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COASTAL FORCE ACTIONS.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 13th March, 1943, by Admiral Sir HENRY H. HARWOOD, K.C.B., O.B.E., Commander-in-Chief, Levant.

*Leyton,
13th March, 1943.*

MOTOR TORPEDO BOATS 61, 77, 82, 307 AND 315
—REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS 15TH/16TH FEBRUARY, 1943.

Forwarded for the information of Their Lordships, concurring generally in the remarks of the Captain Coastal Forces. This operation resulted in a torpedo hit on an enemy merchant ship and damage to other enemy ships by gunfire.* Much valuable experience was gained.

2. The remarks in paragraph 3 of the Captain Coastal Forces' letter are fully concurred in. M.T.B.s 77 and 82 should have fired both torpedoes at their targets.

3. The operation was carried out in the face of strong opposition in a spirited and determined manner, which bodes well for future operations. The diversion by the M.G.B., was well planned and carried out.

4. The freedom from mechanical trouble during the operation reflects credit on all concerned.

(Signed) **H. H. HARWOOD,**
*Admiral,
Commander-in-Chief.*

Admiralty footnote:

* The action took place in the vicinity of Maritimo Island, off the western point of Sicily.

ENCLOSURE I TO C.-IN-C., LEVANT'S LETTER.
FROM ... The Captain Coastal Forces, Mediterranean.

DATE ... 21st February, 1943.

To ... The Commander-in-Chief, Levant.

The attached report and diagram from the Commanding Officer, 7th Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla are forwarded, with the following remarks.

1. The composition of this strike was as follows:—

M.T.B.s 61	77 (Flotilla Commanding Officer on board)	7th Flotilla (Vospers)
82		
M.T.B.s 307	315	10th Flotilla (Elcos).

As the 10th Flotilla boats had been undocked only the same day, it was impossible for them to be ready in time to sail in company with the other boats. It was unfortunate that the two units were not able to join up, as intended; results would probably have been far more effective had a larger number of Motor Torpedo Boats been available to attack the main enemy convoy. The results of this attack were that one merchant vessel of medium size was definitely damaged with an expenditure of two torpedoes. There is now no reason to suppose that this ship was the same as that subsequently sunk by an aircraft.

2. It is considered that Motor Torpedo Boat 77 was well handled by Lieutenant J. B. Sturgeon, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. His

attacks were pressed home to short range, resulting in a hit with the only torpedo fired, confirmed by Motor Torpedo Boat 82. It was not known to the Commanding Officer that his second torpedo had failed to fire until about twenty minutes later. This misfire and the casualty to the First Lieutenant when about to release a depth charge, were two misfortunes which combined to spoil a very spirited attack during which Motor Torpedo Boat 77 was subjected to intense enemy fire.

3. Motor Torpedo Boat 82 fired one torpedo only, which missed. The conclusions (paragraph 13 (viii)) of the Flotilla Commanding Officer are that both torpedoes should be fired whenever a good target presents itself. This is considered, without doubt, to be the correct procedure and has again been impressed on Commanding Officers.

4. Motor Torpedo Boat 61 (Lieutenant T. J. Bligh, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve), equipped as a gunboat, fought a prolonged and resolute action with the convoy escort, which was greatly superior in fire power. It is considered that this boat did particularly well; her wheel steering was out of order throughout the action, during which she was steered with the tiller from aft.

5. The conclusions of the Flotilla Commanding Officer are considered sound, particularly paragraph 13 (viii), referred to above. The R.D.F.* with which these M.T.B.s are fitted was not used on this occasion, as the enemy convoy appeared before it was expected.

6. Motor Torpedo Boats 307 and 315, not having met the others at the rendezvous, were deprived of their target at the last moment by its being sunk by a Wellington torpedo-bomber. The small fast enemy destroyer which had been escorting the merchant ship was not a suitable torpedo target and these Motor Torpedo Boats are not sufficiently heavily armed with guns to engage such a target with a good chance of success.

7. Mechanically, all the Motor Torpedo Boats ran well and without giving any trouble. This is a far more satisfactory state of affairs than has recently been the case with boats of this type, and the improvement is largely due to the skill and enthusiasm of Lieutenant (E) W. R. Coverdale, Royal Navy, the Coastal Force Base Engineer Officer.

The conduct of officers and ships' companies during this operation is reported to have been excellent.

8. It is considered that this force of Motor Torpedo Boats was well led by Lieutenant R. A. M. Hennessy, Royal Navy, the Commanding Officer of the 7th Flotilla, who was hampered by having only two Motor Torpedo Boats and one Motor Gun Boat, against the enemy escort of four destroyers and three E-boats† and merchant ships which were themselves armed. His small attacking force caused great confusion among the convoy, enemy ships firing on one another and some in the air. Under these conditions, a really adequate force of Motor Torpedo Boats should have been able to sink several enemy ships. In this case

the main Motor Torpedo Boat striking force had been removed from Malta a few days previously.

(Signed) M. C. GILES,
Lieutenant, R.N.,
for Captain, Absent on Duty.

ENCLOSURE 2 TO C.-IN-C., LEVANT'S LETTER.
FROM ... The Senior Officer, 7th M.T.B. Flotilla.

DATE ... 17th February, 1943.
To ... The Captain Coastal Forces, Mediterranean.

Submitted:

M.T.B.s 77 (V.7* on board), 82 and 61 sailed from Malta in accordance with previous instructions, and passed the boom at 1500. Having reached the end of the swept channel a course was set for a position 15 miles due south of Maritimo Island. All three boats were carrying a thousand gallons of upper-deck fuel, and as this was the first time of carrying it a speed of 18½ knots was allowed for engine revolutions giving 20 knots under normal load. It was subsequently found that there was no reduction in speed due to the extra load.

M.T.B.s 307 and 315 were due to sail at approximately 1600, and catch us up en route, or failing that to rendezvous in position 15 miles south of Maritimo Island.

2. At 2140, an enemy report was received of one merchant vessel and two destroyers, steering 240 degrees towards Maritimo Island. It was thought that these ships would be our target, and that they would eventually alter course to the southward, in which case our position south of Maritimo Island would be very suitable.

At 2320, M.T.B. 61 signalled that she had a defective dynamo and that it was necessary for her to stop. Boats stopped at 2325 and cut engines. At that moment an enemy report of four merchant vessels and three destroyers to the northward of us was received, and before it could be plotted on the chart M.T.B. 61 reported that she had sighted a large merchant vessel to starboard, about 1½ miles away.

3. All boats were ordered to start up one engine, and M.T.B. 77 followed by M.T.B. 82, proceeded on a north-easterly course with the object of getting the target on the port bow.

On closing it was observed that there were two columns of ships, with a heavy escort of destroyers, and that we were steering on a course almost exactly opposite to the port enemy column.

The starboard column was sighted to port, and consisted of a destroyer with two merchant vessels astern. As we were in an ideal position to attack the leading ship of this column, the signal "Attack with torpedoes" was made, and all three boats acted independently from then on.

4. M.T.B. 77 (Lieutenant J. B. Sturgeon, R.N.V.R.) altered course to port to get on the firing course to attack the leading merchant vessel of the starboard column. In order to avoid the port column it was necessary to go on to all three engines and increase to 20 knots.

Admiralty footnotes:

* R.D.F.—radar.

† E-boats—similar to British M.T.B.s.

Admiralty footnote:

* V.7—the Commanding Officer of 7th M.T.B. Flotilla.

M.T.B. 77 was now crossing the centre of the convoy and by some miracle remained unobserved until the range of the target had closed to 400 yards, and the port torpedo was fired. The torpedo was seen to run correctly, and we decided to alter course 100 degrees to starboard to attack the rear ship of the port column. The columns were about 5 cables apart. Having turned 100 degrees to starboard, fire commenced on M.T.B. 77, at first from the second merchant vessel of the starboard column, but very soon every ship was firing with machine-guns varying from 40-m.m. to .303-inch, and the destroyers were firing 4-inch H.E. that burst about 50 feet in the air.

An explosion was felt shortly after M.T.B. 77 had altered round.

5. M.T.B. 77 got into position between 300 and 400 yards on the starboard bow of the second merchant vessel of the port column and the starboard torpedo firing lever was pulled.

Unfortunately the firing mechanism failed, and owing to the heat of the battle it was not noticed that the torpedo had not left the tube. At about this time a burst of about ten heavy calibre cannon shells aimed at M.T.B. 77 struck the bridge of the merchant vessel.

6. It was then decided to attack the leading merchant vessel of the port column with depth-charges before disengaging. Speed was increased to 27 knots and M.T.B. 77 steered so as to pass close under the stern of the target, Lieutenant D. M. W. Napier, R.N.V.R. went aft to the port depth-charge to release it when in position, but was killed when abreast of it.

M.T.B. 77 passed right under the stern of the target, and a tray of twelve 20-m.m. S.A.P. incendiary from the Breda gun was fired into the merchant vessel hitting her just above the water line.

We then decided to disengage to the southward as quickly as possible as the enemy gunfire was intense and becoming very accurate; an attempt to lay smoke was unsuccessful as the C.S.A. apparatus had been hit. After about ten minutes, firing on M.T.B. 77 ceased and course was set to the south-east, M.T.B. 82 having joined us. The escort continued to fire, at times in the air, for some time after our withdrawal.

7. M.T.B. 82 (Lieutenant P. R. A. Taylor, R.N.R.), when the order was received to proceed on one engine, followed close behind M.T.B. 77 and assumed by the course that M.T.B. 77 was steering that she intended to attack the port column, and consequently altered course to the westward to attack from the convoy's starboard bow.

On altering course to port to cross over to the starboard column, M.T.B. 82 sighted the destroyer ahead of the column and decided to steer down between the lines and attack the first merchant vessel of the port column. By this time M.T.B. 77 was crossing between the columns and M.T.B. 82 decided to attack the leading ship of the starboard column. M.T.B. 82 then came under very heavy fire from many directions, and fired one torpedo at the leading ship of the starboard column.

M.T.B. 82 altered course to the southward, being engaged by a destroyer and an E-boat.

8. A cloud of black smoke was observed alongside the leading merchant vessel of the starboard column, preceded by a flash. This was certainly caused by M.T.B. 77's torpedo hitting.

During her withdrawal, M.T.B. 82 engaged an E-boat that was keeping station on her starboard beam; this action drew accurate fire from the destroyer. M.T.B. 82 increased to maximum speed and withdrew to the south-east, joining up with M.T.B. 77.

9. M.T.B. 61 (*Gun Boat*) (Lieutenant T. J. Bligh, R.N.V.R.) sighted the enemy at 2328, and on receiving the order to proceed on one engine decided to proceed to the stern of the convoy to create a diversion in accordance with pre-arranged tactics.

On hearing M.T.B. 77 start all three engines, M.T.B. 61 did likewise and passed down the port side of the convoy engaging the merchant ships with 20-m.m. gunfire. Having observed the two M.T.B.s disengaging, and M.T.B. 61 being apparently mistaken for an E-boat (or unobserved) she stopped abeam of the stern destroyer. Calcium flares were then dropped in an endeavour to draw off an E-boat, but although a destroyer opened fire on the flares, the E-boats did not leave the convoy.

