

religious outlook, if he were in great pain. But it did not appear he was in much pain, and he repeated himself so often that no doubt remained as to his words. The effect on the rest of the men was little at first; prayer or blasphemy, they were used to both, but they soon tired of the constant repetition and bluntly told him to be quiet. This had very little effect and he was struck sharply by one or two men and threatened with severer blows if he wouldn't stop. This silenced him for a time but it was obvious that he was delirious and would need watching.

I remember feeling immensely sorry for this poor lad; through no fault of his own his privations led him to say a terrible thing, and my mind must have become obsessed to some extent with this. When darkness came and he was weak from exhaustion, I tried to find a comfortable place where I could lie down and nurse him back to health. This I tried to do. There were very few corners where one could find a place, but I settled down somewhere somehow, and supporting this fellow as best I could, stayed perhaps an hour. By then I was feeling so cramped and uncomfortable that I had to give up, and begged someone else to take the job over. There was no response; apparently the men had less sympathy than I for him and I also heard muttered remarks which suggested that I was making some sort of a favourite of him.

Later, this same lad made a dart at me and apparently tried to pull me over backwards into the water. I managed to shake him off. He also spoke to me in the most abusive terms. I found that my shirt was badly torn over the left shoulder blade. Later he made another attack without warning and bit me in the buttocks. I cried out and thrust him away. His teeth did not appear to have gone through my shorts.

I have often thought about those incidents; it is clear that my mind was losing its normalcy. But to what extent? Probably the fish tore my shirt and attacked my stern, at any rate my shirt was undoubtedly torn, as will be noted next day. Also there were no 'corners' to a Carley float.

It was the third night, and, as on the second, we had rain. This time we managed to catch some and refill our water jar. It was handed round for a mouthful apiece, and perhaps refilled. We wished we could keep warm and envied the men with the sail on another raft. They had draped it round their shoulders.

It seems rather nightmarish to look back upon.

A young officer from one raft became obsessed with the need to go to another raft; he swam there but was rejected, and swam to us for sanctuary. The ratings did not want him, but I told them at least they must allow him to rest until he could recover strength to swim to his own raft. He was dragged half on to our raft, scared and meandering. He had often kept watch with me on the bridge, and I knew his mental make-up well enough. I induced the men to paddle to his own raft, and then told the Petty Officer there that he must take him back. He replied that he had told him not to leave the float but in spite of every effort he had left, and now he did not want him back; he would not be able to restrain him. However, back he had to go. The men next me began to whisper that they were afraid the men on the other raft were plotting to put some of their people in to ours as they considered we were not carrying our fair share. They reckoned this would capsize us and that would be the end of us all, so that we must somehow get clear again. So, summoning a little strength, we cast off and paddled clear about a float's length. After we had rested a bit the floats seemed to have drifted together somewhat and we paddled

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some more. Later this same officer reappeared, swimming towards our raft and pleading to be taken onboard. He cried out that he had been bitten in the arm by a shark. Again there were shouts telling him to keep away, but I let him come to our float and rest on it to some extent. I found that his arm was streaming blood but it was too dark to see more. He was clearly weakening, and rambling. Suddenly he threw up an arm, shouted something unintelligible, and swam off. We soon lost sight of him and never saw him again.

By this time quite a number of men had died. At first the men asked my permission to slide the body over the side. Only after we were absolutely sure that there was no spark of life in a man did I agree to this. Later it became more obvious when men were dead, and progressively shorter intervals elapsed before they were 'buried'. Eventually a point was reached - I think on the third day - when a man took a good deal longer than usual to go through the final stages and was put over-board before he was dead. I protested when they began to do this, telling them he was still alive. However they retorted "He'll soon be dead anyhow", and continued. I called out "You can't do that, it's murder"! The man was put overboard, resisting feebly, just the same. Immersion rallied him, and he held on to the side of the raft, grinning ghoulishly. He made some insulting remarks to the men who had put him over, and then, releasing his hold, drifted away.

