

HECLA

SECRET

1.

GIBRALTAR,

16th November, 1942.

Sir,

I have the honour to submit the following report on the loss of H.M.S. HECLA, under my command, on the night of 11th/12th November, 1942. All times quoted are G.M.T. but are necessarily approximate in the later stages of the narrative.

2. H.M.S. HECLA was on passage from FREETOWN to GIBRALTAR and was stationed 3 cables 270 degrees from H.M.S. VINDICTIVE (Captain H.G.D. ACLAND, D.S.O., R.N., Retd.) who was Senior Officer, with escorting destroyers MARNE (Lieut. Commander H.N.A. RICHARDSON, D.S.C., R.N.) and VENOMOUS (Commander H.W. FALCON-STEWARD, R.N.) in Screening Diagram No. 2, VENOMOUS being in position (A) and MARNE in position (O). The mean course was 090 degrees to which it had been altered from 043 degrees at 2230. The force was zig-zagging in accordance with Diagram No. 15. Speed through the water 14½ knots, Wind - N.N.E. force 3. Moderate northerly swell. The night was dark, but starlit, the moon having set at 2200. Heavy cumulus clouds low down on the horizon had the effect of rendering silhouettes difficult to see, although the ships' wakes were plainly visible.

3. The ship's state was as follows :-

- (a) All "X" and "XX" doors and hatches on and below main deck closed, and "Patch" damage control parties closed up.
- (b) Half the armament closed up.
- (c) Machinery in unit system.
- (d) R.D.F. Policy 'J' in force.

4. At 2316, when in position latitude 35 degrees 42 minutes North longitude 9 degrees 55 minutes West, VINDICTIVE was just turning to the mean course 090 degrees from 120 degrees at the starboard leg of the zig-zig. HECLA had not commenced turn when two torpedoes struck the ship on the starboard side against the Boiler Rooms. The tracks were not reported, and I had no previous indication that enemy submarines were in the immediate vicinity.

5. "Action Alarm" rattlers were sounded, and the hands heeded quickly and quietly to their stations. The ship paid off to starboard, lost way, listed rapidly to 7½ degrees starboard, then slowly to 11 degrees starboard, where she hung.

6. The first damage report received from below was to the following effect:-

"Both Boiler Rooms flooded and all steam lost, but ship in no immediate danger of sinking".

This was signalled by W/T to GIBRALTAR and by V/S to MARNE, who was the only destroyer in sight at that time. MARNE was also directed to establish a

circular patrol around HECLA.

Steps were taken with my approval to counter flood port wing compartments abreast the Boiler Room and this had the effect of reducing the list to 5 degrees to starboard. At the same time after bulkhead of the Auxiliary Engine Room and both Main Engine Room bulkheads were shored, also the armour deck over the

The Main Suction system was then isolated, and forward and after electric pumps brought into operation on their respective systems.

The only power available was electric from both Diesel generators which were still running.

The ship was prepared to be taken in tow, forward, boat securing chains cast off, and power boats fuelled.

8. I declined an offer from VENMOUS to take HECLA in tow as I considered that only very slow speed would be attained, and that both destroyers would be more profitably employed as an A/S screen.

9. At 0022/12 a torpedo track was observed to be approaching from the port quarter, and the ship was struck at a position estimated to be exactly on 82 bulkhead.

The explosion of this torpedo, which appeared to be more violent than any of the others, threw up large quantities of water, oil, and debris, which covered personnel on the bridge and Fxle, and demolished the port sea boat.

The ship listed very rapidly from 5 degrees to starboard to 17 degrees to port.

10. The damage report received was as follows:-

"All port wings flooded between 69 and 121 bulkheads, also the Torpedo Store, Torpedo Parting Space, Light Machine Shop, and Refrigerator Space - and that the ship's condition was critical".

A signal to this effect was drafted, but I was informed that it could not be transmitted by W/T. MARNE was also informed, and ordered to stand-by if abandoning ship became necessary.

