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ACTIONS AGAINST RAIDERS

**REPORT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF
ENEMY RAIDER No. 16 BY
H.M.S. DEVONSHIRE**

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 8th December, 1941, by Vice-Admiral A. U. Willis, C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic Station.

*South Atlantic.
8th December, 1941.*

Forwarded for the information of Their Lordships.

2. The action taken by the Commanding Officer, H.M.S. DEVONSHIRE, is considered to have been correct throughout.

A successful operation well carried out.

(Signed) A. U. WILLIS,
*Vice-Admiral,
Commander-in-Chief.*

H.M.S. DEVONSHIRE
26th November, 1941.

Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic.

The following report on the events leading to the sinking of German Raider No. 16 is submitted.*

2. Following the usual practice in suitable weather of carrying out a dawn reconnaissance, the Walrus aircraft took off at 0520 on Saturday, 22nd November, to carry out an A/S patrol and long range search ahead of the ship. In these circumstances W/T silence is preserved unless an enemy warship is

Admiralty footnote —

* The raider was the ATLANTIS (ex S S GOLDEN-FELS) 7,862 tons, seven 5 9 in guns. After sinking a number of ships since leaving Kiel in March, 1940, she acted as a submarine supply ship, and was so employed, in fact about to fuel a submarine alongside her, when she sighted DEVONSHIRE'S aircraft

sighted. On recovery at 0710 the observer reported having sighted a merchant ship in approximate position 04 degs. 20 mins. South, 18 degs. 50 mins West, and course was immediately altered to close this position at 25 knots. The description given contained the grounds of a suspicion that she might be a German raider.

3. The masts of a ship were sighted at 0809 bearing 160 degs. in position 04 degs. 12 mins. South, 18 degs. 42 mins. West. Wind south east, force four. Sky partly cloudy. Visibility ten miles. Slight sea, short slow swell. Course was altered to 090 degs. to fly off aircraft. The Walrus was again catapulted at 0820 to carry out further investigation and for this purpose had been provided with photographs of known German raiders.

4. My suspicions were immediately aroused by the manoeuvres and appearance of the ship which closely resembled the description of Raider No. 16 given in the supplement to Weekly Intelligence Report No. 64 and the American periodical "Life" of 23rd June, 1941, with the exception of removable characteristics such as ventilators and Samson posts.

5. DEVONSHIRE was manoeuvred to keep between 18,000 and 12,000 yards from the merchant ship—speed 26 knots—making frequent alterations of course to frustrate torpedo attack. Immediately after the Walrus took off the enemy made a complete circle to starboard and thereafter made a great many alterations of course and speed. Her general tendency was to the south east and she was careful to prevent me getting a clear view of her stern. The signal "NNJ" was made by light but no reply was received. She hoisted "L" flag in international code meaning "Stop—I have something to communicate" and later "MT" meaning "My engines are stopped." Apart from this she refused to answer any signals.

6. At 0837 DEVONSHIRE fired two salvos spread to the right and left My object was—

(a) to provoke a return fire and so establish her identity beyond doubt, or

(b) to induce her to abandon ship in order to avoid bloodshed, particularly as she might have a number of British prisoners on board.

The enemy stopped and turned round and at 0840 transmitted a raider report on 500 kc/s in the form "RRR RRR RRR de POLYPHEMUS 04 degs. 20 mins. South, 18 degs. 35 mins. West 0940 GMT."

It was noted that—

(a) no signal letters were included, and

(b) that three "R"s were transmitted in a group and not four.

7. The possibility of the ship being in fact the POLYPHEMUS had now to be considered. Talbot Booth showed a ship of similar appearance but with a counter stern Admiralty's signal timed 1134A/22nd October indicated that she was at Balboa on 21st September, and therefore within reach of my position To remove what little doubt remained I signalled at 0905 "Is POLYPHEMUS genuine?" and at 0934 received your reply "No repetition no". In the meantime a signal was passed to the aircraft—"What type of stern has she got?" and the reply "Cruiser stern—hull similar to ATLANTIS" was received at 0931.

