

# CONVOY PQ.17 | First hand accounts

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In this document you will find, gleaned over a considerable period of time from across the internet, several documents written by participants in Convoy PQ.17. These have been gathered together out of scholarly interest and where possible the author and sources are properly cited.

The intention is to complement the diary written by Jack Bowman and published at [www.pq17.eclipse.co.uk](http://www.pq17.eclipse.co.uk). This diary is also recorded in full here.

**Adam Bowman | December 2007.**

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### Life on HMS Pozarica in Convoy PQ17 to Russia 1942

by: **“Aif” G. Webster** – Able Seaman, HMS Pozarica

source: [www.red-rooster.co.uk/ships/webster.htm](http://www.red-rooster.co.uk/ships/webster.htm)

"We left Belfast on June 23rd 1942 for an unknown destination and after a few days at sea we arrived in Iceland on the 27th after a rather quiet and smooth trip. We anchored in the harbour at Sedisfjord and it was rather picturesque with the snow capped high mountains coming right down to the sea.

After a two days stay we then set sail for the open sea to join a convoy of thirty five ships. They were all shapes and sizes, the merchant ships formed up in their respective stations and we set sail for North Russia well escorted by destroyer, corvettes, trawlers and two ack-ack ships. We had a covering force of three cruisers namely, HMS London, Norfolk and the American Tuscaloosa, although we never saw them as they were supposedly astern and over the horizon.

The convoy sailed on harmlessly for the first two days in reasonably good weather, although it was getting colder and my shipmates on watch were dressed in their rig of the day sea-boots, overalls, duffle coats and balaclavas, I was more fortunate operating in the transmitting station responsible for controlling the twin four inch guns. The escorts were still in their positions with no sign of action and we were of the opinion that a pleasant trip was in store.

On July 1st 1942 we sighted our first German aircraft, it was easily recognised as a Blohm and Voss 136 and it circled the convoy all day long, just out of range of the guns and it was rather tantalizing. In the meantime wireless messages must have been passing from the aircraft to its base in Northern Norway, as the following day we were attacked by German torpedo bombers Heinkel 115's and JU88 Stuka Dive Bombers, this attack persisted all day and it was then we realised we were only off the Island of Spitzbergen and we still had a long way to go. One of the Merchant Ships was torpedoed, although I was unaware of its name, but we did manage to shoot down one of the German planes, all our guns, twin 4", pom-poms, oerlikons and machine guns were consistently in action, so we did get some consolation for our efforts, but felt sorry for the crews of the Merchantmen as the weather had deteriorated and very cold, so if they took to the water they would have to be picked up quickly if they had to survive.

We were attacked every day by bombers and submarines, in addition we always had the company of the Blohm and Voss on the horizon.

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As we steamed past Bear Island in the Barents Sea we received a signal from the Admiral stating that "The German Heavy Fleet consisting of the Tirpitz, Prince Eugen and eight destroyers had left Trondheim in Norway to intercept the convoy"

On July 8th we received another signal stating that" this fleet were at North Cape in Northern Norway and were heading in the same direction as the convoy"

The convoy was ordered to scatter and each ship make for its nearest port independently. The Admiralty instructed the cruisers and destroyers to return to Scapa Flow leaving us and our sister ship Palomares, a few corvettes and trawlers as the only escorts for these brave men on the merchant ships. At this point our Skipper Captain Lawford cleared lower deck and advised the crew of the position of the German Heavy Units and he went on to say "we will fight these ships to the last shell and if it need be, go down fighting", so the crew were rather despondent with this news and everyone kept looking to the horizon for a sight of the German ships.

Next day we had a further signal from the Admiralty stating, that, "the Tirpitz had been damaged by one of our submarines and all the German ships had returned to Port", so one and all on board were relieved. We were still being attacked by planes and submarines and the Merchant Ships steaming without escorts were being picked off and sunk by the U-boats.

Out of our convoy of thirty five ships, twenty four of them had been sunk with a heavy loss of life.

It was under instruction and with regret, that on July 9th, we left the convoy with two corvettes and steamed North into the Arctic Ocean, close to Franz Joseph Land an island in the far north , which I believe is only seven hundred miles from the North Pole. We are now in the land of the Midnight Sun, the weather is quite nice but are at present "running" close to icebergs and were later brought to a standstill in icefields. After considerable difficulty we managed to break parts of the ice and were free. Next day we altered course and sailed in a more southerly direction and a few days later we put into Port at Matochkin Straits in the Island of Novaya Zelya off the coast of Siberia. Two days later we left this island with six Merchant Ships and steamed into another icefield, but managed to get out without much difficulty.

We were still being attacked by aircraft and U-boats, the latter seemed to be coming out from under the ice. It was another bad day for the few escorts remaining as our ammunition was getting low and of these six ships, five were sent to the bottom. The FOG was beginning to descend now, this was a temporary relief from the constant attacks, but the fog didn't last very long.

On July 13th we arrived at the entrance to the White Sea and anchored in the Gulf of

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Mezen and we now had the feeling that the attacks were over. The following day we steamed down the White Sea escorting two Merchantmen, remnants from the convoy and on the horizon two destroyers were spotted racing towards us and they were identified as Russian - our allies. They formed in on our Port and Starboard sides, but shortly afterwards we were attacked by German Junkers 88's Stuka dive bombers and we had near misses. As soon as this attack started the Russian destroyers just "fled", leaving us to our own devices and we didn't see them again until we sailed up the River Dvina and arrived at Archangel on July 18th, where we remained for a month.

On August 17th 1942 we left Archangel and sailed for Novaya Zemlya to escort three merchant Ships to the White Sea. We returned to Archangel with the ships four days later and tied up in Port again for practically another month as future convoys had been temporary suspended.

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On September 13th 1942 we left Archangel with a home bound convoy and we were continually attacked by U-boats, in fact the attacks were so intense at times that we lost the Tribal Class destroyer HMS Somali, the corvette HMS Leda and three Merchant Ships. We encountered very rough weather in the Barents Sea and arrived in Loch Ewe, Scotland on September 27th 1942, this being a more direct trip. We left the convoy in the Bay and arrived in Belfast the same day.

This was later described in a paper as the worst PQ convoy of the war."

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### Our Fight through Arctic Seas to Russia

by: **Horace Carswell DSM, MM, BEM** – Chief Steward SS Empire Tide

source: [www.naval-history.net/WW2Memoir-PQ17-Carswell.htm](http://www.naval-history.net/WW2Memoir-PQ17-Carswell.htm)

### Extracts from The Second World War: An Illustrated History of WWII

#### Volume X, page 27

As Chief Steward of the Empire Tide of the Royal Mail Line, in convoy for Archangel in 1942 (PQ.17), Horace Carswell mixed other excitements with the suddenly assumed role of surgeon - and gained the Lloyds War Medal for Bravery at Sea to add to his D.S.M., M.M. and B.E.M.

... joined the S.S. Empire Tide of the Royal Mail Line as Chief Steward, and learnt that the ship was due to leave for America to load a general cargo for Russia.

We sailed on May 10, 1942 ..... cargo was taken aboard at an American port, and the ship then proceeded to Reykjavik in Iceland. From the Icelandic port we set out to Archangel ... with thirty-seven merchant ships accompanied by an escort of twelve cruisers, destroyers and corvettes.

The season was midsummer by the time we were over the Arctic Circle steaming on a nor'-easterly course for the Barents Sea and daylight had lengthened to about twenty hours. Three days out from Reykjavik the first German air-scout came nosing along.... almost uninterrupted daylight and clear weather made reconnaissance easy for the Hun.

#### Bells Ringing "Action Stations"

..... the threat from the Jerries did not prevent some of us, in Arctic seas for the first time, from being initiated in the Order of the Bluenose. The initiation was a bit different from the ceremony of greeting King Neptune when crossing the Equator: a feature was that each new " Bluenose" was presented with a coloured certificate duly signed by " Neptunus Rex, Ruler of the Raging Main" and his consort "Aurora Borealis, Queen of His Majesty's Northern Provinces."

Our convoy altered course and steamed due east through a sea a-glitter with floe-ice. Not long afterwards we reached a position near Bear Island... the zone of greatest danger, lying within easy range of the German air-bases and.... the alarm bells were soon ringing for "Action Stations."

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Between forty and fifty Jerries came racing in from all directions .... that filled the Arctic sky with the thunder of high-powered engines. It was the Fourth of July. A ship on the Empire Tide's port quarter erupted like a volcano and disappeared .... . Two or three others began to lose way, then listed and settled deeply from the impacts of bombs and the deadly "fish."

Fragments of ice from the shattered floes spattered our decks. Warships and merchantmen combined to fill the sky with the fury of high-explosives, and the rain of steel made you thankful for a tin "battle bowler," inadequate protection though it was.

For handling and fighting his ship that day, Captain Frank Willis Harvey, master of the Empire Tide, was awarded the D.S.O. .... Chief Engineer Hughes and Second Engineer Griffith remained in the engine-room, ensuring the utmost possible speed under conditions of great stress. They, too, earned decorations.

### A Shout in the Din of Gunfire

.... thought to myself. "This is about as hot as the party we had on the Malta convoy." Then I heard an agonized shout .... from the gun position on the ship's "monkey island," and was just in time to see a lad sag limply across the bullet-proof screen.

.... Everyone seemed to have a job on his hand just then except me. So....I managed to bounce up ...to the isolated platform to look after him. The victim .... one of the few R.N. ratings borne in the Empire Tide for gunnery duties.... had caught "a proper fourpennyone" in the thigh.

.... I managed to hoist this matelot across my back... and carry him down the ladders .... and .... got him below...

Our ship had no doctor ..... I decided something else must be done smartly, or he would soon be slipping his cables. .... I summoned the pantryman and a few others of the First Aid party, and made ready to do a spot of surgery ..... I was happily unaware from my amateurish examination of what the emergency operation entailed. What knowledge I had of surgery and medicine was of the elementary order, but I had confidence in myself - although unwarranted - and, was not lacking in the "bedside manner."

"There's nothing to worry about, son," I assured the patient. "I'll soon fix you up all right..... His lurid remarks betokened pain and resentment when I probed the gaping wound in his thigh and the ship lurched to the concussion of a bursting bomb ..... I remarked: -You've picked up a bit of metal in this leg of yours, that's all. I'll winkle it out in two shakes of a cod's tail.

..... It .... shook me to find a small-calibre unexploded shell from an Oerlikon gun embedded in the chap's thigh! The thing had to be extracted and the wound properly dressed .... there were no anaesthetics in the medicine chest and our surgical instruments were the sort of things you might expect to find in a carpenter's tool-box.....having dug the live shell out, I put sixteen stitches in the wound while the luckless victim alternately gritted

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his teeth and bellowed pungent opinions of the proceedings. I gave a sigh of relief.

"Like taking a tooth out," I murmured.

"Here, son - put this tot of rum down the hatch. You're the best patient I've had on his voyage." It did not seem necessary to add that he was also the first! And he was not the last.

That aerial attack on July 4, 1942, began at 4.30 p.m., and continued for some time with unabated fury. ....A heavy price was paid with the lives of British, American and Norwegian seamen for the delivery of a large proportion of the vital cargoes. The sacrifice in our own convoy can be judged by the fact that only nine merchant ships out of thirty-seven made the round trip unscathed.

### **With Toes and Fingers Gangrenous**

.... Things were bad enough in the Med when your ship was scuppered, but if you took to the boats or went overboard in these icy seas your ordeal was a sight worse and chance of survival considerably less.

.... our captain decided to make for temporary haven at Novaya Zemlya.... which, if you look at a map, rears up like a disturbed caterpillar from the north Russian coast. On the way, we picked up 148 survivors from lifeboats adrift - men suffering from exposure and frost-bitten hands and feet. This rescue work provided me with plenty to do .... a job occupying twenty-four hours a day looking after these "orphans of the storm."

Once we had gained shelter, radio signals were made. These brought a plane ... from the mainland, and a Russian lady doctor took charge of the casualties, and a few of the severely wounded were flown to Archangel for hospital treatment. Among these was my patient, the naval gunner....

Many of the others were in bad shape, but had to be left in my care.... some had landed on another island before being rescued, and had built fires and toasted their toes. The safe method in a below zero climate is to rub snow on partly frozen extremities, and the result of their mistake was that toes and fingers became gangrenous and needed drastic treatment

In making Moller Bay, the Empire Tide struck an uncharted rock.... But the ship was repaired and refloated, and we set off unescorted .... to Archangel .... when the look-out in the crow's-nest reported to the bridge :

"Object on the starboard bow, sir!" ..... On closer inspection they proved to be the foremast and stern of a sinking ship and three lifeboats manned by survivors.

Another "object" .... drew near the boats ..... a U-boat. Our captain altered course and ordered "Full ahead" on the engines, ... No one would have taken a crack at that U-boat with more zest than Captain Harvey, but all our ammo had been expended .....

.... the wreck sank slowly, and the U-boat made off. "We're going to pick those blokes up!"

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I heard someone remark. .... no attack was made. The crew of the torpedoed ship were got aboard, some of them suffering from frostbite due to immersion in the icy water before being hauled into the boats. So I received more patients for my shipboard "hospital."