Hands were ordered to "Carley Raft and Float Stations" and, as the list was steadily increasing, I shortly afterwards gave the order to "Abandon Ship".

By the time the damage control parties left their stations the list had increased to 25 degrees to port, and this was the last recorded list.

11. At 0032/12 a fourth torpedo hit the ship port side aft breast 'X' turret. The list to port accelerated, and the ship settled until the quarter deck and port waist were awash.

12. At 0105/12 a fifth torpedo, fired from the beam struck the ship right aft on the starboard side. MARNE, in a position on HECLA'S port quarter was also torpedoed about this time.

It was now obvious that the end was at hand, and I made my way down the starboard side into the water, together with the few remaining Officers and ratings. At 0116 HECLA was seen to heel over to her beam ends and sink stern first in approximately 2000 fathoms.

ABANDONING SHIP.

13. Boom boats on the starboard side were stove in by the initial explosion, and, after the second attack, power was not available on the ton crane. No boom boats could therefore be hoisted out.

The starboard sea boat was lowered into the water in spite of the heavy list to port, but may have been damaged in the process as she later capsized.

14. Some of the Carley Floats and practically all the spanner rafts on the starboard **side** were seriously damaged, and overcrowding of the surviving appliances was inevitable. They were, however, lowered and occupied in an orderly manner, but difficulty was experienced in propelling them clear of the ship. Two or three of the port boom boats floated off in an awash condition when the ship sank, but they were then too far from the bulk of the men in the water to be of much value.

SURVIVORS.

15. These were roughly in two groups :-

Group one :- Those who left the ship on the order "Abandon Ship" and were mostly picked up by "VENOMOUS" after daylight, some of whom were in the water for as much as ten hours. This group became very scattered during the night, which must have added to the difficulties of "VENOMOUS" in picking them up.

Group two :- Those who left the ship after the fifth torpedo and swam to H.M.S. "MARNE", only to find that their prospects had not greatly improved as that ship was entirely immobilised. This group - 10 Officers and 54 ratings - remained on board until transferred to "JONQUIL" (Lt. Commander R.E.H. Partington R.D. R.N.R.), at 1700 on 12th. No words can adequately express my appreciation of the efforts and arrangements made on board "VENOMOUS", "MARNE", and "JONQUIL" for the comfort of survivors.

CASUALTIES.

16. From the information at present available it would appear that out of a complement of 39 Officers and 799 Ratings, 12 Officers and 279 Ratings lost their lives.

I attribute these casualties to the following factors:-

- (a) A small number killed inside the ship due to torpedo explosions, and being struck by falling debris, whilst on the upper deck.
- (b) The effect of the explosions of the 4th and 5th torpedoes upon men in the water close to the ship.
- (c) Exhaustion and being unable to hold on to rafts, lines, etc, when covered in oil fuel.
- (d) The necessity which arose for "VENOMOUS" to carry out a depth charge attack in the vicinity of men in the water.

Taking the above into consideration and also the prevailing darkness, it is felt that the loss of life cannot be regarded as unduly heavy.

17. The following ratings included in the total casualties died after having been picked up by "VENOMOUS" and were buried at sea in a position approximately latitude 34 degrees 30 minutes North, longitude 7 degrees 30 minutes West :-

Ldg Cook LUXTON.
A.B. G.E. TAYLOR.
Sto DUTTON.
Sto Charles ODEY.

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BEHAVIOUR OF SHIP'S COMPANY.

18. The highest standard of discipline and morale was maintained throughout, although there were some individual cases of hysteria, principally among men in the water, The cumulative effect of the repeated explosions, the list on the ship, the slippery decks, the darkness, and above all, the pervading oil fuel, was a severe test of the nerves of even the most unimaginative.

19. Many instances of bravery and devotion to others were witnessed, but in very few cases could those responsible be recognised. A list of the names of Officers and Ratings considered worthy of special commendation is attached as an Appendix to this report, but it will be appreciated that the names of many equally deserving of commendation, have necessarily been omitted.

