



Union Oilers were not long in discovering that they were at war. Within two weeks after Pearl Harbor, the tanker *Montebello* was at the bottom of the Pacific. Under the command of Captain Arnold Edstrom, the tanker had loaded at Avila with a cargo bound for Vancouver. She headed out to sea December 21, 1941, without escort. Two hours later, barely out of sight of land, a lurking Japanese submarine, which had started its journey to the Pacific Coast well before the war had been declared, sent a torpedo crashing into the port side of the tanker. Surfacing, the submarine's batteries poured shells into the wallowing, smoking ship as the tanker crew took to lifeboats. While the *Montebello* slid beneath the waves, her crew pulled for shore under a rain of Japanese bullets, which miraculously failed to wound a single crewman.

By this time Union's tanker fleet had been taken over by the United States War Shipping Administration, which reassigned the tankers, together with a score of government oil carriers, back to Union for operation. Five Union tankers were already in the war at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. Two were carrying British oil between the Dutch West Indies and the Atlantic Coast; three more were delivering petroleum products to Vladivostok and to American outposts in the far Pacific. Two new 100,000-barrel tankers, the *Paul M. Gregg* and the *A. C. Rubel*, launched early in 1942, helped beef up Union's wartime fleet.

As the demands for oil mounted, Union was able to increase its crude-oil production 17 per cent by the end of 1942 by operating 1,566 wells. The newly discovered Vinton and Fresh Water Bayou fields in Louisiana added to the reserves. At one period field-development work was cut in half because of severe priority controls over critical materials, such as oil-well casing and pipe. As fast as new oil came out of the earth, it was rushed to the refineries and to depots

**"WELL DONE!"
SAID THE NAVY**

Union's tankers, drafted to serve in World War II, earned special commendation from the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for their outstanding contribution to the war effort.

**UNION TANKER TORPEDOED
OFF CALIFORNIA**

*One of the first tanker casualties of the war with Japan was the **Montebello**, torpedoed and sunk off the California coast two weeks after Pearl Harbor. She had just left Avila and was enroute to Vancouver. The presence of a Japanese submarine so close to the coast gave Californians a bad case of the jitters.*



that supplied the war fleet. Never before had Union Oilers handled such quantities of petroleum.

The modernization program was paying off in an accelerated flow of military products, but the war effort demanded still greater production. To increase output of aviation gasoline, additional units were built and put into operation at all refineries. At Los Angeles ground was broken for a giant "cat cracker," which utilized new refining methods to increase gasoline yields.

Union's tankers were fueling American ships around the world. In 1943 the tanker *Gurney E. Newlin*, commanded by Captain Herman Dahlhof, was torpedoed without warning in mid-Atlantic. Only seven of the tanker's crew of 41 Union Oilers were saved. The tankers were part of the vast river of oil flowing across the oceans, so important that Admiral Chester W. Nimitz called it "one of our greatest secret weapons" when he sent a personal citation to Union's tanker *La Placentia* for outstanding service at Majuro Atoll in the direct fueling of combat ships. Tankers bearing the big U on their stacks filled Navy bunkers from Australia to Guam to Saipan to Manila and Okinawa, Iwo Jima, and finally Tokyo.

It was only after the war ended that the Japanese learned how this man-made river of oil had kept their attacking forces continually off balance. The Japanese naval strategy was based on the idea that warships had to return to bases for fuel, as they had always done previously, after each battle. The Nipponese were completely confounded when the American ships fought one battle and kept on striking before the Japanese admirals were ready for the next fight. The oil-company tankers were floating supply bases, pumping fuel into high-speed Navy tankers, which in turn refueled the combat ships on the move.