

## Operation "CANNED" – 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> February 1944

### Background

The German tanker CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN (7,747 tons) was a U-Boat Supply ship. She arrived at Las Palmas in the Canary Islands on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1939 with 10,800 tons of fuel oil which had been embarked at Aruba in the Dutch Antilles and remained in Las Palmas until early 1942.

On February 24<sup>th</sup> 1942, she left the Canaries to supply the German raider ships STIER and MICHEL, and between April and August made rendezvous with each of them at least three times.

On August 27<sup>th</sup> 1942, CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN fuelled STIER for the last time and took passage for Japan.



**CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN** - in her previous guise as the 'Karl Knudsen'

In June 1943 CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN was refuelling at least 7 different U-boats southeast of Madagascar. These U-boats had been operating off the Cape of Good Hope and after refuelling from SCHLIEMANN they moved north-northeast to seek targets in the Mozambique Channel and for ships transiting between the Cape and India or Ceylon.

The search for the CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN was first implemented in 1943 as Operation PLAYER and RELENTLESS had joined the cruisers SUFFOLK and NEWCASTLE and the destroyers NIZAM and RACEHORSE from 24<sup>th</sup> June to 2<sup>nd</sup> July in the search. The German ship had been reported to be on passage in the Indian Ocean after replenishing 5 U-Boats south of Mauritius on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. However, the search was abandoned after no sighting was made of the German ship.

In the last 10 days of January 1944, six independently routed British ships were sunk in the Indian Ocean by 4 U-boats working in the Gulf of Aden and north of the Maldives.

The following pages form part of, and are transcribed from, the official reports of Operation "CANNED".

Firstly, to set the scene, is the report to C-in-C Eastern Fleet from the Rear Admiral Commanding the Fourth Cruiser Squadron (RAC 4<sup>th</sup> CS) to which RELENTLESS was temporarily attached with the cruiser NEWCASTLE.

Secondly, RELENTLESS' report to RAC 4<sup>th</sup> CS.

MOST SECRET

Office of Rear Admiral Commanding,

Fourth Cruiser Squadron.

18<sup>th</sup> February 1944

No.40S/03B

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

EASTERN FLEET

REPORT ON OPERATION "CANNED"

List of References

List of Enclosures

Operation "CANNED" was designed with the object of locating and destroying an enemy tanker which it was believed might attempt to refuel one or more U-boats in the South Indian Ocean between 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February, the forces available being H.M. Ships NEWCASTLE, RELENTLESS and seven Catalinas.

The report of the operation is forwarded herewith.

2. The operation was successful, a tanker with a U-boat in company was sighted by a Catalina in position 22° 48'S 73° 05'E at 1055Z on 11<sup>th</sup> February and the German tanker "CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN" was sunk by H.M.S. RELENTLESS in position 23° 23'S 74° 37'E at 2040Z on 11<sup>th</sup> February and 41 survivors were picked up.

The Plan

3. It was eventually decided to concentrate the search in three likely areas in the following vicinities:-

- (a) 23°S 73°E
- (b) 23°S 65°E
- (c) 31°S 63°E

With H.M.S RELENTLESS in Area "A", H.M.S NEWCASTLE in Area "C", and Area "B" being the least likely owing to its closeness to Mauritius, covered only by aircraft on their way to and from Area "A". The intention was that Areas "A" and "C" should be searched once on 9<sup>th</sup> February by a Catalina covering a 120 square mile; on subsequent days in Area "A" two Catalinas (normal tanks) were each to search the 120 mile square once, one after first light and the other before dark; in Area "C" one Catalina (with overload tanks) was to search the 120 mile square three times during the twelve hours which the aircraft could remain in the area.

4. This search scheme would in any case have required some modification by the Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force, Mauritius, as only one aircraft with overload tanks could be made available instead of the two expected.

## Weather

5. The operation was affected considerably by bad weather; at 0200Z on 8<sup>th</sup> February when H.M.S NEWCASTLE and H.M.S RELENTLESS sailed from Grand Port, Mauritius, a cyclone of moderate intensity was centred about 100 miles NNW of Mauritius and having re-curved was moving slowly South East. At the time there were three Catalinas at Grand Port. The cyclone which touched the North end of Mauritius at about 2100Z 8<sup>th</sup> February prevented the remaining four Catalinas arriving from Diego Suarez PM 10<sup>th</sup> February. The weather prevented any searches being carried out until 11<sup>th</sup> February and on that day, owing to the late arrival of the other aircraft and continued bad weather to the Southward only Area "A" could be covered.

