

attacks were pressed home to short range, resulting in a hit with the only torpedo fired, confirmed by Motor Torpedo Boat 82. It was not known to the Commanding Officer that his second torpedo had failed to fire until about twenty minutes later. This misfire and the casualty to the First Lieutenant when about to release a depth charge, were two misfortunes which combined to spoil a very spirited attack during which Motor Torpedo Boat 77 was subjected to intense enemy fire.

3. Motor Torpedo Boat 82 fired one torpedo only, which missed. The conclusions (paragraph 13 (viii)) of the Flotilla Commanding Officer are that both torpedoes should be fired whenever a good target presents itself. This is considered, without doubt, to be the correct procedure and has again been impressed on Commanding Officers.

4. Motor Torpedo Boat 61 (Lieutenant T. J. Bligh, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve), equipped as a gunboat, fought a prolonged and resolute action with the convoy escort, which was greatly superior in fire power. It is considered that this boat did particularly well; her wheel steering was out of order throughout the action, during which she was steered with the tiller from aft.

5. The conclusions of the Flotilla Commanding Officer are considered sound, particularly paragraph 13 (viii), referred to above. The R.D.F.* with which these M.T.B.s are fitted was not used on this occasion, as the enemy convoy appeared before it was expected.

6. Motor Torpedo Boats 307 and 315, not having met the others at the rendezvous, were deprived of their target at the last moment by its being sunk by a Wellington torpedo-bomber. The small fast enemy destroyer which had been escorting the merchant ship was not a suitable torpedo target and these Motor Torpedo Boats are not sufficiently heavily armed with guns to engage such a target with a good chance of success.

7. Mechanically, all the Motor Torpedo Boats ran well and without giving any trouble. This is a far more satisfactory state of affairs than has recently been the case with boats of this type, and the improvement is largely due to the skill and enthusiasm of Lieutenant (E) W. R. Coverdale, Royal Navy, the Coastal Force Base Engineer Officer.

The conduct of officers and ships' companies during this operation is reported to have been excellent.

8. It is considered that this force of Motor Torpedo Boats was well led by Lieutenant R. A. M. Hennessy, Royal Navy, the Commanding Officer of the 7th Flotilla, who was hampered by having only two Motor Torpedo Boats and one Motor Gun Boat, against the enemy escort of four destroyers and three E-boats† and merchant ships which were themselves armed. His small attacking force caused great confusion among the convoy, enemy ships firing on one another and some in the air. Under these conditions, a really adequate force of Motor Torpedo Boats should have been able to sink several enemy ships. In this case

the main Motor Torpedo Boat striking force had been removed from Malta a few days previously.

(Signed) M. C. GILES,
Lieutenant, R.N.,
for Captain, Absent on Duty.

ENCLOSURE 2 TO C.-IN-C., LEVANT'S LETTER.
FROM ... The Senior Officer, 7th M.T.B. Flotilla.

DATE ... 17th February, 1943.
To ... The Captain Coastal Forces, Mediterranean.

Submitted:

M.T.B.s 77 (V.7* on board), 82 and 61 sailed from Malta in accordance with previous instructions, and passed the boom at 1500. Having reached the end of the swept channel a course was set for a position 15 miles due south of Maritimo Island. All three boats were carrying a thousand gallons of upper-deck fuel, and as this was the first time of carrying it a speed of 18½ knots was allowed for engine revolutions giving 20 knots under normal load. It was subsequently found that there was no reduction in speed due to the extra load.

M.T.B.s 307 and 315 were due to sail at approximately 1600, and catch us up en route, or failing that to rendezvous in position 15 miles south of Maritimo Island.

2. At 2140, an enemy report was received of one merchant vessel and two destroyers, steering 240 degrees towards Maritimo Island. It was thought that these ships would be our target, and that they would eventually alter course to the southward, in which case our position south of Maritimo Island would be very suitable.

At 2320, M.T.B. 61 signalled that she had a defective dynamo and that it was necessary for her to stop. Boats stopped at 2325 and cut engines. At that moment an enemy report of four merchant vessels and three destroyers to the northward of us was received, and before it could be plotted on the chart M.T.B. 61 reported that she had sighted a large merchant vessel to starboard, about 1½ miles away.

3. All boats were ordered to start up one engine, and M.T.B. 77 followed by M.T.B. 82 proceeded on a north-easterly course with the object of getting the target on the port bow.

On closing it was observed that there were two columns of ships, with a heavy escort of destroyers, and that we were steering on a course almost exactly opposite to the port enemy column.

The starboard column was sighted to port, and consisted of a destroyer with two merchant vessels astern. As we were in an ideal position to attack the leading ship of this column, the signal "Attack with torpedoes" was made, and all three boats acted independently from then on.

4. M.T.B. 77 (Lieutenant J. B. Sturgeon, R.N.V.R.) altered course to port to get on the firing course to attack the leading merchant vessel of the starboard column. In order to avoid the port column it was necessary to go on to all three engines and increase to 20 knots.

Admiralty footnotes:

* R.D.F.—radar.

† E-boats—similar to British M.T.B.s.

Admiralty footnote:

* V.7—the Commanding Officer of 7th M.T.B. Flotilla.