Long as the first and second nights had seemed, the third seemed longer still. I remember towards the end of it doubting whether I could live through another night. Perhaps I was in pain as well, which would have accounted for the thought. We hoped that those ferocious fishes would not return, but after some hours of darkness one suddenly attacked a man. We sat there in the darkness and in silence. I tried to keep my legs on the move, to avoid being bitten, but it was too tiring to keep up for long. I felt one glancing blow on my left shin, and found two small wounds there - nothing serious.

The weather seemed to have become foggy. Lights appeared through the fog, and it seemed we had run in among some trawlers. They came pretty close to us. Shouts were exchanged but nothing much more seemed to come of it. It puzzled me. I was on some sort of small vessel myself, wandering round trying to achieve something complicated and difficult. So the rest of the night passed.

The beginning of the fourth day was not one that I remember with great clearness, but daylight must have sobered my brain. I felt damper and colder than on the previous night and took longer to dry off in the sun. Otherwise things were much the same. The men stood up and looked for a ship, and we received their report that there was nothing in sight with the same resignation - though to be sure I could hardly estimate the reactions of my companions. Some would curse to keep up their spirits, some would remain silent, but they probably all realised that our lot was a desperate one.

I don't remember that I felt any particular pangs from hunger or thirst. Water was certainly very welcome when it came, and worthy of every effort to obtain, but that was all. Only that salty ration of biscuit became very difficult to swallow. I suppose it was lack of saliva. I chewed and chewed at mine until it became a lump of paste in my mouth. I turned it over and over, but only with a great effort did I manage to swallow it.

People have asked whether we performed our natural functions

during that time. Most people, including myself, made water occasionally by turning round and kneeling where we had been sitting, but very few opened their bowels. There was, however, only too clear evidence floating round that some had. I myself remained constipated.

Another point comes to my mind, but I cannot date it. I was sitting as usual, supporting myself with my hands on the float by my hips. I felt a violent shock on my left hand at the knuckles. Snatching it up I found that I had been stung, and this proved to have been done by a Portuguese man-of-war, whose gas-filled 'sail' had caused it to drift alongside. These innocent looking creatures are coloured a beautiful pink and blue.

I warned the others and imagined they would keep clear of it, but Moore seized a paddle and tried to destroy the thing. He took no notice of our shouts to leave it alone, but battered away, and brought several long tendrils on to his hands and arms, which must have caused him much intense pain. However he took it 'like a man' and never complained. My own comparatively light sting remained irritant for several weeks after and the marks on my knuckles persisted for months.

Leeches bit my wrists also.

In the forenoon we saw a small rain shower approaching, and prepared to replenish the water jar. My neighbour and I held out the small corner of duck. The first of the rain had to be used to wash the salt water out of this. Then we collected some and tasted it. It was brackish and not fit to keep. We poured it away. By this time the rain had eased off and we collected it very slowly. It was not quite pure either. Every now and then my assistant would let one corner of the catcher dip into the sea. This meant washing it again. I asked him to avoid this, but he seemed to lack the necessary mental concentration, and he let the same thing happen again more than once. Finally, after we had collected only a small quantity, I found myself doing it too. Soon after this the rain ceased.

The sun had climbed high and now began to scorch us. It became necessary to bathe oneself more and more frequently with handfuls of salt water to soothe the burning sensation on one's exposed arms and legs. I even had to bathe at intervals the part of my back which was exposed by the tear in my shirt. The water seemed to dry off again in no time, and men with few or no clothes were using up their little remaining energy in these efforts.

Incidentally the young fellow who had torn my shirt had spoken to me next morning about it. He said that he was sorry for what he had done. I told him that it was of no consequence, and as for the things he had said to me, I realised that he had not known what he was saying. To this he replied that he had meant every word that he had said. There seemed to be no answer to this. Either his mind was still wandering, or mine was. He, poor fellow, did not survive.

People began to see things that day. There were several reports of ships, but nothing came of them. I began to imagine things myself, but when asked to confirm someone else's views I replied that I could always see a ship somewhere if I looked hard enough so they had better not rely on me.