8. At 0935 DEVONSHIRE opened fire to destroy the enemy raider. The range was 17,500 yards The fourth salvo scored a hit in number two hold setting it on fire and subsequently blowing up the magazine. Thirty salvos were fired in all. The enemy turned away and started a very efficient chloro-sulphonic smoke screen from her stern and from both sides abreast the bridge. She also abandoned ship. No attempt was made to return my fire. Owing to the smoke I checked fire at 0939 and altered course to the eastwards to regain bearing and get clear of the smoke. Indirect fire using R.D.F.* ranging was attempted but failed owing to the breakdown of the R.D.F. transmitter through gun blast and of the aircraft's W/T generator owing to a short circuit. At 0943 the target was again visible and fire was re-opened and maintained until 0956 when the ship was seen to be badly on fire forward and down by the stern. The necessity for this latter burst of fire was a report by the aircraft that she was still proceeding at 15 knots.

9. DEVONSHIRE turned away on ceasing fire. The raider had consistently attempted to draw me in a south easterly direction and I was determined to make no more ground in that direction than I could help. At 1002 her magazine blew up and it was clear that no further offensive action was necessary. At 1005 the situation was reported to you There was another heavy explosion at 1014 and the raider sank at 1016.

10 My next action was to recover the aircraft. She had been in the air for two hours with a damaged propeller, temporarily repaired on board, which I knew was causing excessive vibration and which might precipitate a forced landing at any moment. The wind and sea

were on the increase. The ship proceeded to the north west and made a successful recovery at 1040.

11. After receiving verbal reports from the pilot and observer I had no further doubt regarding the identity of the raider and was almost certain that a U-Boat had been present. Unquestionably it was impossible to rescue the survivors without grave risk of being torpedoed.* The reasons for abandoning the boats were as follows:—

(a) the identity of the raider and Admiralty's signal timed 1218A/21st November reporting that U-Boats had been used as escorts for returning raiders;

(b) two large patches of oil on the water,

(c) a lifeboat filled with oil drums cast adrift shortly after my arrival,

(d) the movements of the raider. She was head to wind when sighted and subsequently made good no more than 2½ miles to the south east although she was reported to have steamed as fast as 15 knots;

(e) the character of the Captain described in the supplement to Weekly Intelligence Report No. 64, page 8, paragraph 13, and the fact that he did not return my fire;

(f) the unreliability of my aircraft and lack of any other A/S protection.

(Signed) R. D. OLIVER,

*Captain, R.N.,
Commanding Officer.*

REPORT OF THE SINKING OF THE GERMAN SUPPLY SHIP PYTHON.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 29th December, 1941, by Vice-Admiral A. U. Willis, C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic Station.

South Atlantic.

29th December, 1941.

Forwarded for the information of Their Lordships.

2. The strategical effect of this sinking combined with that by H.M.S. DEVONSHIRE on 23rd November has been considerable, for the submarine threat to shipping in the Cape area has—at any rate temporarily—been removed.

3. After DORSETSHIRE had, quite rightly, left them, efforts were made to regain touch with the survivors' boats by means of the corvettes ASTER and MARGUERITE who were ordered to pass through the area of the sinking on 8th December, on passage to the Cape. This came to nothing and no positive information has been obtained as to the fate of the survivors.

4. The U-Boats, known to have been in the vicinity by the attacks on S.S. CLAN MAC-BEAN on the 3rd December and on the U.S. ship SAGADAHOC on 3rd December, were tracked on their northward passage by Admiralty estimated dispositions and by D/F

Admiralty footnote —

* After the raider had sunk, the survivors in her laden boats were met by submarines and later by the supply ship PYTHON so that, in the event, they were rescued, though not as prisoners

Admiralty footnote —

* R D F—radar

bearings obtained on South Atlantic Station and these U-Boats may well have embarked the survivors or some of them.

5. As pointed out by her Commanding Officer, H.M.S. DORSETSHIRE has done an immense amount of steaming and has spent many days searching for suspected raiders and supply ships. She has always been an efficient and reliable ship and her success on this occasion has been well earned.

6. Captain A. W. S. Agar, V.C., D.S.O., R.N., has displayed good leadership and much zeal and ingenuity in conducting these searches and I desire to bring his name to Their Lordships' notice for his services in disposing of this enemy ship.

7. As it does not appear by the terms of Admiralty letter No. C.W. 2558/41 of 7th March, 1941, that recommendations can be forwarded for immediate or operational awards, I intend to submit names in the next list of periodical recommendations due on 31st March, 1942.

