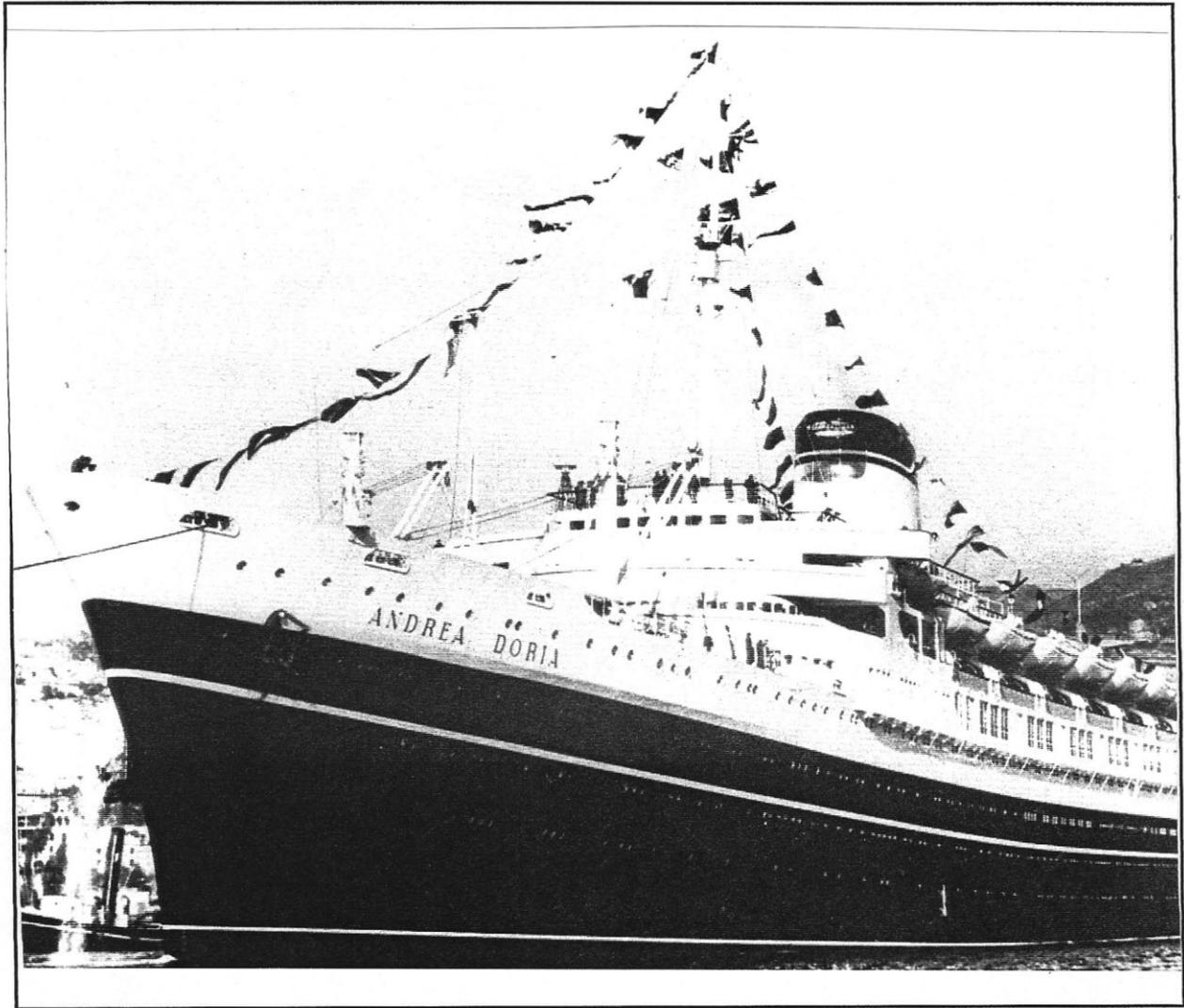


2016 PDF edition

Old Familiar Strains

A newsletter for Collectors of Radio Strain Insulators and related items
Volume 3 No. 3

June 1996



Andrea Doria

by Dan Howard

[Most of this information was adapted from *Disasters at Sea* - by permission]

Another *Titanic*? As I learned the story of the wreck of the *Andrea Doria*, I was struck by the similarities of the damage that caused the demise of both ships.