10. M.T.B. 61 then proceeded to the starboard beam of the convoy and opened fire with all bearing guns at a range of about 2,000 yards. As the E-boats still declined action and the merchant vessels showed no inclination to straggle, M.T.B. 61 proceeded to the port beam of the convoy and opened fire on an E-boat at a range of 2,000 yards. Fire was returned by the convoy. M.T.B. 61 then proceeded to the head of the convoy to investigate possibilities of a smoke screen, but as three destroyers were keeping close station there, and the wind and sea were increasing, it was decided to discontinue the engagement at 0100/16.

A course of south 48 degrees east was steered and M.T.B. 61 joined M.T.B.s 77 and 82 at the rendezvous at 0210.

During the whole of the time that M.T.B. 61 was in contact with the enemy she was on hand steering, which made manœuvring very difficult, and turning at high speed almost impossible.

At 0220/16, M.T.B.s 77, 82 and 61 proceeded on a course of south 48 degrees east for Malta, arriving at 0830/16.

11. It is considered that the following damage was sustained by the convoy:—

One merchant vessel damaged and possibly sunk by torpedo from M.T.B. 77;

One merchant vessel damaged by gunfire from escort;

One merchant vessel damaged by gunfire from M.T.B. 77;

E-boats possibly damaged by our gunfire.

12. Damage sustained by our own forces:—

M.T.B. 77—shrapnel holes in engine-room, tank-space and crew space, slight damage on deck;

M.T.B. 82—one cannon-shell hit on the stern;

M.T.B. 61—no damage.

13. *Conclusions.*—

(i) Due to the fact that the convoy appeared much sooner than we expected, and that we found ourselves right in their track, there were two courses open to us.

(ii) The first was to haul out and return to carry out a silent attack in the hope that the escort would not see us. This course was not adopted as it was considered that we were already too close, and were bound to be observed any moment.

(iii) The alternative was to deliver an attack at once, down the middle of the convoy, as it would not have been possible to get outside the screen without using all engines and making a great deal of noise.

(iv) We adopted the second method, which was made much easier by the very indifferent look-out that the convoy was keeping.

(v) They could not have been using R.D.F. or keeping a listening watch.

(vi) In future, more use could be made of a gunboat diversion astern of the convoy to leave the M.T.B.s a clear run from ahead.

(vii) For this method of attack more gun-boats are needed.

(viii) Both torpedoes should be fired at the same target to make certain of sinking it.

(Signed) R. A. M. HENNESSY,
Lieutenant, R.N.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 12th October, 1943, by Vice-Admiral Sir HENRY D. PRIDHAM-WIPPELL, K.C.B., C.V.O., Flag Officer Commanding, Dover.

Dover,

12th October, 1943.

SINKING OF ENEMY SUPPLY SHIP IN A STRONGLY ESCORTED CONVOY EASTBOUND FROM LE HAVRE—NIGHT 26TH/27TH SEPTEMBER, 1943.
Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships the attached reports of an action between three M.T.B.s, supported by three M.G.B.s, and a strongly escorted enemy convoy on passage from Le Havre to Boulogne during the night 26th/27th September, 1943.

2. Aerial reconnaissance had reported the presence in Le Havre of two enemy merchant vessels which were expected to attempt the passage of the Dover Strait.

3. Accordingly, M.T.B.s 202 (Lieutenant J. L. Bommebyn, R.Neth.N.); Lieutenant E. H. Larive, D.S.C., R.Neth.N., Senior Officer embarked, 204 (Lieutenant H. C. Jorissen, R.Neth.N.), 231 (Lieutenant C. H. Vaneeghen, R.Neth.N.) with M.G.B.s 108 (Lieutenant L. E. Thompson, R.N.V.R.), 118 (Lieutenant M. O. Forsyth Grant, R.N.V.R.), 117 (Sub-Lieutenant D. W. B. Woolven, R.N.V.R.), were ordered to patrol the vicinity of Berck Buoy in accordance with my signal timed 1545 on 25th September, copy of which is attached.

Albacore patrol between Boulogne and Dieppe had to be withdrawn earlier owing to weather.

4. Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of the remarks of the Senior Officer, M.T.B.s are concurred in.

This well planned and skilfully executed attack reflects the greatest credit on Lieutenant E. H. Larive and the officers and men under his command.

It is probable that the enemy's misplaced faith in his recently laid minefields, through which a channel had been swept only two days prior to the engagement, together with the improbability of our Coastal Forces operating in the prevailing weather conditions, contributed to an unusual element of surprise.

The likelihood of this event in no way belittles the success of the M.G.B.s' diversion to seaward which, added to the advantage of the light, no doubt accounted for the unpreparedness of the enemy for a torpedo attack from inshore.

5. This action was fought outside the range of shore-based radar and in consequence considerable risk from enemy minefields to returning craft doubtful of their position had to be accepted, but had all craft been fitted with Rotet,* valuable assistance could have been given in the later stages of their return.

(Signed) H. D. PRIDHAM-WIPPELL,
Vice-Admiral.

ENCLOSURE I TO F.O.C. DOVER'S LETTER.
FROM ... Senior Officer, H.M.M.T.B.s, Dover.
DATE ... 6th October, 1943.
To ... Flag Officer Commanding, Dover.

I have the honour to submit the following report of proceedings of the night 26th/27th September, 1943, from the Senior Officer, 9th M.T.B. Flotilla.

2. The action was well planned and executed and led to the sinking of the main torpedo target.

3. The handling of the force by the Senior Officer, 9th M.T.B. Flotilla up to the moment of firing torpedoes was excellent and put the M.T.B.s into a perfect firing position. I feel, however, that he would have been better advised to have had the M.T.B.s in Starboard Quarter line instead of Port Quarter line and thus avoided M.T.B. 204 crossing the bows of M.T.B. 231 just before M.T.B. 231 fired. Starboard Quarter line in this instance would have been the usual formation.

4. I consider M.T.B. 231 was incorrect in shifting his point of aim to a coaster from the main torpedo target. All Commanding Officers should realise that while the main torpedo target remains afloat that target only should be attacked. Even if the main target has been hit but has not yet sunk, any torpedoes remaining in the force should be used against that target.

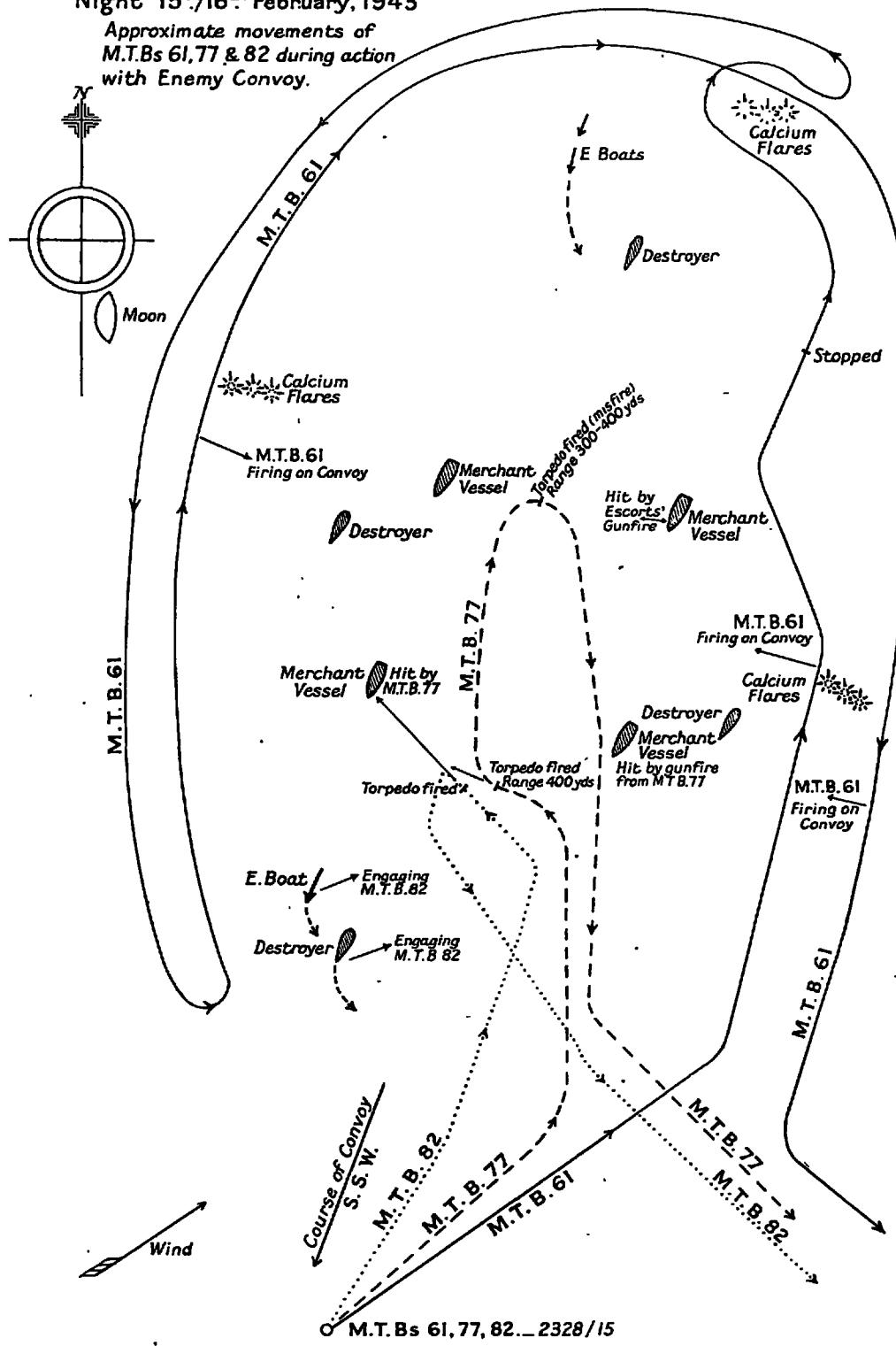
5. It has long been the intention to attack from inshore in this area and it is most satisfactory that on this first occasion the attack was successful. This is only possible between the Berck Buoy and the southern limit of the Command. The suggestion in para. 17 of the Senior Officer, 9th M.T.B. Flotilla's report is agreed with and it is hoped to try it out at an early opportunity.

(Signed) B. C. WARD,
Lieutenant, R.N.

Admiralty footnote:

* Rotet—a device to increase the range of shore-based radar.

Enclosure 3 to C-in-C, Levant's Letter

COASTAL FORCE ACTIONin the vicinity of Maritimo Island (Sicily)
Night 15th/16th February, 1943Approximate movements of
M.TBs 61, 77 & 82 during action
with Enemy Convoy.

ENCLOSURE 2 TO F.O.C. DOVER'S LETTER.

FROM ... Senior Officer, 9th M.T.B. Flotilla.
 DATE ... 27th September, 1943.
 To ... Senior Officer, H.M.M.T.B.s,
 Dover.

I have the honour to submit the following report of the action on the night of 26th/27th September off Point du Haut Banc between a combined Motor Torpedo Boat and Motor Gun Boat force and an escorted enemy convoy.