(Signed) A. U. WILLIS,
Vice-Admiral,
Commander-in-Chief.

H M.S. DORSETSHIRE.
2nd December, 1941.

Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic.

I have the honour to report the following movements which led to the sinking of an enemy vessel, believed to be either a Raider or Supply Ship,* by H.M. Ship under my command, between 1800 and 1821 on Monday, 1st December, 1941, in position:

Latitude 27 degrees 53 minutes South,

Longitude 3 degrees 55 minutes West.

All times referred to are Zone - I.

Movements of DORSETSHIRE prior to sighting.

2. H.M.S. DORSETSHIRE sailed from Free-town at 1300 Wednesday, 26th November in accordance with your orders, with the object of searching for enemy ships in certain localities near the relatively calm area 720 miles south and west of St. Helena.

3. At 0700 Monday, 1st December, whilst in position:

Latitude 26 degrees 45 minutes South,

Longitude 6 degrees 25 minutes West,

the Walrus aircraft was flown off on a triangular reconnaissance to the south east to a depth of 70 miles, the ship's course and speed being 162 degrees, 17 knots. Nothing was sighted and course and speed were altered at 1100 to 111 degrees, 18½ knots.

4. At 1515 the aircraft was again flown off on a similar search, with orders to commence the first leg of the search to starboard for one hour (i.e. to the southward), then at right angles to the mean line of advance of the ship for one hour, after which to rejoin. Visibility was maximum about 25 miles, sea calm with a slight swell

Admiralty footnote —

* The ship was the German submarine supply ship PYTHON, a motor vessel of 3,664 tons.

First Sighting of Enemy.

5. At 1653, while the ship was on the port leg of a zig-zag, the lookout in DORSETSHIRE'S crow's nest reported the mast of a ship bearing 032 degrees. Although the Walrus was out of sight to the southward, I decided to close the ship at once and if necessary recall the aircraft by W/T on Low Power. Course was altered to 031 degrees and speed increased to 25 knots to investigate. It is my opinion that this was the "first sighting" and due to a very good lookout being kept.

6. Shortly afterwards, the ship sighted was observed to be making quite a lot of smoke and remained hull down until 1717, which confirmed my opinion made later, that she was stopped when sighted, and later on, sighting DORSETSHIRE, increased to full speed and altered course directly away from us.

7. Speed was increased to 30 knots to close, the ship's company ordered to their action stations, and aircraft recalled by W/T. (This recall for some reason still unexplained, did not reach the aircraft)

8. Small patches of oil were observed on the water, including one definite track which was not that of the target. These tracks all pointed to the direction in which the ship was first sighted, and gave rise at once to the suspicion that a U-Boat might be in the vicinity. A further alteration of course was in consequence made by DORSETSHIRE to starboard (i.e. to the southward).

Sighting of Boats.

9. At 1708, an object closely resembling the conning tower of a submarine was sighted on the port bow, distant 6 miles. Four other objects were also sighted in the same position, which later were identified as boats in tow of a power boat making a total of five or six in all. These were definitely identified by 1720. I assumed therefore that the ship in sight was an enemy, and that she was either a Raider or Supply Ship.

10. The theory that she was a genuine British ship endeavouring to escape from DORSETSHIRE—a supposed German warship—and that the boats in the water contained survivors from a ship just torpedoed by a U-Boat, could not altogether be rejected. Signals made to the ship by searchlight and flags however produced no result, neither did she break W/T silence to make a "Q" message (raider report).

Action of Enemy After Warning Salvo

11. At 1725, I ordered two warning shots to be fired, one right and one left of the target, at a range of twelve miles. Within two minutes a burst of white smoke appeared from the stern of the ship, which rose vertically in the almost still atmosphere. This may have been either a smoke screen made from the stern, a smoke float dropped in the water to attract a submarine, or an explosive charge to scuttle.

12. I decided in the circumstances to keep DORSETSHIRE moving at high speed, and outside a range of eight miles, so as to reduce as much as possible any risk of attack by U-Boat.* There could therefore be no considera-

Admiralty footnote —

* H.M.S. DORSETSHIRE'S suspicion that U-Boats were in the vicinity has since been confirmed. There were two, and one of them fired a torpedo at the ship but missed.

tion of any action by DORSETSHIRE to stop scuttling and capture the enemy ship.