(Continued on page 4)

Editorial

CQD! SOS! Almost since its beginning, radio has been inexorably connected to shipping. For almost 100 years, radio has provided a link between ships at sea and the rest of the world. While ship wrecks often represent low points our history, their salvage presents unique opportunities for collectors of historically-significant items. I am pleased to profile five historical antenna insulators in this issue and to tell the stories of the ships from which they came.

For a well-written history of the part radio has played in making shipping safer, I recommend SOS to the Rescue by Karl Baarslag.

The next issue is planned for sometime this Fall. As in 1995, I am planning an extended-length issue to take the place of the August and October issues. The longer length allows me to present a longer, more in-depth presentation of a manufacturer. This year's focus is planned on the M.M. Fleron Company. (Any information, pictures, ads, would be appreciated).

John Lewis recently called to get permission to reprint a back issue of OFS to distribute from his table at an insulator show. What a great idea! Although OFS is not copyrighted (see publisher's notes), I appreciate John's courtesy in asking. If you get the chance to publicize OFS in some fashion, I would like to hear about it.

Please Note: Much of the information in this issue is reprinted by permission of others and remains copyright-protected. Please do not reprint articles from this issue without contacting the appropriate parties.

John Lewis also sent me a list of his military insulators. I am still seeking information in this area. Lists of military numbers and codes from your insulators would really help me out. John has a few military-style insulators that he would like to sell or trade. See the classified's on page 13.

You are cordially invited to join **Bob Stahr, Carol McDougald**, me and other collectors at the National Insulator Show July 19th - 21st in Long Beach, CA. Bob Stahr has offered space on his table to publicize Old Familiar Strains and one or the other of us is likely to be hanging around there. I plan to set up a contest entry featuring insulators from Kwajalein, two of which are shown in this issue. For more information on the show please contact Dwayne Anthony at (909) 888-6417.

(Continued from page 1)

Although the instruments of damage were different (*Andrea Doria* was impaled by another ship) both New York-bound luxury liners were torn open amidships, below the water line, sustaining damage to multiple water-tight compartments.

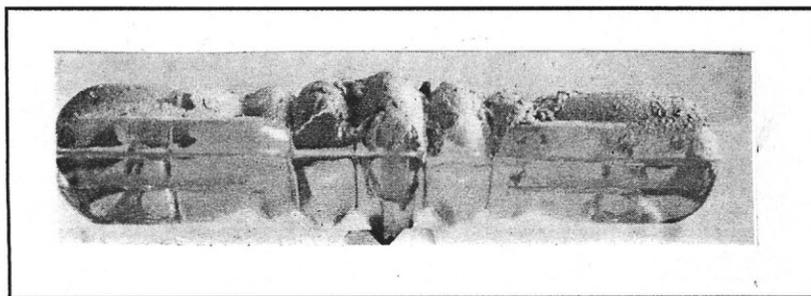
Andrea Doria set off on her maiden voyage on January 14th, 1953. She had been built in Genoa, Italy, by Ansaldo SpA for Italia-Societa per Azioni di Navigazione. Her christening marked the beginning of the reconstruction of the Italian merchant fleet following World War II. Three years later, on July 17, 1956, she left Genoa for New York on her 51st, and final, voyage.

On the afternoon of July 25th, less than a day out of New York, *Andrea Doria* entered an area of thick fog which reduced visibility to 1/2 mile. For safety, the ship's speed was reduced to 21 knots. At 10:40 pm, a pip was sighted on the ship's radar screen. As the pip drew closer, the *Andrea Doria* began sounding her fog horn at intervals. Suddenly, the lights of the *Stockholm* appeared, dead ahead. Captain Calamai ordered a sharp turn to port to avoid the collision. As she began to turn, the *Stockholm's* bow was driven almost 30 feet into *Andrea Doria's* starboard side.