....our captain decided to make a wide sweep of the area in case other hapless crews were adrift, and the search resulted in the rescue of survivors from two other torpedoed vessels. From this and other warnings, there appeared to be small hope of the Empire Tide making a lone voyage to Archangel in safety. So we ran back to Moller Bay where... we found four corvettes and an equal number of merchant ships that had arrived after various misadventures. A small convoy formed, and without further interference we reached Archangel to deliver our cargoes.

At the time, some 2,000 British and Allied seamen - survivors from aircraft and U-boat attack - were housed in the Intourist Club, a huge logwood building surmounted by the Union Jack and Soviet flag. Our arrival with munitions and supplies was greeted cordially by Russian officials, but there were no wild demonstrations of welcome by the people. After our ship had made a call at Molotov, a new port about forty miles from Archangel, a convoy of twelve ships was formed for the homeward voyage (QP.14). Again we had to run the gauntlet of the Polar route, and were frequently attacked by hostile aircraft and finally by a U-boat pack. ....

“CHIEF STEWARD CARSWELL behaved with outstanding courage in the face of great danger when a gunner was wounded during the action with enemy aircraft. He made his way to the gun position and carried the gunner down to the ship's hospital. There he inserted sixteen stitches in the man's leg while the attack on the vessel was proceeding. But for the prompt action and skill of Mr. Carswell the wounded man might have lost his life.” - Extract from LLOYD's List and Shipping Gazette, No. 40310

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**CONVOY PQ.17, the Russian convoy "massacre" June 1942** (from chapter 4 of the book *Coxswain in the Northern Convoys*)

by: **S.A. "Sid" Kerlake** – Cox'n, HMS Northern Gem

source: [www.naval-history.net/WW2Memoir-RussianConvoyCoxswain04.htm](http://www.naval-history.net/WW2Memoir-RussianConvoyCoxswain04.htm)

... [several paragraphs of pre-amble removed at the beginning of the chapter]

At last in the middle of 1942 we in the Gem found ourselves going north once more, this time to the Russian port of Archangel, not knowing that the convoy we were to escort was to become the most tragic and controversial of all the convoys during the whole of the Second World War.

The middle of June 1942 found us in company with three other A/S trawlers, the Lord Austin, Lord Middleton and the Ayrshire, the first two being ex-Hull trawlers, and the latter ex-Grimsby. All three I knew pretty well from pre-war days, having often fished alongside of them on the different grounds. We four minor warships left Reykjavik, the Icelandic capital, for Hvalfiord on the north-west corner of Iceland, supposedly to sail with convoy PQ 17 early in June. This was not to be, for we had a long wait until there were enough destroyer escorts to accompany the convoy of merchant ships which were arriving almost daily to drop their anchors and wait for the day of sailing. It wasn't until the afternoon of the 27th June that we all left the shelter of Hvalfiord, and meanwhile we saw with amazement the fiord filling up with the ships of several nations. There were British, American and Russian merchant vessels of all sizes. Some of them were piled up with deck cargo lashed down and chained securely to the decks, and consisting of tanks, lorries, planes and huge wooden crates. The contents of these we could only guess at, and what they carried below decks in their holds must have been war equipment of all kinds to aid the Russians in their fight against the invading German armies. We could see by the way they sat in the water they were loaded to capacity, right up to their Plimsoll lines.

From where we four trawlers were anchored, we could see not only the mass of merchant ships, but also British and American warships at anchor in the deep blue and still icy waters of Hvalfiord. Even now in June it was cold from the snow and ice melting from the tops of the high mountain peaks surrounding the fiord. The view from the deck of our small ship was awe-inspiring. I had seen such sights before many times, but with so many ships in the anchorage it was even more beautiful. An aircraft carrier, for all its huge size, looked tiny with the backing of those high mountains, the lower regions of which were decorated here and there with colourful farmhouses, and the mauves, yellows and greens of the plant life.

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Once the anchor was in the water, and the routine of squaring up of the ship was completed, some of the crew got out their fishing lines to try their luck at catching some fish to give us a change of diet. Soon the CO left the ship on one of the many duty boats that were chasing about all over the fiord, to attend a conference about the future convoy. As the days went past, the usual buzzes started to go around the Gem, gathered from the occupants of these small boats. We learned that this was the largest convoy yet to set sail for Russia. There were more rumours going the rounds of the mess decks, and the fact that so many ships were in the vicinity seemed to give credence to what we were being told. My heart goes out to all who sailed in those great lumbering merchant ships during the war years. It must have been terrible to have to plod along at times at the same speed as the slowest ship in the convoy, expecting to be mined, or bombed or torpedoed, sometimes even shelled by German raiders who managed to evade the naval and air patrols in the Denmark Straits. Yet, at the bottom of their hearts, they must have been saying, if they were anything like me, 'It can't happen to me'. But unfortunately it did to so many of those brave men whose ships went to the bottoms of the many oceans of the world, where they still lie rusting.

As we cast our eyes over this array of ships at anchor in the fiord on those days in June 1942, I suppose we wondered which of them would be the unlucky ones, the ones which would not make it to Archangel, and how we ourselves would fare on the trip, for it was being said that we, the convoy that is, was to be the cheese in the trap, the means of drawing the Tirpitz, Lutzow and the Admiral Hipper from their anchorages, along with others of their tribe, and that the other and smaller convoy which sailed at the same time as PQ 17, would make them think that an invasion of Norway was on the cards. We know now from the books written since the war, about PQ17, what the plan really was, but I am trying in this record of the Northern Gem's war, to record what we on the lower deck felt about things that were going on around us at the time. The ordinary matelot was lucky if he was in a ship where the CO gave them a good insight into what was going on. I'm not certain which was best, to be told or not to be told.

On the afternoon of the 27th June, several things happened when the convoy cleared Hvalfiord and formed up, which in our position at the stern of the convoy we mostly did not see. For a convoy of thirty five ships along with their escorts and accompanying tanker, and in this case three rescue ships, covers very many square miles of ocean, and what is going on at one side of such a huge and very complex conglomeration of ships, is not necessarily known at the other side. While one side was in clear sunny weather, apparently the other was in fog, and encountering ice which holed one vessel so badly that it had to turn back to Iceland. We in the Gem were in clear weather as far as I can remember with no knowledge of what was happening some ten or fifteen miles away, and so we just plodded on, a small part of Convoy PQ 17, to whatever was in store for us in the tiring and frantic days ahead, which would bring memories of sights, sounds and fears that have stayed with me to this very day: the two or three air attacks that were beaten off with such ferocity by the escorts and the merchant ships, and then, when everything seemed to

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be going well for us and our morale was at its highest, the signal that came from the Admiralty which sent us off to all points of the compass, seeking a place of safety and in great fear for our lives.

I don't intend to even try to put down here the reasons that caused the Naval High Command to scatter this fine convoy of ships. All this has been gone into by far better brains than mine, and argued about by those more knowledgeable than I. With their hindsight maybe many of the twenty-four ships that were lost could have sailed on to reach their destination, but more important still, many more brave merchant seamen would still be alive and others might not have lost their minds and reason as they did. Here I am trying to state the feelings and thoughts of myself and others on the Northern Gem on this tragic convoy. I am certain that many of the men on the other ships taking part, whichever nation or service they belonged to, will have similar memories to mine, and that they will feel the same as I do, after all these years.

PQ17 was our first Russian convoy, and during the few days before sailing, a feeling of quiet apprehension and foreboding as to what would happen, circulated round the crew, I told myself, 'Well here goes, either we get there or we don't; we had to take our chances along with the rest.

After coming out of Hvalfiord, leaving Akranes on the starboard side, and Reykjavik on the port, the convoy formed up, and we in the Gem took up our position on the starboard quarter. There seemed to be ships stretched out as far as the eye could see. The cavalcade carried on until we left 'Snowy Jokell', (Snaefells Jokull) a large extinct volcano on our starboard side, then Patriksfiord and Isafiord, then once past there we turned on to a more north-westerly course which would take us further away from the north coast of Iceland until we reached the point somewhere off and to the northeast of the rocky island of Grimsey, where the destroyer escorts were to join up with us at a certain time. They had been waiting at Seydisfiord for some of the latecomers who had been on a Malta convoy. What a comparison from the lovely sunny blue Med, to at that time the sunny but cold Arctic Ocean, and only God knew what.

By this time although we didn't know it, one of the ships, a fairly large merchantman, had turned back to Hvalfiord, having had the good or bad (whichever way you look at it) fortune, to run into some ice as she steamed merrily along, and put a hole in her hull. There were reports of fog around, but whilst I was on deck or at the wheel, I don't remember seeing any at all. With the convoy taking up so many square miles of sea space, this was not unusual. At times we did not hear for some time what was going on, on the opposite side at all. As the other escorts joined us, we breathed a sigh of relief at the knowledge that at some point just over the horizon were the big boys, the cruisers Norfolk and London, and the United States Navy with their Tuscaloosa and Wichita and battleship Washington. There was also the Duke of York and the aircraft carrier Victorious, from which I believe the photograph of the Northern Gem was taken. I remember passing her

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as she lay at anchor in Hvalfiord. I was at the wheel on the bridge at the time and I felt very proud just looking at her. This knowledge that they were at hand made our foreboding turn to a feeling of exhilaration, and with it that 'piece of cake, and easy' attitude, which, although we didn't know it at the time, would in a matter of a few days be knocked out of us by something that no one on this vast array of ships ever expected or had even thought about.

In our minds, I think that all of us were pretty certain that the enemy ships would not come out to fight when they had a report from their spotter planes about the armada moving across the Arctic Ocean, the outer covering force and the inner escort of destroyers and corvettes, two submarines, and two anti-aircraft ships, the Pozerica and the Palomaris, not forgetting of course the four armed trawlers, coal burning ex-fishing vessels. After all we were equipped with Asdic gear and depth charges to hunt the U-boats, and they were hunted and some were sunk by trawlers manned by men of the RNR and ex-fishermen like myself, along with some men and youths who in some circumstances had never seen the sea before being called up.

Of course we did expect the usual U-boat attacks, but the weather as far as we in the Gem were concerned was great, with the sea almost as flat as a mill pond. At that time of the year it was daylight for the whole twenty-four hours; we knew that we could be seen for miles and miles. The smoke from the merchant ships and coal burning trawlers was going straight up into the air, until it reached a certain height, and then it spread out horizontally helped by the winds in the upper atmosphere to form clouds in an otherwise lovely blue summer sky.

A few hours after sailing from Hvalfiord, the ships had got themselves into their allotted positions; the crews had settled down once they had taken in the inspiring sight around their vessel, to the usual watch-on watch-off routine. When off watch, they would play cards and dominoes which were the favourite off-watch pastimes, as well as reading and sleeping of course. All the usual duties had been carried out, all the guns had been cleaned and checked over and over again, the depth charge throwers and rails, the lifeboats, rafts and the gear in them had been checked and checked again, to ensure that they could be dropped into the water should the need arise with, we hoped, very little effort. The old four-inch quick firing gun that was positioned on a platform over the whale-back, was pulled through, and cleaned, traversed and elevated up and down, to make sure that the movements were loose and free, the dust and crystallized salt was removed from the telescopic sights, which were then polished up to perfection. Yes, we were fit, and as ready as we would ever be.

Being the coxswain, I had no regular watch as I had to be ready for any emergency, and in the event of an attack my place of action was on the steering bridge, at the wheel. One of my favourite spots, when things were calm and quiet, was on the point five gun platform over the galley, just abaft amidships. There I kept a few tins of tomato juice (purchased in

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Reykjavik) to keep them cold. To me they were a luxury that I enjoyed very much when we were not able to get a pot of tea or Kye. I was up there on one of my voluntary vigils, when I saw my first German spotter plane, the nose to sea bloodhound, as I christened him. He went round and around the convoy, and looked as if he were set to escort us all the way to the White Sea. Some days later on 2nd July, I was up on the gun platform when I saw six or eight planes come up over the horizon, right astern of our position on the starboard quarter. Action stations were sounded, and I just had time before running to the bridge to see that they were biplanes, of a similar appearance to the Swordfish, but these had floats below them instead of wheels, and they were carrying torpedoes.

Thinking back, it seems to me that they had no intentions of coming in too close to the convoy, or that was my impression. I was on my way to the bridge and had just got to the foot of the bridge ladder, when I heard someone shout at the top of his voice, 'Torpedo on starboard quarter'. I stopped and looked around, and on sighting its track of air bubbles, I stood rooted to the spot, one foot on the ladder and the other frozen to the casing. I saw that it was approaching the ship's side at an angle of about fifteen degrees, and heading straight for the engine room under where I stood. My heart was thumping like mad, and I was scared almost to death, believe me. I heard the CO shout, 'Hard Aport', then 'Steady', and to my relief, saw the track of the torpedo was now travelling on a parallel course to that of the ship, and was gradually overtaking us. I heard the order given to bring her back on to her original course, and hypnotized I watched the track of bubbles from the torpedo sweep under the cut-away icebreaker bows of the Gem. I came back to life taking in deep breaths and gulps of that sweet and clean Arctic air, then continued on to relieve the man at the wheel, where both of us commented that it had been a close thing.