## Allied Shipping

6. The information in the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet's signals 110247Z and 110326Z/February, that there was a possibility that two Allied tankers were in the vicinity of Area "A" was disturbing as it had previously been confirmed three times that the areas were clear of our own shipping. The signal was received by the Royal Air Force, Mauritius, after the aircraft had taken off for the searches on 11<sup>th</sup> February. The information was not passed on by the Royal Air Force, Mauritius, to these aircraft as REKOH would have to have to have been used and it was considered that had the message been decoded by the enemy the success of the operation on subsequent days would have been prejudiced. The message was passed to the second search aircraft by H.M.S RELENTLESS on sighting before the aircraft began its search.

## General Narrative

7. H.M. Ships NEWCASTLE and RELENTLESS sailed for the search areas at 0200Z 8<sup>th</sup> February. H.M.S. RELENTLESS crossed the path of the approaching cyclone and the weather improved as she steered to the Eastward. H.M.S. NEWCASTLE's course kept her just ahead of it in the right-hand semicircle and fairly heavy weather was experienced until late on 11<sup>th</sup> February.

8. Both ships arrived in their search areas on 10<sup>th</sup> February and carried out sweeps across their areas. No air searches were flown on 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> February

On the evening of 10<sup>th</sup> February as only two aircraft were serviceable and the weather to the Southwards was obviously bad, the Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force, decided to send both to carry out the pre-arranged searches in Area "A" and get a third ready to shadow, leaving Area "C" until the 12<sup>th</sup> February.

9. H.M.S. RELENTLESS, on the 11<sup>th</sup> February, patrolled about 100 miles to the Westward of the centre of the area, his main consideration being to make contact with the aircraft before each started its search. Important as this was to check positions with the aircraft, I consider it would have been wiser to have remained to the South Eastward, as it was towards that side of the area that the enemy was almost certain to break if sighted by aircraft.

10. H.M.S. RELENTLESS did not make contact with the first aircraft, who under difficult conditions for navigation with cloud and variable winds, was apparently some 40 miles out in his position (to the Southward), in addition, he carried out his creeping line ahead search from North to South instead of South to North as ordered. If the tanker was approaching his rendezvous from the North it was probably the error in position which prevented the aircraft sighting him; if approaching from South to North the fact that the aircraft was doing his search towards the direction of approach was probably the cause.

11. H.M.S. RELENTLESS sighted the second search aircraft at 0745Z and checked position, the aircraft working entirely on D.R. was only 8 miles in error after about seven hours flying. The aircraft was informed that the tankers "JALAPA" and "KONGSDAL" might be in the area.

12. A tanker with a U-boat on the surface, about half a mile away, was sighted by the Catalina at 1055Z in position 22° 48'S 73° 05'E and a first sighting report was made which included the fact that the aircraft could remain for one hour. It seems unlikely that the aircraft was sighted on this occasion but on returning twenty minutes later when the U-boat was almost alongside the tanker the aircraft was sighted and the U-boat dived.

13. H.M.S. RELENTLESS did not acknowledge the first sighting report for the a considerable time, which caused some anxiety; he was waiting until he could give a time of arrival and wished to make as few signals as possible. In his signal he included the group 594 to which had been allocated the special meaning "If you consider weather conditions are suitable for landing on the sea remain in contact with the enemy". The Captain of the aircraft decided that sea conditions made a safe night landing in this area unlikely and replied accordingly.

14. The aircraft reported the tanker's position and course and speed as 142° six knots at 1210 and then returned to base.

H.M.S. RELENTLESS meanwhile, proceeded towards the first sighting position at 30 knots and when an enemy course and speed was received proceeded on an intercepting course. By 1720Z the enemy's 'furthest on' on the reported course of 142° had been covered between speeds of six and twelve knots and a vignot curve of search was started at 25 knots to cover the enemy's 'furthest on' assuming he had steered between 140° and 090° at 11 knots from the last aircraft position.