Captain Calamai quickly ordered the SOS. He waited to give the order to abandon ship, however. An 18 degree list to starboard had rendered the port side lifeboats useless! With lifeboat capacity for only two-thirds of the passengers, the captain was afraid of stampeding the passengers if he acted unwisely.

Eventually, neighboring ships, including the *Stockholm* which had since withdrawn into the fog, responded to the SOS and rescued all but 47 of those on board. The ship was reported sunk at 5:30 on the morning of July 26, 1956.

In the April, 1973, issue of "Cross Arms Magazine," Bob Wilson presented this picture of an antenna insulator from the *Andrea Doria*. Partially obscured by coral, it appears to be similar to a Pyrex 7-inch "amateur transmitting" insulator.



Sources:

"Collector of the Month." *Cross Arms Magazine*, April 1973. [used by permission]
Watson, Milton H. *Disasters at Sea*, Sparkford, England: Patrick Stephens LTD, 1995.
[used by permission]

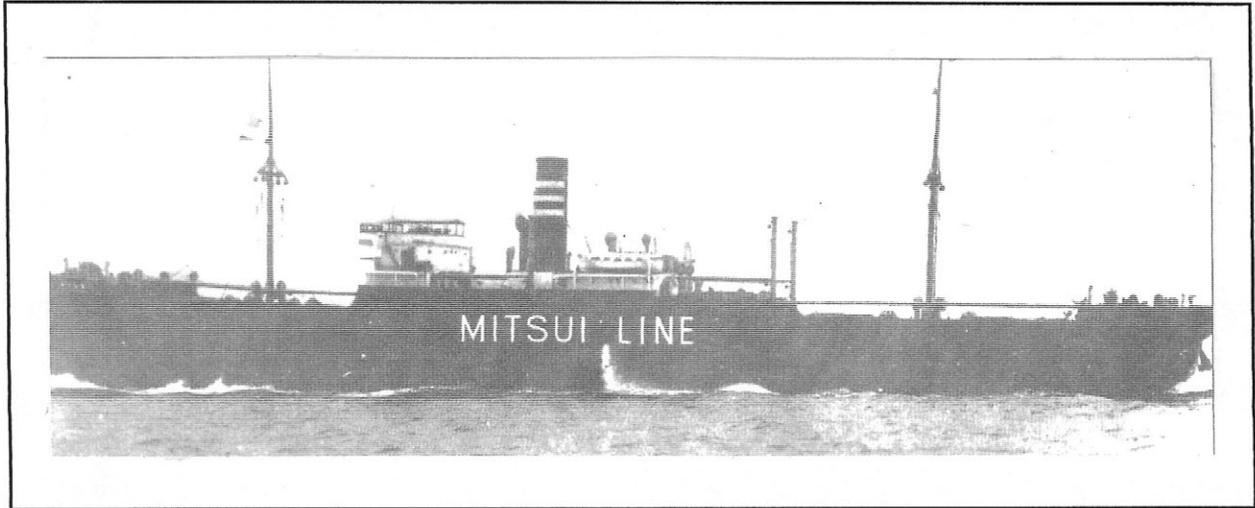
Photo of ship courtesy of Patrick Stephens LTD.

Akibasan Maru and Asakaze Maru

by Dan Howard

[Much of this information was adapted from *In the Arms of the Sea* - by permission]

As the Allied forces island-hopped across the Pacific during World War II, both sides endured heavy losses of personnel and equipment. Aircraft bombed strategic targets, including Japanese warships and freighters, before the Allied landing on Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