Whether this 'fish' had been dropped from one of the planes or from a sub, I don't really know, but I would assume that it had come from an aircraft. The Gem was doing about eleven knots at the time in order to close up with the convoy, as laid down in the orders during an attack on the convoy. What bit of wind there was that day was coming over the port bow causing the smoke coming from the funnel to lay along the surface of the water of our starboard quarter; this was helped by our speed through the water, so we came to the conclusion that one of the Heinkels had crept into our smoke, before dropping the torpedo. Still it missed us, or our skipper evaded it, and from our warning signal other ships on our port side were able to keep clear of it. We lived to fight another day, with the faithful nose-to-sea bloodhound still keeping his eye on the convoy.

If I remember correctly, it was about twenty-four hours later, that we got a second shock. We were at this time nearing an old haunt of mine from pre-war fishing days, Bear Island. We had received a warning of a further air attack, and as I was standing on the after gun platform, waiting for the alarm that would send me rushing to the bridge, we gazed in awe at the sight astern of what looked like a flock of birds coming into sight over the horizon. I started to count the planes 1-2-5-10-15-25. There I gave up and ran for the bridge. The alarm had not been sounded for everyone was on his way to action stations, or was there

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already, hearts beating sixty to the dozen, and the saliva was thick in our mouths; we were hoping that they would not come for a small ship like ours. Once I got on the bridge, I saw very little of what was going on around us, except for the area immediately ahead of the Gem. I saw the leading plane go flashing past the port side of the bridge, and another along the starboard side and across our bows, very close and making for the convoy. All of our guns were having a go. It appeared to me that tracer shells were hitting this last one from all sides; then I heard one of the look-outs shout from the top bridge that he had crashed onto the tanker, a Russian ship named the Azerbaijan, and that she was on fire. Taking a quick glance in that direction I could see the smoke and flames billowing out from her bows.

One or two merchant ships seemed to be slowing down, and the two small rescue ships, the Rathlin and the Zamelac were manoeuvring around. One merchant ship that I had in sight just vanished as I was looking at her; one second she was there and the next all there was left was a huge pall of smoke, reaching up towards the blue sky. I had not the time to see if she was a tanker or not. The crew would not have known what hit them. It was an unbelievable thing to see happen, and quite unforgettable. Also in my memory of those few hectic minutes of the attack, is the sight of an American destroyer, steaming full out and being very, very aggressive towards these intruder German planes. She was turning in towards them and letting fly with all the guns she had, and I would not have been surprised to see her crew popping off with rifles and revolvers at anything that was airborne, I've found out since that she was the USS Rowan.

Personally, I did not go much on being cooped up in the bridge on the Gem, while all this was going on around at the time, so I felt the greatest sympathy for all engine room staff who could not see what was happening. At least I could hear the shouts from the men on the top bridge, and I did know a little bit of the local and close incidents. Yet I felt bad enough for all that, especially when I heard them shouting, 'Here's one', and 'Christ, look at that', and I could not dash out to see. Our chief engineer, Bill Maitland, a dour Scot from the granite city of Aberdeen, once told me when I asked him how he felt down there at the time, 'I'm all right all the time I can hear the thumps and bangs of the explosions; it's the silences that I cannot stand.'

One incident happened within a few hours of this attack. To us in our state of mind at the time it appeared rather funny, though I cannot imagine the pilot and his crew seeing our side of it. An old Walrus plane from one of the larger ships of the outer escort, wandered over the convoy, and ran slap bang into the enemy spotting plane, who immediately chased the Walrus around the convoy. The Walrus of course wasn't fast enough to get away, and after making several attempts to get back to his own ship only to be met by the spotter each time, thought that discretion was the better part of valour, and landed on the flat surface of the sea, to be taken in tow by one of the escorting corvettes.

On 4th July, American Independence Day 1942, one that a lot of our American friends will

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never forget, the sight of the outer escort of battleships and cruisers, along with their own destroyer escorts, closing in towards the convoy, the American ships amongst them having a great display of flags flying all over the place, had us all guessing for a time, but suddenly the penny dropped. Someone had realised what day it was. With the success the convoy had had in fighting off the attacks, and now the sight of all these large warships celebrating the day dear to the hearts of the people of the United States of America, my pride and the feeling of being safe in their hands came back to me, and I say once more that I am proud to have been there and to have witnessed this great display. That the feeling was destined to be so short-lived is irrelevant.

Even though the skies had kept fairly clear for us, there had been patches of fog in various parts of the convoy, and we soon got our share of it. Though it was not too clear at sea level, there seemed to be clouds of the stuff forming overhead, but we kept on moving along very nicely. So it was with great surprise that a single plane dropped through the clouds and sent a torpedo into one of the merchant ships, the crew being picked up by one of the rescue ships. Not long after this the convoy sustained a heavy attack from bombers flying above the clouds of fog. We could hear them in the air, but never caught sight of one of them. Yet again while this was going on, in came more torpedo-carrying planes to carry out a brave and damaging attack during which two or three more merchant ships were sunk. As suddenly as it began, so the attack finished, and all was quiet after the noise of the exploding bombs and the roar of the many guns of the convoy. Several of the planes were seen to be shot down by the members of our crew, and each time a cheer went up from those who had seen them go down.

By this time we were somewhere to the north of Bear Island, and this put us well within range of the enemy airfields in Norway which was not so very far away as the seagull flies, and as the clouds and fog began to thin out, we began to think that we would be getting many more of these heavy attacks. Here we were wrong, for suddenly we saw flag hoists going up on all the destroyers and the big ships, and Aldis lamps flashing in all directions. As the outer escort closed in towards us, we sensed that something out of the ordinary was going on. It was. A few minutes later the word was passed around that the convoy was to scatter; apparently the German Navy had dared to come out from their bases in Norway after all.\* (\* In fact they had not. The Admiralty faced with conflicting intelligence reports, made the wrong deduction, and sent the 'scatter' signal). Word had come from the Admiralty in London, and it was to be every ship for themselves as far as the small escorts and merchant ships were concerned.

To say that all of us on the Gem were stunned would be putting it mildly. I can remember the words that I said at the time, 'What are we splitting up for, we're better off as we are, on our own we have no chance at all'. The more we thought and talked about it, the more horrified we became. I was only twenty-two, and like many others of my age, was still young enough to want to live and come through this war, but now I felt that my time had come. It was probably only because I had a responsible position that I was able to keep

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my worst thoughts to myself.

More than two thirds of our crew had never been to sea before they joined up. One of them acted up badly, constantly saying to everyone 'We'll never get there, we'll never make it', and 'We'll never get home again', until in the galley an hour or so later, I literally had to shake him by the shoulders to get him to stop saying what most of us were thinking; by saying it out loud, he was making everyone feel much worse. Standing on the bridge a bit later on, my own thoughts sorted themselves out, and I thought, 'Well, we are a small ship on a very large ocean, and with a bit of luck we should take some finding.' The sea was my life, and I had loved every minute of it, but this was different, and I wondered if my Mother knew what we were going through now, as she had done in 1940.

The departure of the outer big escort vessels and their attendant destroyer force, who were joined by the close escort destroyers, hell bent on getting at the German ships for a right royal battle, meant the convoy now no longer existed. The merchant ships, the rescue vessels, and the remaining small escort corvettes and trawlers, along with the two ack-ack ships, 'scattered' to all points of the compass. Ships were making off at their top speed in all directions, and many had already vanished from our sight over the horizon by the time we on the Gem realised how serious the situation was. But here and there we could still see the odd plume of smoke from one or other of these ships, its crew no doubt praying as we were for a safe landfall. The deadly game of hide and seek was on for us once more in deadly earnest, the ships piling on the revs, and each man with his own thoughts and a prayer of God Save us.

As our speeds through the water were about the same, at the most about eleven knots, the Lord Austin, Lord Middleton, and our own ship Northern Gem, decided to stay in each other's company for mutual protection, and in line ahead we made to the north to find the edge of the ice. Since the Gem was German-built it has crossed my mind on more than one occasion since then as to whether a U-boat skipper, (and one must have sighted us at some time during the next four days), from our shape and our silhouette, the ice-breaker bows, and the cruiser stern, typical of their own fishing vessels, might have mistaken us for one of their own units, or did he think that we were not worth one of his torpedoes, or that we might eventually lead them to bigger game?

Our two lifeboats were now slung out over the port and starboard rail respectively, ready for a quick getaway in, the case of an emergency. Owing to the calm sea, there was very little rolling movement in the ship, and the boats could be lowered almost level with the ship's rail. Into each one we put extra food, clothing, and blankets, water, a couple of gallon jars of navy rum, rifles and quite a lot of ammunition for those and some revolvers, last but not least we threw in one or two tins of 'Tickler's', (Tobacco), fag papers and packets of cigarettes. All of these items were made secure, along with the mast, sails and

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oars, in case there were any accidents, in the event of us having to make a quick getaway. We had seen too many upturned boats over the last couple of years which had lost all their equipment, and we were determined that this would not happen to our boats. The life rafts of which we had three were also made ready. Two of these were on small wooden platforms level with the top of the galley, and over the deck, as they were laid flat on these platforms, the lashings holding them were released so that if the ship were hit and went too quickly for us to get the boats away, they at least would eventually come to the surface, to give those who had survived something to get into if they could. The third raft was a different proposition, as it was secured almost upright on end to the starboard rigging of the foremast, by quick release grips. But with a ship the size of the Gem, the chances of anyone being able to get at these grips to release it would depend on how quickly the ship was going under. Of course there was always the problem that a torpedo hit would leave nothing at all, but that was one of those horrible thoughts that one tried hard to bury at the back of one's mind. However, we made all the arrangements that we could to escape as quickly as would be possible under all but the worst disaster. Now we had to think of ourselves, as well as the survivors of other ships that we might have to pick up, and to save time we made certain that the rescue nets were hung over the sides of the vessel, ready for this act of mercy should it arise.

Each man put on extra clothing, for the further north we went, the colder it was getting. Even though the sea was calm, there was the odd shower of snow now and again; there were a few fog banks about for the three trawlers to dodge into, the temperature of the sea being well below freezing point even though it was summer in the northern hemisphere. A swim of much more than two minutes and one would lapse into a deep sleep of unconsciousness, and inevitable death. Apart from the clothing, we all made certain that we had our bicycle inner tubes on, the navy issue life belts, our steel helmets at the ready; also we had our pockets full of personal things that we did not want to leave behind. One man even packed a small pusser's suitcase. This gives an idea of the feeling that was touching every one of the crew. Old Frampton, the second engineer, who had been called back to the service after being pensioned off, and now found himself in a ship that was hardly pusser's Navy, as he had known it for most of his early life, now had his pension book and all of his other private papers, hung around his neck in a well-used oilskin bag, and underneath the few bits of clothing that those below could stand to wear in the oily heat below.

The usual ship's joker, Jack Sullivan, when not on the Asdic set, was helping everyone along with his wit and joviality. Never seeming to be down in the dumps, he would always come up with something to make us laugh when we were feeling low. On our way to the ice barrier, we saw on odd occasions a ship in the distance either on fire, or lying abandoned after being attacked, but due to our slow speed and small amount of armament, we could do little to help. How we regretted it, we really did. After all, the three skippers of our small flotilla had about a hundred and sixty men in their care, and had their lives to consider, as well as their ship's. Selfish, probably some would say, but those who

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did not go through this awful experience have no idea just what the feeling of self-preservation was at the time, nor how awful we ourselves felt, knowing that somewhere out there were probably men in rafts or boats, maybe wounded, but definitely in serious trouble as the temperatures were freezing during the night, even though the sun never sets in those latitudes at that time of the year. Our hearts went out to those men but we were in no position to give them more. When I took a spell at the wheel with Leading Seaman Tim Coleman, as we carried on at top speed to the north, the showers of snow came down with more frequency, and we could see far away in the final spells between these showers, a thin layer of fog low down on the horizon. I told Tim that I could smell the ice, and that it wasn't so very far away now.

An hour or so later we were in the ice, thin pancake stuff at first, and then as we pressed further on into it, we got amongst the smaller floes, and then the larger and more dangerous lumps. The skippers had to ease down on the speed of the ships, for safety's sake, and for hours on end which seemed endless Tim Coleman and myself stayed in the wheel-house, taking turns at steering the Gem along, following the open water and leads through the much larger and more dangerous lumps of ice. Soon there was plenty of ice between us and the open sea, and we felt that here at least, we were reasonably secure and safe, from torpedo attacks, both by U-boat and torpedo-carrying aircraft, should they find us. What we would do if the enemy bombers found us was another matter, as there was no room to manoeuvre amongst the ice, as there was always the chance of being holed, or even losing blades off the propeller, which would make us or one of the other trawlers a lame duck. So we were having to take extreme care when coming upon the much larger floes and small bergs that were in our path, and we listened intently to shouts from the top bridge and the men on the forecastle head, who were keeping a good look-out from both places.

Our CO, Lieutenant Mullender, now let it be known that we were making all haste for Novaya Zembla, hoping that no German ships had arrived there before us. If they had, and it was thought that escape by sea was impossible, then the three trawlers would be run ashore on one of these God-forsaken islands. We would then salvage what we could from them and try to make our way overland and the sea ice, until we found a settlement, or until we reached the Russian mainland. Not a very charming or happy prospect to look forward to, but at least it would be a great deal better than freezing to death in open boats, if the enemy gave us the chance to get away in them. Others were now already going through that ordeal much to our regret. I don't know just how long it took us, but it seemed an eternity, before we saw on the horizon, two humps of land rising out of the sea ahead of us, the two islands of Novaya Zembla.

