany and

²³ BA-MA, RM 7/2480, OKW/Ausl. to M. Att. in Madrid, 15 Aug. 1939.

²⁴ Ludwig Dinkluge and Hans Jürgen Witthöft, *Die Deutsche Handelsflotte 1939-1945: Handelsschiffe, Blockadebrecher, Hilfskriegsschiffe* (Hamburg, 2001), vol. 2, 101.

²⁵ BA-MA, RM 7/2480, OKW/Ausl. to OKM/Skl., 14 Sept. 1939.

²⁶ BA-MA, RM 7/2480, OKW/Ausl. to OKM, 29 Sept. 1939.

Italy for their assistance during the Civil War, Spain's ideological proximity to these countries, and the diplomatic rapprochement between the Axis and Spain with respect to Spain's expansionist ambitions in Gibraltar and Africa, Spain declared itself neutral. The country was in no condition to become involved in another struggle.²⁷ OKW/Ausl. determined to move forward with the supply operations without the knowledge of the Spanish government. However, eventually, the German ambassador and naval attaché were able to obtain at the end of November 1939 the Spanish government's consent for German submarines to be supplied by German oil tankers in Spanish ports.²⁸ Shortly thereafter, the Etappe Kanaren performed its first supply operation when, on 13 December, the blockade runner *Pioneer*, which was on a voyage from Bioko (Equatorial Guinea) to Germany, departed Las Palmas after taking on 340 tonnes of fuel from the *Charlotte Schliemann*.²⁹

During the following months, preparations continued under significant changes. The *Corrientes* was converted into a supply ship and in January 1940 had to be provided with one unit of provisions for a battleship and two for submarines, whereas the *Winnetou*, equipped with one unit of provisions for a battleship, had to divide that unit into one for its own consumption and another for the *Charlotte Schliemann* for six months.³⁰ The two oil tankers were prepared at the beginning of February, and the

²⁷ Enrique Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill: España y Gran Bretaña en la Segunda Guerra Mundial (1939-1945)* (Barcelona, 2005), 52-62. Víctor Morales Lezcano, *Historia de la no beligerancia española durante la segunda guerra mundial* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1995), 35-40. Stanley G. Payne, *Franco y Hitler. España, Alemania, la Segunda Guerra Mundial y el Holocausto* (Madrid, 2008), 79-99. Joan Maria Thomàs, *Roosevelt y Franco: De la guerra civil española a Pearl Harbor* (Barcelona, 2007), 99-107.

²⁸ BA-MA, RM 7/2480, OKW/Ausl. IV, notes on meeting with M. Att., 14 November 1939, and M. Att. to OKW/Ausl., 30 Nov. 1939.

²⁹ BA-MA, RM 7/2480, OKW/Ausl. IV to OKM/Skl, 13 Dec. 1939. BA-MA, RM 7/2481, OKW/Ausl. IV to OKM/Skl, 11 Jan. 1940.

³⁰ BA-MA, RM 7/2481, OKW/Ausl. IV to OKM/Skl, 29 Jan. 1940.

Winnetou departed Las Palmas on 9 April to supply the auxiliary cruiser *Orion*, which arrived at Kobe (Japan) on 1 September after a voyage of five months.³¹ The *Corrientes* suffered an Allied attack with limpet mines on 9 May 1940, which was erroneously attributed to a cannon shot from the French ship *Le Rhin*. By the beginning of June, the damage had been repaired.³² Meanwhile, on 20 May, another oil tanker, the *Rudolf Albrecht*, arrived in Tenerife from the Azores after being transferred to the Canary Islands by order of the OKW/Ausl. IV.³³

Table 2. German blockade runners and supply ships from the Etappe Kanaren, 1939-42.