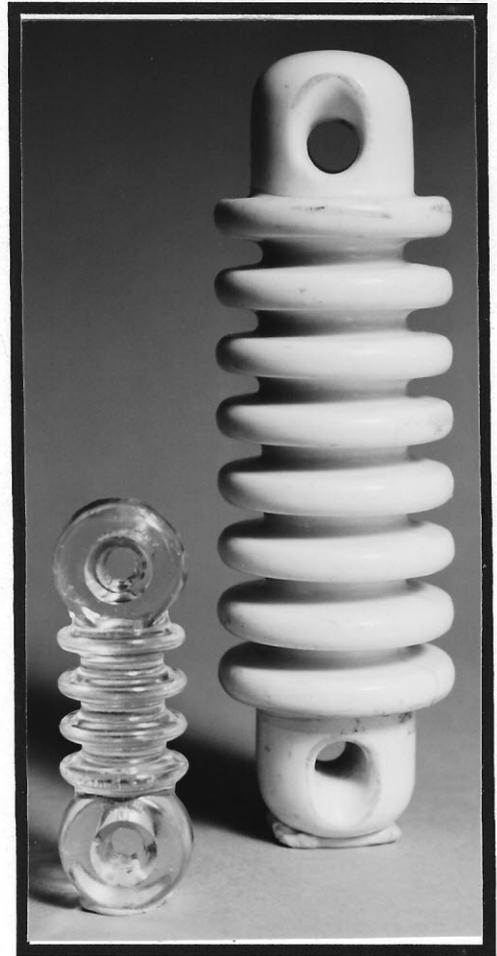
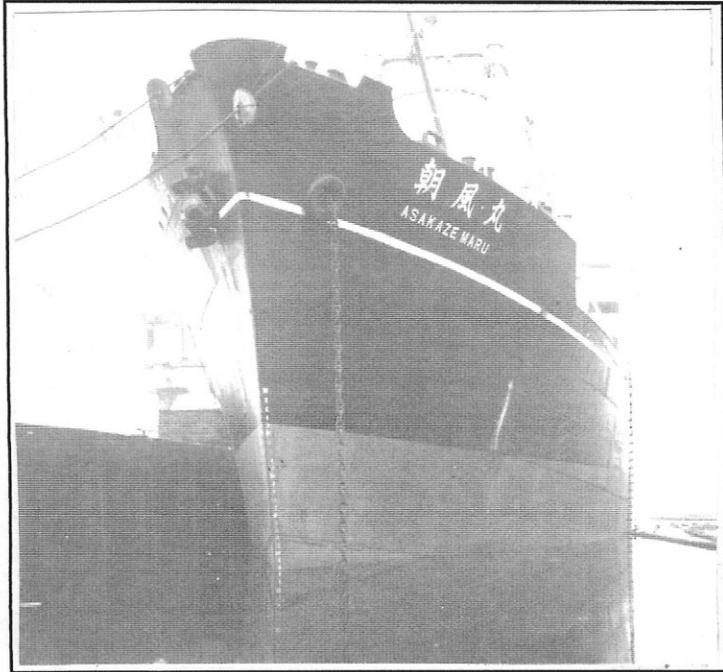


The *Akibasan Maru*, the 389 foot long freighter shown above had a capacity of 4,607 tons and was sunk in Kwajalein's lagoon. Originally built in 1924, she was resupplying the Japanese garrison with beer, sake, and aircraft wings. On January 30th, 1944, the day of the main Allied invasion, a bomb tore a hole in her side and she sank. The ship now rests in 160 feet of water.

Most of the wrecks at Kwajalein have been identified and mapped and are popular destinations for divers. Mark Miller, a diver from the Seattle area, moved to Kwajalein in 1985 and published *In the Arms of the Sea: a Historical Guide to the Shipwrecks of Kwajalein Atoll*. Mr. Miller's book tells the story of *Akibasan Maru* and many of the other wrecks at Kwajalein.

Although I understand that it was recently made illegal, salvaging souvenirs from the wrecked ships was once a common pastime for visitors to the islands. Last year, I was given a radio strain insulator which was allegedly salvaged from the wreck of *Akibasan Maru* many years ago. Unfortunately, it has passed through several hands over the years, making absolute authentication impossible. The photo on the following page shows the insulator. It is glazed white clay, 7½" by 2¼" with no markings of any kind.