We made our way carefully out of the ice and into the open sea once again, all hands now standing at some vantage point around the ship keeping a good look-out. By this time Tim and I were having trouble with our eyes, through the constant staring at the ice for so long. Until getting clear of the ice we had not needed to use the compass to steer by, but now in

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the open sea we found that the only way we could see the compass points was by almost closing our eyes in concentration, otherwise we felt as though we were looking through frosted glass. Distant sight did not seem to be affected, and later we both found that our eyesight was back to normal. The order for full ahead was given, and the three trawlers were soon going full out and making for the gap between the two islands, the Matochkin Straits. We had at least made a landfall. The only problem was what was waiting for us in the straits? Some of our side, or some of theirs? We kept our fingers crossed very firmly indeed.

When we got closer to the shore, we turned beam on to the land and the speed of the ships was reduced to allow us to creep up to the entrance to the straits. This was a vital period. All eyes, something like three hundred or so of them, were hypnotized by the sight of the strait opening up like a page of a picture book. From behind the port side promontory appeared the bows of a ship, and as the angle of our approach opened up the straits more of the vessel came into view. In those first few minutes we thought that the enemy had got there before us, and were waiting ready to blast us out of the water, but to our intense relief, an Aldis lamp flashed in English. We saw that it was a corvette, and the three of us made our way past the Poppy, for that was her name, to make for a spot to drop the anchor and come to rest if only for a short time.

Once in the strait, with the anchor down, we had time to take a proper look around, and saw the La Malouine, Pozerica, Palomares and one of the rescue ships, the Zamalek. There were also three Fleet sweepers, Halcyon, Salamander and the Britomart. Five merchant ships had also found their way in to uneasy safety of the strait, Samuel Chase, Ocean Freedom, El Capitan, the Hoosier and the Benjamin Harrison. Later there was another welcome arrival, the corvette Lotus. Her decks were crammed with survivors; she had gone back after hearing reports on the RT of ships being bombed and torpedoed, and had picked up about a hundred men from the sea, and certain death. What pluck and courage the crew of the Lotus had shown, with complete disregard for their own safety. If only the Gem had been able to give us a few more knots, we might have been able to do the same, but of course we did not have those few extra knots under our belt. We had to be satisfied with being one of the lucky ones who had got this far. It had not seemed possible some twenty to thirty hours previously, but then neither had the order for the convoy to scatter. Now here we were at anchor in the Matochkin Strait, between two almost barren islands, with what may well have been the only ships remaining out of that magnificent array of fine ships, Convoy PQ 17. It was unbelievable.

There were, perched on one side of the strait, what appeared to be a few wooden shacks, which we were told were a Russian settlement, and we did occasionally see one or two people moving about, and I seem to remember at one time some kind of a boat coming alongside from the shore. We were also told that the strait was alive with fish, but even if we had felt like putting out the fishing lines, I do not think that we would have caught any as there was a very strong flow of water rushing past the ships, suggesting a very strong

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tide. However none of the crew had any interest in fishing, for there were much more important things to do first. There was not much else to see of the land, the coast appeared to be very rocky, and there was not much vegetation to be seen. The two islands were pretty much the same in appearance; from the shore line the ground climbed steadily upwards, until it came to the top of the two large 'mountain' tops, which we had seen when we were coming out of the ice. I remembered that there were some great plaice fishing grounds around here and the Sem Islands not so far away, but this was actually the first time that I had seen these islands in the daylight. Usually these fishing grounds were worked by trawlers of many countries, but mostly in the winter months. During the summer and when it was daylight the trawlers were mostly working the Bear Island and Spitzbergen grounds, when the ice receded back towards the North Pole.

While we lay there wondering what was in store for us next, we talked of the land we could see, and of what it would be like if we had to try making our way over it, had we been forced to run our ships onto the shore. I for one would have been sorry to have had to leave the Gem on that barren shoreline, for she had been my home for almost three years. Some people may think me stupid when I say that I loved every inch of her, and the affection I had for her is still with me to this day, I often 'walk' around her in my thoughts, and can remember how sad I was when I learned that she had been broken up for scrap in the early fifties.

The officers from each vessel in the group of surviving ones that were anchored in this barren but welcome place, which was giving us at least the chance to get a small amount of respite, went over to the ack-ack ship Palomares for a conference about what the next move was going to be. Some sort of plan of action had to be arrived at, because we all realised that we could not stay in this haven of dubious relief for very much longer, without being found by the German bombers. In here there would be no room for manoeuvre, and we would become sitting targets. Not only that but the longer we stayed, there was always the chance that U-boats would be gathering for the slaughter outside the Strait. The outcome of this conference, the CO told us when he came back aboard, was that first the three trawlers had to coal ship, for supplies were running low; it must have been fifteen or sixteen days since we had last coaled at Londonderry, and I don't recall taking any on board during our stay in Iceland at all. Each trawler went alongside the Ocean Freedom, and took on a specified amount of the precious stuff; the whole of the crew got stuck in to the job, and we soon had our quota down below in the coal bunkers. The CO also told us that the conference onboard the Palomares had ended with a unanimous decision to form a small convoy of the ships already in the strait, along with any others who came in before we sailed, and try to make our way along the coast of Novaya Zembla, and into the White Sea, where it was hoped we should be able to expect some air cover from the Russian Air Force, and possibly some help from their Navy.

When all was ready, anchors were hove up, and each ship made its way out of the Matochkin Straits, and back into the open sea once again. The six merchant ships which

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included the rescue ship Zamalek, soon formed themselves into a small and compact convoy, and the escorts took up their allotted positions around it. There was a cold wet fog covering the area, and the visibility was not too good, though we welcomed it at the time as being heaven sent. Our position in the screen this time was on the port quarter of the convoy, so we were between it and the land. We found ourselves alongside the Ocean Freedom, but there was no freedom in this bloody ocean. As we steamed along the fog got thicker, and we edged nearer to the Freedom; at times all that we could see of her out of the bridge window, despite our close proximity, was the white foaming water rushing past a dark patch of her hull; her upper structure could not be seen at all. The ships in the middle of the group were streaming fog buoys at the end of a cable, so that the next in line could follow at a safe distance, but in this lot there must have been some very near collisions at various times. My job at the wheel was to keep as near as I could without actually hitting the Freedom, and with Tim Coleman keeping a wary eye open alongside me, it wasn't a hard job.

After steaming along in these conditions for a considerable period, during which Tim and myself spelled each other at the wheel and on lookout, we broke out of the fog into brilliant sunshine and clear blue skies. It was like walking along a blacked out street at home and opening the door of the house to walk into a brightly lit room. On looking around, apart from the Ocean Freedom and ourselves, there were no other ships to be seen at all. The others had vanished. At some time in the past hour or so we had got separated in the fog. That old feeling came back, once more we felt fear, and this time something else which I find hard to describe. Only people who have been in, and experienced that sort of situation can know what I am trying to explain. It was a horrible lonely feeling of being watched akin probably to being locked in a haunted house at the dead of night all on your own.

There were ahead of us to port and starboard banks of fog lying low in the water, but which of these the other ships were in was anyone's guess. After a hurried conversation over the loud hailer, the two skippers decided to make for the fog bank on the port bow. It seemed to be the nearest and would also keep us closer to the land, so we steamed for it, still close alongside each other. It turned out to be a real pea-souper, and once again we huddled close up to the side of the big merchant vessel, just close enough for us to be able to see the dark bulk of her hull at the water line. Both ships went on in this way for some time, until suddenly on the water under the fog there was ice, masses of it, too close to avoid. I was at the wheel, and, as we both saw it, Tim reached out for the handle of the bridge telegraph, anticipating the order to go full astern even as he made the move. There was no order for an alteration of course, and in the bridge Tim and I stood there, bracing ourselves for the inevitable crunch, for there was no time to do anything else.

The old Gem hit it stem on, and with the forward momentum of the ship, the ice-cracker bows started to lift up into the air, and right on to the thick layer of ice. The order came down the voice pipe to stop engines. She had gone onto the ice almost up to the foremast, and stayed in that position for a few seconds, then broke through and was afloat once

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more along the whole of her length, shivering from the shock of the impact, and the way she had launched herself back into the sea.

The voice pipe from the top bridge came back to life again, with the CO shouting down it, 'Coxs'n, go forward and see if she is taking any water in, and check for any signs of damage'.

Leaving Tim in the wheelhouse, I ran down the ladder and onto the deck, and forward to the fore-peak hatch. Lifting it up after knocking away the wedges holding the tarpaulin cover on, I peered down expecting to hear water gushing in from a hole, caused by the first explosive meeting between the ship's bows and the solid layer of ice, but I could hear no more than the sound of the lumps of ice, hitting the ship's side with the motion of the swell. Going down the ladder into the fore-peak with a couple of the seamen, I left them to have a look around, while I made my way into the cable locker where the anchor chain is stowed when it comes inboard as the anchor is hauled in. I could see no signs of any damage by the light of the torch that we always kept handy down there, nor was there any water, except for the usual amount that was down there at any given time. So breathing a sigh of relief, I made my way back onto the deck, from where I shouted up to the CO on the top bridge that she was dry, and that everything was OK. She was snuff dry. The old girl had brought us through again. What a fine ship she was; they had certainly built her well in Bremerhaven. Thanks jerry, I thought to myself.

While I was inspecting the fore-peak, some conversation had been going on via the loud hailer, with the Ocean Freedom. Apparently she had not been as fortunate as the Gem. With her square cut stem and her huge dead weight of cargo, plus the speed at which we both had been going through the water, she had not been able to ride up on to the ice as we had done. She had gone right into it and had finished up with a fair-sized hole in her bows. This, although it was not too bad, was serious enough for her to have to cut her speed down by a knot or two. Eventually we both went astern to get clear of the ice, and with the Gem again taking up station on her port side, the Ocean Freedom, now having to keep down the flood of water which was entering through the hole in her bow, set off in the general direction which would we hoped take us to the entrance of the White Sea. The fog was still thick, but skirting the edge of the ice which we could still see faintly, and keeping a weather eye on the spot ahead where the fog met the sea, we both plodded along at a reduced speed.

As had happened before, we shortly burst out of the fog into the blue skies and sunshine, and there a few miles ahead of us were the rest of our small convoy. They were under air attack. We could see the black specks of the aircraft and the flashes of sun glinting on perspex noses and cockpit covers as they wheeled about over the ships, and in the water alongside them we could see huge fountains of water rising into the air from the bursting bombs. Later we were to find that the Hoosier, and the El Capitan had been sunk, and that all the other vessels had suffered from near misses. The Gem and Freedom now went

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along at the best possible speed to rejoin the other ships. The sky over them looked as though it was now clear of aircraft, and we hoped that the planes had gone for good. But they did not give up so easily. When we got to within a couple of miles of the convoy or what was left of it, we saw coming up over the horizon some six or eight aircraft, and we noticed with not a little apprehension that this time they were making for us and the Ocean Freedom. In no time at all they were on us, and bombs were falling all over the place. The Ocean Freedom vanished from our sight two or three times, and we thought that she had gone, but each time she came out of the deluge of foam and spray caused by the near miss explosions of the bombs. We wondered how long the luck would last. Answering an enquiry from our CO, her Captain shouted across that she had suffered some damage but nothing that they could not handle. Almost as quickly as it had started, the attack finished. The silence after the noise of the bomb explosions and the chattering of the guns was startling. Now there was just the noise of the sea rushing past the Gem's hull as we made all speed to get back into the company of the other vessels. Finally we made it, and away on the horizon ahead of us we could see land. It must have been around midnight because the big red orb of the sun just touched the horizon for a few minutes and then started its climb back into the heavens to start off another day. It was 11th July 1942.

During the next few hours before we reached the White Sea there were a couple of half-hearted attacks by the Luftwaffe, but none of the now much smaller convoy suffered any further damage. We were met by two British fleet sweepers, and a couple of Russian ships which helped to escort us out of the Barents Sea, and into the confines of the White Sea proper. We were almost at our destination, though not quite for we now had to wait for the Russian pilots to come on board to take us up the River Dvina, and up to our moorings at Archangel, or wherever they decided to put us.

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### PQ17 - Journal of a Midshipman

by: **Richard Campbell-Begg** – Midshipman, HMS Norfolk

source: [www.war-experience.org/history/keyaspects/rusconvoys0742/](http://www.war-experience.org/history/keyaspects/rusconvoys0742/)

**Journal.** We arrived back at Scapa Flow on 23 June after exercising with our friends, the Swordfish aircraft, on the way. Rumours were circulating that something 'big' was afoot with various possibilities being mooted. We were off to open a second front in Norway, going to replace cruisers sunk in the Mediterranean but most probable of all escorting another convoy to Russia. It turned out to be the latter and early on the morning of the 29 June we proceeded to sea, our destination Seydisfjord in Iceland. We arrived there on 30 June and oiled. The cruisers HMS London, flying the Flag of Rear Admiral Hamilton, USS Tuscaloosa and USS Wichita were already there and we were to form the cruiser covering force for the Russian Convoy PQ17.