My next impression was that a large portion of the ship had been salvaged and taken in tow to Natal. I assumed this must be the one in Brazil, not in South Africa, but even then it seemed a remarkable feat.

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As it was the forward part, containing the messdecks, I hoped that many of the occupants had been rescued.

Next we were going ashore at some place and were being put through some interrogation at a sort of ticket office window. A civilian in front of me was being very difficult and argumentative and I became very impatient.

After that several of us were mounted on horseback, and rode off a great distance through the shallow water, shark hunting. I think the local natives had some sort of spear for this. When it began to pall, we began to return in a large open motor boat. I sat near the stern. The Commander and some men I did not know were up forward, where the wheel and the engine were. However, we found we were not going fast enough. There was a ship somewhere in the offing and we had to paddle to close her. We were afraid we should miss her. We were trying to signal to her, fearing that she would get under way and leave us. We were all urged to paddle. I had no paddle and felt very weak, but I did my best, with one hand.

Presently we came to a rocky islet on which was a lighthouse. We stepped out, up a few steps cut in the rock, and entered a sort of low single-storied pavilion. The sides all appeared to be either glassed in or open to the sea. It was a pleasant place and we sat down in chairs and conversed with the men and women who lived there. These were apparently Australian, to judge by their speech, and fairly well-to-do. They offered us something to drink which we eagerly accepted. This involved moving to the next room, down one or two steps, and I found it most inconvenient. One of my legs seemed painful and I needed assistance. Once there, we found plates of soup, one of which I received. I drank a little, but it was terribly salt - the reason for this appeared to be that spray was constantly coming in through the open window.

There was some food also. I took some on a fork but it never reached my mouth. Instead it seemed to break up into a cloud of flakes which were so flimsy that they were blown away. It was useless to catch them in one's mouth; they were too unsubstantial and tasteless. They too resembled drops of spray scintillating in the sun.

I began to protest to someone about all this. We were extremely hungry and thirsty, I explained. We were offered food and drink, but when it came it was useless. This was very unfair treatment, in fact I went so far as to call it a form of torture.

Finally someone announced that the boat had come to take us to the ship. We went to the other end of the islet, a distance of only a few yards, and I was helped into the boat.

The next thing I remember is that I was sitting in this boat, which was an enormous pulling boat, at a level slightly below the thwarts. Close by a very hefty sailor in a 'gob' cap was labouring at a vast oar. Every time he fell back on his oar he bumped into me, and this had evidently brought me to my senses. I seemed to see some very dark faced man crouching further below. I assumed he was a negro, but he may only have been one of our men with oil fuel for a complexion.

The distance we had to travel seemed very long. Once or twice I must have gone off again, but eventually we arrived alongside the ship. I had no idea what this ship was and didn't much care, but we soon saw and heard the people on deck and found they were American. This seemed pretty

good news.

The boat rose and fell through a great height in consequence of the swell. Several cautions were shouted to men to keep back from the side. Then some ladders were lowered down the ship's side, and those who could do so were exhorted to climb up. By judging the timing so as to jump on the ladder at the top of the swell, they only had two or three feet left to climb. I realised that this feat was quite beyond me. I could not stand let alone climb. However, at length a special belt was lowered on the hook of a crane, and several of us were hoisted up to the level of the deck. I was about the last one out of the boat. The belt was put round me as I knelt on the thwart. It was fastened, the wire alternately tautening and slacking off. At the moment when it was taut the winchman hoisted away and I was soon bumping up the ship's side and on to the upper deck. I was still outside the guard rails but a couple of hefty matelots seized me and dragged me over them to safety. The guard chains scraped all the way down the front of my legs, at which I yelled with pain.

I lay huddled on the deck. Someone said "Can you walk"? I answered "NO". Two of them lifted me and supported me as I half hopped half stumbled along, keeping my right foot clear of the deck. I still didn't know what was wrong with my leg.