Ship	Type	Departure		Arrival	
		Harbor	Date	Harbor	Date
<i>Amasis</i>	Blockade runner	La Luz	24.09.39	Hamburg	18.10.39
<i>Chemnitz</i>	Blockade runner	La Luz	24.09.39	Taken by French Navy	28.09.39
<i>Biscaya</i>	Blockade runner	La Palma	07.10.39	Taken by Royal Navy	20.10.39
<i>Asuncion</i>	Blockade runner	La Luz	10.11.39	Hamburg	29.12.39
<i>Winnetou</i>	Supply ship	La Luz	09.04.40	Kobe	01.09.40
<i>Rekum</i>	Supply ship	Tenerife	17/18.07.40	St. Nazaire	08.10.40
<i>Eurofeld</i>	Supply ship	Tenerife	03.09.40	Bordeaux	01.03.41
<i>Ostmark</i>	Blockade runner	La Luz	05.09.40	Bordeaux	29.10.41
<i>Gedania</i>	Blockade runner	La Luz	14.10.40	St. Nazaire	02.11.40
<i>Madrid</i>	Blockade runner	La Luz	11.12.40	St. Nazaire	29.12.40
<i>Baden</i>	Blockade runner	Tenerife	16.12.40	Sunk by her crew	25.12.40
<i>Rudolf Albrecht</i>	Supply ship	Tenerife	22.03.41	Bordeaux	03.05.41
<i>Charlotte Schliemann</i>	Supply ship	La Luz	23/24.02.42	Yokohama	20.10.42
<i>Germania</i>	Blockade runner	Tenerife	04.03.42	Bordeaux	10.03.42

Sources: BA-MA, RW 5/347, Reichsverkehrsminister/Seeschiffahrtsmat to OKW, 30 Jan. 1941. BA-MA, RM 7/223, OKW/Ausl. IV to Skl, 13 Apr. 1942; report 904/42 by Skl, 16 Apr. 1942; report 2704/42 by Skl, 12 Dec. 1942. Dinklage and Witthöft, *Die Deutsche Handelsflotte*, vol. 1, 86-106.

³¹ BA-MA, RM 7/223, OKW/Ausl. IV to OKM/Skl, 13 April 1942.

³² Díaz Benítez, J. J., 'El ataque contra el buque alemán Corrientes en el Puerto de la Luz en mayo de 1940', in *XX Coloquio de Historia Canario-Americana* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2014), 1161-1170 (1165-1166).

³³ BA-MA, RM 7/2481, OKW/Ausl. IV to OKM/Skl, 18 May 1940.

In the documents of the SkI, there is not much information on the blockade runners that set off from the Etappe Kanaren until September 1940, when the EO took charge of those ships.³⁴ In addition to the ships that had left at the end of August 1939, before the war found them there, four ships departed between 24 September and 10 November of that year. However, only two reached Germany (Table 2). Subsequently, the departure of blockade runners from the archipelago was stopped until the Spanish government's declaration of non-belligerence in June 1940. Historians interpret this non-belligerence as a pre-belligerence, that is, a preparatory posture for entering the war on the side of the Axis, with the aim of satisfying Spanish ambitions in Gibraltar and Africa. These intentions were addressed in negotiations between September and November of that year, as was a more active collaboration with the German war effort, which did not comply with the obligations Spain should have observed as a neutral party.³⁵ Rear Admiral Kurt Fricke of the SkI was aware of the new situation, which he attributed to the following factors: French exhaustion, British loss of prestige and Spanish territorial ambitions that were only achievable with the help of the Axis. Therefore, he foresaw a decrease in the difficulties that the EO had encountered until that point and consequently thought the moment had arrived to expand the EO's activities.³⁶

³⁴ Freedom of Information Act, Electronic Reading Room, German Intelligence Service (WWII), vol. 3, MI-5, report 'Etappenorganisation der Kriegsmarine', 30 July 1946, accessed 27 June 2015. [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGENCE%20SERVICE%20\(WWII\),%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGENCE%20SERVICE%20(WWII),%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf)

³⁵ Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 111-134. Morales Lezcano, *Historia de la no beligerancia*, 241-261. Payne, *Franco y Hitler*, 103-141 and 183-202. David Wingeate Pike, *Franco y el Eje Roma-Berlín-Tokio* (Madrid, 2010), 83-121. Manuel Ros Agudo, *La Gran Tentación: Franco, el Imperio colonial y los planes de intervención en la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Barcelona, 2008), 215-268.

³⁶ BA-MA, RM 7/2482, OKM/SkI to M. Att. and OK/Ausl. IV, 14 June 1940.

