

OFFICE OF THE NAVAL HISTORIAN

4, Ontario.

20 April, 1964.

Dear Dr. Rohwer:

I am now able to answer your letter of 20 July last year and I have a question to ask you. You enquired about two groups of sinkings in late 1941 and early 1942. On the latter group the information available here is inconclusive. The numbering corresponds with that in your letter.

1. The SS FRIAR ROCK sailed on 9 January 1942 from Sydney, Nova Scotia, to catch up with Convoy SC-64. She left harbour two hours after the previous ship. She was bound for Hvalfjord and Archangel. Apparently she was unable to join the convoy and was returning to port when she was sunk. Her survivors were picked up by HMS MONTGOMERY at 1400Z on 17 January in position 45° 35' north, 57° 45' west and they gave the time and place of sinking as 0900Z on 13 January 100 miles south-east of Cape Race. The position given in your letter would be 120 miles, 124° from the Cape.

2. The SS BELIZE sailed from New York on 15 January 1942 bound for St. John's, Newfoundland. She was not heard from again. HMCS SPIKENARD found one of her life boats swamped and with four bodies in it at 0850Z on 24 January in position 47° 21' north, 58° 08' west.

The SS DIMITRIOS G. THERMIOTIS sailed from Sydney, Nova Scotia, on 3 January 1942 in Convoy SC-63, bound for Loch Ewe. On 9 January the convoy was scattered by a storm and on the 13th it was ordered to disperse. "SSSS" was heard from the ship at 0438Z on 18 January, but no position was given. The operator classified the signal as ground wave and estimated the distance as between 75 and 100 miles from Cape Race radio station. The vagueness of these data seem to make the identification of the sinkings doubtful.

3. The SS WILLIAM HANSEN sailed from Argentina, escorted by HMCS GEORGIAN, for St. John's, Newfoundland, on 21 January 1942. GEORGIAN reported her

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torpedoed off Ferryland Head (which is in 47° 00' north, 52° 51' west) at 0231Z on the 22nd. She sank and five survivors were picked up by HMCS ALGOMA.

The SS MARO sailed from Britain on 2 January 1942 and was reported overdue at Halifax on 23 January. It is not clear from the records available in Ottawa whether she sailed in Convoy ON-53 or independently. She was not heard from again.

The SS FRANCIS SALMAN sailed on 17 January 1941 from St. John's for Corner Brook, Newfoundland, and was reported overdue on the 21st. No trace was found of her.

One ship not mentioned in your letter was the SS NORTH GASPE. She sailed from St. John's for Argentia, Newfoundland, on 21 January 1942, and reported herself at 0200Z on the 22nd January torpedoed but afloat and trying to make harbour. Nothing more was heard of her until she turned up undamaged at Halifax at 2200Z on 23 January. Her distress signal had been made after feeling a bump probably caused by depth charges dropped by the escort. This may account for one of the torpedoings reported by a submarine.

I have been unable to match any of these with the incidents you cite, partly through not understanding the abbreviation "DSZ" which you attach to the times given in the reports, and partly because when I plotted the position 47° 20' north, 53° 10' west, given in your letter for two of the sinkings, it appeared to be inland near the head of Conception Bay. Perhaps this is another case where a typographical error has crept in.

4. The SS BURDMAN was damaged by air attack in the Mediterranean on 14 or 15 June 1942, and had to be sunk later by British forces.

The SS VASILISSOS A. POLEMIS was due in Halifax from Britain on 25 January 1942, apparently routed independently, but she was torpedoed at 1930Z on 22 January in 42° 32' north, 52° 38' west. The SS LEONIDAS M. CONDYLIS picked up her survivors. The SS GANDIA was bound for Saint John, New Brunswick from Britain. The position of her loss is given as 240 miles south of Cape Race, but no other information is available except that survivors were landed in Reykjavik.

We do not have detailed records of west-bound Atlantic convoys so cannot say if any of the three vessels mentioned was in ON-53.

On the other group of ships, those that disappeared late in 1941, I can be a little more definite--again the numbering corresponds to yours:

1. & 5. The SS BROSUND was renamed CRUSADER on 1 October 1941. She sailed from Sydney, Nova Scotia, under the latter name for Convoy SC-53, but the escort reported that she was never seen with the convoy. She was not heard of again.