The 3½" by 1⅛" glass insulator in the photograph is believed to have come from *Asakaze Maru*, shown below. It is embossed with Japanese characters which I have been unable to translate. *Asakaze Maru*, built in 1938, was also sunk in Kwajalein lagoon by U.S. naval aircraft on December 5th, 1943. A freighter, like *Akibasan Maru*, she was 425 feet long with a capacity of 6,517 gross tons. She carried, among other things, a small automobile on her final voyage.



I have enjoyed corresponding with divers like Mark Miller and Martha West while working on this story. Mrs. West and her husband Ray were recreational SCUBA divers while they worked on Kwajalein. Now stateside and retired in Arizona, she thinks back fondly on weekends spent souvenir hunting. These insulators, and others, were among many items which they found on their dives. While she confirms the origins and authenticity of the insulators, she was unable to say specifically from which ship each came.

Sources:

Miller, Mark S. In the Arms of the Sea: A Historical Guide to the Wrecks of Kwajalein Atoll, Enigma Books, Gig Harbor, WA. 1991. [used by permission of Mark Miller]

West, Martha L., Letters: 29 August 95, 12/95

Photos of ships courtesy of Mark Miller.

Photo of insulators courtesy of John Webster, Portland Oregon.

Bianca C: The Ship that Sank Twice

by Dan Howard

[Most of this information appeared previously in *Cross Arms Magazine* or is adapted from *Disasters at Sea* - by permission]

Over her 17 year life, *Bianca C* bore four names and sank twice.

The *Marechal Petain* was christened and launched by the Vichy government on 16 June 1944. The ship was then towed to Port de Bouc where she remained in an incomplete state. When the Germans withdrew from France, the *Marechal Petain* was scuttled by the retreating troops. In 1946 the vessel was renamed *La Marseillaise*, refloated and towed to Toulon and later back to La Ciotat for completion. (1:135)

In 1957, after serving Messageries Maritimes for several years on the Marseille to Yokohama line, the ship was sold to the Arosa Line who renamed her *Arosa Sky*. Arosa sailed the ship between Bremerhaven, West Germany, and New York City. When Arosa neared bankruptcy in October, 1958, the ship was sold to her final owner, Costa, of Genoa, Italy. Costa renamed her the *Bianca C* in 1959 and set her sailing between Naples, Genoa, and La Guaira, a port near Caracas, Venezuela.

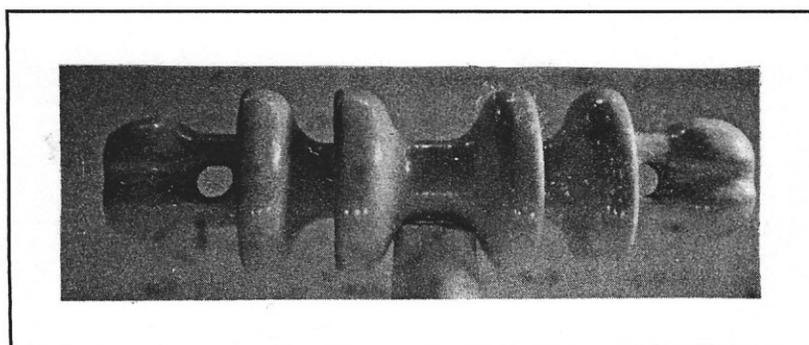


Her second sinking occurred on October 22, 1961. While at anchor at St. George, Grenada, a stop in the West Indies, the ship suffered an engine room explosion which ignited a fire. The ship's 400 passengers and crew of 273 were evacuated by the ship's life boats and various harbor craft. Remarkably, only four perished in the accident. The British frigate

Londonderry made an attempt to tow the burning ship to shallow water or to beach her. However, she sprang a leak and sank in 160 feet of water near the Point Salines lighthouse.

Authorities of the Costa line erected a 20 foot statue of Christ of the Deep near the entrance to St. George's harbor as a gesture of thanks to the government and people of Grenada for the assistance given to the passengers rendered destitute by the fire and subsequent sinking.

Later salvage expeditions removed the ship's propellers and whatever valuables were left aboard. An insightful diver retrieved the insulator shown below. This unusual insulator is probably French or Italian in origin. It is a good-sized, glazed porcelain antenna strain insulator with large ribs and reinforced ends. The ship would most likely have used such a device for insulating a low frequency wire antenna.