However, the Etappe Kanaren was facing a serious problem. The provisions required for the supply units had to be transported from the Iberian Peninsula, which became impossible given the British control over navigation in the waters around the archipelago. On 31 July 1940, Great Britain included Spain and the Canary Islands within the navicert area to prevent smuggling on behalf of the Axis.³⁷ That month, provisions were to arrive at the islands in a steamship owned by the Spanish company Transmediterránea. However, in the following month, there were warnings of the reinforcement of British control, and in March 1941, it was declined to send on a shipment that had arrived in February.³⁸ At the beginning of April, given the difficulties of obtaining the necessary navicerts to send the supplies in Spanish ships, it was proposed to send the supplies by aeroplane.³⁹

This situation led the EO to try to acquire provisions in Argentina and to directly transport them from Argentina to the supply ships in the Canary Islands. In October 1940, the naval attaché reported that in Tenerife there were 13 tonnes of provisions acquired in Buenos Aires by the L (BE).⁴⁰ On 20 December, the acquisition of supplies in Argentina was authorised for a unit of battleship provisions for six weeks in Tenerife, at an estimated cost of 260,000 Argentine pesos.⁴¹ The payment would be made in dollars from Lisbon, and the provisions would be shipped at the beginning of March in the *Cabo de Hornos* (Transmediterránea) to the Board of Supplies (Junta de Abastos) of Tenerife from Ant. M. Delfino & Co.⁴² However, the operation was delayed due to the

³⁷ William N. Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade* (London, 1978), vol. I, 436-437.

³⁸ BA-MA, RM 7/2482, OKM to OKW/Ausl. IV, 23 July 1940, and M. Att. to OKW/Ausl. IV, 9 Aug. 1940. BA-MA, RM 7/2483, OKW/Ausl. IV (a) to OKM/AMA/C, 13 March 1941.

³⁹ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, M. Att. to OKW/Ausl., 10 April 1941.

⁴⁰ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, M. Att. to OKW/Ausl. IV, 31 Oct. 1940.

⁴¹ BA-MA, RM 7/2482, Minute on meeting with Verwaltungsoberspektor Martens, 20 Dec. 1940, and OKW/Ausl. IV to OKM/Skl, 23 Dec. 1940.

⁴² BA-MA, RM 7/2483, General Naval Office (OKM/AMA/CIc) to OKW/Ausl. IV, 8 Apr. 1941.

British insistence on ascertaining with the civil governor of Santa Cruz de Tenerife (and the Board's head) that the provisions were destined for consumption by the resident population. The governor was reluctant to continue the operation although Wilhelm Rahn suspected he would overcome his reticence in return for payment.⁴³ Finally, in mid-1941, the provisions reached Tenerife. A total of 60 tonnes was transferred to Las Palmas shortly before submarine supply operations in La Luz were suspended.⁴⁴

The first attempt to supply a submarine in the Port of La Luz dates to December 1940, when the *Corrientes* was ordered to supply the *U-37* during the night of 19 to 20 December. Intense British surveillance forced the operation to be cancelled.⁴⁵ In February 1941, an attempt was made to supply the *U-43* and the *U-37*. However, both operations were cancelled.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, in January, the Etappe Kanaren provided fuel and provisions to the Italian submarine *Capellini*, which had been repaired by the Woermann Linie in La Luz.⁴⁷ Different from the treatment of German submarines, which the *Corrientes* had to supply when they entered or left the operating zone, the repair of the *Capellini* complied with Spain's obligations as a neutral country.⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter, between 3 and 5 March, the *Corrientes* supplied the submarines *U-124*, *U-105* and *U-106* over three consecutive nights (Table 3) while they were travelling towards the waters of western Africa. The three provisions were made with the knowledge of the Spanish authorities, who collaborated in keeping them secret.⁴⁹

⁴³ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, OKM/AMA/Cic to OKM/Skl, 10 May 1941.

⁴⁴ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, OKM/AMA/Cic to OKW/Ausl. IV, 25 July 1941.

⁴⁵ BA-MA, RM 7/2482, OKW/Ausl. IV to OKM/Skl, 9 and 21 Dec. 1940. BA-MA, RM 7/2483, OKW/Ausl. IV to M. Att., 16 Jan. 1941.

⁴⁶ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, OKW/Ausl. IV to M. Att., 4, 6 and 12 Feb. 1941.

⁴⁷ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, M. Att. to OKW/Ausl. IV, 29 Jan. 1941.

⁴⁸ Juan José Díaz Benítez, 'The Italian Naval War in the Mid-Atlantic: the Canary islands 1940-1943', *The Mariner's Mirror* 100, No. 2 (2014), 186-197 (191-192).

⁴⁹ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, M. Att. to OKW/Ausl. IV, 20 Mar. 1941.

