



SECOND SUPPLEMENT

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WEDNESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER, 1918.

Admiralty, 20th November, 1918.

With reference to announcements of the award of the Victoria Cross to naval officers and men for services in action with enemy submarines, the following are the accounts of the actions for which these awards were made:—

(1) Action of H.M.S. "Q5" on the 17th February, 1917.

On the 17th February, 1917, H.M.S. "Q5," under the command of Commander Campbell, D.S.O., R.N., was struck by a torpedo abreast of No. 3 hold. Action stations were sounded and the "panic party" abandoned ship. The engineer officer reported that the engine-room was flooding, and was ordered to remain at his post as long as possible, which he and his staff, several of whom were severely wounded, most gallantly did. The submarine was observed on the starboard quarter 200 yards distant, watching the proceedings through his periscope. He ran past the ship on the starboard side so closely that the whole hull was visible beneath the surface, finally emerging about 300 yards on the port bow. The enemy came down the port side of the ship, and fire was withheld until all guns could bear at point blank range. The first shot beheaded the captain of the submarine as he was climbing out of the conning tower, and the submarine finally sank with conning tower

open and crew pouring out. One officer and one man were rescued on the surface and taken prisoner, after which the boats were recalled and all hands proceeded to do their utmost to keep the ship afloat. A wireless signal for assistance had been sent out when (but not until) the fate of the submarine was assured, and a destroyer and sloop arrived a couple of hours later and took "Q5" in tow. She was finally beached in safety the following evening.

The action may be regarded as the supreme test of naval discipline. The chief engineer and engine-room watch remained at their posts to keep the dynamo working until driven out by the water, then remaining concealed on top of the cylinders. The guns' crews had to remain concealed in their gun houses for nearly half an hour, while the ship slowly sank lower in the water.

(The award of the Victoria Cross to Commander Gordon Campbell, D.S.O., R.N., was announced in London Gazette No. 30029, dated the 21st April, 1917.)

(2) Action of H.M.S. "Prize" on the 30th April, 1917.

H.M.S. "Prize," a topsail schooner of 200 tons, under command of Lieutenant William Edward Sanders, R.N.R., sighted an enemy submarine on the 30th April, 1917. The

enemy opened fire at three miles range and approached slowly astern. The "panic party," in charge of Skipper William Henry Brewer, R.N.R. (Trawler Section), immediately abandoned ship. Ship's head was put into the wind, and the guns' crews concealed themselves by lying face downwards on the deck. The enemy continued deliberately shelling the schooner, inflicting severe damage and wounding a number of men. For 20 minutes she continued to approach, firing as she came, but at length, apparently satisfied that no one remained on board, she drew out on the schooner's quarter 70 yards away. The white ensign was immediately hoisted, the screens dropped, and all guns opened fire. A shell struck the foremost gun of the submarine, blowing it to atoms and annihilating the crew. Another shot demolished the conning tower, and at the same time a Lewis gun raked the survivors off the submarine's deck. She sank four minutes after the commencement of the action in clouds of smoke, the glare of an internal fire being visible through the rents in her hull. The captain of the submarine, a warrant officer and one man were picked up and brought on board the "Prize," which was then herself sinking fast. Captors and prisoners, however, succeeded in plugging the shot holes and keeping the water under with the pumps. The "Prize" then set sail for the land, 120 miles distant. They were finally picked up two days later by a motor-launch and towed the remaining five miles into harbour.

(The award of the Victoria Cross to Acting Lieutenant William Edward Sanders, R.N.R., was announced in London Gazette No. 30147, dated the 22nd June, 1917.)

(3) Action of H.M.S. "Pargust" on the 7th June, 1917.