At 1am on 1 July 1942 our small fleet proceeded to sea. There were the four 8-inch cruisers escorted by the destroyers HMS Somali, USS Wainwright and USS Rowan. Our job is to cover the convoy PQ17 against German surface attack.

**Journal, 2 July.** We have been steering steadily on a course which has now brought us northwest of Bear Island. Occasionally we have sighted the convoy and have been able to see the top works of the nearest ships sheltering in a smudge of smoke on the horizon. All day we have been passing wreckage from previous convoys and possibly from this one. Waterlogged lifeboats and rafts are frequently seen. This afternoon five enemy aircraft were seen flying above the convoy at a great distance. 'Repel aircraft' stations was sounded but third degree of readiness was reverted to half an hour later when the planes had disappeared. A signal has been received to the effect that heavy German vessels have left their bases and are at sea. This afternoon we oiled the destroyer Wainwright but had to desist because of a submarine alarm. Oiling resumed half an hour later.

**Journal, 3 July.** Early this morning the American cruiser Tuscaloosa veered off at speed signalling that she was being torpedoed. A little later she resumed station rather sheepishly. The 'torpedo' was, in fact, the fog buoy towed by the ship ahead which had appeared on her starboard bow whilst zigzagging!

Later on this evening we were picked up by two German Blohm und Voss reconnaissance aircraft which circled us for a few hours before being driven off by anti-aircraft fire from the London and then ourselves.

**Journal, 4 July.** We have been passing icebergs all morning and were picked up by

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another German reconnaissance plane which has been shadowing us ever since. Someone or other has been credited with sending the German a visual signal asking him to 'circle in the opposite direction as you are making us giddy' whereupon the pilot acknowledged the signal and obligingly turned his plane in the opposite direction. On another occasion, when the relief plane had been picked up by radar, a signal was supposedly sent saying 'your relief is on his way' and gave the bearing and distance. This brought the response 'thank you' from the German who flew off homewards.

During the latter part of the afternoon we were closed up at 'repel aircraft' stations about six times and then the ship went to 'action stations' when the convoy was observed to be under air attack. Three ships were seen to be hit and one plane brought down. . .

Later in the evening there was a report that German surface vessels were close to the convoy. The convoy was ordered to scatter and then the cruiser covering force together with the destroyers from the convoy's close escort, proceeded to the west at high speed. With merchant ships breaking away from the convoy in all directions and signal flags flying from the yardarms, the cruisers steaming at speed in line ahead with the destroyers from the convoy taking position in line on the port quarter it all looked an awesome spectacle.

We thought we were about to bring the German Fleet into action until it soon became apparent that this was not the case but that we were withdrawing and leaving the merchant ships to their fate. Dreadful. The Norfolk's Walrus seaplane was in the air at the time and permission to stop and recover it was refused. She was lucky. She landed near a merchant ship which was one of the few to make it to Russia and we were able to re-embark the crew on a subsequent visit.

**Journal, 5 July.** Today we continued our withdrawal westwards but at a slower speed. We are receiving signals from individual ships of the convoy, 'am being bombed, torpedoed', etc and requesting assistance, and of course there is no assistance available. During the day we oiled three destroyers, HMS Wilton, HMS Fury and HMS Keppel (Captain D, Jack Broom).

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### Convoy PQ17 – one sailor’s story

by: **Mr Green** – Senior Leading Seaman (ASDIC), HMS La Malouine

source: <http://www.navynews.co.uk/articles/2002/0208/1002080201.asp>

Mr Green wrote to Navy News, saying he was interested in the account printed in our July edition of the disastrous PQ17 convoy to Russia in July 1942.

Here he gives his recollections of the events which led up to the devastating attacks by German aircraft and submarines.

“I was the Senior Leading Seaman Asdic/sonar rating on board one of the corvettes, La Malouine.

“Originally she was built for French naval ratings, but only half a ship’s company of Frenchmen could be found, so after a few months the Royal Navy took the ship over and, incidentally, after the changeover, always flew the French flag and the White Ensign.

“I joined her at Tilbury Docks about April 1942 and noticed I was one of only three active service ratings on board. Eyebrows were raised when housings were welded above the main deck to take three Oerlikon guns each side.

“On completion of the refit the ship proceeded to Londonderry for the usual shakedown.

“We then sailed in a northern direction and were informed that the ship would be part of the escort of a convoy called the PQ17.

“On arrival at Seidisfjord, Iceland, our postman landed to collect the mail. It was known that people of this country were pro-Axis. This was demonstrated to us by seeing our postman walk along the road and pass six houses.

“Out of the window of one of the houses we saw a young girl give Postie a wave. Immediately her mother pulled her back inside the room and close the window.

“The next day we sailed. In due course we joined the gathering of ships and took up our station on the port bow of the convoy.

“What happened later has been well documented. Suffice it to say before the scattering of the convoy, during one raid, one of the aircraft was shot down.

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“The La Malouine was nearest and proceeded to attempt to pick up the crew that by this time were in their rubber dinghy. At the same time another aircraft with floats fitted landed near the dinghy and picked up the crew and flew off.

“We, along with other ships, tried to bring down the rescue plane but the craft took off quite happily. We brought the dinghy inboard.

“The contents of the dinghy were binoculars, flying gloves, flying boots and a compass. All these items were ordered to be sent to the bridge.

“Naturally, fatigue set in for the convoy, as the raids by air and U-boat were in relays, and as there were no nights to give a little respite, tiredness was a big factor.

“Furthermore, as the weather was excellent and warm, unfortunately with warmth on the surface of the sea, it tended to bend sonar beams down, thus any U-boat at periscope depth had a fair chance of not being detected. I noticed this with the wakes of other ships.

“A few days later, and following a battering by aircraft on American Independence Day, we noticed there was a lot of activity by the escorting destroyers, and they all seemed to be steering westward at high speed.

“Being on a little corvette, we did wonder what on earth was going on as we saw all the destroyers going flat out – and that was the last we saw of them.

“Later we were informed that the convoy had scattered and that as we were now eastwards of Bear Island we were to make for Archangel.

“We were informed about the Tirpitz, and lookouts were doubled up. It was the first time I saw engine room staff climb up the mast. Indeed, one or two tricks up the mast were carried out by the senior ERA.

“The wireless office kept receiving calls for assistance as the ships were sunk. The Captain and the Captain of the corvette HMS Poppy decided to skirt the ice cap.

“At about this time, to my horror, my sonar set broke down. Frankly, along with the rest of the crew I was in no fit state to start chasing defects.

“However, I did get the set going insofar as the set could still transmit, but if a submarine was detected the attacking would be very hit or miss.

“In exhaustion I slipped down by the feet of the duty sonar operator and dropped off. Naturally, my mind was still on the defect, and I dreamt I was back in Osprey and a Chief told me to go into the room where there was a sonar set that was defective and to get it

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ready for sea in 15 minutes. This was the usual passing-out routine for a class qualifying.

“I was successful – and awoke with a start. I immediately called to the bridge to stop the sonar for ten minutes. This was given and I immediately whipped off the control training unit and cleaned out the gap between the segments that were shorting together, and the set was once again operational.

“The two ships headed for Novaya Zemlya, in company with some of the convoy, and at last we sighted land.

“Entering a small type of entrance, the ship was about to anchor when we heeled over for a brief instant.

“I immediately checked out my sonar dome. It was no longer watertight, and furthermore my sonar transducer in the dome was useless.

“The few ships that made this inlet anchored and the crews immediately went to sleep in the sure knowledge that no submarine would sneak into the anchorage, it being too shallow. We hoped no aircraft would spot us.

“After about 12 hours the ships got under way and set sail for Archangel. By this time we had gathered four ships to escort, and proceeded south down the White Sea.

“Almost immediately we came under attack by aircraft. No ships were hit, but we picked up survivors in an open boat. They said a U-boat had surfaced and the Captain appeared immaculately dressed and informed them that the convoy had been destroyed. He then gave them a bottle of whisky and then sank beneath the waves.

“I think it was the second day that one of the four ships, the Hoosier, was hit, and the Captain decided to abandon ship. His crew made for the Poppy.

“Our Captain decided to go alongside the Hoosier in an attempt to tow her. The Captain put us alongside the Hoosier very neatly. A towing party went on board to sight out the towing arrangements, and as I had no sonar set, I also went on board.

“Almost immediately aircraft were spotted approaching. I went to the bridge of the Hoosier as I had spotted a pair of Browning guns on each side of the bridge. But by this time the Poppy had picked up the Hoosier crew and its captain went straight to the bridge and told the Poppy captain to get that ship away from the Hoosier as the fire on board was next to the magazine.

“The Poppy informed us and the Captain sounded the ship’s siren. Hearing that noise I left the bridge, but before doing so I spotted a splendid ship’s telescope. I grabbed hold of a flag from the signal locker, draped it over the telescope and brought the flag aboard.

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“Thankfully we cleared the Hoosier safely, and indeed she soon sank.

“Now the reason I used the flag was when the items from the German dinghy were sent to the bridge, the next day all the young officers were seen to be sporting their spoils – the gloves, the binoculars, including the flying boots – so there was no way they were getting this telescope.

“Unfortunately, another of our force, the El Capitan, was attacked and sank. After that our little force arrived in Archangel.

“Our three-month stay there is another story, but it is worth mentioning a couple of points. The Russians were short of food, so all we received was a constant supply of bread. It tasted awful.

“Now during the war, wives and mothers in the UK were asked to knit woollen socks, jumpers, gloves and headgear. My mother did her bit with her friends. The La Malouine had a good stock of this clothing.

“As it was summer there was no need to issue this clothing to the crew. My mess discovered that manning the skiff and pulling across the river to a small village and bartering with the wives of these homes, they would take us to their back gardens and give us spades and we could dig for katoshkas (potatoes).

“When they considered we had collected enough we would swap our woollies for the potatoes. In the end we used to see the officers doing their bit in a garden further along.

“Point two. When the unfortunate Dieppe raid took place the Russians thought it was the start of the Second Front and gave each ship (I believe) a yak carcass. It proved to be delicious and was all gone in a day.

“We understood the Russians wanted the carcasses back when the raid turned out to be a hit and run, but all the ships had consumed their yaks.

“And finally and this I still have bad dreams about, the Senior Officer of, I believe, the Palomares informed the trawler Northern Gem to transfer their dome and transducer to the La Malouine.

“Naturally, the Commanding Officer of Northern Gem was furious. However, I believe the Captain mellowed when he found that the four corvettes would carry out patrol duties up the White Sea.

“In September the PQ18 arrived, losing 14 ships out of 40. A number of days elapsed, and

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then the return journey got under way, and the La Malouine was stationed on the port quarter of the now-called convoy QP14.

“About two days later one of the old PQ18 escorts, HMS Leda, on the starboard bow of QP14, reported that her sonar had broken down.

“The Senior Officer ordered her to swap her station on the starboard bow with the La Malouine stationed on the convoy’s port quarter. During the night the Leda was torpedoed and, regrettably, no ship was sent to assist her.

“Over the years I often thought of that unfortunate crew, and how lucky the La Malouine crew was that the Senior Officer had made Northern Gem swap her dome and transducer with us.

“Finally, more than 50 years later, looking up information about the convoy on the Internet, I was amazed to see a photo of the Leda, prior to or after her being torpedoed. The U-boat also picked up some crew member survivors – thank goodness.”

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### The PQ17 Story - The Worst Journey in the World

by: **John Beardmore** – Navigating Officer (Lieutenant), HMS Poppy

source: [www.cbrnp.com/RNP/Flower/ARTICLES/Poppy/Beardmore-1.htm](http://www.cbrnp.com/RNP/Flower/ARTICLES/Poppy/Beardmore-1.htm)

In the summer of 1942 I was a 22 year old R.N.VR. Naval Sub-Lieutenant, serving as Navigating Officer on board the newly built Flower Class Corvette, H.M.S. Poppy, part of the close escort of the ill-fated convoy to Russia, P.Q.17.

PQ17 was probably doomed from the start. A whole chain of events was set off by a number of what are now clearly seen to have been mistaken decisions, which once put into effect could not be reversed.

To begin with the convoy was sailed against the express advice of the Admiralty, who had been obliged to withdraw aircraft carriers from the Home Fleet to support the already hard pressed Malta convoys, leaving no effective air cover at all for the Russian convoys once they had entered the Barents Sea.

Stalin, supported by Roosevelt, had insisted to Churchill that the northern convoys to Russia be continued during the summer months of 1942 a period of continuous daylight when air cover was important, if not imperative, and reluctantly Churchill agreed, knowing the need of the Russians, for one must remember at that time the Red Army were particularly hard pressed fighting with their backs to the wall at Stalingrad.

The convoy, consisting of 36 heavily laden Merchant ships mostly American, plus three British tescue ships, the Rathlin, Zamalek and Zafferan, who were to cover themselves with glory later on, sailed from Hvalfjiorð in Iceland on the afternoon of 27th June, 1942, and proceeded under escort through the treacherous Denmark Straits, round the north coast of Iceland to be joined two days later by the rest of the escorts sailing from Seydisfjiorð on the east coast.