Action taken by Enemy to Abandon Ship and Scuttle.

13. Within a further three minutes, i.e. at 1730, the enemy turned to starboard, stopped and commenced to lower boats. I decided to withhold fire and continued zig-zagging at high speed outside his gun and torpedo range, while within ours. In this I had in mind the possibility that the enemy was a Raider, with British merchant seamen on board, and that he should be allowed sufficient time in which to get the boats clear and thus save the unnecessary loss of British lives.

14. At 1744, by which time DORSETSHIRE had crossed the enemy's bows, the boats were seen to be moving away from the ship, which had a definite list to port. Range of enemy 8-9 miles. A faint flashing light was seen from her bridge, which was impossible to read.

15. At 1751 smoke commenced pouring from the bridge and foredeck, indicating she had been set on fire. This fire took hold rapidly, flames reaching the height of the funnel, with occasional minor explosions probably caused by ammunition. By 1805 she was heavily on fire when a large explosion in the forepart of the ship settled the business, and she sank at 1821 leaving only a trail of smoke behind and a number of survivors in boats.

Action taken by DORSETSHIRE Subsequent to Scuttling.

16. When at 1805 it was evident that the self-destruction of the enemy was certain, I altered DORSETSHIRE'S course to one at right angles to the enemy's line of advance so as to clear the area as soon as possible and recover our aircraft. This was effected at 1910, and the aircraft refuelled and flown off again at 1930 to make a further reconnaissance of the area of the boats.

Reports from Aircraft.

17. Observation by the aircraft was not easy as the light was failing, but it was definitely established that there were fourteen boats, one large raft painted white, and one large raft painted red in the position where the ship had gone down. It was estimated that each boat contained between 25 to 30 survivors at least, plus those on the raft painted white. The raft painted red had a five foot staff with a red ball on it, and was being used either as a sea-anchor or a rallying point for the other boats which were clustered around it.

18. As the aircraft circled the boats at a height of between 400 and 500 feet no demonstration was made or action taken, neither were any survivors seen in the water.

19. The aircraft proceeded to examine the second lot of boats, which had been first sighted by the ship at 1708. These were closing the scene of the survivors' boats—distant by now, four to five miles—and consisted of one large power boat (possibly two) with two tows of two cutters each. These boats were fully loaded with what appeared to be packages and crates, and manned by about three men in each. It is considered that they were actually transferring these stores to a U-Boat,

or about to do so, at the time of "first sighting", as the enemy could not have had time to hoist them out between 1653 and 1708, and remain steaming at the speed she did. No U-Boat however, was sighted by the aircraft.

Other Observations.

20. Enemy did not fire on DORSETSHIRE and no torpedo tracks were observed. The smoke screen attempted—if it was intended as such—was a poor effort, and supports the supposition that it was a signal and not a smoke screen. In any case, at 18,000 yards or more, she would have had little chance of doing DORSETSHIRE much damage, before she herself was out of action with heavy casualties, while there remained two hours of daylight. My own opinion is that the enemy was relying on U-Boat protection, and with the large number of men on board decided to abandon ship at the first opportunity, hoping DORSETSHIRE would close to pick up survivors, when perhaps an opportunity for attack by U-Boat would present itself.

21. The efficiency and speed with which she abandoned ship shows that this evolution must have been practised frequently, as must also have been the arrangements for scuttling and setting fire to the ship.

22. The large number of survivors—estimated by aircraft to be about 500—is significant. If she was a Raider this would account for British merchant seamen prisoners, otherwise the only explanation offered is that they were spare crews for U-Boats.

Final Remarks.

23. Now that U-Boats are known to be operating in the South Atlantic as far south as 30 degrees, in company with Supply Ships and Raiders, the problem of dealing with them hinges almost entirely on one of identification. In this case the enemy, by definitely acting in a suspicious manner, helped us to solve the problem and take action accordingly but there are many cases where the contrary is the case.

British and Allied merchant ships, independently routed, are frequently met at sea often hundreds of miles from the position where they ought to be on the plot. Their identity can only be established by signalling, which is extremely difficult outside a range of 8 miles. In these circumstances the temptation to close to signalling distance (5 miles or less) is very great, especially if the course of the vessel to be identified is in the opposite direction to that on which the cruiser wishes to advance, and the more so if daylight is running short. A more detailed memorandum on this matter is being forwarded as a separate submission.