Own Forces.

2. Force A, M.T.B.s 202 (S.O.), 204 and 231, and Force B, M.G.B.s 108 (S.O.), 118 and 117. S.O. Force A was in command of the combined forces.

Object.

3. To intercept and destroy northbound convoy which was expected to be on passage from Le Havre.

Weather Conditions.

4. Visibility moderate to westward, poor to eastward, due to clouds and land giving no horizon; sea moderate; swell short; wind N.W. force 4*; squally.

Narrative.

5. Forces A and B slipped at 2325/26th and proceeded in accordance with Vice-Admiral, Dover's signal timed 1545 on 25th September (copy attached). AA buoy was passed at 0046 and course was set through swept channel until Point du Haut Banc was bearing east, when course was altered to east. When forces were 9 miles east of Point du Haut Banc, radar was switched on and M.T.B.s came in single starboard cruising line. M.G.B.s were in single port cruising line. This formation is always used when approaching patrol line as no signalling is allowed by me unless in emergency, and speed can be reduced or increased without danger of collision.

6. Forces stopped in position Point du Haut Banc 5 miles at 0202 and engines were cut. Position was checked with bearings from Etaples and Point du Haut Banc lights and constant radar watch was kept. As the horizon to the westward was far better than to the eastward and it was suspected that northbound convoys used the inshore route, I decided at 0245 to move $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles more inshore, where forces stopped and cut engines at 0251. Although the weather was too bad for proper use of hydrophone, watch was kept as well as with radar. A faint "ping" noise was heard in the hydrophone and at 0307 a faint propeller effect was obtained through the interference. By this time the radar as well was giving echoes and "hydrophone up" was ordered. The ship was rolling too much to use the radar echoes for plotting the enemy movements accurately.

7. Enemy was sighted at 0308 when clear of a low dark cloud obscuring the horizon. Immediately after the first radar echoes were obtained fast signalling with a blue light was seen on the same bearing as given by radar and hydrophone, being south 20 degs. west, thus confirming by visual contact the

technical ones. As it could be seen that under the present circumstances the enemy would be passing too close to the seaward of us, I ordered both forces to start up at 0309, and proceeded on course north-east to get more inshore. I steered north-east and not east so as to prevent showing more silhouette than was necessary. Speed at first 12 knots and later increased to 20 knots for reasons of wash. The enemy was expected to do 9 knots. Enemy was kept in radar touch all the time.

8. At 0317 forces were stopped in position 290 degs. Point du Haut Banc 1.8 miles and the ships' heads kept pointing in the direction of the enemy to keep the silhouette small.

At 0319 the enemy was sighted again in the form of several still, small, dark shapes.

9. At 0320 several starshells exploded dead above us. Immediately afterwards a most violent battle started in the direction of the enemy. Radar gave a range of 2,000 yards to the enemy. I ordered the forces to start up and proceeded on course north-west, speed 36 knots, in order to get to the seaward of the enemy forces and the shore batteries. An attack under these circumstances was out of the question. It could not be observed where the starshells were coming from. No small arms fire was directed at us except some stray bullets. Shell fire, however, was experienced. At 0323 speed was reduced to 22 knots so as not to damage the engines. Boats were bumping heavily against the swell.

10. In the light of the starshells the bows and bow waves of nine E or R-boats* forming a screen ahead of the convoy could be seen in line abreast, six of which seemed to be pointing in our direction, giving the impression of being in pursuit of us. No fire from these ships however seemed to be directed at us. The whole situation was rather puzzling.

11. When the enemy convoy was south of us the gunboats on our starboard quarter swung into attack to create a diversion, passing astern of the M.T.B.s to the south-west, in accordance with plans discussed previously. When the M.T.B.s had cleared the light arc of the starshells and I considered that the gunboats had attracted the attention of the enemy effectively, course was altered to the north and later to the north-east, speed 30 knots, and east at 0328. Speed varied between 30 knots and 18 knots as convenient. Radar touch was kept all the time. Force was stopped at 0337 in position 350 degs. Point du Haut Banc 4.2 miles, when range was 4,500 yards and M.T.B.s were well inshore of the enemy route.

12. When the inshore position was reached, Force B was ordered to attack from the seaward. By the time, however, Force A attacked, no diversion from seaward took place. When the enemy came up north the M.T.B.s slowly closed in, keeping well out of sight of the screen ahead. The enemy, however, silhouetted against a fairly light horizon, could be observed with ease from about 1,800 yards. As soon as the screen ahead of the convoy passed, the M.T.B.s increased speed to between 8 and 12 knots, closing in to about 1,400 yards.

Admiralty footnote:

* Wind force 4—moderate breeze (11-15 m.p.h.).

Admiralty footnote:

* R-boats—motor launches.

13. Having been unable to plot the enemy movements with the radar echoes, I altered course to parallel with the enemy, speed 10 knots, thus comparing our speeds and in the meantime picking out the main target, which was rather difficult as the longest silhouette that could be seen was rather low and I was expecting something higher for that size of ship. After close scrutiny it was decided that the silhouette mentioned was the main target, but heavily laden, a three island ship. At approximately 0400 course was altered to port. Orders to attack the main target were shouted to M.T.B.s 204 and 231, who were in advanced single port cruising line, and the estimated speed of the enemy passed—9 knots.

14. The enemy convoy consisted of a big merchant vessel, 6 to 9 E or R-boats ahead, two coaster type vessels on the starboard quarter of the main target, and astern were 6 or more other trawler size vessels. The screen on the port side, being of no interest to us, was not observed properly. No outer screen was present on the starboard side. At 0403, I observed a bright flash and a dark smoke cloud just abaft the funnel of the main target and a distinct shock was felt in M.T.B. 202. Immediately afterwards a siren was heard.

15. The Commanding Officer of M.T.B. 202 had just fired his starboard torpedo and turned to port to disengage according to his instructions. Speed was increased—when very heavy gun and machine gun-fire was opened on us. Starshell was again used with great accuracy; apart from the usual starshell the enemy used floating luminous flares coming down ahead of us, and several grape-shots exploded fairly close ahead and to starboard. Although no hits were received enemy fire was extremely heavy and accurate, causing numerous near misses. Quite a lot of fire went just over.

16. At 0426 M.T.B. 202 was stopped and an investigation was carried out as to the cause of a misfire at the port torpedo tube. When this was cleared I ordered M.T.B. 202 at 0443 to close some lights and an occasional small searchlight which had been observed in the bearing where the action had taken place, to fire her second torpedo. After having closed in at varying speeds for reasons of wash I ordered M.T.B. 202 to stop at 0451, when radar range was 1,200 yards to the centre of activity, where three ships were lying stopped. I considered it unnecessary to reduce the range more as the targets were lying stopped and an outer screen of E or R-boats were circling slowly around them, only 700 yards away, and the attack might have been spoiled if sighted. After two disappointing attempts to fire the port torpedo I ordered M.T.B. 202 to return to harbour as it was obvious that the firing system was defective.

Conclusions.

17. Attack from inshore has been proved to be possible at this point of the enemy convoy route. Close co-operation with gunboats to create a diversion, strongly enough armed to fight off a pursuing enemy, again proved its value, particularly under circumstances like these where an attack from the inshore side can be made. The diversion created by the gunboats is of great value, partly because of the starshells fired at them silhouetting the enemy for the inshore attack. Against such a

heavy escort, however, it is too risky to do so for a long time. To get the same result as from starshell it would be of great value if the M.G.B.s could drop floating luminous flares to seaward in a case like this, not just abreast of the enemy, but starting from a mile or half a mile ahead; this making a line of flares which the enemy has to pass, giving the M.T.B.s a fair chance to attack. The possibility that the enemy expects an attack from inshore in this case is acceptable as they probably have no time in the confusion to divert their escorts to their inshore side.

(Signed) E. H. LARIVE,
Lieutenant, R. Neth. N.

ENCLOSURE 3 TO F.O.C. DOVER'S LETTER.

FROM ... Senior Officer, M.G.B.s.

DATE ... 29th September, 1943.

To ... Flag Officer Commanding, Dover.

I have the honour to submit the following report on the action on the night 26th/27th September by a combined Motor Torpedo Boat and Motor Gun Boat force on an escorted enemy convoy.

General Narrative.

2. Combined forces were stopped in position 090° Berck Buoy 1 mile at 0203. Owing to low visibility to shoreward and good visibility to seaward, forces moved 1½ miles inshore, stopping in position 100° Berck Buoy 2½ miles at 0250. Engines were cut, and M.G.B. 117 set radar watch, while M.T.B.s kept hydrophone watch.

3. At 0306, some flashing from a blue light was observed, bearing south-west, and immediately afterwards one large vessel and several smaller could be seen. S.O. Force A was informed. At 0310, combined forces proceeded north-east at 12 knots, gradually increasing speed. At 0314, starshell were fired over the forces. It could not be seen whether they were fired by the convoy or from ashore, but it is probable that the convoy sighted our wakes.

4. The combined forces altered course north-west and increased speed. Force B altered course to port at 30 knots and engaged the leading enemy escort on opposite courses, opening fire at 0317. The enemy fire was believed to be from 4-inch and all calibres below. It was intense and mainly accurate, especially from the larger calibre guns. Many near misses were observed by all boats. The enemy starshell also were intense, but promiscuously placed. The blinding effect of the starshell and enemy tracer made it difficult to distinguish targets. M.G.B. 117 observed the nearest escort to be almost stopped with a small fire aft, and her guns temporarily silenced. The Commanding Officer of M.G.B. 117 assumed that this had been caused by the fire of M.G.B. 108. M.G.B. 117 engaged this target at a range of 300 yards, and observed several hits with Oerlikon shells.

5. At 0330, a 4-inch (?) shell missed M.G.B. 108's port quarter by two yards, and the starboard engine stopped. M.G.B.s, who were in line ahead, disengaged to north-west and stopped at 0335 to investigate damage and casualties. The after Oerlikon gunner of M.G.B. 108 was wounded and his place was taken by the radar operator. The other boats

were not damaged, but M.G.B.117's pom-pom could not be laid owing to the failure of the elevating ram. Force B was still being illuminated by starshell, but was not being actively engaged. It was decided to withdraw to the north and signal the Force A to find out if they had attacked with torpedoes. Accordingly at 0342, Force B proceeded north at 22 knots, and stopped at 0353, where signals were made to Force A, firstly asking if they were all right, and secondly asking if they had completed the attack. At 0357, a message from Force A was received, ordering Force B to attack from seaward.

6. Accordingly, Force B proceeded at 26 knots steering north-east, and at 0406 were again illuminated by starshell. At 0407, Force B engaged the enemy screen on a similar course. Enemy fire was still heavy, especially from larger calibre guns, but was not so intense as during the first attack. Starshell again made it difficult to see the enemy at all clearly, and no results of own gunfire were observed. At 0408 the signal "Attack completed" was received from Force A. At 0410, Force B disengaged to the north-west and stopped at 0413, when the signal "Withdraw" was received from Dover.