Remains of the masts rose to about 70 feet below the surface when Bob Wilson visited the ship in the early 1970's. The bridge lay about 90 feet from the surface. While the midships section was burnt out, the bow and stern areas were in good condition, from eye-witness accounts. Local divers have long shared reports of sharks and other fish cruising about the wreck and described the joys of swimming around the bridge, sundeck, etc..

End Notes:

1. Milton H. Watson, *Disasters at Sea*.

Photo of *Bianca C* courtesy of Patrick Stephens LTD.

Photo of insulator courtesy of Jim Garrity

Sources:

Brown, Gerald *Collectible Porcelain Insulators Supplement 1974*. [used by permission of Quinith Janssen]

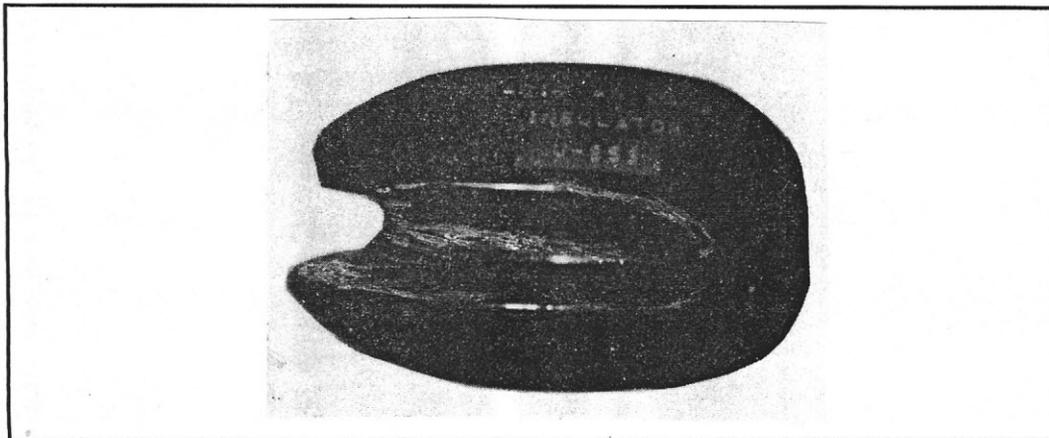
Watson, Milton H. *Disasters at Sea*, Sparkford, England: Patrick Stephens LTD., 1995. [used by permission]

Wilson, Bob "Bianca C.," *Cross Arms Magazine*, March 1974 pp 25-26. [used by permission of Jim Garrity]

U-853

by Dan Howard

U-853. A name that means very little to some and so very much to many. *U-853* is the ship number for a German submarine (U-boat) that was lost during World War II. Bob Wilson owned the antenna insulator pictured below which was salvaged from the vessel. According to Bob, the large porcelain egg insulator is glazed in green (1). Green seems to be a popular glaze color in Europe and, in this application, would have the added benefit of low visibility.



A photo of a U-boat taken in 1918 shows a flat top antenna stretching from the conning tower to the bow of the boat. The support wires at each end of the antenna are broken up by five porcelain egg insulators strung in series (2: plate 17).

U-853, a type IX C-40 submarine, was commanded by Oberleutenant zur See Helmut Fromsdorf (3:253). Over 94 type IX C-40 U-boats were built in Germany between 1940 and 1944. *U-853* was built by Deishimag Seebeck of Wesermunde. The boat measured 287 feet long by 24.5 feet wide and weighed 1,144 tons when surfaced and 1,247 tons when submerged. Powered by twin diesel and twin electric engines, she could sail 13,850 miles at 10 knots on the surface but only 63 miles at 4 knots submerged!(4:70)

The following story was adapted from *Track of the Gray Wolf* [by permission]

By May, 1945 the European war was all but over. Still, U-boats continued to menace Atlantic shipping ranging as far as the Eastern seaboard of the United States. On May 5th, *U-853* spotted a collier (coal freighter) *Black Point*, which had just separated from her northbound convoy near Long Island, New York. At 1730, the submarine launched a torpedo which struck the ship aft and tore away 40 feet of her stern. This was the last torpedo fired against the merchant marine in the Atlantic.