Table 3. Supply of German submarines in Spain, 1940-1942

Date	Supply ship	Harbor	U-boat	Gasoil (Tonnes)	Heavy oil (Tonnes)	Torpedos
30.01.40	<i>Thalia</i>	Cádiz	U-25	33,00	2,20	---
18.06.40	<i>Bessel</i>	Vigo	U-43	101,00	2,10	---
20.06.40	<i>Bessel</i>	Vigo	U-29	35,00	1,00	---
27.06.40	<i>Max Albrecht</i>	El Ferrol	U-30	60,00	2,00	---
01.07.40	<i>Max Albrecht</i>	El Ferrol	U-52	56,00	---	---
03.03.41	<i>Corrientes</i>	La Luz	U-124	40,00	1,00	---
04.03.41	<i>Corrientes</i>	La Luz	U-105	76,00	2,00	---
05.03.41	<i>Corrientes</i>	La Luz	U-106	50,00	0,65	---
24.06.41	<i>Corrientes</i>	La Luz	U-123	40,00	2,0	---
30.06.41	<i>Corrientes</i>	La Luz	U-69	71,00	---	---
05.07.41	<i>Corrientes</i>	La Luz	U-103	54,00	2,30	---
21.07.41	<i>Thalia</i>	Cádiz	U-109	86,60	2,80	3
31.07.41	<i>Thalia</i>	Cádiz	U-331	48,00	---	1
14.10.41	<i>Thalia</i>	Cádiz	U-564	118,00	3,00	---
15.10.41	<i>Thalia</i>	Cádiz	U-204	105,00	3,00	6
07.11.41	<i>Bessel</i>	Vigo	U-77	100,40	3,80	---
27.11.41	<i>Thalia</i>	Cádiz	U-652	88,00	1,50	---
27.11.41	<i>Bessel</i>	Vigo	U-96	100,00	3,30	---
11.12.41	<i>Bessel</i>	Vigo	U-574	121,00	1,40	---
12.12.41	<i>Bessel</i>	Vigo	U-575	8,34	---	---
14.12.41	<i>Bessel</i>	Vigo	U-434	92,50	3,00	---
17.05.42	<i>Max Albrecht</i>	El Ferrol	U-68	14,20	---	---
25.09.42	<i>Max Albrecht</i>	El Ferrol	U-66	10,00	---	---
Total				1.508,04	37,05	10

Source: BA-MA, RM 7/223. OKW/Ausland to Skl, 13 Apr. 1942; extract of report 1885/42 by OKW/Ausland, no date; extract of report 2308/42 by OKW/Ausland, 5 Nov. 1942. BA-MA, RM 7/222, Report 1950/41 by Skl, Nov. 31, 1941.

Note: There are different amounts between 1941 and 1942 documents. The data of 1941 report are used only for U-25 (no data in 1942 report).

Despite the success of these three operations, their repetition posed serious problems not only because of the need to replace the supplies but also with respect to security.

Accompanied by Verwaltungsobersinspektor Martens, Lieutenant Commander Lorek

flew to Las Palmas on 7 April 1941 to evaluate the difficulties on the ground.⁵⁰ On his return, the naval attaché sought to replace the *Corrientes* with the *Charlotte Schliemann* as the supply ship for submarines so as to increase the capacity of the *Corrientes* to store and transfer fuel to Santa Cruz de Tenerife, although Las Palmas was considered preferable for supplying submarines.⁵¹ The Spanish Navy contributed to preparing the *Corrientes* to perform new provisioning of submarines by facilitating the transfer of 100 tonnes of coal⁵² and transporting 250 barrels of lubricating oil and 32 tonnes of provisions in the oil tanker *Plutón*, which as a neutral warship was not under British naval control.⁵³

Another of the sheltered ships, the *Kersten Miles*, was moved on 22 April 1941 from Tenerife to Las Palmas to be repaired and transformed into a supply ship in the Woermann workshops.⁵⁴ Regarding the *Corrientes*, a decision was made for it to remain in Las Palmas,⁵⁵ where it provided fuel and provisions to three more submarines, although with difficulties (Table 3). The *U-123* entered La Luz during the night of 24 to 25 June. During the night, a projector illuminated the *Corrientes* several times.⁵⁶ On a return voyage, the *U-69* entered during the night of 29 to 30 June with a sick person on board who required medical attention. The arrival occurred with so little advance warning that it was difficult to obtain provisions without arousing suspicion.⁵⁷ The last

⁵⁰ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, M. Att. to OKW/Ausl., 7 Apr. 1941.

⁵¹ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, M. Att. to OKW/Ausl., 15 Apr. 1941.

⁵² BA-MA, RM 7/2483, M. Att. to OKW/Ausl. IV, 25 Apr. 1941.