7. As however it was obvious that the enemy were by now in a confused state and were firing at each other, it was decided to make a brief attack in order to keep the kettle boiling. Accordingly Force B proceeded at 0415, steering east at 10 knots in single line abreast to port, and at 0418, opened fire. Two T.L.C.* type craft were observed, and several E or R-boats in a formed state were observed by the light of the enemy starshell. A considerable amount of enemy fire was observed, but not very much in our direction, and it appeared as if the kettle was boiling nicely. At 0420, Force B turned 180° and disengaged under smoke. Course was set west at 28 knots and then to Dover by the swept channel.

General Conclusions.

8. It had previously been arranged between the S.O.s of the forces that if possible, M.G.B.s should make diversionary attacks from seaward, in order to draw the attention and fire of the enemy, while M.T.B.s made an unobserved attack on the main target from inshore. In the event, this was carried out successfully, although the M.T.B.s did not attack while the M.G.B.s were carrying out the first diversion.

9. It is estimated that the enemy escort consisted of at least two gun coasters or T.L.C.s and three or more groups of E or R-boats, each group consisting of at least 4 boats. The groups were mainly on the seaward side of the convoy, and were also ahead and astern of the main target. From the intensity of larger calibre fire, there may have been more larger sized escorts, as it was too accurately placed to have been fired from the shore.

10. It was interesting and heartening to observe during the first attack that although the enemy fire was intense, and it appeared impossible for boats to live through it, negligible damage was actually sustained.

(Signed) R. B. ROOPER,
Lieutenant, R.N.

ENCLOSURE 4 TO F.O.C. DOVER'S LETTER.

SIGNAL.

FROM ... V.A. Dover.

Tonight Saturday Force A, M.T.B.s 202 (S.O.), 204, 231, and Force B, M.G.B.s 114 (S.O.), 108, 116, are to be sailed in company to pass AA buoy at 0045, thence via swept channel to Berck Buoy where patrol is to be assumed in vicinity.

Object to intercept and destroy northbound convoy which may be expected to be on passage from Le Havre.

Albacores of 841 Squadron may be patrolling convoy route to Dieppe with freedom to bomb surface craft south of latitude 50° 20' North.

Unless in action and in absence of other orders, forces are to leave patrol area at 0500 and return by same route at best speed until AA buoy is passed thence to harbour.

1545/25th September.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 18th November, 1943, by Admiral of the Fleet Sir JOHN C. TOVEY, K.B.E., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, The Nore.

The Nore,
18th November, 1943.

DESTROYER AND COASTAL FORCE ACTION WITH E-BOATS ON NIGHT OF 24TH/25TH OCTOBER, 1943.

Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships the following report on E-boat operations on the night of 24th/25th October, 1943. The forces employed were:—

Destroyers patrolling convoy route:

EGLINTON, WORCESTER, MACKAY, and CAMPBELL.

With F.N. Convoy:

PYTCHLEY.

Coastal Force Units:

Unit P. M.T.B.s 693, 689.

Unit O. M.G.B.s 86, 85.

Unit C. M.L.s 112, 114.

Unit Y. M.G.B.s 607, 603.

Unit L. M.T.B.s 444, 445.

Unit V. M.G.B.s 313, 327.

Unit R. M.G.B.s 609, 610.

Unit S. R.M.L.s* 250, 517.

Unit E. M.T.B.s 438, 443, 440.†

Unit J. M.T.B.s 442, 439.‡

‡ At Lowestoft until receipt of first enemy report.

PART I—NARRATIVE.

The Coastal Force dispositions for this night had been made with an eye to a possible attack north of Yarmouth. The dispositions north of Yarmouth are shown in Appendix A. Other patrols and Coastal Force Units operated south of the area shown in the diagram.

2. Soon after 2200A several reports from bombers who had been out "gardening"† were received. These indicated the possibility of small craft in the vicinity of 52° 50' N.

Admiralty footnotes:

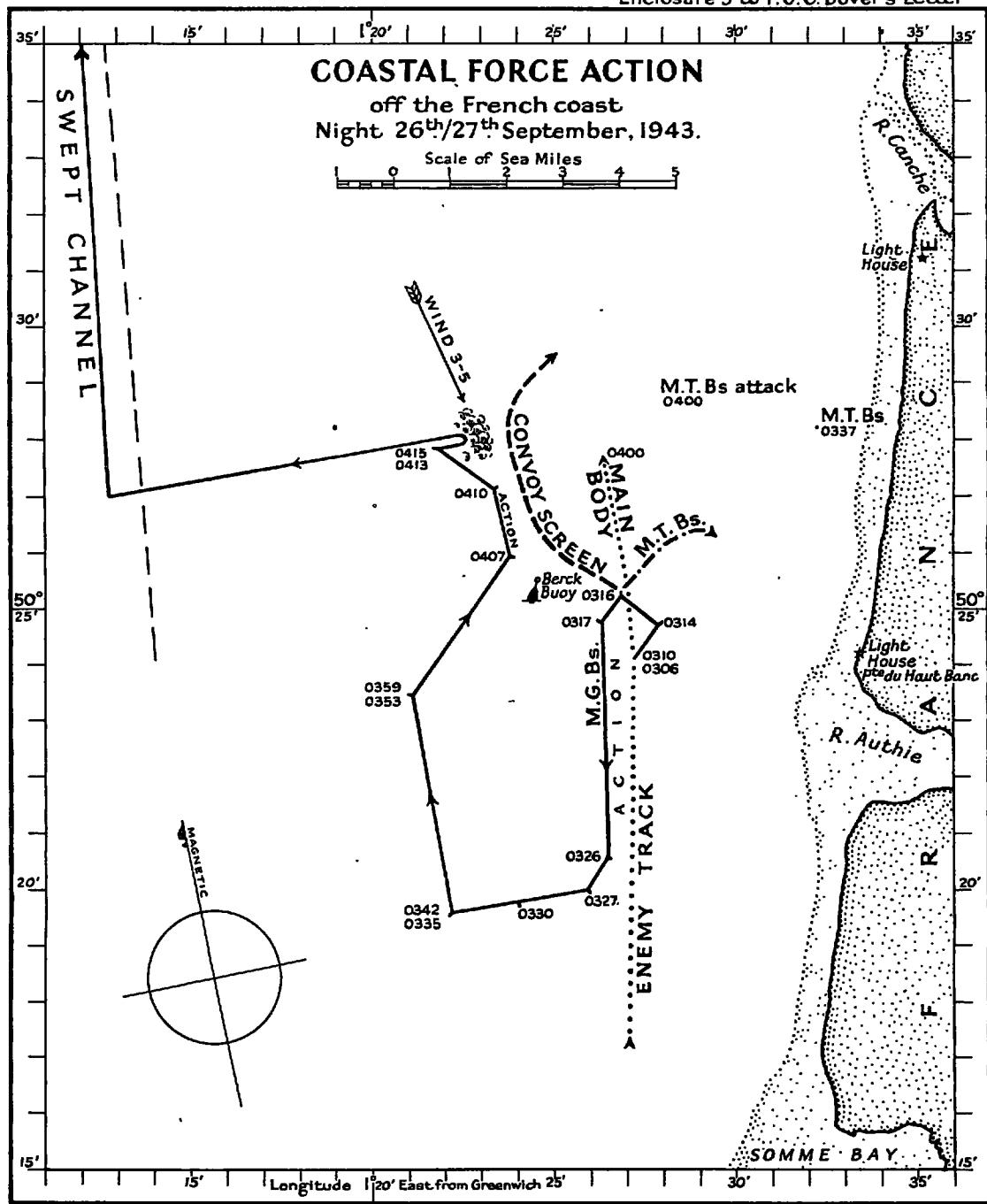
* R.M.L.s—Rescue Motor Launches.

† "Gardening"—laying parachute sea-mines.

Admiralty footnote:

* T.L.C.—Tank Landing Craft.

Enclosure 5 to F.O.C. Dover's Letter



3° 35' E. steering 300° at about 1940. The inference was made that if these were in fact E-boats they were using a route direct from Ijmuiden north of the Ower Bank thence to the convoy route either in the Humber or Cromer area. It was also considered probable that they would use the same route for their retirement. When the action started coastal forces were redispersed accordingly.

3. At about 2318 H.M.S. PYTCHLEY who was guarding the seaward flank of the F.N. convoy* obtained a radar contact of E-boats. The E-boat warning was at once sent out. At 2318 H.M.S. PYTCHLEY went into action with 5 or 6 E-boats 4 miles north of 56B buoy† and drove them off to the north-east, severely damaging one. This timely and well fought action undoubtedly saved the convoy from being accurately located. It appears probable that the E-boats intercepted by Unit Y at 0206 (see paragraph 22) were some of this group escorting the damaged boat back to its base.

4. On receipt of H.M.S. PYTCHLEY's enemy report at 2318 coastal force units were redispersed as follows:—

(a) Units R and V (positions Z56 and Z55‡) were fleeted§ 300°, 20 miles.

(b) Units L and Y (positions Z18 and Z16) were fleeted 020°, 20 miles, to cover the inferred line of retirement to Ijmuiden.

(c) Units C, O and P (positions Z14, Z12 and Z10) were fleeted 015°, 18 miles to close the gap left by (b).

(d) Two fast units of M.T.B.s (E and J) were ordered out from Lowestoft to positions Z10 and Z12. These were later ordered to the northern end of Brown Ridge, again covering the inferred line of retirement to Ijmuiden.

It is most creditable that all these signals were correctly received and acted upon with promptitude.

5. The shore radar stations now began to get unidentified plots in dangerous proximity to the F.N. convoy—H.M.S. EGLINTON on patrol 3 was therefore ordered to remain with the convoy until further orders, H.M. Ships WORCESTER, MACKAY and CAMPBELL (patrols 4, 5 and 6) being fleeted north to 3, 4 and 5 respectively at 0002.

6. It soon became clear that the E-boats had split into numerous groups which were approaching the outer war channel at a number of points east of 57F buoy. It was remarkably fortunate that all these groups came in astern of the convoy which was in fact never sighted. This convoy happened to be 2 hours ahead of timetable. In addition to the convoy the trawler WILLIAM STEPHEN was a source of anxiety as she had straggled some miles astern of the convoy.

7. The situation at 0002 on 25th October on the convoy route was as follows:—

The rear of the F.N. convoy approximately

Admiralty footnotes:

* F.N. convoys were northbound coastal convoys.

† For positions of numbered buoys, see Appendix A.

‡ For numbered positions Z56 etc., see Appendix A.

§ "Fleet" was a code-word used in signals when re-disposing units on patrol; in this context, "fleeted" means merely "moved".

at 57C buoy—H.M.S. WORCESTER on patrol 4 had by that time reached the eastern end of her patrol, 57 buoy. There was thus temporarily a stretch of 25 miles that was completely open to attack since H.M.S. EGLINTON (patrol 3) had been ordered to remain with the convoy. Radar stations showed unidentified plots close north of 55B buoy and approaching 56B. Another track appeared about 3 miles north-east of 57C moving slowly towards 57F. Shortly after this time yet another track appeared a mile or so north of 56 buoy. At 0002 H.M.T. WILLIAM STEPHEN was near 56 buoy.