Said Captain Charles Prior: 'I was lighting a cigarette when a thunderous explosion rocked the ship. Everything in the wheel house came apart...even the glass face on the clock smashed on the deck...To this day, I can't remember if I lit the cigarette or swallowed it.'(3:255)

A passing Yugoslavian ship, the *Kamen*, witnessed the blast, and immediately transmitted an SOS (3:256). Thirty-four survivors were picked up by U.S. Coast Guard cutters.

Retribution came swiftly. U.S. Navy destroyer escorts were operating 30 miles to the south at the time of the attack and picked up the radio transmissions. The *Atherton*, the *Amick*, and the Coast Guard Frigate *Moberly*, immediately began searching for *U-853* using sonar. Depth charges and "hedgehogs"*** were used in an effort to pin the submarine down and break her up before she could escape to deeper water.

By 2200 hours, three more destroyers and four escort ships had arrived and joined in the search. Once the U-boat was located, destroyers crisscrossed the area dropping munitions throughout the night of May 5th/6th. By sunrise, pools of oil and miscellaneous debris had begun floating on the surface.

On the afternoon of May 6th, a diver from the *Penguin* descended over the sight and found *U-853* with huge holes in her pressure hull and bodies inside. The submarine and her crew were dead.

** Hedgehogs were a forward-firing mortar that fired a pattern of twenty-four 65 pound rounds in a 100 foot diameter circle. Unlike depth charges that could be set to go off automatically at a given depth, hedgehog bombs were triggered by physical contact (2:440).

End Notes:

1. "Collector of the Month," *Cross Arms Magazine*, April, 1973.
2. John Terraine. *The U-Boat Wars 1916 - 1945*.
3. Gary Gentile. *Track of the Gray Wolf*.
4. Erminio Bagnasco. *Submarines of World War Two*.

Photo courtesy of Quinith Janssen

Sources:

Bagnasco, Erminio. *Submarines of World War Two*. Anapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1986.

Brown, Gerald. *Collectible Porcelain Insulators Supplement*. 1974 [by permission of Quinith Janssen]

"Collector of the Month." *Cross Arms Magazine*, April, 1973. [by permission]

Gentile, Gary. *Track of the Gray Wolf: U-Boat Warfare on the U.S. Eastern Seaboard 1942-1945*. New York: Avon Books, 1989. [by permission, all rights reserved]

Terraine, John. *The U-Boat Wars 1916-1945*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1989.

Back Strains

(Old Familiar Strains Back Issues)

- Vol. 1 #1** (3/94) "letter of introduction" 1 pg. (reprint)
- Vol. 1 #2** (4/94) letter from Keith Roloson, want ads, roster, 6 pg. (reprint)
- Vol. 1 #3** (6/94) letters, list of insulator manufacturers, Story of W4fXQ insulator, Requesting Patents, Manufacturer's Codes for Military insulators, roster, 12 pg. (reprint)
- Vol. 1 #4** (10/94) NIA Western Regional Convention, Philmore Manufacturing (ill.), Collecting Antenna Insulators, Patents, roster, 8 pg.
- Vol. 1 #5** (12/94) Budwig Mfg. Co. (ill.), How I Got Started, A Shattering Experience, ads, roster, 8 pg.
- Vol. 2 #1** (2/95) Cataloging Radio Antenna Insulators Part 1 (ill.), ads, 1995 roster, 10 pg.
- Vol. 2 #2** (4/95) Cataloging Radio Antenna Insulators Part 2 (ill.), A Brief Look at Pyrex Insulators (ill.), ads, 10 pg.
- Vol. 2 #3** (6/95) Cataloging Radio Antenna Insulators Part 3 (ill.), Northwest Collectors Show and Sale, Color Page: Jim Overstreet Collection, 10 pg.
- Vol. 2 #4/5** (8/95) L.S. Brach Mfg. Co.: company history, key dates, check list, 17 figures (1 color), 16 pg.
- Vol. 2 #6** (12/95) Shell Insulators (ill.), Measuring and Cleaning Insulators, World's First Strain Swap Meet w/ Color Page, Display Suggestions, letters, roster update, 14 pg.
- Vol. 3 #1** (2/96) D.C. Jenkins Glass Company (ill.), Charles F. Jacobs Adjustable Spreader Insulators (ill.), 2 color illustrations, 1996 roster, 14 pg.
- Vol. 3 #2** (4/96) Brilliant Glass Company (ill. 2 color), Cataloging Radio Antenna Insulators Part 4, A Bottle Stopper Insulator, letters, ads, roster update, 14 pg.