⁵³ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, M. Att. to OKW/Ausl., 15 Apr. 1941. Archivo General de la Administración (AGA), Marina, Secretaría del Ministro, legajo 6, Spanish Minister of the Navy to General Commander of Ferrol, 9 May (probably 1941).

⁵⁴ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, M. Att. to OKW/Ausl., 7 Apr. 1941. BA-MA, RM 7/2483, OKW/Ausl. IV to OKM/Skl., 16 May 1941.

⁵⁵ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, OKW/Ausl. IV (a) to OKM/Skl., 17 May 1941.

⁵⁶ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, OKW/Ausl. IV (a) to OKM/Skl., 8 July 1941.

⁵⁷ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, M. Att. to OKW/Ausl., 8 July 1941.

submarine to visit was the *U-103*, which arrived during the night of 5 to 6 July and encountered so many difficulties that the naval attaché requested that no more provisioning be ordered until the 18th of that month.⁵⁸ Five days later, the *Kersten Miles* and the *Corrientes* had 1,747 tonnes of gasoil, 229 barrels of lubricating oil and 900 litres of distilled water for new operations.⁵⁹ However, no U-boat was resupplied again in the Canarian ports.

End of the Etappe Kanaren, 1941-4

The British consul in Las Palmas had indications that provisioning occurred in La Luz although he had not obtained irrefutable proof.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the British embassy in Madrid presented a formal protest on 16 July 1941, which forced the provisional suspension of the La Luz operations.⁶¹ However, despite the suspension, the German naval attaché managed to persuade the minister of the Spanish Navy to authorise the shipment of eight torpedoes to Las Palmas in the *Contramaestre Casado*, with the requirement that the provisioning of submarines be resumed.⁶² British pressure forced the *Corrientes* and the *Charlotte Schliemann* to be transferred in September to the port's interior, from which they could not supply the submarines.⁶³ After being moved again to the exterior, another British protest in November 1941 did not achieve their immediate

⁵⁸ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, M. Att. to OKW/Ausl., 6 July 1941.

⁵⁹ M. Att. to OKW/Ausl., 23 July 1941.

⁶⁰ National Archives (NA), FO 371/26929, British Consul in Las Palmas to Admiralty, 15 July 1941.

⁶¹ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, OKM/Skl. to Commander of the U-boats (Befehlshaber der U-Boote, B.d.U.), 16 July 1941. *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (DGFP), Series D (1937-1945), vol. XIII: *The War Years, June 23 – December 11, 1941* (Washington, 1964), 168-169, German Foreign Office, memorandum, 18 July 1941.

⁶² NARA, RG 242, T-1022, R-3013, File PG-48852-NID, German Naval Attaché's war diary, 16 July 1941.

⁶³ DGFP, vol. XIII, 647-648, German Ambassador in Spain (Gerhard von Stohrer) to German Foreign Ministry (Joachim von Ribbentrop), 14 Oct. 1941.

return to the interior of the port.⁶⁴ However, in any case, the provisioning of submarines by the *Etappe Kanaren* ended.

In February 1942, the *Charlotte Schliemann* departed the port to supply the auxiliary cruisers *Michel* and *Stier*, taking with it the majority of the remaining fuel.⁶⁵ In September of that year, the *Etappe Kanaren* only possessed 200 tonnes of gasoil.⁶⁶ The Anglo-American landings in northwest Africa (Operation Torch) increased the difficulty of the EO's activities. On the one hand, the landings resulted in the interruption of the regular flight between the Canary Islands and the Peninsula, which was frequently used by the EO to transport personnel and materials. Thus, at the beginning of 1943, Vogel and Sauermann had to return to the archipelago using false documents on a Spanish ship.⁶⁷ On the other hand, the landings enabled the Allies to install air bases in Morocco,⁶⁸ from where they could frequently fly over Canarian waters. Given the increasingly reduced prospects of resuming the provisioning operations, on March 1944, the *Corrientes* and the *Kersten Miles* ceased to be considered supply ships.⁶⁹ It was also determined that Johann von Thun and Otto Bertram would stop acting as Vm after 30 June of that year.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Archivo General del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores (AMAE), R-2150/85, British Ambassador in Spain (Samuel Hoare) to Spanish Foreign Ministry (Ramón Serrano Suñer), 20 Nov. 1941.

⁶⁵ BA-MA, RM 7/223, OKM/Skl., report 658/42, 25 March 1942.