8. Between 0015 and 0115 there were groups of E-boats at 56, 56B and at 57F buoy after the convoy had passed. Positions of these groups obtained by shore radar were signalled by Commander-in-Chief, The Nore, although no immediate action could be taken to deal with them. These groups were in addition to those engaged by H.M.S. PYTCHLEY at 2318, H.M.S. WORCESTER at 0027, H.M.S. MACKAY at 0045 and 0136, and Unit R at 0140.

Destroyer Actions.

9. H.M.S. PYTCHLEY (*with F.N. 60*).—Already described in paragraph 3.

10. H.M.S. WORCESTER (*patrol 4*).—At 0027 when 3 miles east of 55B buoy, H.M.S. WORCESTER engaged 4 E-boats, scoring Oerlikon hits on second boat in the line. The E-boats retired on a course of 030°. A cast round after contact had been lost did not locate the possibly damaged boat.

11. H.M.S. WORCESTER passed 56 buoy about 0100, at which time shore radar placed the group that had been near that buoy about 3 miles north of it. By now the large number of plots made identification and following of units extremely difficult and a clear picture of the situation in this area could not be obtained.

12. At 0117 H.M.S. WORCESTER engaged 3 E-boats $\frac{1}{4}$ miles north of 56B buoy. One E-boat was hit by a 4.7-inch shell and close range weapons and was seen to blow up, burning wreckage being passed during the chase to the northward. At 0151 on return to the channel, H.M.S. WORCESTER sighted and engaged 3 E-boats on the scene of the action at 0117. These were stopped when sighted. They were engaged and driven off.

13. H.M.S. MACKAY (*patrol 5*).—At 0005 when "fleet north" signal was received H.M.S. MACKAY was at southern end of patrol 5. At 0036 when at 57 buoy radar detected 3 targets 4 miles to the northward. At 0040 5 E-boats were engaged at 1,700 yards range. These retired to north-eastward, making smoke and dropping delayed action depth charges which were easily avoided. M.G.B. Unit L fleeted 020°, 20 miles from Z18 obtained H.E. from this group at 0137 but could not intercept. At 0107 H.M.S. MACKAY, then some $\frac{1}{4}$ miles north-east of 57 buoy, shaped course for 54D buoy.

14. At 0136 when 6 miles north of 57 buoy, H.M.S. MACKAY obtained suspicious radar contact 4 miles to the west. At 0148 at least 2 E-boats were engaged and straddled with the twin 6-pdr. The E-boats retired to the north-eastward, dropping depth charges as they went.

At 0205 H.M.S. MACKAY in the vicinity of Z23 broke off the engagement and returned to patrol 4.

Loss of H.M.T. WILLIAM STEPHEN.

15. This trawler did not maintain her station in the convoy though she should have had sufficient speed and had dropped some five miles astern. As soon as the E-boat activity developed it was seen that this unfortunate trawler had E-boats both ahead and astern of her and she ran into the group at 56B buoy, being sunk by torpedo a few minutes before 0100. I regret now that I did order her to steer inshore, but at the time the E-boat situation was not so clear as it became subsequently. The explosion was felt by Unit V to the northward. A German broadcast on the following day mentioned the picking up of survivors.

Coastal Force Engagements.

16. *Unit S—M.L. 250 and R.M.L. 517 (position Z22)* sighted H.M.S. MACKAY's first action but was not able to intercept the E-boats, the speed of the unit being reduced to 12 knots due to engine failure in M.L. 250. At 0156 a momentary action was fought with the two E-boats driven off by H.M.S. MACKAY in her second action.

17. *Unit V—M.G.B.s 315 and 327 (position Z55)* started to fleet 300°, 20 miles at 2345. The first actions of H.M. Ships WORCESTER and MACKAY were seen in the distance to the southward. An underwater explosion was felt about 0100 which confirms the time of the torpedoing of trawler WILLIAM STEPHEN. H.M.S. WORCESTER's second action (paragraph 14) was also seen and at 0120 radar contact was made with these E-boats. Three boats were heavily engaged from 0138 until 0144, hits being observed on two of them. The last boat in the line may have been considerably damaged. At 0230 three more E-boats were sighted on a north-easterly course at high speed about six miles north of 55B buoy. Owing to their large turning circle Unit V was unable to turn quickly enough to engage the fast moving enemy.

18. *Unit R—M.G.B.s 609 and 610 (position Z56)* started to fleet 300°, 20 miles at 2341. Two unidentified plots were signalled to the unit at 0035 and 0040 some ten miles E.N.E. of Sheringham buoy but Unit R had already investigated radar contacts in this area by the time the signals were received.

19. At 0100 Commander-in-Chief signalled position of Unit R and an enemy plot—Unit R had already obtained hydrophone contact and at 0102 obtained contact by radar. From this time until 0141 Unit R stalked the enemy, keeping between him and the convoy. As soon as the enemy showed signs of closing the convoy, Unit R attacked, twice forcing him to withdraw to the eastward, the second time for good. The second boat in the line on which Unit R concentrated their fire was undoubtedly hit hard and forced to leave the line.

20. This group of E-boats was the only one to operate north of 57F buoy.

21. *Unit Y—M.G.B.s 607 and 603 (position Z16)* together with Unit L (position Z18) was fleeted 020°, 20 miles at 2340 as mentioned in paragraph 4. H.M.S. WORCESTER's first

engagement at 0027 and those of H.M.S. MACKAY were observed to the westward. H.M.S. MACKAY's track chart and that of Unit Y indicate that the E-boats engaged by H.M.S. MACKAY at 0148 could not be the same as those engaged by Unit Y as suggested by Senior Officer of Unit Y. From statements by prisoners of war and other sources it is considered that Unit Y's group were proceeding back to their base possibly escorting one E-boat that had been damaged by H.M.S. PYTCHLEY at 2318. The fact that they reached Unit Y approximately at the end of H.M.S. MACKAY's action appears to have been pure coincidence.

22. At 0206 Unit Y engaged a group of E-boats steering an easterly course about 22 miles north-east of Smiths Knoll buoy. The unit pressed home its attack with great vigour and set two E-boats on fire. These E-boats were seen to blow up. M.G.B. 607 (Lieutenant R. M. Marshall, R.N.V.R.) also rammed and sank a third E-boat.

23. At 0400 M.G.B. 603 with 607 in tow obtained radar contact to the northward. Tow was slipped and at 0418 M.G.B. 603 went into action with six E-boats at a range of under 800 yards. As the result of being the first to open fire M.G.B. 603 obtained many hits on one boat and probably damaged it severely. After a running fight the enemy made off at high speed at about 0445. M.G.B. 603 then rejoined M.G.B. 607.

24. *Unit J—M.T.B.s 442 and 439.* Units E and J which had been ordered out from Lowestoft to positions Z10 and Z12 when E-boat activity started, were ordered to the northern end of Brown Ridge (position RB27 and ten miles north of position RB27 respectively) where they arrived at 0300. At 0406 unit went into action with three E-boats and a high speed running fight ensued in which both M.T.B.s scored a number of hits. They also suffered damage and casualties, a hit on the bridge of 442 killing the First Lieutenant. At 0415 M.T.B. 439 lost contact with 442 owing to the failure of the rudder to turn the boat, although hard over—439 continued to engage the enemy, however, until 0445 when it became necessary to attend to action damage and to wounded. At 0450 M.T.B. 442 also disengaged due to action damage and stoppage of 2-pdr. It is considered probable that considerable damage was inflicted on the enemy in these engagements.

25. At 0545 in position 52° 50' N. 3° 04' E., M.T.B. 439 sighted four E-boats steering E.S.E. As by this time 439 was in no fit state for action, avoiding action was taken. The presence of 439 appears to have confused the enemy sufficiently to induce them to open fire on one of their own boats which was straggling from the line.

26. At 0605, some 12 miles further west, 439 sighted another group of eastbound E-boats who opened fire. This group was also avoided. I consider this avoiding action was justified.

27. Most unfortunately fog at the aerodromes prevented any aircraft of Fighter or Coastal Commands taking advantage of this unique opportunity of attacking E-boats in daylight. A number of these did not reach their base before noon.

PART II—REMARKS.

28. This was probably the most difficult night yet experienced from the radar point of view. The E-boats split up into many small groups thus making identification most difficult.

29. As late as 0540 there were indications that some E-boats were still not far from the coast, almost certainly north of Ower Bank since the area south of it was covered by Coastal Forces. From previous experience it can be inferred that they were looking for missing boats. It is always a sign that our counter-measures have achieved some success. Analysis of the action reports points to the E-boats having come in north of the Ower Bank and then fanned out to the southward in probably three main groups (A, B and C) which in turn split up into smaller groups.

30. Group A operated between 57F buoy and 56B buoy and appears to have been a very large group. Units of it were engaged by H.M. Ships PYTCHLEY and WORCESTER (second action). Group A also provided the unit which remained at 57F buoy between 0050 and 0212. Another unit of this group went north of 57F buoy in search of the convoy and was only prevented from finding it by the well judged action of Unit R. It was probably some of group A that sank H.M.T. WILLIAM STEPHEN.

31. Group C was the most easterly of the three. Units of it were engaged by H.M.S. WORCESTER at 0027 and H.M.S. MACKAY at 0045 and 0148.

32. Group B appears to have been between 56B and 55B buoys. Shore radar showed E-boats near 56 buoy and Unit V's second sighting was probably boats of this group. It appears to have merged with group A at times and may have had a hand in the sinking of H.M.T. WILLIAM STEPHEN and therefore in H.M.S. WORCESTER's second action.

33. From the number of callsigns heard (30) and the number of boats accounted for by radar plots and ships' action reports (see paragraph 8) it is considered that at least 30 E-boats were present on this occasion, a strength of attack that has to be expected with the large number of E-boats known to be based on Dutch ports.

Shore Radar.

34. Shore radar stations did much good work in detecting E-boat units in or near the swept channel. It was their first experience of action conditions and it is considered that great credit is due to them in view of the very large number of both enemy and friendly vessels involved.

Remarks on Ships' Actions and Reports.

35. H.M.S. PYTCHLEY (Lieutenant-Commander R. H. Hodgkinson, R.N.).—This timely and well fought action had considerable bearing on the general success of the night's operations in that it prevented the enemy accurately locating the convoy. Throughout the Commanding Officer acted with sound judgment.

36. H.M.S. WORCESTER (Lieutenant J. A. H. Hamer, R.N.).—The Commanding Officer's decision at 0130 to break off the chase of E-boats when five miles north of the swept channel and return to his patrol was correct,

especially as the range was such that hits could scarcely be expected. The definite destruction of an E-boat is a most satisfactory indication of the efficiency of the ship. The Commanding Officer handled his ship with determination and sound judgment.

37. H.M.S. MACKAY (Lieutenant-Commander J. H. Eaden, D.S.C., R.N.).—Although it is undesirable to lay down any hard and fast rule as to how far from his patrol a destroyer should chase E-boats, in this case H.M.S. MACKAY's patrol was left completely open for a very long time. The object of these patrols is the prevention of minelaying in the channel and on this occasion the enemy would have been able to lay mines at his leisure during a period of two hours.