24. Although this encounter did not fulfil our expected desire of an action with the enemy, its successful result is, I submit, due primarily to your initial dispositions and orders.

After spending over a hundred days at sea during the last four months, mostly on this particular kind of operation, it is at least some satisfaction to the officers and ship's company that at last a "dividend" has been earned, and both your signal, and that made by the Admiralty of "Well done" is much appreciated.

(Signed) A. W. S. AGAR,
Captain, R.N.,
Commanding Officer.

REPORT OF A GALLANT ACTION BY
H.M.I.S. BENGAL AND M.V. ONDINA
WITH TWO JAPANESE RAIDERS

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 8th January, 1943, by Admiral Sir James F. Somerville, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet.

Admiralty Foreword.

This despatch deals with a gallant action by H.M.I.S. BENGAL and the Dutch M.V. ONDINA against two much superior Japanese raiders.

2. H.M.I.S. BENGAL* was escorting the tanker M.V. ONDINA† on passage from Fremantle to Diego Garcia. Early on 11th November, 1942, in Latitude 19° 45' S., Longitude 92° 40' E, BENGAL sighted two ships proceeding on a north easterly course at high speed. These were Japanese armed raiders, one of the Aikoku Maru Class and the other of the Kiyosumi Maru Class, of 10,439 and 8,631 tons respectively.

3. BENGAL promptly attacked the nearest, which was the larger raider, and soon after opening fire, succeeded in obtaining a hit aft, as a result of which this enemy caught fire and, after a large explosion on board an hour later, sank by the stern. BENGAL continued the action with both raiders to draw them away from ONDINA.

4. Meanwhile ONDINA, who, in spite of BENGAL'S order to make her escape by acting independently, had also been in action with the first raider, became separated from BENGAL. ONDINA was then engaged by the second raider who returned to her after having, as she evidently thought, disposed of BENGAL.

5. ONDINA, after being repeatedly hit, expending all her ammunition and having her Master killed, abandoned ship. This raider closed, machine-gunned the survivors in their boats and fired two torpedoes at ONDINA. These hit, and ONDINA, taking up a 30° list to starboard, must have been considered doomed by the second raider who then left the scene to search for survivors of her consort. The raider later returned to fire a third torpedo at ONDINA, which missed, but her principal concern seems to have been to make good her escape before the intervention of British warships, and she disappeared over the horizon in a north easterly direction.

6. ONDINA'S crew then reboarded their ship and brought her safely back to Fremantle.

7. A letter of appreciation of the part played by H.M.I.S. BENGAL in this action, which the Admiralty caused to be sent to the India Office, is attached as Appendix I.

Eastern Fleet.

8th January, 1943

Forwarded for Their Lordships' information.

(Signed) J. F. SOMERVILLE,

Admiral,

Commander-in-Chief.

Notes —

* BENGAL—a minesweeper, 650 tons, armed with one 12-pdr, one single Bofors and two Oerlikons.

† ONDINA—a Shell Company tanker, armed with one 4-inch gun whose crew was composed of four R.N. and one R.A.N.R. ratings, three Gunners R.A. and one Dutch merchant seaman.

‡ ONDINA also claimed this hit with the fifth round from her 4-inch gun at 8,000 yards range. It is not possible to adjudicate between these two claims.

*H.M. Naval Office,
Colombo.*

30th November, 1942

The report of the Commanding Officer, H.M.I.S. BENGAL, which he rendered to me on his arrival at Colombo is forwarded herewith.

2. The Commanding Officer, BENGAL, informed me that his signal to ONDINA to "act independently" was made with the intention that she should make good her escape and that he was disappointed to observe that she altered course only 90° instead of 180°, but he had no time to make a further signal to her. His prompt decision to steer at full speed directly towards the larger of the two enemy ships in sight was made solely with a view to give the ONDINA time to get away; he had little hopes that his ship could survive against such odds. He was greatly encouraged on the run in that fire was not opened on him until he got to 3,500 yards, as at this range his 12-pdr. gun was effective. He states that at full speed steering is difficult so that the unsteady course he was making increased the difficulties of the enemy in getting hits on their tiny opponent. The BENGAL only carried 40 rounds L.A. ammunition.