On the 7th June, 1917, while disguised as a British merchant vessel with a dummy gun mounted aft, H.M.S. "Pargust" was torpedoed at very close range. Her boiler-room, engine-room, and No. 5 hold were immediately flooded, and the starboard lifeboat was blown to pieces. The weather was misty at the time, fresh breeze and a choppy sea. The "panic party," under the command of Lieutenant F. R. Hereford, D.S.C., R.N.R., abandoned ship, and as the last boat was shoving off, the periscope of the submarine was observed close before the port beam about 400 yards distant. The enemy then submerged, and periscope reappeared directly astern, passing to the starboard quarter, and then round to the port beam, when it turned again towards the ship, breaking surface about 50 yards away. The lifeboat, acting as a lure, commenced to pull round the stern; submarine followed closely and Lieutenant Hereford, with complete disregard of the danger incurred from fire of either ship or submarine (who had trained a maxim on the lifeboat), continued to decoy her to within 50 yards of the ship. The "Pargust" then opened fire with all guns, and the submarine, with oil squirting from her side and the crew pouring out of the conning tower, steamed slowly across the bows with a heavy list. The enemy crew held up their hands in token of surrender, whereupon fire immediately ceased. The submarine then began to move away at a gradually increasing speed, apparently endeavouring to escape in the mist. Fire was reopened until she sank, one man clinging

to the bow as she went down. The boats, after a severe pull to windward, succeeded in saving one officer and one man. American Destroyers and a British sloop arrived shortly afterwards, and the "Pargust" was towed back to port. As on the previous occasions, officers and men displayed the utmost courage and confidence in their captain, and the action serves as an example of what perfect discipline, when coupled with such confidence, can achieve.

(The award of the Victoria Cross to Lieut. Ronald Neil Stuart, D.S.O., R.N.R., and Sea. William Williams, R.N.R., O.N., 6224A., was announced in London Gazette No. 30194, dated the 20th July, 1917.)

(4) Action of H.M.S. "Dunraven" on the 8th August, 1917.

On the 8th August, 1917, H.M.S. "Dunraven," under the command of Captain Gordon Campbell, V.C., D.S.O., R.N., sighted an enemy submarine on the horizon. In her rôle of armed British merchant ship, the "Dunraven" continued her zig-zag course, whereupon the submarine closed, remaining submerged to within 5,000 yards, and then, rising to the surface, opened fire. The "Dunraven" returned the fire with her merchant ship gun, at the same time reducing speed to enable the enemy to overtake her. Wireless signals were also sent out for the benefit of the submarine: "Help! come quickly—submarine chasing and shelling me." Finally, when the shells began falling close, the "Dunraven" stopped and abandoned ship by the "panic party." The ship was then being heavily shelled, and on fire aft. In the meantime the submarine closed to 400 yards distant, partly obscured from view by the dense clouds of smoke issuing from the "Dunraven's" stern. Despite the knowledge that the after magazine must inevitably explode if he waited, and further, that a gun and gun's crew lay concealed over the magazine, Captain Campbell decided to reserve his fire until the submarine had passed clear of the smoke. A moment later, however, a heavy explosion occurred aft, blowing the gun and gun's crew into the air, and accidentally starting the fire-gongs at the remaining gun positions; screens were immediately dropped, and the only gun that would bear opened fire, but the submarine, apparently frightened by the explosion, had already commenced to submerge. Realising that a torpedo must inevitably follow, Captain Campbell ordered the surgeon to remove all wounded and conceal them in cabins; hoses were also turned on the poop, which was a mass of flames. A signal was sent out warning men-of-war to divert all traffic below the horizon in order that nothing should interrupt the final phase of the action. Twenty minutes later a torpedo again struck the ship abaft the engine-room. An additional party of men were again sent away as a "panic party," and left the ship to outward appearances completely abandoned, with the White Ensign flying and guns unmasked. For the succeeding fifty minutes the submarine examined the ship through her periscope. During this period boxes of cordite and shells exploded every few minutes, and the fire on the poop still blazed furiously. Captain Campbell and the handful of officers and men who remained on board lay hidden during this ordeal. The submarine then rose to the surface astern, where no guns could bear and

shelled the ship closely for twenty minutes. The enemy then submerged and steamed past the ship 150 yards off, examining her through the periscope. Captain Campbell decided then to fire one of his torpedoes, but missed by a few inches. The submarine crossed the bows and came slowly down the other side, whereupon a second torpedo was fired and missed again. The enemy observed it and immediately submerged. Urgent signals for assistance were immediately sent out, but pending arrival of assistance Captain Campbell arranged for a third "panic party" to jump overboard if necessary and leave one gun's crew on board for a final attempt to destroy the enemy, should he again attack. Almost immediately afterwards, however, British and American destroyers arrived on the scene, the wounded were transferred, boats were recalled and the fire extinguished. The "Dunraven" although her stern was awash, was taken in tow, but the weather grew worse, and early the following morning she sank with colours flying.