In all there were 21 British warships closely escorting the convoy: H.M.S. Palomares and Pozarica, two 2000 ton, 15 knot converted peacetime West Indies Banana Boats now each equipped with eight 4 inch anti-aircraft guns and called Ack Ack ships; there were six experienced Western Approaches destroyers, three Minesweepers, four Corvettes, three Anti-submarine trawlers and two submarines taking passage to Russia. Distant cover at 10 to 20 miles was provided by two cruiser Squadrons, one British, one American, while long range cover was provided by the Home Fleet Admiral Jack Tovey, C. in C. in the battleship Duke of York. The fleet carrier Victorious and the U.S. battleship Washington, plus two cruisers and 14 destroyers who were hovering between Scapa Flow and Jan Mayern

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Island just in case! A grand total of 61 warships defending a convoy of 35 M/S. In the middle of the convoy steamed the two British Submarines on passage to Russia, but significantly no aircraft carrier with the convoy.

The Senior Officer Escort was Commander Jack Broome, RN, an experienced Western Approaches convoy leader in his First World War destroyer H.M.S. Keppeil. He was to become even more famous 30 years later in the famous Old Bailey libel case of 1971 that went to the House of Lords when he sued Cassels, the publishers, and David Irving who wrote "The Destruction of Convoy P.Q.17." He won his case but the £40,000 damages awarded were never paid as Cassels conveniently went bankrupt.

We sailed upon a note of optimism in spite of a warning report through ULTRA at Bletchley Park (the code breaking Centre) that there was a strong chance of the German battleship The Admiral von Tirpitz being deployed against the convoy from her base in northern Norway. A Decoy convoy, E.S., consisting of five Minelayers and four ancient colliers had been simultaneously sailed from Scapa Flow and was boldly skirting the Norwegian coast in an attempt to draw the German fleet into the arms of the Royal Navy's Home fleet. Unfortunately convoy E.S. became completely enveloped in fog and passed completely unnoticed and returned to Scapa Flow, mission unaccomplished.

In the meantime PQ17 had settled down to a steady 7 knots on a north easterly course and with its escorts covered a sea area of 25 square miles, which it must be admitted is an awful lot of sea if one hopes to pass undetected. Needless to say the convoy was soon reported by shadowing Blom and Voss reconnaissance aircraft, and patrolling U-Boats, as it proceeded to the south of Jan Mayen Island upon its fateful voyage.

"This is Jarminy calling! Jarminy calling!" (Now you know who that was.) Within a few hours Lord Haw Flaw's nasal tones could be heard on the ships' radios in the convoy, giving the names of most of the ships in the convoy and the dire fate that awaited them at the hands of the German fleet and Luftwaffe. So much we thought for "Mum's the word, the enemy is listening" but I seem to recall that we merely blamed those unfriendly Icelanders, for after all Iceland was known to be full of German agents!

The Bloom and Voss German reconnaissance planes continued to circle the convoy out of firing range until one exasperated destroyer Captain called to his yeoman, "Tell that bugger to go round the other way." So the yeoman of the exasperated destroyer flashed, "Please go round the other way." The Bloom & Voss flashed back in English, "Anything to oblige an Englishman," and did so! You could be forgiven for thinking it was "all a game!" During the next three days several U-Boat attacks were driven off by our own destroyers, as was a rather half-hearted attack by seven Heinkel 115 torpedo carrying aircraft, who dropped their torpedoes and scurried off when they met the intensive barrage put up by the convoy and its escorts.

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During this action an enemy plane, shot down by the destroyer H.M.S. Fury landed on the sea a mile or more ahead of the convoy. Out of firing range, we watched as a German float plane swooped down and landed like a gnat alongside the sinking aircraft, picked up its crew and flew off again. We watched in wonderment. Our CO. muttered in admiration, "Bloody marvellous!"

So P.Q.17, its hopes rising, to the sound of its depth charges exploding and the thud-thud of the pom pom guns continued on its way. The convoy had now left behind the treacherous drift ice and dangerous seas of the Denmark Straits and was entering the strange, becalmed Summer world of the Arctic Ocean with its mirages, its refractory images of upside down ships upon a calm iridescent sea, in a rarefied almost intoxicating atmosphere in which the sun at midnight burned our faces, in spite of an air temperature well below zero. We began to pass majestic icebergs and saw polar bears basking themselves upon ice flows which sailed silently by like giant water lilies.

We even passed the partly iced over remains of a German aircraft which had been shot down on a previous convoy and which had crash landed upon an ice flow, and was silently drifting about the Arctic wastes like some ghostly Marie Celeste. The convoy had now assumed an easterly course and was skirting the Great Ice Barrier in order to distance itself from the enemy. We suddenly realised that we were less than 800 miles across the ice from the North Pole!

At midnight between the 3rd and 4th of July the convoy passed to the nor'ward of Bear Island and at about 5 a.m. suffered its first casualty directly attributable to the enemy. A U.S. Liberty ship, the Christopher Newport was torpedoed by a single enemy aircraft which appeared suddenly out of a cloud bank.

The top masts of the covering British and U.S. cruiser squadrons could be seen far away to the northward, hull down on the horizon. We felt secure to know that they were there! Shortly after breakfast the Admirals of the U.S. and Royal Naval cruiser Squadrons exchanged somewhat platitudinous but friendly greetings on the T.B.S. (ships to ship short range telephone), forerunner of that modern convenient menace, the mobile phone.

"Glad to have you with us - old boy."

"Glad to be here - Buddy."

It was Independence Day - July 4th The American Merchant ships in the convoy having hoisted brand new large "Stars and Stripes" were singing songs and waving to us - it was to be a day many would remember with sadness but just at that moment, "A National day of pride and defiance".

The convoy was now entering the zone of the Barents Sea where enemy surface attack was most likely to happen. Lt. Beckley (P614), the senior Officer of one of the two British

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Submarines taking passage in the middle of the convoy, flashed to Senior Officer Escorts, "In the event of attack by enemy forces propose to remain on the surface." Commander Jack Broome in H.M.S. Keppel (ever the humourist) promptly flashed back, "So do I!" Throughout the day there were sporadic attacks by groups of torpedo carrying Heinkel 115s and Junkers 88 and there was a splendid teatime display of pyrotechnics and rapid anti-aircraft fire by the U.S. destroyer Wainwright when she came over from the U.S. squadron to fuel from our fleet oil tanker, the Aldersdale. She did however shoot down one enemy aircraft.

Later on that evening PQ17 received attention from two low level bombing attacks by 30 Heinkel 115s, each carrying two torpedoes Which were driven off with the loss of only two Merchant ships, The Navorino and the Liberty Ship William Hooper. Still outstanding in one's memory of that dramatic half hour (even after 60 years) was the inspiring display of suicidal courage shown by the leader of the enemy squadron, who deliberately diverted the convoy's fire to himself by flying straight up between the columns of ships at bridge level. Of course he and his aircraft were totally blasted to smithereens by the intensive barrage of fire at close range and crashed into the sea in flames just ahead of the convoy, but instead of inspiring his squadron to press home their attack many of them dropped their torpedoes and turned away.

We in Poppy counted our blessings as we watched two torpedoes approaching our ship in the clear water on either bow. Our engine room in jittery language reported hearing their motors as they passed under us with about a foot to spare, and sped on toward the convoy.

In the meantime the Russian Tanker Azerbaijan, carrying a cargo of crude oil, had been torpedoed forward and set on fire. As some of her crew abandoned ship the women gunners left on board turned a machine gun onto the departing lifeboat, fired a couple of bursts and forced the panicking crew back on board where they set to, fought and extinguished the fire and being capable of 15 knots caught up again with the convoy. How we cheered them! Then just as the convoy was settling down again feeling rather pleased with itself, having accounted for a couple more aircraft, the survivors picked up, and the two stricken U.S. Merchantmen astern sunk by our escorts own gunfire, the following significant and baffling signal was received at 9. 11 p.m. from the Admiralty, addressed to the cruiser Squadron still 10 miles to the northward:

"Most immediate. cruiser force withdraw to the Westward at high speed". A few minutes later came a further signal:

"Immediate. Due to threat from surface ships convoy is to disperse and proceed to Russian Ports."

Exactly thirteen minutes later the Admiralty sent what was to become the most lethal and

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ominous signal of the entire war at sea.

"CONVOY IS TO SCATTER."

Arriving in quick succession these three signals which in the end proved to be misconceived and inaccurate created an atmosphere of considerable alarm, to all present. The enemy fleet was clearly near at hand. What the Admiralty did not appreciate was that the Tirpitz and the German fleet were 300 miles away still at anchor in Altenfjord, having arrived from Trondheim and Narvik.

Intercepting and breaking the German ENIGMA signals at the secret code-breaking centre at Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire, whose brilliant wartime work shortened the War by at least a year and saved thousands of lives, had reported no flurry of wireless signals associated with the departure of the German fleet. There were no sightings by our own submarines patrolling the Norwegian coast and the entrance to Altenfjord, all of which indicated that the German ships had not sailed.

To this negative evidence Naval Intelligence agreed. However the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound (a dedicated and conscientious officer slowly dying of cancer) was utterly convinced otherwise and chose to ignore Bletchley Park's assurance. There had also been a complete breakdown in our own aerial reconnaissance for several vital hours over Altenfjord due to adverse weather conditions. The Tirpitz did not in fact sail until fifteen hours after the convoy had been scattered. By which time 14 merchant ships had already been sunk by U-Boats and aircraft, more than the total numbers of ships sunk on all the previous convoys to Russia.

The German Admiral Raedar immediately cancelled KNIGHTSMOVE (the codeword for the German operation) and Tirpitz soon returned to harbour after a brief coastal sortie. The scatter signal was naturally interpreted by us on the spot to mean that the Tirpitz and a strong enemy force was fast approaching us from the South West and just over the horizon.

The only other case of a convoy being scattered was that in October 1940, when the German Battle cruiser Admiral Scheer was actually shelling the convoy of 37 ships in the North Atlantic when the decision to scatter was taken by the only Naval ship present, the armed Merchant cruiser The Jervis Bay, who immediately engaged the enemy and sacrificed herself heroically. The decision to scatter the convoy successfully was taken on the spot by the Captain of The Jervis Bay and the convoy had a chance to disperse. So it was not difficult to imagine the feelings of Commander Jack Broome (Senior Officer), on the bridge of his ancient destroyer H.M.S. Keppel for those indeed were the feelings of all the Escort Commanders and the Commodore of the convoy (Commodore John Dowding, D.S.O., R.N.R.) who so completely disbelieved his eyes that he demanded that the signal should be twice repeated before he would pass the order on to the convoy to

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scatter. And all this was in spite of the fact that there were the two powerful allied cruiser Squadrons within 10 miles and the capital ships of the Home Fleet were 150 miles off Jan Mayern Island. All this happened when a wave of great confidence had passed through the convoy following the two abortive attacks an hour or so earlier.

The convoy and its escorts were in fine fettle, in close formation, making good speed and ready for anything. I well remember on my own ship the Poppy, the First Lieutenant saying to the captain, "My God - we can't just leave these poor devils to their fate and shove off," but this was exactly what we were being ordered to do. To an escort vessel on convoy duty the very thought of abandoning its charges is utterly unthinkable.

It was now nearly 10 p.m. when Commander Broome signalled his flotilla of destroyers "Join me" and sped off to the westward in the hope of joining the cruisers and hopefully intercepting the enemy in a "death or glory" battle.

As he sailed away he signalled to Commodore Dowding in the River Aft on, "Sorry to leave you like this. Looks like a bloody business." Commodore Dowding signalled back, "Goodbye and good luck." Within one hour the scattered convoy was spread out on a 25 mile front heading in all directions from north to south east, and it would have been virtually impossible to re-form it. The remaining escorts were ordered to proceed independently to Archangel. However...

We in Poppy joined up with the Corvettes Lotus and La Malouine when we were ordered to screen the anti-aircraft ship Pozarica (carrying the late Godfrey Winn as War Correspondent) and together we retired (if that is the correct word) to the eastward at our maximum speed of 15 knots. The brave little corvette Lotus (Lt. H. J. Hall, R.N.R.) however, in spite of the Admiralty's directive, decided to turn back into the presumed path of the enemy and rescued some 85 survivors (including Commodore Dowding) as soon as the harrowing S.O.S. messages started coming in from the Merchant ships under attack. Retiring eastward we overtook M.V. Bellinghani also heading east, who when invited to join up with our group replied "Go to Hell." Our CO. remarked "I don't blame him." Two days later a mixed bag consisting of all but two of the remaining escorts, plus six Merchant ships, plus the rescue ships Zamelek and Raihlin already loaded down with survivors, crept into Matochkin Straits, a narrow channel in the peninsular of Novaya Zambia, that straight finger of land that sticks up into the Arctic wastes where the main continent of Siberia begins. This bleak area was to become within the next decade the locale of the first Russian nuclear tests.

We found however only a small rather startled settlement of fishermen and meteorologists, who first thought that they were being invaded by the Germans. A Russian naval officer came out in an old fishing boat with an ancient machine gun in its bows. We quickly took stock of the situation (the Corvettes, now very low in fuel, fuelling from one of the Merchant ships) and decided to slip away before we were spotted and mined by the enemy. So we

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continued southwards in a reformed convoy through fog banks which were to our advantage and through pack ice, which was not.