SAFETY OF CONFIDENTIAL BOOKS AND PAPERS.

20. On proceeding to sea from Freetown I gave instructions for all C.B.'s and S.P.'s "O" Series, other than those actually in use, to be returned to the safe in the C.B. Room, and all ordinary C.B.'s on loan to be locked away in steel cupboards.

21. Of the S.P.'s and Key Memoranda in use, reports were received before abandoning ship that those issued to the Signal and W/T departments had been locked in steel chests.

No report was received from the Cypher Office and it is regretted that the Cypher Officer of the Watch is among those missing, but no doubt is felt that these books were safely disposed of.

P.O. Writer Cowley abandoned ship carrying the box containing the Ship's Book and Nominal List, etc, but found it was too heavy and it was observed to sink.

22. My Navigating Officer, Lt. Commander H.C.R. Alexander R.N. who was picked up by H.M.S. "VENOMOUS", subsequently reported that when the ship passed through the wreckage after daylight there was no trace of any books or papers floating with the debris.

PROCEEDINGS OF ESCORTING DESTROYERS.

23. The action taken by H.M. Ships "VENOMOUS" and "MARNE" forms the subject of separate reports from their Commanding Officers.

24. I was much impressed with the skill and judgement displayed by the Commanding Officer H.M.S. "VENOMOUS" in carrying out and pressing home attacks, picking up HECLA survivors, and screening MARNE, although handicapped by a serious shortage of fuel. The fact that MARNE was not again torpedoed while lying disabled is an indication of the effectiveness of his attacks,

25. I also wish to pay tribute to the bearing, under trying circumstances, of the Commanding Officer, Officers, and Ship's Company of H.M.S. "MARNE".

GENERAL REMARKS.

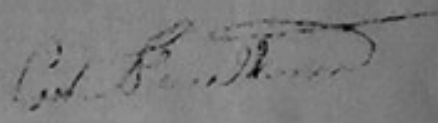
26. The following points of interest are considered worth recording:-

- (a) No trace of fire on board HECLA was reported at any time.
- (b) Shortly before the 2nd torpedo attack two green Very's lights were seen to be fired from a position fairly close on the starboard beam.
- (c) The use of starshell by the destroyers illuminated HECLA, and may have assisted the enemy.
- (d) The only submarine sighted from HECLA was shortly after the fifth torpedo, when one was observed by the light of a starshell to be on the surface about 1000 yards on the starboard quarter.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant



Acting Captain, Royal Navy.

The Naval Commander,
Expeditionary Force.

S E C R E T

APPENDIX I.

It is desired to bring to the notice of Their Lordships the names of the following Officers and Ratings whose conduct and example are considered specially worthy of recognition :-

Acting Commander JOHN ROCHFORD D'OYLY R.N.
Acting Commander (E) OSWALD JOHN GERRARD R.N.
Lieutenant Commander HARRY CERDA RYRIE ALEXANDER R.N.
Lieutenant Commander (E) HUGH WILSON FINDLAY R.N.
Lieutenant ROGER LESLIE CLODE R.N.
Lieutenant GEOFFREY NEWTON SPRING R.N.R.
Mr WILLIAM FRANCIS MCCONNELL ARNOLD EDDY R.N.

Chief Petty Officer	BROTHERTON.	-	S
" " "	THOMPSON.	-	S
Chief Stoker	SLEEMAN.	-	S
" "	WEBBER +	✓	M
Chief Shipwright	UPHAM +	?	M
Petty Officer	GREEDY +	✓	M
Regulating Petty Officer	WILLIAMS		S
" " "	CUDD.		S
Petty Officer Writer	COWLEY.		
Shipwright.	SEVENOAKS.		M

+ Believed missing.

*stated to be HT Stoker by HRA
enquiries proceeding*