38. Unit V (M.G.B.s 315 and 327) (Senior Officer, Lieutenant J. A. Caulfield, R.N.V.R.).—The shore control had great difficulty in identifying Unit V among the many radar plots that appeared in the area concerned, consequently it was not possible to give this unit much help. It is most satisfactory that the unit was able to get into action with good effect so soon after H.M.S. WORCESTER's engagement and probably with the same boats. The continual harrying of the E-boats is bound to have a discouraging effect. The results obtained by the new type of hydrophone are most satisfactory but the standard of radar performance in M.G.B. 315 leaves something to be desired. Had the second enemy unit been picked up by radar the unit might have been able to turn to a similar course to that of the enemy before sighting and thus have got into action.

39. Unit R (M.G.B.s 609 and 610).—The Senior Officer of this unit, Lieutenant P. Edge, R.N.V.R., showed a quick and sound appreciation of the Commander-in-Chief's object in fleeting the unit, i.e., the defence of the north-bound convoy, and throughout handled his unit with tactical ability of a high order. Skilful use of radar gave him an exact picture of the enemy's movements and enabled him to go into action at a moment of his own choosing. The moment he chose was entirely correct and there is no doubt that this well fought action saved the convoy from being located and attacked. The unit was unfortunate in not obtaining a kill especially as a probable one had to be sacrificed in achieving the object.

40. It is not possible to lay down any hard and fast rule as to how far destroyers should be from the convoy route and it is inevitable that they should illuminate any craft approaching them that they cannot identify as friendly. The onus of establishing identity must remain with the coastal forces.

41. Unit Y (M.G.B.s 607 and 603).—Lieutenants Marshall and Lightoller showed admirable judgment and a magnificent fighting spirit in this, the most successful action of the night. It is considered that the claim to have destroyed 3 E-boats is substantiated. Once again the value of 2-pdr. starshell both as illuminants and as incendiary ammunition was demonstrated.

42. This action also shows the devastating effect of the gunpower of the D class M.G.B.s in an attack which is pressed well

home. The results obtained give clear proof of the very high fighting efficiency of these two boats.

43. The gallant action fought single-handed by M.G.B. 603 against six E-boats not only showed determination to lose no chance of engaging the enemy but may well have saved M.G.B. 607 from destruction.

44. *Unit J (M.T.B.s 442 and 439)* (Senior Officer, Lieutenant C. A. Burk, R.C.N.V.R.)—Here again good use was made of radar during the action. Considerable damage was undoubtedly done to the enemy and but for action damage a kill might well have resulted.

General.

45. This action gives general proof of a great improvement in the efficiency of the Coastal Forces particularly as regards communications and the use of radar. The small number of material breakdowns also indicates a higher standard of interest and handling by the Commanding Officers and crews of boats and reflects great credit on the maintenance officers and staffs of the bases. Furthermore, it clearly demonstrates the value and essential need of constant training and practice.

46. The dispositions and movements of forces were controlled by Commander H. A. Taylor, R.N., and the success of the operations was in large part due to his skill and extremely clever and prompt anticipation of enemy movements.

47. In addition to the successful defence of the convoy, it is considered permissible to feel a modicum of satisfaction in the number of times the E-boats were engaged. They were roughly handled six times in or near the convoy route (H.M. Ships WORCESTER and MACKAY twice, H.M.S. PYTCHELY and Unit R once each), once by Unit V when retiring from H.M.S. WORCESTER's second action, and by Units Y and J on their homeward passage when they probably felt they were clear of our forces. Had the R.A.F. been able to attack them after daylight it would have been a strong deterrent to E-boats leaving their return to their bases till so late.

(Signed) JACK C. TOVEY,
Admiral of the Fleet., Commander-in-Chief.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 9th December, 1944, by Admiral Sir JOHN H. D. CUNNINGHAM, K.C.B., M.V.O., Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Station.

*Mediterranean,
9th December, 1944.*

ACTION REPORT—H.M. M.G.B. 662, H.M. M.T.B.s 634, 637, 638 ON THE NIGHT OF 11TH/12TH OCTOBER, 1944.

Forwarded for the information of Their Lordships, strongly concurring in paragraph 2 of the remarks of the Captain Coastal Forces, Mediterranean.

(Signed) J. H. D. CUNNINGHAM,
*Admiral,
Commander-in-Chief.*

ENCLOSURE 1 TO C.-IN-C., MEDITERRANEAN STATION'S LETTER.

FROM ... The Captain Coastal Forces, Mediterranean.
DATE ... 18th November, 1944.
To ... The Commander - in - Chief, Mediterranean Station.

The remarks of the Commander Coastal Forces, Western Mediterranean, are fully concurred in.

2. The Senior Officer, 57th M.T.B. Flotilla has written such an excellent report and so ably summed up this prolonged action in his paragraphs 39 and 40, that little remains to be said. To the factors which made victory possible (*vide* paragraph 39 of the Action Report) must unquestionably be added brilliant and inspiring leadership, as the Commander Coastal Forces, Western Mediterranean has indeed already remarked. I have on several previous occasions remarked on Lieutenant-Commander T. J. Bligh's splendid leadership of his flotilla in action. On this occasion he set a seal on his previous performances.

3. In my letter dated 3rd October, 1944, I remarked on the brilliant success of three boats of the 56th M.T.B. Flotilla in a prolonged night action. It is a matter of great personal satisfaction to me, knowing all the officers of both flotillas and having watched the happy mixture of close co-operation and friendly rivalry existing between them, that the 57th Flotilla has now crowned its career with an equally, and possibly even more brilliant success.

(Signed) J. F. STEVENS,
Captain, R.N.

ENCLOSURE 2 TO C.-IN-C., MEDITERRANEAN STATION'S LETTER.

FROM ... The Commander Coastal Forces, Western Mediterranean.
DATE ... 23rd October, 1944.
To ... The Captain Coastal Forces, Mediterranean.

Submitted:

Forwarded:

2. This highly successful action was characterised in its initial stages by skilful anticipation of enemy movements; and later, by the manner in which prevailing conditions and available resources were turned to such good account in securing maximum opportunity for attack, but for which our boats would have undoubtedly incurred greater damage and casualties. Throughout, the engagement was carried out with skill and determination under brilliant leadership, in the face of heavy enemy fire.

(Signed) A. D. McILWRAITH,
Commander, R.N.V.R.

ENCLOSURE 3 TO C.-IN-C., MEDITERRANEAN STATION'S LETTER.

FROM ... The Senior Officer, 57th M.T.B. Flotilla.
DATE ... 15th October, 1944.
To ... The Commander Coastal Forces, Western Mediterranean.

The following report of the attack on enemy F-lighter* convoys in the Adriatic on the night of 11th/12th October, 1944, is submitted.

Admiralty footnote:—

* F-lighter—comparable to an armed tank landing craft.

Own Force.

2. His Majesty's M.G.B. 662 (Senior Officer), His Majesty's M.T.B. 634 (Lieutenant W. E. A. Blount, D.S.C., R.N.V.R.), His Majesty's M.T.B. 637 (Lieutenant R. C. Davidson, D.S.C., R.N.V.R.) and His Majesty's M.T.B. 638 (Lieutenant D. Lummis, R.N.V.R.).

Duty on which Force was employed.

3. On patrol, North of Zara, in accordance with instructions from the British Senior Naval Officer, Vis.

4. Weather—fine: Wind force and direction—north-east, force 1-2*: Sea and swell—nil: Moon—moonrise 0114: Visibility—1,000 yards until moonrise: Phosphorescence—slight.

General Narrative.

5. It was arranged that the unit proceed on patrol, north of Zara, on D—1 day, lie up at Ist on D day, patrol on the night of D day and either return to Vis on D+1, or wait at Ist for a further night, patrolling on D+2 and returning to Vis on D+3 day.

Accordingly, the unit left Komiza at 1300 on 10th October, 1944, proceeding northwards at seventeen knots in arrowhead formation. H.M.M.T.B. 634, who had been to Ist before, was sent ahead at nineteen knots to contact the L.R.D.G.† Officer and the Partisan naval authorities and obtain the latest naval intelligence. At 1845, the unit arrived at the rendezvous position just south of Ist harbour, but as H.M.M.T.B. 634 was not there H.M.M.G.B. 662 entered the bay to find her and go alongside.

6. Lieutenant W. E. A. Blount, D.S.C., R.N.V.R., reported that the intelligence he had been given was as follows. A northbound convoy of some four or five ships (mostly F-Boats) had been seen by L.R.D.G. to enter Zara some three or four days ago and it was to be expected that they would endeavour to proceed northwards as soon as possible. Further, no shipping had been seen either northbound or southbound for three days and there was a certainty of something passing near Vir Island during the night. In addition, three Partisan "tigers"‡ were patrolling the Maon Channel to the northwards (where they had recently sunk one and captured another enemy schooner), and a Ju.88 had machine-gunned a small ship in Ist Bay at dawn two days previously.

7. Accordingly the unit was led between Ist and Mulat (a very narrow but deep channel) at 1945 and course was set to close Vir Island on silent engines, the three "tigers" being sighted on the port beam, forming up into their cruising formation as the leading boat left the channel.

8. At 2040 the unit closed the coast of Vir, and lay stopped, in wait for the promised north-bound convoy.

Admiralty footnotes:

* Wind force 1-2—light air to light breeze (1-6 m.p.h.).

† L.R.D.G.—Long Range Desert Group.

‡ Tigers—any minor partisan craft employed on reconnaissance or patrol duties.

The weather was very dark and thundery, with vivid flashes of lightning to the southwards, but apart from two panics caused by the spire of Zara Church, all was quiet.

9. At 2245, three white flares were seen over Mulat.

At 2347, much tracer was seen coming from Ist, in what appeared to be a land battle, but the L.R.D.G. representatives on board H.M. M.T.B. 634 considered that a low flying air attack was being made on the harbour. I myself thought this unlikely, and was of the opinion that an E-boat was firing irresponsibly for some obscure reason known only to the enemy. (I had seen this happen before, in the same place, on the night of 26th June, this year.) The firing then ceased, but ten minutes later broke out further south, near Mulat. This time there were some flares (or starshell) being used, and some large flashes were seen on the land, and the aircraft theory seemed possible: however, some 88-m.m. tracer was identified from the eastern side of Mulat and it was obvious that there was something taking place.

10. In view of the intelligence reports received earlier in the evening, I was averse to leaving the patrol area—in fact the firing may have been a diversion to draw our craft away from the eastern side of the channel—but it did seem possible that there was at least one F-lighter or siebel ferry* over on that side, so at 0039 H.M.M.T.B. 634 was detached to go to Ist to contact the L.R.D.G. or Partisans and find out what was happening, whilst the remainder of the unit stayed in the patrol area.

11. At 0223, H.M.M.T.B. 634 made R/T† contact with H.M.M.T.B. 637 and reported that there had been two destroyers in position 206° 4½ miles Veli Rat Light, having previously sent a W/T signal to me to the effect that there was heavy firing to seaward, and broadcasting an enemy report. H.M.M.T.B. 634 also reported that an F-lighter had been seen by the Partisans in amongst the islands, but was southbound.

The unit at once proceeded to Kok Point to rendezvous H.M.M.T.B. 634, torpedoes were set to 3 and 5 feet, radar switched on and a course set to pass between Skarda and Ist, to carry out a sweep outside the islands to try and find the two destroyers. Search was abandoned at 0345, as there was a rising wind and sea, and unit returned to Ist.