15. A radar contact at 10 miles was obtained at 1925Z and the tanker was sighted at 1928Z. The tanker was recognised as "CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN" in the moonlight. Eight torpedoes were fired at 2,000 yards range at 2015Z and two or three hits obtained, fire was also opened with the 4.7" armament. "CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN" sank at 2040Z in position 23° 23'S 74° 37'E. Forty one out of the crew of eighty eight were picked up by H.M.S. RELENTLESS.

16. H.M.S. RELENTLESS states that an enemy report was passed on Admiral's Wave (3835 Kc/s) and Ship Shore Wave (8290 Kc/s) when "CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN" was identified; this report was not received by H.M.S. NEWCASTLE nor, as far as is known, ashore.

17. H.M.S. RELENTLESS reported the 'sinking of the tanker' when 100 miles clear at 0230Z 12<sup>th</sup> February, which was amplified at your request in H.M.S. RELENTLESS's signal 120629.

18. On receiving the first sighting report from the aircraft I directed H.M.S. NEWCASTLE to alter course to the Eastward, at best speed, to close the position (some 700 miles). When the enemy's course had been received and sea conditions allowed, speed was increased to 24 knots and later course altered to 100° to gain an intercepting position should the enemy break to the Southward and evade H.M.S. RELENTLESS and subsequent air searches.

19. A relief shadowing aircraft was got away from Grand Port at 1215Z, an hour after receipt of the first sighting report but could not reach its area until 2130. The second, third and fourth, on which work had been proceeding at full pressure since their arrival, got away at 1400Z, 1730Z and 1745Z (with overload tanks) respectively which was as soon as they could be made serviceable.

20. The search areas for these aircraft (which were passed while on their way out) were arranged to the Southeast, East, North and South respectively of the first sighting report and covered any enemy course between 330° through 090° to 260°. The tanker had been sunk however before the first aircraft reached her position. The second and third aircraft were unable to complete their searches owing to engine trouble; one of them found visibility bad at Grand Port on retuning and flew on to Tombeau Bay where he landed in a heavy swell and reached his moorings with only 10 gallons of fuel remaining.

21. The above aircraft while returning from its search area sighted a U-boat on the surface at 0424Z 12<sup>th</sup> February in position 22° 10'S 72° 09'E steering 340° ten knots. The aircraft carried no depth charges and owing to engine trouble could not stay in the vicinity. As it was not then known that the tanker had been sunk the sighting was not reported until return to base (in accordance with the Operation Orders) which was unfortunate as H.M.S. RELENTLESS was about sixty miles from this position.

#### General Remarks

22. The Commanding Officer, H.M.S. RELENTLESS (Lieutenant-Commander R A Fell, Royal Navy) carried out his task with judgement and skill and lost no time in finding and sinking "CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN" when she had been located by aircraft. His somewhat extravagant expenditure of eight torpedoes to sink the ship was prompted by the wish to finish the job as soon as possible as a U-boat was likely to be in the vicinity and the armament of "CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN" was unknown.

23. The performance of the Royal Air Force personnel and their aircraft was excellent. They were working under the handicaps of weather, which also necessitated the use of Grand Port instead of Tombeau Bay where the Air Headquarters is sited, and the late arrival of most of their aircraft but by great efforts did all that could be required of them. Much of the credit for the success of the operation is due to Squadron Leader J N Stacey, Distinguished Flying Cross, who was sent by Air Officer Commanding, 222 Group, to command the Royal Air Force detachment at Mauritius for operations "THWART" and "CANNED". In the conduct of the air side of these operations he showed sound judgement and initiative and got the best out of his aircraft and their crews. He co-operated very fully with my staff and worked his aircraft to the limit of their endurance to meet my requirements.

24. Commendations in paragraphs 23 and above and in Enclosure 3, paragraphs 13, 14 and 15 have been dealt with separately.

(stamped) (Sgd) A D READ

REAR ADMIRAL

MOST SECRET

H.M.S. RELENTLESS – REPORT

Subject:- OPERATION “CANNED”. REPORT ON PROCEDURE

From... The Commanding Officer, H.M.S. RELENTLESS

Date ... 13<sup>th</sup> February 1944                      No.7/01.

To ... THE ADMIRAL COMMANDING, FOURTH CRUISER SQUADRON.

The following report of the proceedings of H.M.S. RELENTLESS on Operation “CANNED” is forwarded in accordance with your instructions.

Narrative and Track Chart are enclosed.