⁶⁶ BA-MA, RM 7/223, OKM/Skl., report 2308/42, 5 Nov. 1942.

⁶⁷ NARA, RG 242, T-1022, R-3013, File PG-48855-NID, German Naval Attaché's war diary, 15 and 20 Jan. 1943, and 14 and 16 Feb. 1943.

⁶⁸ Clay Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War*, vol. II: *The Hunted 1942-1945* (Londres, 2000), 109. Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II*, vol. X: *The Atlantic Battle Won, May 1943-May 1945* (New Jersey, 2001), 129.

⁶⁹ BA-MA, RM 7/225, OKM/Skl., report 837/44, 14 March 1944.

⁷⁰ NARA, RG 242, T-1022, R-3014, File PG-48857-NID, German Naval Attaché's war diary, 30 March 1944.

In contrast to the paralysed provisioning operations, the Etappe Kanaren actively intervened in the escape of the crew of the *U-167*. It was not the first time that it facilitated the escape of German sailors. In 1941, it received several dozen crewmembers of the pocket battleship *Graf Spee*, who escaped from Argentina in Spanish ships as ‘stowaways’.⁷¹ On arriving at the Canary Islands, they disembarked and remained there until a special Deutsche Lufthansa flight transported them to Germany.⁷² The *U-167* was severely damaged on 5 April 1943 by British planes, after which its commander determined to sink it in Spanish waters south of Gran Canaria.⁷³ The Spanish government should have retained the survivors. Instead, it allowed their escape during the night of 12 to 13 April, when a Woermann tugboat carried them out of the Port of La Luz to the *U-455*.⁷⁴

However, the collaboration of the Spanish government increasingly diminished. In August 1942, Spanish foreign policy had begun a slow turn towards strict neutrality as a consequence of the replacement of the Falangist Ramón Serrano Suñer in the Foreign Ministry by the monarchist and neutralist Francisco Gómez Jordana.⁷⁵ The Spanish collaboration with the Axis, which broke the obligations imposed by the condition of neutrality, continued over the following months until, in September 1943, Anglo-

⁷¹ Juan José Díaz Benítez, *La Armada española y la defensa de Canarias durante la II Guerra Mundial* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2008), 117-121.

⁷² NARA, RG 242, T-1022, R-3013, File PG-48851-IND, German Naval Attaché’s war diary, 27 February, and 13 and 29 March 1941.

⁷³ César O’Donnell Torralba, ‘Hundimiento del submarino alemán U-167 en aguas de Gran Canaria durante la II Guerra Mundial’, *Revista Española de Historia Militar*, No. 3 (2000), 156-166.

⁷⁴ NARA, RG 242, T-1022, R-3013, File PG-48855-NID, German Naval Attaché’s war diary, 13 and 14 Apr. 1943.

⁷⁵ Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 278-282. Payne, *Franco y Hitler*, 276-282. Pike, *Franco y el Eje*, 184-194. Klaus-Jorg Ruhl, *Franco, Falange y III Reich: España durante la II Guerra Mundial* (Madrid, 1986), 119. Emilio Sáenz-Francés, *Entre la Antorcha y la Esvástica: Franco en la encrucijada de la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Madrid, 2009), 269-273. Javier Tusell, *Franco, España y la II Guerra Mundial: Entre el Eje y la neutralidad* (Madrid, 1995), 348-349. Joan Maria Thomàs, *La batalla del wolframio: Estados Unidos y España de Pearl Harbor a la Guerra Fría (1941-1947)* (Madrid, 2010), 27-28.

American pressure intensified on a Spain that depended on the economic assistance of the Allies to survive.⁷⁶ Subsequently, the Francoist regime was obligated to remove the Blue Division from the Russian front, to dismantle the organisation of the *Abwehr* in the Strait of Gibraltar and, after the North American embargo of Spanish petrol imports in the first half of 1944, to end the export of tungsten to Germany.⁷⁷

The Spanish government's change of attitude made the EO's activities increasingly difficult. In September 1943, the *Corrientes* and the *Kersten Miles* were moved definitively to the interior of the Port of La Luz, where they were guarded by a marine infantry detachment and left unused for navigation.⁷⁸ Regarding the *U-167*, its sinking was been so hasty that it had been impossible to destroy all of its classified materials. Admiral Dönitz understood the reticence of the minister of the Spanish Navy regarding blowing up the remains of the submarine. Therefore, he kept Midshipman Semmel in Las Palmas, with the aim of recovering sensitive material.⁷⁹ However, even this proved impossible. In October 1943, a fisherman turned in a code-making machine from the sunken submarine to the Spanish Navy.⁸⁰ In June 1944, the naval attaché continued to consider it necessary to destroy the submarine's remains. However, he resigned himself to the transfer of Semmel together with the crew of the *Corrientes* to the Peninsula.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 321-420.