(Signed) A. D. READ,

Rear Admiral,

Flag Officer, Ceylon.

H.M.I.S. BENGAL.

12th November, 1942

Submitted.

That the following is a true extract from this vessel's Log Book for 11th November, 1942.

- 1145 Unknown vessel sighted bearing 290°. Distance 8 miles. Course 110°. Action Stations.
- 1150 Altered course to 020°. Revs. reduced to 135. ONDINA instructed to take station on starboard beam. Vessel appeared to be Japanese.
- 1154 Second unknown vessel sighted bearing 310°. Distance 10 miles. Course 125°. Vessel appeared to be Japanese.
- 1155 Rendezvous signalled to ONDINA who was instructed to act independently by my 0517Z/11.
- 1156 Altered course to approx 260°, speed increased to full, straight for first vessel sighted.
- 1158 Original enemy report transmitted, frequent amplifying reports followed.
- 1212 First vessel opened fire at approximate range of 3,500 yards from position 10° on starboard bow. BENGAL returned fire forthwith. Second enemy raider altered course to intercept.
- 1215 Second raider opened fire. First raider hit aft and large explosion seen. Magazine presumed hit causing large fire. Mean course of 260° maintained with constant alterations to take avoiding action due to near misses, altering course to northward.
- 1220 BENGAL sustained a direct hit forward, fore provision store flooded.
- 1240 Raider proceeded abaft safety angle*. BENGAL ceased firing. Mean course altered to 200°. Smoke floats failed to function.

Admiralty footnote —

* The reference to "safety angle" is to the limit of training of the 12-pdr gun which was mounted forward in the ship.

- 1241 BENGAL received direct hit in stern.
Fire in officers' baggage room
- 1245 Ammunition running short (subsequent check showed 5 rounds H.E. D.A. fuse remaining). Vessel damaged fore and aft. Tanker had succeeded in opening range from raiders to approx. 7 miles. Decision taken to break off engagement against uneven odds. Made smoke. Undamaged raider continued chase and firing. She obtained several near misses.
- 1304 Altered course 230°.
- 1308 Tanker observed hit abaft bridge.
- 1309 Altered course 240°.
- 1310 Altered course 250°.
- 1312 Very large explosion observed on first raider, which had been burning continuously. No further sight of this raider.
- 1320 Tanker last observed steering approx. 190°.
- 1340 Ceased making smoke to observe enemy.
- 1345 Nothing in sight. Estimated that over 200 rounds were fired at BENGAL.
- 1346 Altered course to 305°. Revolutions reduced to 170.

Larger raider which is presumed sunk was larger edition of Kunikawa Maru class and approximately 10,000 tons.

Smaller raider which was not hit by BENGAL was also of Kunikawa Maru class and approximately 8,000 tons.

No ensign was flown by either raider, and both fired broadsides of 4 guns which appeared to be 5.9".

2. In addition to the damage logged the following damage has been sustained. D.G. gear* is not completely effective, the S/A gear† is out of action, and there is additional shrapnel damage to various parts of the vessel, including the shell plating fore and aft both sides of the vessel.

3. The intention was to draw the enemies' fire and act as screen for as long as possible in an effort to let the tanker ONDINA make her escape. This object was attained to the extent that she was not observed to be hit until fifty-six minutes after the first raider opened fire, and twenty-three minutes after we had ceased firing, though we were under fire for approximately fifteen minutes after the tanker had been hit. After we had hit the first raider the second did not close the range below 7,000 to 8,000 yards.

4. I cannot praise too highly the conduct of all the officers and men of this vessel, and while under these circumstances it is difficult to single out individuals I would particularly like to commend the 12-pdr. crew for the able fashion in which they used their weapon and kept it firing after what appeared to be a direct hit immediately below the gun position.

5. A narrative is attached.

(Signed) W. J. WILSON,

*Lieutenant-Commander, R.I.N.R.,
Commanding Officer.*

NARRATIVE.

On Wednesday morning, 11th November, 1942, a beautiful sunny day with a calm sea, H.M.I.S. BENGAL was proceeding in company with the tanker ONDINA.

2. At about 1145 an unknown vessel was sighted steaming straight for us; it was still a good distance away, and its identity could not be established. The alarm gongs were sounded and the ship's company went to "Action Stations". The unknown ship was heading straight for us, our course was altered to starboard and the tanker told to follow; this brought the unknown ship on our port beam.