2. Ship left Grand Port at 0600D on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1944, and proceeded at 16 knots to area “A”. Arrived in area on the 10<sup>th</sup>. As a cyclone was apparently stalking us it was not considered likely that aircraft would arrive; this was confirmed by signal later. So ship entered area and swept towards centre and then southwards to cover South West corner. During the night swept to the Southward and then around North West to arrive on line of approach of first aircraft for sweep of 11<sup>th</sup>. Morning, aircraft was not sighted. Moved Northwards and then back to try and contact mid-day aircraft. Made contact, gave him ship’s position and told him that “JALAPA” and “KONGSDAL” might be in the area. Aircraft left for patrol. Moved Northward to be in best striking position if enemy sighted at end of patrol.

3. At 1506D 11<sup>th</sup> February received aircraft first sighting report, altered course towards and worked up to 30 knots. Acknowledged report and passed ETA at position to aircraft and told him to do 594. He replied in the negative so decided interception was up to the ship in view of the fact that relief aircraft could not arrive before 2300D.

4. On receipt of aircraft’s 1610D, altered course to intercept at enemy’s ‘furthest on’ position on that course and speed. On arrival at 2020D made no contact with enemy. The following plan was then made. To sweep along the enemy’s last known course to his ‘furthest on’ positions in the South East Quadrant of the circle from his last known position. The reasons for doing this were:-

(1) He was unlikely to break in the Westerly direction because attack should come there.

(2) If on his way to Europe he would break South or South East and do a wide sweep down to the higher latitudes.

(3) If just fuelling and then returning to Japan he would go East or South East to get as far away from aircraft search from Mauritius on the North; perhaps giving another rendezvous further East or making straight for Sunda Straits. In addition he would get as far away from the aircraft base as possible during the dark hours.

(4) It was thought that the 2300 aircraft would not find him but, if it did, the ship would be in a good striking position. Also it was felt that time was on his side and it was up to the surface craft to find him before he got outside the limit of possible aircraft searches.

5. This scheme of search was carried out accordingly. Just prior to sighting, a Radar contact to Port was obtained which was either a rain squall or a possible submarine, most probably the former as, on investigation, nothing was seen. But just at that moment the W/T heard what was apparently a first sighting report on 6663 kilocycles, and which was within 20 miles by the intensity.
6. The search was resumed and shortly after another Radar contact was obtained at 10 miles on the Port bow, and almost immediately afterwards sighted as a vessel.
7. Speed was increased to close up moon. Vessel, which was on a course of about 086°, shortly afterwards sighted H.M.S. RELENTLESS and began to take drastic avoiding action. H.M.S. RELENTLESS was manoeuvred to maintain best torpedo advantage and still keep down moon. Fire was not opened, as it was thought best to persuade the enemy H.M.S. RELENTLESS was a Cruiser in case the enemy had superior armament. This bluff was successful according to accounts from prisoners. It was decided to close to 2,000 yards and fire all eight torpedoes as soon as a tactical advantage was obtained. Soon H.M.S. RELENTLESS was able to close at 30 knots to 2,000 yards on the Port beam of the enemy, who was now seen to be almost certainly the "CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN".
8. Torpedoes were fired and fire opened by main armament. Two torpedo hits were observed from the ship, but according to survivors there were three hits obtained – in the Engine Room – under the Bridge and forward under the crew space. It would appear that the enemy had decided that they were up against a cruiser and had decided to abandon and scuttle the ship at the time of torpedoing.
9. Fire was continued with main armament and hits obtained. But shortly after the torpedo hits two other explosions were felt and the vessel's back was seen to be broken. About 10 minutes later she sank.
10. A sweep was made by A/S for any submarine which might be in the vicinity as the Radar had obtained two contacts while the ship was being closed. The second contact was eventually thought to be the Bridge Superstructure. It was decided to pick up survivors as the submarine in the vicinity was considered to be about 30 miles away. The boats did not seem to want to pull towards the ship which had to be manoeuvred to pick up. Two boat loads and a raft load were picked up and no more could be seen. As all this had taken so much time it was decided to leave the area in view of the submarine in the vicinity. Shortly after leaving it was reported that there was another boat load away on the Starboard quarter, but in view of the time spend in the vicinity it was decided, with regret, that they must be left in the hope that the submarine would pick them up.
11. Course was set to avoid a possible submarine search in rear of tanker and then altered course for Mauritius. A sinking signal was sent when over 100 miles from the area of the sinking.
12. The "CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN" was armed with one 7.5" Gun aft, two 5.1" ahead fore superstructure and one 3" H.A. Gun as well as light A.A.?