I remember thinking, 'Now we are going to get something to eat and drink. But I must go gently and only have a little at first'. I was taken into a room with tables and benches and an overpowering atmosphere. It was lit only by artificial light, had little or no ventilation and was heated by several large hot food cupboards. Here I was dumped on the unoccupied end of a bench, and left. It felt the same sort of temperature as the upper part of a boiler room. Soon someone gave me a cup of some liquid and some food.

That was a good moment, yet strangely I cannot remember the exact constituents of that meal. I summoned the strength to deal with some of it, though not very much. There were a couple of slices from a small garlicky sausage which did not appeal to me at all. There was a lot of noise in the room and no one had much time to look after us. I began to feel rather tired of that room, and having heard an American advise one of our men to go to the "cover of No. 2 hatch", I decided that that would be the place for me. I was obsessed with the idea that I must see the doctor, not to tell him my troubles, because somehow I had not properly 'registered' them, but to tell him two or three things about the others. I think one was about their delusions, another was about the way the fish had bitten them. Then I wanted to know how the bad cases were getting on.

Eventually I persuaded two people to help me up and along to the No. 2 hatch. It was dark by now, and I must have dozed off almost as soon as I lay down. When I woke, probably an hour or two later, I thought I was in a hospital. There seemed to be rows of camp beds all about me, and there were voices in subdued conversation. My brain seemed to pick up impressions and get them wrong. I decided that our ship's band were all there. Naturally I wondered if they would shortly play to us. Presently a man came along between the beds, but some distance to my right. I called to him 'I want the Doctor', but he took no notice. I repeatedly asked, but it was no good. I was determined to tell the doctor the things I have mentioned. Finally someone came round calling out a number - one-two-four, or some such figure. I answered 'Yes' but he came no nearer. Still the number was called out, and I said "Here I am; I'm one-two-four". By this time I really believed I was one-two-four. Gradually he came nearer and then I told him I wanted to see a doctor.

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He seemed slow to understand, but withdrew and presently two fairly young officers appeared on my left and made enquiries as to what I wanted. I told them - but instead of telling them what I had been longing to say, I first blurted out that my legs were causing me a great deal of pain. They considered this, and then retired. Soon they returned and said that after discussing the matter they had decided that the best thing would be to give me some massage. I pictured a hefty gymnastic fellow kneeling astride me and the agony which would ensue, and told them that in that case they had better get the band to play while it was being done. This made them laugh. Then I tried to tell them the other things and ask after the men on my raft, but before I could get much satisfaction they had managed to disappear out of reach. I lay on my stomach, awaiting the massage, but it didn't come.

My next moment of consciousness was when some people came and asked me who I was. I told them and they said they would take me to the Captain's cabin. I expected to have to walk with their assistance, but one of them heaved me up on to his shoulders and carried me up two ladders into the Captain's Quarters. It was done too deftly for me to protest; I could only hope that my leg would not be knocked against anything on the way.

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When I awoke next morning I was lying on the Captain's bunk.

Hitherto this has been a subjective narrative. I have written down everything that I remember, whether it happened or not, and not put down anything that happened if I have no recollection of it. To pursue this method further might become tedious. It took me several days, in short interviews, in discussions and by indirect enquiries, to learn the remainder of this story. What happened to the men on the other rafts? How did the ship first find us? Is there any hope for the rest of the ship's company? What can be done for the injured? Where are we going, and when shall we get there? All these questions were asked and no doubt scores of others, and gradually the answers fitted into the puzzle and gave us the whole story.

As I found myself the senior surviving officer, I began after a few days to have pieced together the materials for a report. There were only four officers left, and these were the Navigator, the Gunner, an R.N.V.R. Sub-Lieutenant and myself. The Navigator and the Gunner, who had been on one of the large rafts and were the least affected by the experience, did most of the work of gathering information for me. The Captain of the ship supplied the rest; he was a great personality and seldom at a loss for words.

