

NAVY - 2 Aircraft Carriers
1 Cruiser

and 2 badly damaged.

MERCHANTMEN - 2 sunk.

At this point the "Heavy" ships of the escort now turned west and made for Girbalter.

We are now at the night of the 13th August. Shortly after midnight we were attacked by Italian Motor Torpedo Boats, generally known as M.T.B's. These M.T.B's being small, very fast and also low in the water, were difficult to see, particularly at night. Between 1.30 and 4.30 in the morning, a Cruiser and 4 merchantmen were hit and sunk by the torpedoes fired by these 'E' boats. Unfortunately my own ship, the 'Glenorchy', was one of the ships hit. The loss of life on our ship was in the engine-room where 4 engineers and 2 greasers died. I myself was trapped underneath a grating and there was 45 feet of water which was mixed with oil, above me. I was wearing a life jacket which kept me trapped under the grating and there is only so long that you can live under those conditions. I have a very vivid memory of that incident for I had made up my mind that my time had arrived. I can remember saying good-bye to my wife and telling her not to grieve too much, and I can also remember making my peace with God in the way of asking for forgiveness for my many faults etc. Just what happened then is hard to describe - all that I will say is that suddenly I realised just where I was trapped, for don't forget I had helped to build that ship. Any way by dint of struggling etc. I found that I was able to breath fresh air but unfortunately I also realised that I was blind. I struggled to my feet and felt my way along to where I knew the way out was and grasped the rail that would

lead me to the deck. I hesitated and shouted out "Is there anyone there" and a voice answered in no uncertain terms that there was and he would like to be freed of what was holding him. I explained that I was blind but would not leave without first getting him out, which subsequently I did, and this chap turned out to be the 4th Engineer and he led me out onto the deck. My eyes were starting to see again, and I realised that it was the diesel oil which had covered my eyes, causing my temporary blindness. On deck a boat was being lowered but I did not have the strength to climb over the rail into it and someone - who I do not know - came behind me, grabbed me by the heels and pitched me over the side where I hit the bottom of the boat and promptly passed out. You see it was my head that hit the boat's planking which just goes to show that I was not as thick-headed then as I am now - -

The Master would not leave the sinking ship although we went back for him several times. He was very friendly with the Chief Engineer, Mr. Threlfall and when he heard that he was dead in the engine-room, it can be assumed that that is, or was, a contributory factor in the Master deciding to stay on board. The majority of the crew after taking to the two remaining boats, rowed ashore to the Tunisian coast and were interned by the Vichy French and ended up finally at a place called Sfax where after several adventures they finally boarded a liner which took them to the port where they first embarked, namely, Glasgow. The story of their internment must be told, if necessary, in a separate instalment.

It may be of interest to tell you that of the 14 merchantmen that sailed from Glasgow only 5 managed to arrive there in a sorry state of repair.

The "Times of Malta" acknowledged the high price of 'Operation Pedestal' through the loss of 9 merchantmen, 1 aircraft carrier, 2 cruisers and 1 destroyer. "Due to the courage of officers and men of the British Merchant Service, Malta, G.C., was able to survive her darkest hour" said the newspaper.

The 5 ships which got through carried nearly 40,000 tons of fuel, aircraft spares, ammunition, meat, grain and other commodities. This was enough to save the Island. If they had not come Malta might have been lost too. At the time there was only a fortnight's supply of food left on the Island.

It is interesting to note that the Ohio arrived in harbour of Malta, supported to both port and starboard by two destroyers who kept her afloat, she was so badly damaged.

W.H. Lamb wishes

Shel. B