Paragraph 12 – Note by RAC 4<sup>th</sup> CS

The calibre of the "CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN"'s armament as detailed here is doubtful.

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13. I would personally like to mention the excellent navigation and working out of the scheme of search by Lieutenant A P Dickson, R.N.R. It was his final scheme that was adopted. In this he was assisted by Lieutenant R C Longbottom R N. Lieutenant Dickson also fired the torpedoes as T.G.O. In addition, Mr A B Clark, Gunner (T) assisted by Petty Officer W Williamson, Official Number C/JX 156371, Acting T.G.M. assisted by the whole Torpedo Party have worked hard to get the Torpedo equipment in complete readiness after very hurried torpedo practices at Simonstown.

14. Again I should personally like to recommend PO Telegraphist E D Plimmer, Official Number C/JX 144450 and PO Radio Mechanic P Warham, Official Number P/MX 93227, who worked day and night on the Transformer of the Type 272. This broke down the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> and was in operation again by A.M. 11<sup>th</sup>. This meant rewinding and reinsulating the whole of the primary coil. The set worked perfectly afterwards and was of the greatest assistance. The Radar Operator at the time of the first contact was Ralph C Day A.B., R.D.F., Official Number C/JX 373724.

15. Finally Acting Lieutenant (E) G Jenkinson R.N. and his staff deserve great credit for their efforts in conserving fuel and steaming the ship whilst the search was in progress.

16. The conduct of the Officers and men was exemplary throughout.

(Signed) Robert Fell

LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER-IN-COMMAND

## AFTERMATH

For a first-hand account of this action, it is well worth reading "PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – Ken Waterson" in the HISTORY tab. Ken was an Ordinary Telegraphist on RELENTLESS at the time and wrote of his war experiences for the BBC Series PEOPLES WAR

### Time Zones

It should be borne in mind that this action took place at night. The times stated in the report by RAC 4th CS are ZULU / GMT whilst the times in the RELENTLESS report are in DELTA / Local time.

The first Radar contact of the tanker was at 20,000 yards (10 miles) at 2325 and the visual sighting# at 2328. CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN sank# shortly after 0030 on 12<sup>th</sup> February.

# 1928Z 2328D Enemy in sight bearing 015° 10 miles (23° 31'S 74° 32.5'E)

# 2030Z 0030D Ceased firing. Enemy heavily listed to Starboard and sinking fast

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## RECOMMENDATION FOR AWARDS TO CREW OF HMS RELENTLESS FOR THE ACTION AGAINST THE GERMAN U-BOAT SUPPLY SHIP *CHARLOTTE SCHIELMANN*

No.4CS/03B dated 18<sup>th</sup> February 1944 - Report on Operation "CANNED"

HMS Relentless Report of Proceedings on Operation "Canned" Ref no 7/01 dated 13<sup>th</sup> February 1944

**Robert Augustus FELL, Lt Cdr (Commanding Officer)** - Recommended for Decoration ~~or Mention in Despatches~~ 'Showed initiative and good judgement in interpreting his orders and acted with decision and promptitude when the enemy report was received, which resulted in the complete success of this important operation'

**Alexander Forest DICKSON, Lieutenant** - Recommended for Decoration ~~or Mention in Despatches~~. 'This Officer's outstanding application to navigation enabled the Ship to be in the right place. His was the final scheme of search which was adopted and which led to the success of the operation. In addition he was Torpedo Control Officer and carried out his duties in a most efficient manner and as brought his control parties to a good state of efficiency'

**Peter Grace, WARHAM, Petty Officer Radio Mechanic** - Recommended for Decoration ~~or Mention in Despatches~~. 'He has kept his Radar apparatus in efficient working order. When the transformer of Type 272 broke down on PM 9<sup>th</sup> February he, in conjunction with the Petty Office Telegraphist, worked day and night rewinding and reinsulating the whole primary coil of the transformer until it was working again on am 11<sup>th</sup>. This feat very materially assisted the operation'