⁷⁷ Thomàs, *La batalla del wolframio*, 117-204. Carlos Collado Seidel, *El telegrama que salvó a Franco: Londres, Washington y la cuestión del régimen (1942-1945)* (Barcelona, 2016), 157-213.

⁷⁸ AMAE, R-2150/85, Chief of the Navy's General Staff (AJEMA) to General Commander of the Canary Islands Naval Base, 27 Sept. 1943.

⁷⁹ AGA, Marina, Estado Mayor de la Armada (EMA), caja 719, M. Att. to Spanish ministry of the Navy, 19 July 1943.

⁸⁰ BA-MA, RM 7/1335, M. Att. to OKM, 14 Oct. 1943.

⁸¹ BA-MA, RM 7/1832, M. Att. to OKM, 23 June 1944.

Table 4. Italian and Danish ships in the Canary Islands, November 1943

Harbor	Ships	
	Italian	Danish
La Luz	<i>Cherca</i>	<i>Linda</i>
	<i>Orata</i>	<i>Thyra S.</i>
	<i>Trovatore</i>	
Santa Cruz de Tenerife	<i>Andalusia</i>	
	<i>Madda</i>	
	<i>Teresa Schiaffino</i>	

Source: AMAE, R-2151/2, High Chief of the Navigation Services (Undersecretary of the Merchant Marine) to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 Nov. 1943.

The frictions between the Etappe Kanaren and the Spanish authorities were most notable in the dispute that arose regarding the Danish and Italian ships that were sheltered in the island ports (Table 4). In October 1943, after Italy had signed the armistice, the Allies compelled the new Italian government to confiscate the ships of that nationality that were in Spain and to place them at the disposal of the Allies. In Las Palmas, the EO tried to retain the ships on the pretext that they had not paid their debts to the Woermann Linie and even considered sabotaging them there and in Tenerife, which must have been prevented by the Spanish marine infantry detachments that were on board.⁸² Despite the resistance of the German consuls and the Woermann Linie, the Spanish government allowed the departure of the Danish ships in March 1944 and of four Italian vessels in June and July of the same year. The *Trovatore* and the *Madda* were retained as compensation for the ships sunk by the Italian Regia Marina.⁸³

⁸² NARA, RG 242, T-1022, R-3014, File PG-48856-NID, German Naval Attaché's war diary, 9-12 and 28 Sept., and 4, 15 and 18 Oct. 1943.

⁸³ NARA, RG 242, T-1022, R-3014, Files PG-48857-NID (March and June) and PG-48858-NID (July), German Naval Attaché's war diary, 18 March, 19 and 23 June 1943, and 3 and 16 July 1943.

The Spanish actions in the attempt to blow up the remains of the *U-167* and the exit of the Italian and Danish ships did not favour German interests. However, this distancing did not prevent the Francoist regime from hiding at war's end the actions of the German secret services in Spain, to which it had been an accomplice. The Allies wanted to prevent Spain from becoming a Nazi refuge. Therefore, beginning in 1945, they solicited the Spanish government to extradite a substantial number of Germans. However, many of these German obtained the protection of influential Spaniards. Thus, only a small number of those who had been requested were turned over to the Allies until the repatriation programme was definitively ended in 1949. The attitude of the Spanish government towards the repatriation demands of the Allies did not differ from that of other neutral countries, such as Portugal, Ireland and Turkey. However, Spain had differed from these countries in its previous diplomatic alignment with the Axis.⁸⁴

The Canary Islands were no exception. Faced with a request for information from the Foreign Ministry, the captain-general of the archipelago, Francisco García-Escámez e Iniesta, sent a report on the Germans demanded by the Allies. Among them were EO members Jacob Ahlers, Wilhelm Heinrich Rahn, Otto Bertram, Walter Sauermann and Walter Vogel although the captain-general asserted that there was no reason to open a dossier on them.⁸⁵ In August 1946, the British embassy in Madrid presented four lists of Germans for repatriation in order from highest to lowest priority, with a total of 732 names. Jacob Ahlers and Otto Bertram were included on the second-priority repatriation list, and Walter Vogel appeared on the fourth-priority list.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Carlos Collado Seidel, *España, refugio nazi* (Madrid, 2005), 54-125.