2. The SS MERIDIAN sailed from Sydney on 4 November 1941 with Convoy SC-53 bound for Hvalfjord and Archangel. She was last seen by HMCS CHAMBLY with a group of stragglers at 1730Z on 10 November, but she lost contact with them in fog. Nothing further is known of her.

3. & 6. The SS PROTEUS and the SS NEREUS were former US Naval colliers and were employed in the bauxite trade, plying between the Virgin Islands and Portland, Maine. PROTEUS sailed from St. Thomas, V.I., on 23 November and NEREUS on 10 December 1941. Neither was heard from again.

4. The SS SANTA INEZ ran aground on the north side of Button Island on 19 November 1941 and became a total loss. The location of this island is not given, but since she was owned in Seattle, employed in the China trade and, before transfer to Panamanian registry, was registered in Shanghai, it seems likely that it is the island in 30° 38' north, 122° 22' east, not far from Shanghai. Perhaps Lloyds of London could verify this.

And now I would like to put a question of my own: Can you identify the submarines that sank HMC Ships LEVIS, RACCOON, CHARLOTTETOWN and OTTAWA, each first of name?

HMCS LEVIS, corvette, pennants K-115, was a unit of the escort of Convoy SC-44 with HM Destroyer CHESTERFIELD and three other corvettes. She was on the port beam of the convoy and her asdic was out of action. At 0410Z on 19 September 1941, HMCS MAYFLOWER observed a torpedo pass astern of her and strike LEVIS near the bow. She floated for fifteen hours before sinking. We understand that U-74, U-94, U-373, U-552 and U-562 were in contact with the convoy, but in "Vor zwanzig Jahren" (Marine Rundschau Oct. 1961) you say: "In der Nacht zum 21. Sept. versenkten U 74 and U 552 (oblt.z.S. Topp) die kanadische Korvette Levis und vier Schiffe . . ." Is it possible to say which submarine fired the torpedo that sank LEVIS and give some details of the attack?

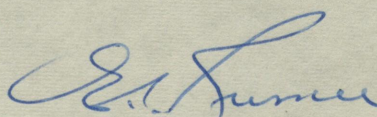
HMC Armed Yacht RACCOON, pennants S-14, was escorting Convoy QS-33 in the Gulf of St. Lawrence bound for Sydney, Nova Scotia. She was last seen on the port quarter of the convoy by the light of starshell fired when the Greek SS AEAS was torpedoed at 0210Z on 7 September 1942. At 0512Z, explosions were heard and columns of water seen in RACCOON's station, but it was assumed that she was dropping depth charges. HMCS ARROWHEAD put about to help, but did not find her or make contact with any under-water target. RACCOON was not missed until daylight.

Four days later in the same waters, HMC Corvette CHARLOTTETOWN, pennants K-244, was torpedoed. She was steering 074° at 11 knots six miles off Cap Chat with HMCS CLAYOQUOT stationed one mile on her port beam when a torpedo, fired from shoreward, struck her in the starboard quarter. A second torpedo struck her amidships.

To quote "Vor zwanzig Jarhen" again (Marine Rundschau Oct. 1962): "U 165 (KKpt. Hoffmann) und U 517 (Kptlt. Hartwig) versenken im St. Lorenz-Strom und vor Neufundland aus dem Konvoi QS.33 4 Schiffe mit 15.471 BRT." We believe that U-165 sank RACCOON and CHARLOTTETOWN, but would be glad of confirmation and of any further details that might be available.

HMCS OTTAWA, pennants H-60, was in the escort of Convoy ON-127 in September 1942. The convoy was under attack from the 10th and lost eleven merchantmen, the last one sinking at 1215Z on the 13th. About midnight that night (GMT), OTTAWA was investigating radar contacts about five miles ahead of the convoy. She sighted an object close ahead and turned to port to avoid it. She had swung about 20° when a torpedo struck her on the port side at 0003 on the 14th. Still on an even keel OTTAWA continued to swing and had turned about 180° when she was struck by another torpedo on the starboard side. She broke in two and sank, bow and stern up. You identify U-91 as the boat that sank OTTAWA (Marine Rundschau, Oct. 1962), but we would be glad of any details of her action that you might be able to give.

Yours sincerely,



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