We were soon spotted by a German "reccy" plane as we cleared the fog. The Fuhrer had already ordered his crack air squadrons from Sicily to Finland in order to destroy PQ17 and every available U-Boat was out on patrol in the Barents Sea. We subsequently learned that the German Command had deployed some 240 air sorties against PQ17 and that there had been over a dozen U-Boats out looking for us. It was probably just as well that we did not know this at the time.

As we proceeded on our southerly course we were attacked and bombed for nearly seven hours by wave after wave of Junkers 88s, who fortunately failed with their poor aim and we lost only two more Merchant ships which were abandoned after near misses (Hoosier and El Capitain) and after two more days we reached the small port of Lokanka at the entrance to the White Sea, our decks bulging with survivors like a Bateman drawing. But here to our astonishment we were tartly ordered away by a Russian pilot boat as this was a "Secret port" and no foreigners were allowed in. This was the first indication of the Soviet's true attitude to its Allies - total suspicion and total insularity.

So we limped round into the almost enclosed White Sea, where we were once more attacked by a couple of Junkers 88s, and not a Russian fighter in sight, and so on until we reached Archangel. And all this time we had been asking ourselves, "What happened to the Tirpitz?" Why no news of a great naval battle between the capital ships. Had something gone wrong?

As we approached the delta of the Dvina River our exhausted Yeoman of Signals turned to our Commanding Officer, who had never left the bridge for days on end, and said, "If you'll pardon me for saying so, Sir, I think there's been a balls up!" The Captain (Lt. N. K. Boyd, D.S.C, R.N.R.) breathed heavily and replied, "Yeoman, I think you're right."

After landing our survivors, refuelling and taking breath, the Corvettes within a couple of days had proceeded to sea again to continue the search for other survivors and any ships that had not fallen into the hands of the enemy or been sunk. We in Poppy carried on board the convoy's Commodore, John Dowding, a man well past middle age who had already become a survivor himself when his Commodore Ship River Afton had been torpedoed under him. He was determined to search for and bring in the remnants of his convoy. He was subsequently torpedoed again on the home bound convoy later in the year and became a survivor once more.

The Corvettes reached and re-entered our former "funk hole", the Matochkin Straits and 20 miles up this uncharted inlet found five more Merchant ships, Silver Sword, Trouhador and Ironclad, Benjamin Harrison and the Russian Azerbyjam, being guarded by the 500 ton Anti-submarine Trawler Ayrshire commanded by a brave and eccentric barrister

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yachtsman Lt. "Leo" Gradwell, R.N.V.R. They were tucked up against the ice wall, having earlier in the northern ice fields painted themselves "white" to avoid detection by German reconnaissance planes. This they succeeded in doing before breaking out of the ice field and heading eastward, arriving at Matochkin a few days after we had left. Gradwell's bravery and Initiative was highly praised by the Commander in Chief (Tovey) and he was awarded with others the D.S.C. Years later Leo Gradwell also achieved fame of a different sort as the presiding London magistrate in the famous Ward - Profumo affair.

In the meantime we formed yet another small convoy of remnants and proceeded south again, Commodore Dowding having transferred to the Russian ice breaker Murnian. We were soon joined by the British CAM ship Empire Tide which had refloated herself after running ashore in the fog in Moller Bay on our previous flight southward.

Earlier on we had found a U.S. Merchantman Winston Salem stranded in a little bay further down the coast. Her terrified Captain and crew had spiked her guns, thrown overboard the breeches and were camping out ashore under tarpaulins, having washed their hands of the whole affair and declared themselves neutral. They declined our offer to pull their ship off the sandbar on which it had lodged and demanded rescue by air. We could not persuade them to chance their luck with us so were obliged to leave them. I am glad to say that they were later rescued by Catalina and a British volunteer crew put on board who brought their ship in safely. The story of the Winston Salem affair was of course a disgraceful incident, a sorry affair. When the Russians learned what had happened, they demanded that the Winston Salem's captain be shot for cowardice - he wasn't, of course. Unfortunately, some of the American merchant ships had been on their maiden voyages and were crewed by men who had never been to, or even seen the sea before many of whom were ex-farm hands from the prairies who had been tempted by the enormous bonuses offered.

In a few cases relations between the U.S. survivors and their British rescuers became somewhat strained as the Americans expected a far higher standard of treatment than we could offer. Some declined to help out in the now cramped quarters of the small escorts and generally made themselves unpopular. "We're survivors man - our Union says so -so we don't do nothing!" The U.S. Merchant ships were Union ridden and there was a lack of discipline. Others were both helpful and grateful for being rescued. However we noticed that the white U.S. survivors all refused to sit down to eat at the same mess tables as their black compatriots. This really astonished us as we were simply trying to feed them with our own rations.

Finally some two weeks after the scatter signal the remnants of convoy PQ17 were eventually shepherded into Archangel, making a grand total of 11 Merchant ships and over 1,300 survivors some badly injured, others frost bitten, who subsequently lost their limbs in Russian hospitals, many without anaesthetics.

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We had lost 24 Merchant ships, one Rescue ship, 450 tanks, 200 fighter planes, 300 Army vehicles and one hundred thousand tons of war supplies, over 450 million pounds worth (at present day values), all at the bottom of the Barents Sea. Enough to equip a whole army, enough perhaps to have saved Stalingrad which, of course, eventually the Russians did themselves. Added to this there were 156 brave allied seamen killed or drowned, frozen to death, and another 50 taken prisoner. It seemed a heavy toll indeed to pay for a human error. The Russian Tanker Azerbyjarn, which had shown such bravery and determination, berthed at nearby Molotok. Those who had prematurely left the ship in the lifeboat were marched off under guard - their fate only to be guessed at.

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### Diary – Convoy PQ17

by: **Jack Bowman** – Engine Room Artificer (ERA), HMS La Malouine

source: <http://www.pq17.eclipse.co.uk/>

Saturday, June 20th 1942

Left Londonderry at 0800 for Loch Foyle. We had Asdic trials and anti-aircraft. Our pom-pom gunners shot the trailer down. After that, several of the guns broke down. We returned to Derry at 2100. I am dead in a cold.

Sunday, June 1st.

Left Derry again for further trials at 0730. These were very successful, returned at 2100. Tobruk fell today.

Monday, June 22nd.

We repaired steering engine exhaust and main steam joints, dynamo, and reducing valves. I went to the 'Dianella' and saw Norman Birkett. We proceeded ashore, went to the pictures, and had supper.

Tuesday, June 23rd.

Spent the day making a snifting cock for No.2 boiler room fuel pump. I had arranged to meet Norman Birkett, but as my cold was not improving, I stayed inboard and wrote a letter home.

Wednesday, June 24th.

We left Derry at 0900 for more exercises, oiled up, and set off on escort duties about 1400, along with two rescue ships, two corvettes including 'Dianella', and two Ack-Ack ships.

Thursday, June 25th.

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We are steaming along at a steady twelve knots. The weather is dark and stormy.

Friday, June 26th.

Still steaming at 12 knots. About 16000 we ran into a minefield, but we sank these by gunfire; again, at 2000 we ran into another, and got through safely.

Saturday, June 27th.

I came off the morning watch at 0400. I was amazed on reaching the deck to see land all covered in snow. This turned out to be Sedijfjord, Iceland. Indeed, it was a glorious sight - mountains all round, stretching down to a natural harbour. I went ashore on the 1800 liberty boat to see what the habitation was like. I found the people were of Norse origin. The houses were built mainly of tin and wood, and what stores there were, were built under the houses. English and American troops are stationed here, and the price of things, my goodness! Kroners 24 to the £ is the rate of exchange.

Sunday, 28th June.

We left the fjord at 0100 this morning for a submarine sweep, arriving back at noon. I wish my wife could have been with me on this sweep, to be in broad daylight all night long, and the grandeur of this magnificent scenery. It reminded me of the pleasant days we had spent together in the Lakes. Leave was piped at 1400 for C.P.O.'s only. I got the boat crew to take me over to 'Dianella ' which was anchored further down from us. I chatted with Norman for an hour or so, then got their boat crew to take me ashore. I watched a rugby match between two army teams, and then returned aboard. In the meantime, the cruisers 'London' and 'Manchester' and a score of destroyers had turned up. Spent the rest of the night playing cards. We left again at 2400 for another night's sweep, so they give us plenty of sea time!

Monday, June 29th.

We returned from sweep at 1000, oiled up, and put to sea again at 1330 to pick convoy up coming from America. It was a fine sight, all those destroyers, cruisers, rescue ships, corvettes and ack-ack ships.

Tuesday, June 30th.

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The weather is now very cold and foggy with a very low temperature. Our ship picked the convoy up at 1500 by R.D.F. I believe that we were complimented for same. it was one of the largest convoys I have been in, huge ships, heavily laden. These were accompanied by Yankee destroyers, battleships 'Washington' and 'Duke of York' and an aircraft carrier ( 'Victorious '). Rumours started flying about that we were being used as a decoy to bring the German fleet out, the battlewagons being several miles astern. Our captain piped lower deck and told us for the first time that we were for Russia, and wished us luck.

Wednesday, July 1st.

By now we are 70 degrees N, and on the bridge it is below freezing point. I have seen my first small iceberg, we were attacked all afternoon by subs, but no ship took any harm - the escort was too strong for them to enter. It was deafening in the engine room, depth charges going off everywhere. I thought many a time that everything was up. Standing by all the time with lifebelts on. My thoughts always with home.

Thursday, July 2nd.

Attacks started early again this morning by subs. It was reported that we had been spotted by a Focke-Wolfe. This was bad, because later in the day we noticed three Dornier flying-boats shadowing us on our port beam<sup>1</sup>. They kept manoeuvring for position, and at 2000 pressed their attack home. we beat them off, our ship bringing one down in flames<sup>2</sup>. We picked their rubber dinghy up. It was well packed with stores. Subs came on again for the rest of the night.

Friday, July 3rd.

Spasmodic raids by aircraft, who are still flying on our port side. At the moment we are on the outer screen. The Admiralty have just sent a signal to say that the German fleet,'Hipper', 'Lutzow', 'Tirpitz' and 'von Sheer' with escort of destroyers have left Narvik and Trondheim. Icebergs are getting fairly big now. It is damned cold. 11.00pm.

Saturday, July 4th. Fatal Day

German planes are still making swoops at us, and shadowing. At 1800 suddenly the sky is black with bombers and the attack is on. It was a small hell let loose. As far as is known, all these were carrying tinfish. One of the merchant ships, it must have been an oiler, sank within five seconds<sup>1</sup>. Soon the sea was covered with boats and rafts and bodies. As far as I know, three ships were sunk and some abandoned, but later were boarded again<sup>2</sup>. All

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this time neither cruisers, battleships, or aircraft from the carrier came to our assistance. I suppose they were looking for the German fleet. Later on the Admiralty signalled all destroyers to leave the convoy and try to engage the Germans. The convoy was to split up, every man for himself. We seemed to be in a very hopeless situation. Soon ships seemed to be racing in every direction. Our captain<sup>3</sup> decided to go north. Two or three followed us.

Sunday, July 5th.

By this morning we could get no further because of icefields. We are 15 degrees off the North Pole. What a sight! Icebergs as big as Orrest Head, all a lovely bluey-green, covered with arctic birds. I think we have covered about 200 miles trying to get round these icefields. At 1600 another Admiralty signal. Two German battlewagons and eight destroyers were likely to intercept that night, or early morning. Imagine our feelings. By this time we were beginning to lose hope. Remember that we had never had our clothes off for a week, and nerves were becoming taut. I never lost hope myself, but felt very sorry for one of my stokers whose nerve has gone. I was prepared, if given the chance, to sell my life very dearly. My only regrets were those I loved at home. A fog set in and we must have lost the fleet.

Monday, July 6th.

We have come to a big island, roughly the size of Britain. Its name is Novya Zemlya, about 1000 miles north of Archangel. We have found a bay and anchored. The place seems uninhabited, it is all snow and ice. I have heard that it is only open two months in the year. This voyage is becoming an adventure. Here we are, stuck in a bay, oil running short, food becoming rationed very thinly, and awfully cold. Several ships have come in tonight, including four American merchant ships' laden with tanks and bombers, and a corvette<sup>2</sup> with 70 survivors. I have not heard of 'Dianella ' since leaving Iceland, she always being on the starboard side of the convoy. I hope that she has come through alright<sup>3</sup>. What we are going to do now I do not know. I doubt whether we will have enough oil to take us to the Russian mainland, 1000 miles. After what this crew has been through this last week, and when we return home, and the return journey has still to be made, someone will say 'her again'. If only we could give them a night of this! I will turn in for a couple of hours. It is midnight.

Tuesday, July 7th.

We left at 1100 this morning, to take our turn at anchor guard. At 1700 we had a signal to say that the ships were going to try to make for Archangel. By 1900 a thick fog

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has set in, which has made going very slow. We have now found that one of the ships is lost.' We are detailed off to look for it. After several hours we find it heading the remains of the convoy.

Wednesday, 8th July.

It has been clear today, with choppy seas until now, when a thick fog has set in. To make matters worse we have all nearly run into each other, having run into another icefield. We are trying to extract ourselves from this position at the time of writing. We should be now somewhere near the Kara Sea.