(The award of the Victoria Cross to Lieut. Charles George Bonner, D.S.C., R.N.R., and P.O. Ernest Pitcher, O.N. 227029 (Po.), was announced in London Gazette No. 30363, dated the 2nd November, 1917.)

(5) Action of H.M. Armed Smack "Nelson," on the 15th August, 1917.

On the 15th August, 1917, the Smack "Nelson" was engaged in fishing when she was attacked by gunfire from an enemy submarine. The gear was let go and the submarine's fire was returned. The submarine's fourth shot went through the port bow just below the water line, and the seventh shell struck the skipper, Thomas Crisp, partially disembowelling him, and passed through the deck and out through the side of the ship. In spite of the terrible nature of his wound Skipper Crisp retained consciousness, and his first thought was to send off a message that he was being attacked and giving his position. He continued to command his ship until the ammunition was almost exhausted and the smack was sinking. He refused to be moved into the small boat when the rest of the crew were obliged to abandon the vessel as she sank, his last request being that he might be thrown overboard.

(The posthumous award of the Victoria Cross to Skipper Thomas Crisp, D.S.C., R.N.R., 10055 D.A., was announced in London Gazette No. 30363, dated the 2nd November, 1917.)

(6) Action of H.M.S. "Stock Force," on the 30th July 1918.

H.M.S. "Stock Force," under the command of Lieutenant Harold Auten, D.S.C., R.N.R., was torpedoed by an enemy submarine at 5 p.m. on the 30th July, 1918. The torpedo struck the ship abreast No. 1 hatch, entirely wrecking

the fore part of the ship, including the bridge, and wounding three ratings. A tremendous shower of planks, unexploded shells, hatches and other debris followed the explosion, wounding the first lieutenant (Lieutenant E. J. Grey, R.N.R.) and the navigating officer (Lieutenant L. E. Workman, R.N.R.) and adding to the injuries of the foremost gun's crew and a number of other ratings. The ship settled down forward, flooding the foremost magazine and between decks to the depth of about three feet. "Panic party," in charge of Lieutenant Workman, R.N.R., immediately abandoned ship, and the wounded were removed to the lower deck, where the surgeon (Surgeon Probationer G. E. Strahan, R.N.V.R.), working up to his waist in water, attended to their injuries. The captain, two guns' crews and the engine-room staff remained at their posts.

The submarine then came to the surface ahead of the ship half a mile distant, and remained there a quarter of an hour, apparently watching the ship for any doubtful movement.

The "panic party" in the boat accordingly commenced to row back towards the ship in an endeavour to decoy the submarine within range of the hidden guns. The submarine followed, coming slowly down the port side of the "Stock Force," about three hundred yards away. Lieutenant Auten, however, withheld his fire until she was abeam, when both of his guns could bear. Fire was opened at 5.40 p.m.; the first shot carried away one of the periscopes, the second round hit the conning tower, blowing it away and throwing the occupant high into the air. The next round struck the submarine on the water-line, tearing her open and blowing out a number of the crew.

The enemy then subsided several feet into the water and her bows rose. She thus presented a large and immobile target into which the "Stock Force" poured shell after shell until the submarine sank by the stern, leaving a quantity of debris on the water. During the whole of the action one man (Officer's Steward, 2nd Class, R. J. Starling) remained pinned down under the foremost gun after the explosion of the torpedo, and remained there cheerfully and without complaint, although the ship was apparently sinking, until the end of the action.

The "Stock Force" was a vessel of 360 tons, and despite the severity of the shock sustained by the officers and men when she was torpedoed, and the fact that her bows were almost obliterated, she was kept afloat by the exertions of her ship's company until 9.25 p.m. She then sank with colours flying, and the officers and men were taken off by two torpedo boats and a trawler.

The action was cited as one of the finest examples of coolness, discipline and good organisation in the history of "Q" ships.

(The award of the Victoria Cross to Lieutenant Harold Auten, D.S.C., R.N.R., was announced in London Gazette No. 30900, dated the 14th September, 1918.)

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