I found out that about noon one of the lookouts aloft had seen and reported an object on the horizon like a mast or a periscope; the ship had been turned towards this to investigate, but it had subsequently disappeared. After that there was no warning before the first torpedo struck. When Captain Lovatt had decided that there was no chance of saving the ship he had given the order to abandon her. The Navigator went with him to the upper deck and last saw him by the rails.

The lists showing the names of all men who were known to have embarked on the rafts were carefully compiled from information from all the survivors. We had no knowledge of four out of the eleven Carley floats, and little about the one which disappeared. See addition made November 1945. In the rafts and Flotanet which were found by the NISHMAHA, it was computed that there were originally 145 men (or more)

Of these, 10 died of wounds or injuries received before leaving the ship and 63 from exposure, a term covering the various trials to which we had been subjected. On my own raft, 3 died from injuries, 6 from exposure, leaving 8 including myself.

The story told from the viewpoint of the NISHMAHA is worth recording.

On that 27th November she was steaming north-westerly on her lawful occasions, bound for Philadelphia out of Cape Town, doing her customary 10 knots. She was a freighter belonging to Lykes Bros. of Houston, Texas. As the sun was rapidly lowering in the western sky, the officer of the watch thought he saw something unusual in the distance. The light was already beginning to be a little less bright, but he was sufficiently curious about this object to look very closely at it through his glasses. Then he ordered the helmsman to steer over towards it, and went to report to the Old Man.

On such a thread did our lives hang. The skipper had had no information about the sinking of any ship in these waters nor the likelihood of finding any lifeboats or rafts adrift hereabouts. Still, he would not ignore the possibility, and soon the officer of the watch's suspicions were confirmed. And the rafts came in sight, first one, then another, until they counted six. The ship was stopped, and the entire 'deck force' was sent away in the three boats. In the gathering darkness rapidity was essential. The big raft with the light was left till last, as there was little prospect of losing touch with it.

The only men left on deck were the cooks and suchlike, and this accounted for our rather unceremonious reception.

During the first day on board, the Chief Officer assisted by one or two others made the rounds of the injured and did what they could to alleviate their pains. There was no doctor on board. Five of our men had not survived for long after being rescued. Perhaps the reaction had caused them to relax, and their exhaustion was too great to give them a chance to recover.

We found that the officers and crew had put themselves to immense trouble to do whatever they could for us. They gave up their bunks and sleeping billets for us, and for the rest of the voyage they never ceased in their efforts to care for those who were in need.

It was very hot on board, and I found myself constantly in need of something to drink. I consumed a great variety of liquids, chiefly tea, coffee and fruit juice, but even found pleasure in drinking olive oil and castor oil when they were offered to me. Every day, too, I was helped to the bath and lay there with the shower playing on me; this was a delightful pastime. For the rest of the time I lay on the Captain's bunk and tried to steady myself against the roll of the ship. As the motion persisted for the entire trip and as the bunk was very wide and had no side board or rail I found this very wearing. It interfered with my sleep.

We had a long way to go to reach friendly territory. The Captain was for calling at Barbados to land us, but we persuaded him that Trinidad, which was slightly nearer, would be preferable. After a few days at sea he reported our arrival by wireless to Washington and proposed landing us there.

It was a distance of about 2400 sea miles, and at 10 knots this

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would take 10 days. We had to make the best of that. I lay under a sheet, in a pair of pyjama trousers. On the inside of my right leg was a scab which extended from just above the instep up to the top of my calf. The Chief Officer after examining it, decided to leave it alone; he had not much choice. Jolliff had a circular piece out of the sole of his foot about the size of a small fish cake, and this caused him much pain at first, especially when it was treated. Milner and Titheridge were apparently unscathed and walked about the ship talking to the ratings.

I didn't see much of these of course, but used to hear of their progress from the others.

Time was not on my side. As each day went by, my leg became a bit less comfortable. To lower it was painful, so I would hop, with an arm round two men's shoulders, to the bathroom, holding my leg up or getting someone to do it for me. This cost me a great effort. Later my leg was painful all the time and to lower it was even more so. Also I found it more and more difficult to sleep. The incessant rolling of the ship only let me doze for a few minutes and wake again with a start and a confused idea of what was happening. My legs came out in salt-water boils. My elbows were getting raw. The last four nights were feats of endurance, and the last night the prospect of reaching harbour seemed heavenly. I did not feel like facing another.

