



The U-166 was the only German U-boat sunk in the Gulf. It was a Type IXC U-boat with an overall length of 252 ft, width of 23 ft, speed of 18 knots surfaced and 7 knots submerged. She had a test depth of 750 ft. She had a range of approximately 24,000 nautical miles at 10 knots. The crew ranged from 48 to 56 men. Popular belief has long held that the U-166 had been sunk by a torpedo dropped from a U.S. Coast Guard Utility Amphibian aircraft over 100 miles away from its actual location on August 1, 1942.



Assigning a "kill" to the Coastguardsmen seemed obvious. U-166 was the only German submarine lost in the Gulf of Mexico during the war. U-166 had been correctly identified

as the boat that sank the Robert E. Lee near the mouth of the Mississippi, and it would be an easy thing for U-166 to have traveled the relatively short distance to Isles Dernieres in the two days since that attack. It seemed obvious, on the face of it, that Coast Guard had indeed sunk U-166. It is now believed that the sub was sunk two days earlier by depth charges from the Robert E. Lee's naval escort, the U.S. Navy sub-chaser, PC-566. Another German submarine, the U-171, which was operating in the Gulf at the same time, may actually have been the vessel spotted by the aircraft.

By the end of the month, the U-166 was off the mouth of the Mississippi River, in an excellent position both to intercept traffic coming in and out of New Orleans and also to encounter tankers steaming eastward from the Texas Gulf ports. The crew was getting anxious for a suitable target; they hadn't come five thousand miles to sink fishing boats. But patience paid off. On the afternoon of July 30, U-166's lookouts spotted smoke away to the southeast. It was the passenger steamer Robert E. Lee. Neither the steamer nor the submarine would survive the coming encounter.



Like many U.S.-flagged ships, Robert E. Lee found herself pressed into wartime service after Pearl Harbor. Repainted in an overall haze gray scheme to reduce her visibility, in July 1942 she sailed from Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, carrying 270 passengers. Several of those aboard were survivors of other ships torpedoed by German U-Boats. The conditions aboard were appalling. In the heat of the summer, without air conditioning and overcrowded, the ship plodded north into the Gulf of Mexico. There was a shortage of fresh food and water on board, During the night, the ship was obliged to run

"blacked out," which necessitated shutting the cabin portholes and with them, all effective ventilation.

With conditions aboard Robert E. Lee deteriorating by the hour, the ship's master, tried to divert the ship to Tampa, Florida, to put his passengers safely ashore. When he couldn't obtain a pilot to steer the ship into the harbor, he was forced to turn once again for New Orleans. With PC-566 as escort, Robert E. Lee began steaming west-northwest, on a voyage she would never complete.



PC-566 was assigned to patrol and escort operations in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean. While escorting the Robert E. Lee, she had her brief and dramatic encounter with U-166. Although the ship's crew was convinced they'd sunk a U-Boat, their claim was eventually rejected in favor of Coast Guard aircraft's claim.

During the years 1942 and 1943, a fleet of 24 German U-boats cruised the Gulf, seeking to disrupt the vital flow of oil carried by tankers from ports in Texas and Louisiana. They succeeded in sending 56 vessels to the bottom; 39 of these are now believed to be in state or Federal waters off Texas, Louisiana, and Florida. After their initial, devastating success, U-boat attacks in the Gulf became rare by the end of 1943 after merchant vessels began cruising in armed convoys. The opening of the "Big Inch" pipeline from Texas to New Jersey also contributed to freeing the war effort from relying on ships to transport crude oil.

The U-166 was discovered in May 2001 during a routine pipeline survey conducted by C&C Technologies for BP and Shell. The submarine lies in 5,000 feet of water within a mile of her last victim, the passenger ship SS Robert E. Lee, just where the crew of the PC-566 had reported the possible sinking.



The model displayed by the museum is a 1/5 scale model of a Type VIIC German submarine. The most prolific type produced by Germany in WWII. The Type VIIC was 220 ft long, 24 ft wide, it had a speed of 17 knots surfaced and 7 knots submerged, its test depth was 750 ft. They had a crew of between 44 and 52 men and had a range of 15,000 nautical miles at 10 knots. The model, although not of the same type as the U-166, is being used to depict the actual U-boat menace that was in the Gulf of Mexico between 1942 & 1943, as witnessed by the sinking of the SS Robert E. Lee by the U-166 in 1942.

Universal Studios built this radio-controlled model for the making of their movie U-571 in 2000. The movie was purely fictional in its depiction of US forces seizing the German Enigma machine.

After the movie was complete the model was sold to a private individual and through trades, became the property of the Mississippi Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum of Biloxi.



In preparation for Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, the Museum placed the model behind the Federal Courthouse in Biloxi for safekeeping. Events conspired to damage the model despite this precaution. In March of 2008 the United States Submarine Veterans Incorporated, Tullibee Base of

Mississippi, undertook the refurbishment of the model as their project for that year.



In order to have the deck guns made the Tullibee Base enlisted one of the craftsmen from the Seabee Base of Gulfport. He produced three great replicas and they were mounted.



After mounting the deck guns and completing the topside arrangement the Model was ready for display.



Maritime & Seafood Industry Museum

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Presents the story of:

*SS Robert E.
Lee and the
German U-boat
U-166*