12. It seemed probable that the destroyers had proceeded northwards at high speed, directly after the bombardment and the chance of catching them was remote.

My opinion is that I was justified in staying off Vir and not leaving my area, but that I should have detached H.M.M.T.B. 634 earlier, when I might have been able to have contacted the enemy.

13. At 0900, a Partisan reported a large warship with two funnels in a cove on the east coast of Mulat, a moderately alarming report to receive at any time, but this dwindled to an F-lighter by 1000, an E-boat by 1100 and a "trick of the light" by 1200.

Admiralty footnotes:

* Siebel ferry—a type of German landing craft.

† R/T—radio-telephony.

14. At 1730, a conference was held with the local authorities and it was decided to repeat the previous night's patrol, with the additional proviso that if any shipping at all was sighted near Ist, a pre-arranged pyrotechnic signal would be made from the Partisan lookout post.

Having thus secured the rear, the unit proceeded to Vir at 1825.

15. It had been decided that the big demonstration put up by the enemy the previous night (which included torpedoes fired by E-boats at Mulat breakwater) was aimed at eliminating some "tigers" and/or M.G.B.s and that it was probable he would try and run a big convoy north this night. Hence the unit closed Vir Island and was disposed along the coast to meet a northbound convoy.

16. Some flares were seen to the southwards, and there were lights and flickerings in the sky over Nin—all appeared to be set. At 2215 some vertical tracer was seen off Zara.

At about 2220 H.M.M.T.B.634's starboard outer engine pushed a conrod through the crank case and most of the engine-room crew were overcome by fumes.

At about 2245 all the boats started rolling, as if a lot of ships had passed by to seawards, so at 2300 the unit proceeded northwards, a guess that eventually proved correct.

17. The visibility was now very low, due to widely scattered low cloud, but I was not prepared for the shock of suddenly seeing enemy ships on the port bow, at about four hundred yards' range.

The unit was at once stopped and the boats headed into the shore just north of Vir light. The targets were now seen to be four F-lighters, of which one was altering course towards us: he appeared to be higher out of the water than the others and was possibly an escorting flak lighter: he had probably sighted one or more of the unit and was closing to drive us off.

18. H.M.M.T.B.634 was ordered to try and carry out a snap torpedo attack on this target, whilst H.M.M.G.B.662 ordered "single line ahead, speed 8 knots", and went ahead in order to engage the remainder by gunfire.

The flak boat opened fire on H.M.M.G.B.662 at 2306, at once killing one of the pom-pom loading numbers. Fire was returned from all guns and H.M.M.T.B.638 illuminated with starshell.

19. It is scarcely possible to describe the next ten minutes. The visibility was such that the leading boat in the line had a completely different picture from the fourth boat, and the slight offshore breeze was blowing the smoke from H.M.M.G.B.662's gunfire across the line of sight of our ships and the enemy convoy, which was, of course, much more of an advantage to us than them as we had the inshore position and knew where to expect them, while the only ship that they could see was H.M.M.G.B.662. But it will, in fact, be easier to give the impressions of each boat during this phase of the action and try to paint the picture that each one saw, than to give a coherent account of what the unit did.

H.M.M.G.B.662's Narrative.

20. H.M.M.G.B.662 had drawn ahead of H.M.M.T.B.634, who had manoeuvred for a torpedo attack, and was engaging many targets on the port side, including F-lighters, Pi-L Boats* and E-boats. Very heavy 88-m.m. and 20-m.m. was coming our way, all high, from a variety of enemy vessels and this fire had a strong blinding effect on my bridge. Nevertheless, I saw a Pi-L Boat hit by the 6-pounder and blow up, starting a petrol fire on the surface of the water.

In the light of H.M.M.T.B.638's starshell ahead, I saw F-lighters being hit by my pom-pom and Oerlikon. I saw an E-boat in the light of the petrol fire hit, set alight and blow up—a victory achieved by the bridge .303-inch Vickers, and on the port quarter I witnessed an inspiring display of 6-pounder gunnery. An F-lighter, at about four hundred yards, was steering away from us, unilluminated and almost invisible, even through binoculars, yet the 6-pounder fired nearly thirty rounds that scored hits in about a minute. The 6-pounder also hit and sank a Pi-L Boat with an inert cargo.

Meanwhile, H.M.M.G.B.662 had crossed the northern end of the convoys and was lying stopped, waiting for the other boats to rejoin, and trying to ensure that no enemy got away.

It had been intended to work round to the west of the enemy immediately and engage them against the fires of their burning vessels, but this was not possible until all the boats had come round.

Everywhere on the port side there were burning ships and explosions. There were visible many more ships than the original four F-lighters. The sight was fantastic.

H.M.M.T.B.634's Narrative.

21. H.M.M.T.B.634 says—"The Senior Officer signalled single line ahead speed 8 knots and opened fire on the enemy, which now appeared clearly as four F-lighters, three of which were stopped or proceeding slowly northwards in single port cruising line. One was closing. I prepared to attack the flak-lighter with torpedoes, but the range had closed to one hundred yards by the time the sight was on and I decided that it was too close, so I altered back to starboard, and opened up with all guns on the flak-lighter who was firing at H.M.M.G.B.662. As I turned, less than fifty yards from the flak-lighter, H.M.M.T.B.634 was hit in the port pom-pom ready use locker which exploded and went up in flames. The fire was promptly extinguished. All our guns continued to pour an intense fire into the flak-lighter which burst into flames from stem to stern, by the light of which every detail of her could be discerned. She appeared to have an 88-m.m. amidships, a quadruple 20-m.m. aft and many 20-m.m. in sponsons down the starboard side. Her bridge collapsed and she appeared to be breaking in two. I steered parallel to the enemy who was turning slowly to port, at less than forty yards. Then another F-lighter, followed by two more, appeared very close to seaward of the burning flak-lighter.

Admiralty footnote:

* Pi-L boats—Pioneer Landing Craft.

They were well lit up by the flames and steering southwards in single line ahead. All my guns fired on the middle one and then the last one, and fires were started on both. All three were seen to be engaged by H.M.M.T.B.s 637 and 638. A stern of the southgoing F-lighters, what looked like an E-boat, bows on to us, appeared. This was engaged by the port .5-inch turret and was seen by me to explode and disappear.

On rejoining, the flak-lighter of the northbound group was seen to sink in a cloud of smoke and steam, half-a-mile to seaward of the engagement and all the remaining F-lighters appear to have been driven south by H.M.M.G.B.662."

H.M.M.T.B.637's Narrative.

22. H.M.M.T.B.637 says—"At 2306, the enemy opened fire and H.M.M.T.B.634 altered course to port to attack with torpedoes. The Senior Officer and H.M.M.T.B.634 were engaging targets unseen by us, but fires could be seen breaking out. My pom-pom gunner was engaging a northbound F-lighter, but as H.M.M.T.B.638 was on the port beam, no other guns could fire. (This was due to the fact that I was manoeuvring to keep station on H.M.M.T.B.634's gun flashes.) However, in a few seconds I opened fire with all guns on a target which was headed northwards. It was bows on to another burning F-lighter. The range of the target was about seventy-five yards and every detail of the vessel was discerned. At this range none of our guns could miss. She immediately caught fire. The after superstructure of this vessel resembled Wembley Stadium on a dark night, except for the Nazi flag. The gunners reduced it to a blazing wreck, and another large target seen abeam of this blaze was being engaged by H.M.M.T.B.638 with accurate fire.

At 2317 two large objects were observed on the port beam and turned out to be upturned vessels."

H.M.M.T.B.638's Narrative.

23. H.M.M.T.B.638 says—"At 2305 the Senior Officer signalled enemy ahead. They were invisible to us at this moment. The boats ahead opened fire. My pom-pom illuminated with starshell as previously arranged. An F-lighter was set on fire, fine on my port bow and this illuminated two F-lighters, a Pi-L Boat and an E-boat on my port beam, steering southwards. We sank the Pi-L Boat with Oerlikon and concentrated on an F-lighter at two hundred yards. Shells could be seen ripping open her side. This target was left burning fiercely, and fire was directed on another F-lighter which was hit with all guns and set on fire. An E-boat appeared on the starboard quarter, and was hit with Oerlikon. We sustained one 20-m.m. hit in this engagement."

24. At 2314 the situation was resolving itself and a sweep was carried out round to the west and south to discourage any of the enemy from returning to Zara. An active F-lighter could be seen to seaward of the scene of the action, steering south, but he turned inshore, and I was confident that we would easily find him again: I somehow felt that none of the enemy would try and push any further north, and was mostly concerned with the southern flank.

25. At 2346, when about one mile from Vir light, an F-lighter was seen close inshore; it turned over and submerged, and was thought to be the one that had been damaged by H.M.M.G.B.662's six-pounder. There was another possible small target here also, but I was looking for the other F-lighters and decided not to investigate. It was probably a wreck anyhow.

26. At 2353, targets were sighted at Green 20°,* and H.M.M.T.B.637 was ordered to illuminate with starshell. This was done well, and H.M.M.G.B.662 opened fire with all guns on an F-lighter and a Pi-L Boat or E-boat lying close inshore, near Vir Point. The F-lighter was seen to sink; the smaller craft was also hit. The enemy now opened heavy fire from a position abaft the beam, almost certainly one or more F-lighters lying very close to the beach, well north of Vir light and completely invisible. All boats returned fire at the flashes, and some damage may have been inflicted, as the enemy craft ceased fire until we were going away to the northward, when they fired vigorously at nothing to the south-west.

27. It was thus decided to go away and lie off until the moon got up, and the light improved, and then come back and torpedo the remaining enemy. This entailed some risk of losing the enemy if he crept close to the coast, but I decided to place complete confidence and reliance in my radar set and its experienced operator, and to lie off, stopped at about four thousand yards. I felt certain that we should be able to pick up any F-lighters that tried to move, but had to admit that if a Pi-L Boat wanted to get away—well then it could; but I did not want to risk losing any boats by taking them into a dark coast with a belligerent group of well-armed vessels lying on the beach, when there was a big improvement of visibility due in two hours' time.

Various echoes were plotted during the next two hours but they turned out to be ghost or aircraft echoes in the centre of the channel.

28. It was now planned to approach the coast just north of Vir light in very broad single line abreast to starboard, on a north-easterly course with torpedoes ready for immediate firing. H.M.M.G.B.662 was to illuminate the coast line with starshell, and the first M.T.B. to sight an F-lighter was to fire torpedoes and say so at once on the inter-communication; no other M.T.B. was to fire torpedoes until the result of the first attack was observed. By spreading out the unit, danger from enemy fire was reduced and perfect inter-communication ensured that good control could be maintained.