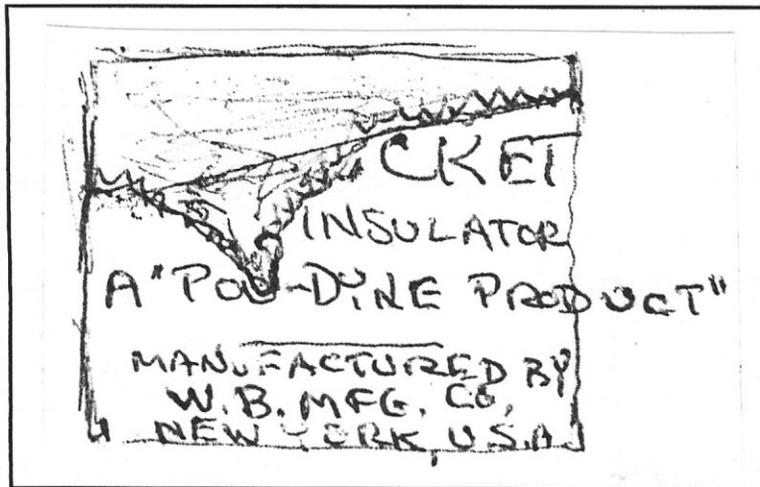
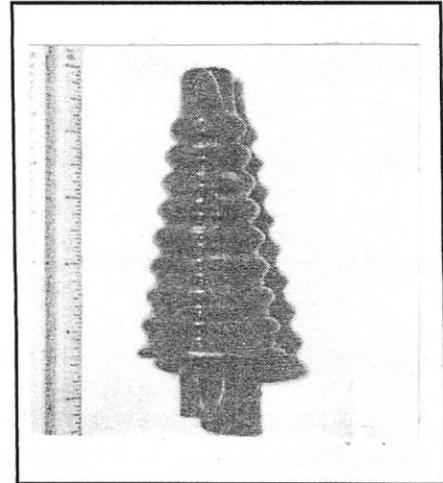
All of the above are currently available. The reprints of Vol. 1 Numbers 1-3 are available as a package for \$3.00. Others issues are available individually for \$2.00 each, post paid.

Christmas Tree or Rocket?

by Dan Howard

On page 12 of the April issue, I reported that **Gil Hedges-Blanquez** (Seattle, WA) had acquired a cobalt blue, Christmas tree-shaped, porcelain strain insulator. Two more sightings have come in since then.

First, **Shirley Patocka** (Penryn, CA) reports that she recently found one of the elusive "trees." Shirley said that her insulator stands 4-3/4" high and came with a partial box! I have reproduced her sketch below. Could it say "Rocket?" Shirley and I think it might.



Second, **Lois Blair** (London, OH) reports that she also has one of the strains. She confirms the 4-3/4" height and says that it measures 1-3/4" in diameter at its widest point. She counts nine ribs - I guess that's "rings" in tree lingo.

Carol McDougald graciously called me from her vacation hide-out to grant permission to reprint the insulator picture below.

I think it's great when we can put together information from several readers. This is what OFS is all about! Now, who else can offer some bit of information that will contribute to the story of the Rocket/Christmas tree insulator?

Source: Crown Jewels of the Wire, May 1987, page 3. [by permission]