



ARCTIC CONVOY

YOU will notice that I am on leave—it's leave all right—survivors' leave. Don't be alarmed. I am safe, well and very fit.

Well, here's how it all happened. After a few weeks of patrol work we were assigned the task of escorting a large convoy to Murmansk. We were all for it. New places and more experiences and all that. We oiled and picked up our convoy and set off. About 36 hours out we ran into a gale which scattered the convoy for hundreds of miles, and at times reduced our speed from 26 to eight knots. This lasted three or four days, and it took us two days after that to round up the convoy. At sea we sleep in the turret while off watch. During the middle watch the alarm rattles went, followed by action stations. When we closed up, the captain spoke to the ship over the loud speaker system:

"I have received a signal from the Admiralty that there are several German destroyers out hunting for this convoy of ours. This means you will have to remain closed up at the second degree of readiness for maybe three days."

This was about 3 a.m. Saturday. In the afternoon German dive-bombers came over and had a smack at us. But our A.A. defences were good—we put up a good barrage, and thanks to the skilful way in which our skipper handled his ship we dodged all their bombs. This was my first experience of bombing. My job of course, as you should remember, was the loading number in one of the six-inch guns in the after turret. We only fired three rounds during the whole attack, and being in the turret we couldn't see what was happening. We relied on the A.D.O. (Air Defence Officer) who was using the loud speaker system, to keep us posted.

"Aircraft on the starboard beam—starboard battery engage. Aircraft overhead—pom-pom!" "Port pom-pom do not fire at aircraft going away." I must confess that I felt the strain at first, but I leant against the gun and prayed silently for strength and protection. My prayers were answered. I found fresh courage and just when the number of Junkers 88 were increasing we ran into a thick snowstorm and managed to shake them off.

At Four Thousand Yards

Sunday dawned mistily and visibility was poor. We had breakfast in the turret—it reminded me rather of the picnic meals in the piping days of peace. We

NOW that the Second Front controversy has died down, it is useful to recall some of the things that were being done for Russia while the critics were saying their worst. Here is a letter from a New Zealand boy in the Royal Navy, whose ship (part of a convoy to Russia), was sunk on the return journey from Murmansk

cleared away after breakfast and settled down at our posts again, trying to snatch a couple of hours' sleep. About 1.55 p.m. the forebridge lookout reported the appearance of three destroyers out of the mist about 4,000 yards ahead.

These might be the Russian escort sent to meet us. Signallers flashed a message—back came the reply in gun flashes.

Back in the turret the alarm bell rang. "With a full charge and C.P.B.C. load! load! load!" came the order. The breech swung open, the shell was rammed home, I inserted the charge of cordite and withdrew the tray—the breech closed with a click, the interception made, and off went a full broadside.

Immediately the gun recoils. We load again and again and again. This is action, speed, excitement. We are firing at the phenomenally high rate of 10-12 rounds a minute. Not bad for 6-inch.

A lull in the firing, then the voice of the captain jubilant. "We've got one, and now we're after the other two." In the turret we are all in high spirits. One destroyer in about two minutes. We could now feel the ship vibrating with the increased speed. Five minutes later we are passing through the survivors in the water. Sherr-rrr! goes the fire bell again, the layer gets in by his pointers, the captain of the gun makes the interception, then—Boom!!!

The officer of our turret reports that the second destroyer is simply one mass of flame from stem to stern. We turn our guns on the third—she is struck repeatedly by 6-inch projectiles, 4-inch and even pom-poms, for the range is now only 1,800 yards.

Torpedoed!

The ship is still travelling at high speed, when with a sudden violent shock, the lights flash and go out. We

are in darkness for a few seconds only—the emergency lights are on. I look across at Bill, the bearded captain of our gun. "Tinfoy", he says laconically in answer to my unspoken question.

The ship is now listing about 20 degrees and has practically stopped. We are ordered to blow up our lifebelts, and then to abandon the turret.

Within a few minutes I was hanging on to the guard rail looking down at the sea. Would we have to abandon ship? I hoped not. And my hopes were realised. We managed by counter flooding to get the ship back on an even keel and then the engine room reported that they could give us 15 knots. This was very cheering, and it was not long before we had our turret in working order once more.

Again Providence intervened to save us. Blinding snow storms swept down upon us, reducing the visibility to zero and shielding us from U-boats. The whole action from the time we fired the first salvo until the tinfoy struck us lasted only 20 minutes.

"An Absolute Miracle"

We had then some 120 miles to go to reach our Russian port of call. I was not on deck during the night or early morning, so I was spared another two hours of anxiety when the ship broke down and lay out of control for two hours in bright moonlight. Taking into consideration the number of submarines about it was an absolute miracle that we escaped. Later when discussing matters with one of our N.Z. chaps, he said to me: "I'm not a religious chap at all, but I said my prayers that night. And I've got a lot more time for religion now." Another of our fellows on board said to me, also speaking about our wonderful escape: "I didn't think it was luck." I was strangely thrilled and felt that my own belief had been strengthened by the testimony of these other two fellows.

It was nearly midday before we steamed into our anchorage. During all this time the pumps had been going and we had a chain of buckets working.

Grim Jobs

Our days were very busy now, mostly spent in cleaning up the mess. The torpedo had burst an oil fuel tank and for the first three or six weeks afterwards we worked in oil, and, it seemed, ate and drank oil. There were some grim jobs to be done also. Thirteen men had been trapped below and had to be got

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