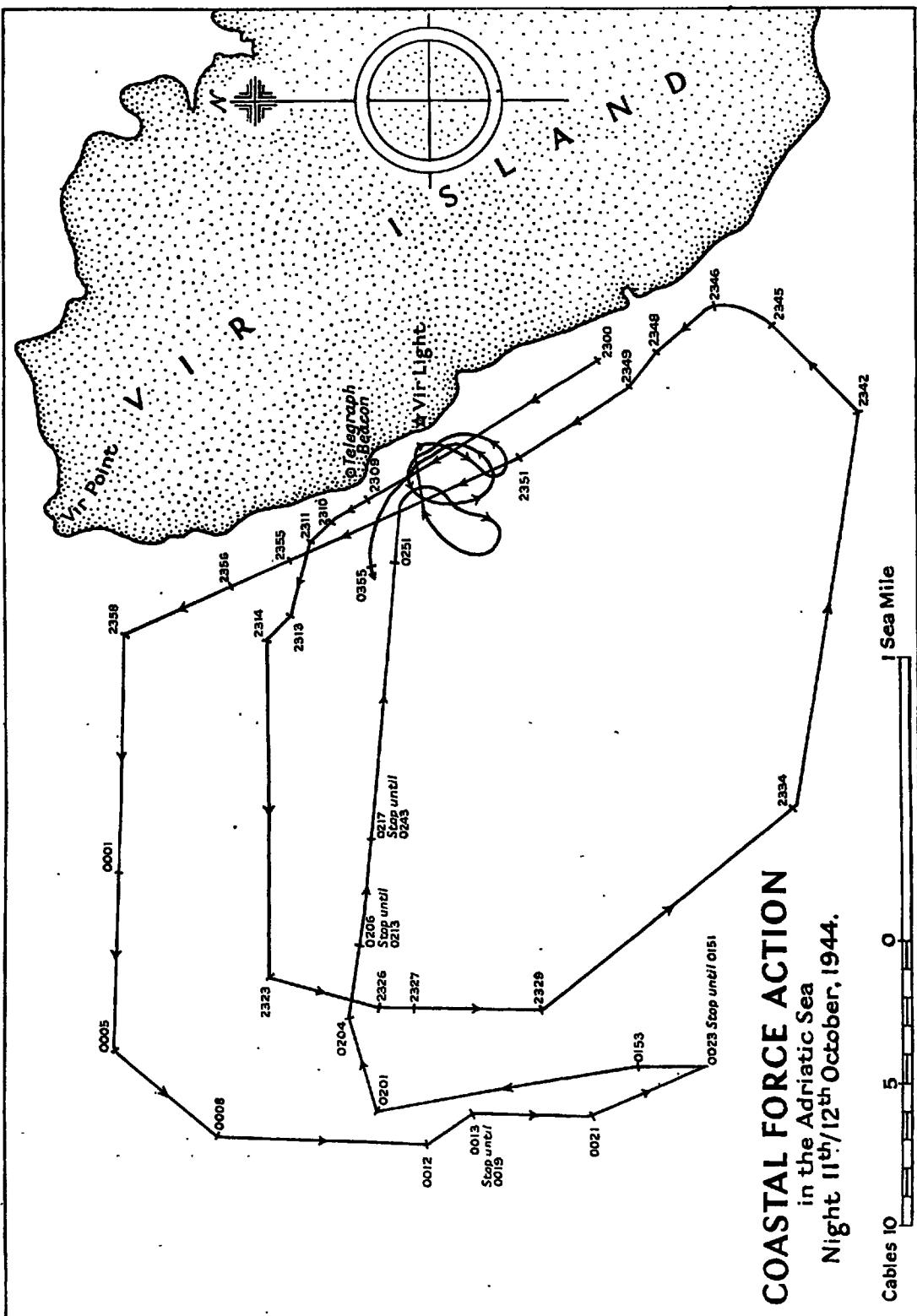
It is at this point worth noting that during the waiting period there were several little explosions from two positions on the coast between Vir Point and Vir light.

29. At 0151 the moon was giving moderate light and it was decided to carry out the third attack of the night. All went according to plan until 0221 when H.M.M.G.B.662 opened fire with starshell. Then the first hitch occurred, in that under the light of the shells that did

Admiralty footnote:

* Green 20°—20 degrees from right ahead on the starboard side.

Enclosure 4 to C-in-C, Mediterranean's Letter



illuminate, nothing of any size could be seen. After twenty minutes searching with starshell by both H.M.M.G.B.662 and H.M.M.T.B.634, and some pom-pom fire from all boats, at the two small objects north of Vir light that had been seen, and nothing having happened from the beach, it was decided to close very near the coast and run down to the southwards.

30. At 0251, when about fifty yards off the coast line the unit was brought round to southwest and set off down the coast in single line ahead at eight knots.

At 0254, a very large F-lighter was sighted dead ahead, at about four hundred and fifty yards, with bows into the beach, a perfect torpedo target. H.M.M.G.B.662 at once altered round to starboard, ordering H.M.M.T.B.634 to sink the target with torpedoes, and lay off ready to engage with covering gunfire. H.M.M.T.B.634 fired at 0256, scoring hits with both torpedoes, and the unit, in loose formation, was stopped to the eastwards of the smoking wreckage.

31. At 0310, H.M.M.G.B.662 decided to close the small piece of F-lighter still visible to try and identify it. Smoke was being carried away from the shore by a light breeze and H.M.M.G.B.662 went through this "screen" to the southwards at 0314. At that moment I found myself only 50 yards from a beached convoy of two F-lighters and some small craft. Fire was at once opened with all guns and the unit called up to close me with despatch. These beached craft were heavily damaged by gunfire from all boats, and the one F-lighter that was not burning was sunk by a torpedo from H.M.M.T.B.637 at 0337.

During the whole of this third attack the enemy could not have fired more than twenty rounds in all.

32. It was now decided to withdraw. Two of these last F-lighters had been torpedoed, hit, and the third was well ablaze. Any small craft that were alongside the lighters had been sunk. There seemed no object in staying and it was desired to get out of the channel before the Royal Air Force came over: accordingly at 0355 the unit proceeded to Ist. All the way across the burning F-lighter was seen to be blowing up continuously.

33. We informed the L.R.D.G. and Partisan authorities of what had occurred and then proceeded to Komiza in two units, H.M.M.G.B.662 and H.M.M.T.B.637 at twenty-two knots, and H.M.M.T.B.s 634 (who had a defective engine) and 638 at fourteen knots.

34. As regards assessing the actual damage suffered by the enemy, great difficulty has been experienced. The natural desire to claim what one believes to have been sunk has been curbed by the almost too satisfactory nature of the best possible results. Conservative and considered estimates are:—

First attack:

1 F-lighter heavily hit by M.T.B.634 and seen to sink by all boats.

1 F-lighter heavily damaged by H.M.M.G.B.662 and seen to sink later by all boats.

1 F-lighter heavily damaged by H.M.M.T.B.637, probably sunk.

2 F-lighters set on fire by H.M.M.T.B.s 637 and 638.

(1 F-lighter seen to be undamaged and going to the beach).

2 Pi-L Boats fired and sunk by H.M.M.G.B.662 and H.M.M.T.B.638.

1 Pi-L Boat sunk by H.M.M.G.B.662.

1 E-boat sunk by H.M.M.G.B.662.

1 E-boat damaged by H.M.M.T.B.638.

1 E-boat damaged by H.M.M.T.B.634.

Second attack:

1 F-lighter sunk by H.M.M.G.B.662 and H.M.M.T.B.634.

1 F-lighter damaged by all boats.

1 Pi-L Boat damaged by H.M.M.T.B.637.

Third attack:

2 F-lighters sunk by torpedoes.

1 F-lighter beached and completely on fire.

1 Pi-L Boat sunk by gunfire from H.M.M.G.B.662.

1 possible E-boat sunk by gunfire from H.M.M.T.B.637.
or in brief,

6 F-lighters sunk.

1 F-lighter probably sunk.

4 Pi-L Boats sunk.

1 E-boat sunk.

1 E-boat possibly sunk.

2 E-boats damaged by gunfire.

It is felt certain by all our boats that no F-lighters got away, although it is possible that one or more may have beached in a more or less invisible manner.

The Pi-L Boats were the larger type of small German lighter, with a silhouette like an R.C.L.* but the high bow and stern made it impossible to distinguish them from an F-lighter, except in fairly full side view.

Casualties and Damage to Own Force.

35. On the other hand our force suffered only superficial damage and the following casualties:—

One A.B. killed, and two seriously and one slightly wounded.

Items of interest.

36. The enemy used no light signals, but one ship fired a three white star cartridge during the latter part of the first attack. Except for the flak-lighter the enemy displayed a lack of vigilance, courage, initiative, and resource. It is possible that the unit was fortunate enough to contact the enemy at the crossing place of two convoys, the one coming up from Sibenik and Zara and the other coming down from the north. This would account for the fact that some of the enemy vessels never at any time opened fire, due to their not knowing which ship was which, the northbound convoy being sighted first.

37. The enemy vessels' armament was the normal one for F-lighters and other craft, except that more than one F-lighter had the 88-m.m., quadruple 20-m.m., twin 20-m.m. and single

Admiralty footnote:

* R.C.L.—Ramped Cargo Lighter.

20-m.m. that is normally associated with flak-lighters. The flak-lighter had more armament than this and may have been the one bombarding Mulat the previous night.

38. Partisans on Ist reported four beached vessels the following morning. L.R.D.G. on Rivanj reported three. Royal Air Force reconnaissance on the morning of the 13th, reported three aground, two still burning. Also, Partisans reported a northbound convoy going through the Pasman Channel earlier on the evening of the 11th.

Most of the enemy vessels were laden, at least one with petrol, and one F-lighter with ammunition.

A report just received indicates that there was a southbound convoy that night going from Trieste to Split and it was probable that this was one of the convoys attacked.

Strategic or Tactical Conclusions.

39. This was the first really decisive victory of D-boats* over the old enemy, F-lighters, and was made possible due to low visibility, land background, uncertainty of identification, absurdly close ranges, excellent gunnery and admirable coolness on the part of the three following Commanding Officers. In fact D-boats are not suited to a "snap" torpedo attack and the fact that H.M.M.T.B.634 was having to manoeuvre on inner engines made her slower on the turn than usual. This kept the

three M.T.B.s well behind the Senior Officer. As it turned out, no tactic could have been more successful. H.M.M.G.B.662 drew all the enemy's fire and attention away from the body of the unit, and the smoke from the guns drifted across the line of sight of the enemy so that they were able to get into within one hundred yards without ever being fired on. The first that the enemy knew of there being any ships there other than H.M.M.G.B.662 was the full broadsides of three "Ds" from under one hundred yards away. This contributed materially to the success of an action which in its results surpasses anything this flotilla has yet done, for the cost of very few casualties and very slight damage.

There is little to say about the second and third attacks, as intuition is incapable of analysis.

40. I would not, on the strength of this action, recommend that units of D-boats can take on units of F-lighters, unless the action can, as it were, be fought on a site of the D-boats' choosing. On this particular occasion the enemy was firing at us with very much heavier armament than we possess, and if the visibility had been a hundred yards or so better I cannot but feel that we would have lost at least one boat. What is certain, though, is that once the action is joined, and both sides are firing, the enemy will be the first to become erratic.

(Signed) T. J. BLIGH,

Lieutenant-Commander, R.N.V.R.

Admiralty footnote:

* D-boat—a "Fairmile" type of M.T.B. and M.G.B.

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