⁸⁵ Archivo General Militar de Ávila (AGMA), Subsecretaría del Ministerio del Ejército, caja 21202, Captain general of the Canary Islands to Ministry of the Army, 9 June 1945.

⁸⁶ NA, FO 371/60437, Priority Lists I, II, III and IV, attached to British Ambassador at Madrid, no. 341, 16 Aug. 1946.

Conclusions

It is difficult to evaluate the efficacy of the Etappe Kanaren. In 1946, MI-5 considered the EO to have had substantial success as a naval supply service until the end of 1941.⁸⁷ In the Canary Islands, the captain of the *Eurofeld* complained regarding the services performed in Tenerife. In contrast, the captain of the *Winnetou* demonstrated a much more positive impression of the treatment received in Las Palmas, addressing a thank-you note to the local personnel for their “always generous, attentive and benevolent” assistance. Another indication of the efficacy of the Etappe Kanaren is the compensation proposed by the naval attaché in Madrid, such as the promotion of Lieutenant (naval reserve) Otto Bertram to Lieutenant Commander in December 1940 for having placed his radio operator and personal contacts at the service of the Etappe and having organised the special flights to Tenerife. The naval attaché also proposed awarding the War Merit Cross (Kriegsverdienstkreuz) Second Class to Walter Vogel and his employees Alfred Öhrens and Johann von Thun as well as to Captain Georg Lanker, First Officer Werner Gottschalk and Chief Engineer Kurt Rieger of the *Corrientes* shortly after the three consecutive submarine supply operations in La Luz in March 1941. Paul Müller, who had collaborated for nearly one month in preparing the *Rudolf Albrecht* to house prisoners, was also nominated for the same award.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Freedom of Information Act, Electronic Reading Room, German Intelligence Service (WWII), vol. 3, MI-5, report ‘Etappenorganisation der Kriegsmarine’, 30 July 1946, accessed 27 June 2015. [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGEN%20SERVICE%20\(WWII\).%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/GERMAN%20INTELLIGEN%20SERVICE%20(WWII).%20%20VOL.%203_0014.pdf)

⁸⁸ BA-MA, RM 7/2483, OKW/Ausl. IV (a) to OKM, 13 and 14 Dec. 1940, and 11 and 27 March 1941.

A better way to approach the influence of the Etappe Kanaren during the Second World War is to compare its activities with those of the Etappe Las Palmas and the Etappe Tenerife during the Great War. In both cases, German ships sheltered at the Canarian ports were used to supply auxiliary cruisers, and Allied pressure was able to stop these operations after several years. However, there are differences among these cases (such as the provisioning of submarines in the Port of La Luz), which originate in the different positions of the Spanish government. During the Great War, Spain tried to maintain strict neutrality against pressure to adopt a benevolent neutrality that favoured France and Great Britain. In contrast, during the Second World War, the Francoist regime collaborated with the Axis, at least beginning in November 1939 and more intensely after the declaration of non-belligerence in June 1940 until the summer of 1942, when the slow return to strict neutrality began, which was accelerated by Allied pressure beginning in September 1943.

The Etappe Kanaren developed similarly to the rest of the Grossetappen Spanien-Portugal according to the previously mentioned changes in Spanish foreign policy. However, two notable differences originate in the Etappe Kanaren's geostrategic location more than 1,000 kilometres south of the Peninsula. The first is that all of the supply ships for auxiliary cruisers prepared by the Grossetappen Spanien-Portugal set sail from this archipelago, which was favourably located on the routes toward the south Atlantic. The second is that this distance made maritime transport between the Peninsula and the islands particularly vulnerable to Allied control, which was aided by the British influence over the principal Canarian ports. Despite the search for solutions, such as air transport, the collaboration of the Spanish Navy or the acquisition of provisions in Buenos Aires, Allied pressure was able to cause the submarine supply

operations in La Luz to begin late, in March 1941, and to cease in July of that same year, whereas in the Etappe Spanien, they began in January 1940 and continued until September 1942 (Table 3). In sum, the activity of the Etappe Kanaren as a supply service developed amidst substantial obstacles, which ultimately caused the operation to cease in March 1942 after the departure of the *Charlotte Schliemann* and the *Germania*, although not before having made a significant contribution to the German naval effort in the Atlantic.