3. At this time a second vessel was seen appearing over the horizon and coming up on our port bow. It could now be seen that these two unknown ships were fairly large, the first (Raider No. 1) about 10,000 tons, and the second (Raider No. 2) about 8,000 tons. Both appeared to be typical Japanese construction.

4. The tanker was told to act independently, and given a rendezvous for the next day.

5. As the unknown ship had not challenged us, also as she was not flying any ensign, it was fairly certain she was an enemy. Knowing that it would be impossible for the tanker and us to evade these two ships we altered course again and headed straight for Raider No. 1 so as to engage her, hoping that the tanker might get away.

6. When the range was closed to about 3,500 yards, Raider No. 1 opened fire, the first shell landing about 400 yards dead ahead. Shells were bursting all around us but our 12-pdr. gun crew fired salvo after salvo and about the sixth found its mark. It hit Raider No. 1 aft and must have exploded in her after magazine or "Ready Use" stowage on deck, for a terrific explosion was observed, flames leaping high in the air. Great cheers went up by all who had seen this, but the gun's crew kept to its job and kept firing. By this time Raider No. 2 had come into range and she too had opened fire on us. Shells were bursting everywhere. A piece of shrapnel from a near miss holed us in the forward provision room just above the water line.

7. A direct hit was expected any moment; the odds were too much against us, the enemy being able to bring to bear four 5.9" or 6" guns per ship, to our one 12-pdr. Nevertheless we knew that we had already got our revenge, for a strong fire was seen to be still burning on Raider No. 1.

8. Having expended all our ammunition with the exception of a few rounds we broke off the attack and steamed away at full speed.

9. All this time the tanker had been steaming away as fast as she was able and it was not until after we stopped attacking that the enemy opened fire on her.

10. Raider No. 1, which had considerably slowed down, concentrated her port guns on the tanker, and her starboard ones at us. Raider No. 2 was chasing us and firing continuously.

11. The tanker was seen to be hit just abaft the bridge and clouds of smoke went up.

12. Next another terrific explosion was seen aboard Raider No. 1. The fire had presumably crept forward to the main magazine, for this

Admiralty footnote —

* D G gear—anti-magnetic mine equipment

† S/A gear—sounding apparatus

explosion was much greater than the one previous; the flames leapt hundreds of feet into the air and when the smoke cleared away nothing could be seen.

13. All this time Raider No 2 was chasing us and firing continuously. We received a direct hit on the stern, luckily again just above the waterline. A fire was started, but was promptly brought under control.

14. We steamed on under the cover of a smoke screen. Raider No 2 continued to chase and fire at us for about another 15 minutes, then the firing ceased and after about another 15 to 20 minutes when the smoke screen was cleared, the enemy was not in sight. It is presumed that Raider No 2 went back to pick up any survivors from the sunken raider.

15. The tanker was last seen disappearing over the horizon, and information has since been received which leads one to believe that she was able to make her escape.

16. It is estimated that there were well over 200 shells fired at us, and considering that we received a direct hit and innumerable near misses, it is incredible that no one was even slightly injured.

17. Those who took part in this action will never cease to marvel at the result. To think that a small ship, with only one 12-pdr. gun, should engage two raiders, both more than ten times her own size, and each with about 20 times her gun power, and so enable the tanker

to escape, sink one raider, and then get away herself, is almost miraculous.

18. The R I.N. should be justly proud of their little "Bengal Tiger"; she has had her tail twisted and has a few scars but these will soon be healed and the Tiger will be roaring again.

APPENDIX I.

Admiralty, S.W.I.

13th April, 1943.

Sir,

I am commanded by My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to transmit, for the information of the Secretary of State for India, the accompanying copy of a letter (with enclosures) from the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, concerning the action in the Indian Ocean on the 11th November last between H.M.I.S. BENGAL and the M.S. ONDINA and two Japanese raiders

2. My Lords have read with great interest the report on this noteworthy success against a much superior enemy force, and they would be glad if the Secretary of State would convey to the Government of India an expression of their deep admiration for the very gallant part played by H.M.I.S. BENGAL.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Signed) F. W. MOTTERSHEAD.

The Under Secretary of State,
India Office, S.W.I.

LONDON

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