Thursday, July 9th.

At 0245 this morning the lookout reported a periscope several miles off our port bow. It turned out to be the mast of two shipwrecked boats, containing 29 men<sup>1</sup>. They were in a very bad way, with swollen hands, feet, and faces, we gave our beds up, but they cried in pain as they started to thaw out. The water temperature is 29 degrees. After the convoy dispersed on Saturday, they tried to make the Russian coast, but they found a Jerry sub following them. They opened up with their 4" gun and thought they must have got him, but he must have crash-dived, because every time the fog cleared he was there. This went on for two days. On Monday at 1530 he put two tinfish into them and then surfaced to take photos. Their cargo alone was valued at £4,000,000. We are now steaming 78 degrees N 47 degrees E with huge icefields, 50ft high in some places. These last two days have been a nightmare, expecting to be cut open by the ice. We hope to make Archangel on Saturday all being well. We are ready for a break. It is warmest here at midnight when the sun is overhead. 2000. Bombers are overhead again. They dive-bombed us, and we lost our two remaining American ships. I had the sad experience of taking a boarding party on a 10,000 ton ship, 'Hoosier', and scuttling her. She was loaded with tanks and bombers. I don't understand this. we are in Russian territory, and have had no air support, although applied for. This attack lasted until midnight. I am feeling very bitter about all this.

Friday, July 10th.

We had another attack again at 0200, and then a break for several hours. We are in the White Sea now, and have been attacked all day, although we have just two rescue ships with us. They said on the wireless they would get us all, and they are picking us off one by one. If we are lucky we will reach Archangel tomorrow. I have just had some severe words with the C.E.R.A. regarding action stations, we are stuck below where he should be; instead, he is on the upper deck with two lifebelts on (coward). He said he would take me on the bridge and I told him to get on with it.

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Saturday, July 11th.

Today was peaceful. We anchored off Archangel about 1800. The children clambered round the boat wanting choc and cigs. They seem to have plenty of money, but it doesn't seem much good. It costs about 175 roubles for a meal, about £3/5/- in our money. Everything is made of wood - there seems to be hundreds of miles of it.

Sunday, July 12th.

We moved off at 1745 to fill up from an oiler. The American survivors left our ship to join another. I will be able to have a bed tonight, the first for several. We have had no shore leave yet (duty tonight).

Monday, July 13th.

Stood by all day ready for going on patrol work. Got my washing done this afternoon. I got up at 0200 and had a bath. I couldn't sleep. It is now 2330.

Tuesday, July 14th.

We went to Archangel by ferry. If this is Soviet Russia, give me England! The place is vile.

Wednesday, July 15th.

Did several repairs today, and then had a walk around the town. It is called Maiskiy. All the streets are made of wood.

Thursday, July 16th.

Repairs to H.P. glands and circulator pipes. I saw N.B. for a few moments. They were alongside just before we set sail. We left at 1030 to look for survivors. Weather very stormy.

Friday, July 17th.

Very rough seas.

Saturday, July 18th.

As above. Not feeling too good.

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Sunday, July 19th.

We arrived in one of the fjords off Novaya Zemlya<sup>1</sup>. We found a Russian merchantman and one of our Catalinas which had been bombed. Gangrene had set in with seven of the crew who had been wounded, and without medical attention. We then set off north again, and picked up a raft off the 'Samuel Chase', but no occupants' We divided their rations among the crew. Food is very scarce. I was listening to the service for seamen. Just as the vicar was praying for our safety, there were three bangs under the ship. Whether we had rammed a sub or not we don't know.

Monday, July 20th.

We found 'Benjamin Harrison', a large merchantman loaded with planes and tanks, hidden in one of the fjords.' what a cheer they gave us! They had 200 survivors aboard from other ships, we left them at 0200, and spent the rest of the day up and down the fjords. We found four more. They had camouflaged themselves like icebergs, we went round these ships and got what food they could spare. We returned with it to the 'Benjamin Harrison' and took their worst survivors on our ship<sup>2</sup>. One little lad of seventeen was torpedoed twice in this convoy. They had been on rafts for six days, hands and feet nearly off.

Tuesday, July 21st.

We gathered up the convoy and set off for Archangel, intending to follow the island all the way down, and then make the 30 hour dash across to the Russian mainland. The weather became terrible, we decided to take advantage of it. At midnight we again ran into icefields. The pressure seems to push the ship's side in.

Wednesday, July 22nd.

Weather still foul. Visibility very poor, but we are ploughing on. At 1800 tonight the AA ship<sup>1</sup> and 'Dianella' have joined us.

Thursday, July 23rd.

Visibility about 50yds, all in our favour. Again I gave my bunk up to survivors, I am making this the last time, as I find that the occupant has been swinging the lead.

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Friday, July 24th.

We attacked some subs in the White Sea today. We have at last reached the mouth of the river. It is now 1930, and about four hours steaming to Archangel. We are circling the convoy awaiting pilots.

Saturday, July 25th.

We arrived in port at 0300 this morning. Met N.B. we went to a Russian Dance. Arrived back on board at 2300.

Sunday, July 26th.

After divisions, J.Chadwick and I fitted the skiff with sail, and went sailing. In the evening we played football on the jetty, finishing up with mending and darning. Weather a bit squally.

Monday, July 27th.

Repaired after L.P. eccentrics. In the evening we moved further upstream. Very showery today. Wrote home and to Barrow.

Tuesday, July 28th.

Overhauled H.P. bearings, we have developed a hole in the ship's hull. It must have been a bomb splinter. Worked at it until 0200.

Wednesday, July 29th.

We left Zolomba at 0800 and proceeded to the White Sea. At 1530 we picked up 12 Russian destroyers, 2 icebreakers, and a fleet tanker. We are escorting them somewhere. A nasty drizzle.

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Thursday, July 30th.

Fog is very dense, we are making about 13 knots. Kept very busy at throttle in engine room.

Friday, July 31st.

Fog still as bad. what I would give for a real meal. we have stopped having breakfast, haven't had any potatoes for a week. Living chiefly on boiled rice, without sugar, canned turnips, peas and beans.

Saturday, August 1st.

The morning was very sunny, and we increased the knots considerably. We are going through the Kara Sea again.

Sunday, August 2nd.

Arrived 0400 this morning. We have run into huge icefields again. The icebreakers are at work. We patrolled around all day. Left again at 1600.

Monday, August 3rd.

Weather fine with choppy seas. The sunsets are the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. I am thinking about Bank Holidays at home today.

Tuesday, August 4th.

Everything just the same. We are in the White Sea again.

Wednesday, August 5th.

We arrived back at 0300, and anchored in midstream. We have just heard that we are boiler-cleaning here, so that seems to suggest staying a bit, and lots of work.

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Thursday, August 6th.

We had inter-ship boat racing today. Our ship did well. The seamen won, and so did the officers. I entered the Carley Float race. It was great sport.

Friday, August 7th.

We moved up to Exonomoiy this morning, and then hung about all day.

Saturday, August 8th.

Started boiler cleaning. I saw N.B. tonight, and we had a walk around. I got a vodka pot.

Sunday, August 9th.

Worked all day. Weather very changeable.

August 10th-16th.

Doing repairs to boilers and engines. Finished boiler cleaning on the 13th. we had a ship's concert on the 15th, given by the ship's company. It was very good. Time is dragging now, and food is very scarce. One of the trawler's stewards died on Saturday evening. He was drowned getting out of the skiff. I sent a cablegram home on the 14th.

17th-26th August.

Just hanging around doing odd jobs. we have been rationed to a slice of bread each meal. The steward off the trawler came to the surface after nine days, and was buried at sea. We also had an air-raid on the 23rd, several fires being started.

Thursday, August 27th.

Set sail for a seven-day sub sweep. Also heard the news that we are due in England by Sept 27th (I hope so).

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Saturday, August 29th.

We have heard that submarines are operating around these islands, shelling small homesteads, we are trying to find them.

Sunday, August 30th.

At 0600 this morning the White Ensign went up on the main mast. We were then engaging the enemy at a distance of eight miles. The chase carried on for six hours, when they eventually dived. This was our chance, or so we thought, expecting the kill to take place that afternoon. On arriving at the place we found that it was a huge icefield. We stayed around until Monday morning, but did not pick them up again.

Monday, August 31st.

We have set off back again for Archangel.

Tuesday, September 1st.

We have been warned that planes have been over and laid mines. Going is very slow with the minesweepers in front.

Wednesday, September 2nd.

We arrived at the bar at 0300 this morning, and moved up the river again at 0700, finally dropping the hook at 1500. During these operations the E.R. staff were complemented for our excellent output, having dropped all the other corvettes in the action.

Thursday, September 3rd.

Doing repairs again. I had a very bad tummy during this last trip, probably due to the food. It is an awful feeling being hungry all day. Some of the fellows have already lost 4".

Friday, September 4th.

Doing repairs to main engines.

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Saturday, September 5th.

Still at repairs.

Sunday, September 6th.

I went to Holy Communion this morning, given by a padre from Archangel. It was held in the hospital of the rescue ship 'Rathlin'. All the ships had a church service later in the morning, the first since arriving. I played cricket this afternoon. I have just had my supper. I do feel hungry, my tummy keeps crying for more, but it is no use.

September 7th-9th.

Doing work for the Captain's cabin. Cablegram home. Put in request to shave off.

Thursday, September 10th.

We had some fleet mail brought on board tonight, so that looks like we are going back to the U.K. several merchant ships are loading up with survivors, several without arms or legs.

Friday, September 11th.

We had a make and mend this afternoon, probably our last. I saw N.B. tonight, and we had a walk about the town, finishing up on my boat for a tot.

Saturday, September 12th.

It is pouring down with rain this morning. The tugs are busy pulling the merchant ships out. The 'Dianella' has tripped anchor, we have moved down as far as the bar.

Sunday, September 13th.

The convoy started to move into position at 0800, and took until 1730 before we got going. Very high seas are running.

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Monday, September 14th.

We arrived at the head of the White Sea tonight, and are moving into the Arctic.

Tuesday, September 15th.

We are moving due north today, intending to go to 80 degrees, it is getting very cold. We have left one ship already. Today brings back much pleasanter memories than I am enduring at the moment.

Wednesday, September 16th.

It is snowing hard this morning. We have been spotted by a Dornier and unless the weather favours us, I guess we will all be standing by. This evening a bomber dived out of the clouds and missed our mast by a few feet. It dropped a stick of bombs, but they too missed.

Thursday, September 17th.

Today we are joined by an extra escort, I think one of the largest. The following names are some of them:

Escort QP17: 'Blankley', 'Lord Middleton', 'Palomares', 'Pozarica', 'Dianella', 'Lotus', 'Poppy', 'LaMalouine', 'Lord Austin', 'Ayrshire', 'Northern Gem'.

Battleships: 'Anson', 'Duke of York'.

Covering Force: 'Jamaica', 'Echo', 'Montrose', 'Keppel', 'Campbell', 'Mackay', 'Scylla', 'Somali', 'Tartar', 'Eskimo', 'Ashanti', 'Faulkner', 'Fury', 'Intrepid', 'Impulsive', 'Onslow', 'Offa', 'Onslought', 'Opportune', 'Milne', 'Norfolk', 'London', 'Sheffield', 'Cumberland', 'Eclipse', 'Bulldog', 'Walpole', 'Venomous'.

Minesweepers: 'Harrier', 'Sharpshooter', 'Gleaner'.

Carriers: 'Avenger', 'Wheatland', 'Wilton'.

Others- 'Worcester', 'Windsor', 'Oakley', 'Cowdray', P145 and P146.

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Friday, September 18th.

The decks are covered with ice and snow, and it is blowing a gale. We took on oil from one of the tankers, this was done while under way. Some of the seamen were brought in with their jaws frozen up. It is icy-cold in the engine room. I have been so long without a good meal I don't think I shall be able to eat one now. We passed the island of Good Hope tonight.

Saturday, September 19th.

We are running alongside Spitzbergen today. It is all covered in snow and ice. I am glad that I live in the U.K. We are being shadowed by German aircraft all the time.

Sunday, September 20th.

Subs attacked all day. We lost the sloop 'Leader', one merchant ship, the destroyer 'Somali' badly damaged, but taken on tow by 'Ashanti'. Depth charges dropped all day

Monday, September 21st.

Another day of attacks. I have just taken two hours rest, the first in 48, and am returning to it again.

Tuesday, September 22nd.

Attacks all day, lost 13 more merchantmen. Cold and rough.

Wednesday, September 23rd.

We lost an oil tanker and one ship today, we are nearing Iceland now, and I can see the snow-capped mountains. Going is very slow, as Jerry is laying minefields ahead of us.

Thursday, September 24th.

The seas are so rough, I almost feel as though I have been filleted. We attacked a sub this evening, the skipper claiming a probable. The sea was covered with herring from our depth charges. Our mess dropped a net and got some. They tasted like heaven after what we have had.

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Friday, September 25th.

We passed the Faeroes on our port bow, so we will soon be reaching our native shores.

Saturday, September 26th.

I am making this my last entry for this trip. We are now heading for Loch Ewe, and we should reach Liverpool late Sunday or early Monday morning. Everyone is longing for the tie-up, so that they can have a full night's rest.

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