The Captain was wonderful. He looked after me and jollied me along and sometimes made me forget my troubles altogether. Finally I was put on a stretcher and carried across to the tender and taken ashore. It was the day that the Japanese struck and the Americans were in the war.

ADDITION MADE IN NOVEMBER 1945.

At various times I have been asked by Naval Officers how it was that none of the boats was got away in a fit state to carry survivors. To me this was not surprising, but if quite senior officers are puzzled by the matter some explanation seems called for, since civilian readers may be even more baffled.

First then a word as to how the boats were stowed when the ship was on patrol. Forward, at the break of the forecastle, was a whaler on either side. These were stowed 'turned in' and lowered on to portable crutches on the deck. To avoid limiting the arc of fire of the midship 6" guns, the davits were lowered on to the deck and lashed.

The gig and skiff had been landed. The cutter had originally been carried on davits abreast No. 4 gun, but so masked its fire that this arrangement had been abandoned. It had been hoisted at the same davits as the motor boat, the latter being 'turned in' and lowered on to chocks on the booms. As the motor boat was only a 25 - foot fast boat, its life saving capacity except in a flat calm was negligible. These two boats were on the port side.

On the starboard side and abreast them was the motor cutter. This was a cumbrous diesel-engined craft, of great value in harbour, but of limited capabilities in a seaway. This boat was also kept 'turned in' so as to allow maximum arcs of fire to Nos. 4 and 5 guns.

Near the motor boat was the little 14 ft. dinghy; it will be remembered that the Commander told me it was not worth getting out. On deck nearby we normally carried a small 'skimmer' or planing dinghy, but this had been recently burnt out inshore at Freetown and no replacement had been available. In fact we had only just obtained a replacement for the motor cutter which had been carried away, davits and all, in a storm off Cadiz some months before.

So much for the disposition of the boats. For a boat to reach the sea in a fit state to carry men there are two pre-requisites. It must be intact and it must be either lowered or first turned out and then lowered. Failing the latter it may float off when the ship sinks, but if a power boat, it must be the right way up to survive. A capsized service power boat cannot be righted, and in any case would probably be sucked down with the ship.

Turning to the individual boats, then, we can rule out the starboard whaler as smashed by the first torpedo, which struck close by. The process of raising the davits, hoisting, turning out and lowering the port boat would have been too difficult with the list on the ship increasing so rapidly. It seems that this boat must have floated off, losing its gear in the process, as I found it waterlogged afterwards.

The ship did not sink until she had turned exactly on to her beam ends, i.e. her masts and funnels heeled over until they touched the sea, and as they did so she went down. Any power boat that floated off therefore would have capsized. But a whaler could have come through the process waterlogged.

The cutter was lowered and its loss is the only hard one to account for. It was on the high side of the ship and might have been holed by being dashed against the ship's bilge keel by the swell. It also looked

very crowded to me, but that alone should not have capsized or sunk it.

To get the motor boat out on the cutters' davits after lowering latter was out of the question. Probably it floated off, capsized and sank.

Turning out the motor cutter was a slow and difficult feat at the best of times. With a heavy list on the ship, even though that list was in the right direction to assist, it would have been extremely difficult. Also the falls would have had to be cut to get the boat clear, as it could not be unhooked and unshackling was impossible in a heavy swell. I do not think any serious attempt could have been made to get it out, or if it was it must have failed.

It is so long ago that it occurs to me as quite possible that the boat was left behind at Freetown as no replacements for the davits had arrived from England. I certainly do not remember any davits ever coming out. Also I abandoned ship from a point very close to where the stern of the boat would have been - though the fact that I have no recollection of seeing it may prove nothing.

As Boat Officer I was fully aware of the situation at the time.