**Edwin Daniel, PLIMMER, Petty Officer Telegraphist** - Recommended for Decoration ~~or Mention in Despatches~~. 'His work with the W/T during the operation has been of the highest order. In addition, when the Type 272 broke down on the 9<sup>th</sup> February he, in conjunction with the Petty Officer Radio Mechanic, worked day and night rewinding and reinsulating the whole primary coil of the transformer until it was ready on am 11<sup>th</sup> February thus most materially assisting the operation'

**William James WILLIAMSON, Acting Petty Officer (Temporary)** - Recommended for ~~Decoration or Mention in Despatches~~. 'This rating stepped into the shoes of the TGM who went sick just before the end of the refit and had worked hard to get the torpedoes ready for the initial firings at Simonstown and then again whilst at sea after these firings. He is actually a Petty Officer (Low Power) who has passed the Fleet Board for Gunner (T). His work on the torpedoes is therefore outstanding'

**William Stanley BURGESS, Chief Stoker** - Recommended for ~~Decoration or Mention in Despatches~~. 'This rating has worked consistently hard since the refit to get his Department, many of whom are new hands, into a good state of efficiency. He has also worked up his Damage Control Parties to a good state of efficiency. The efforts of the Boiler Room Staff were very material in assisting towards the success of the operation.

**Ralph Charles DAY, Able Seaman RDF** - Recommended for ~~Decoration or Mention in Despatches~~. 'This rating was operator of the Type 272 when the enemy was picked up by Radar. He held it well throughout the action. His work has been consistently good'

**Robert Hall SHILLINGLAW, ERA3** - Recommended for ~~Decoration or Mention in Despatches~~. 'This rating since the refit has never ceased working in the Engine Room Department to get the engines back once again to the smoothest and most efficient running. To him a great deal of credit is due for the superb answer that the Bridge always obtained from the Engine Room Department throughout the operation'

#### **EXTRACT FROM SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 18 APRIL, 1944 (No.1777)**

For good services in operations against enemy shipping:

#### **Mention in Despatches**

Lieutenant-Commander Robert Augustus Fell, Royal Navy (Rhu).

Lieutenant Alexander Forrest Dickson, R.N.R. (Edinburgh)

Chief Stoker William Stanley Burgess, C/K.58393 (Newcastle-on-Tyne)

Engine Room Artificer Third Class Robert Hall Shillinglaw, C/MX.55537 (Grangemouth)

Petty Officer Telegraphist Edwin Daniel Plimmer, C/JX.144450 (Oakengates)

Petty Officer Radio Mechanic Peter Grace Warham, P/MX.93227 (Hull)

Acting Temporary Petty Officer William James Williamson, C/JX.156317 (Fakenham)

Able Seaman Ralph Charles Day, C/JX.373724 (Dagenham).

## SURVIVORS

It seems that rather than only one boat load of survivors from CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN not being rescued by RELENTLESS, there were actually 42 survivors in four boats. Two boats with 20 men were never seen again but the two other boats with 10 men and 11 men endured journeys of 26 days and 30 days respectively, in reaching the east coast of Madagascar. One man died of exhaustion on the second boat.

I'm grateful to the website <http://scotland.users.ftech.net> with regard to the story of the German U-boat U188 for the following information.

This is an account of one of the survivors, Radio Officer Alfred Moer who lived through the ordeal and survived.

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*We wake up between 5.50 and 6.00 am and see in the bright sunshine pieces of wreckage everywhere. A short distance away is a second lifeboat, which is turned upside down with four men sitting on it. The seas wash large quantities of gas oil over me and already my eyes are burning horribly. I feel I cannot stand this for much longer.*

*My God! I am sitting in water up to my waist, our own boat is leaking, but we must struggle on and try to get closer to the other upturned boat. Suddenly I jump over and scramble on to its keel. A quick inspection and it looks OK so we jump into the cold water and attempt to turn the boat over. It isn't easy, but we struggle on and in the end we just manage it. Thank God we find there is some food and a little drinking water left in one of its lockers. Not much, but with rationing it will keep us going for a few days.*

*We also find a bottle of red wine and we open this to celebrate our success. We sort out the mast and sails and set a course north north west, hoping to find one of the Mauritius or Reunion Islands. With good winds we should be able to make it in about 14 days.*

*By day we follow the compass and by night we follow the stars. The first officer, the only mariner on board becomes the pilot. He sets the watches and gives out the food rations. The men who cannot row because of their injuries have to bail water. This is a never ending task, because water is coming in through a small hole. We look for it and find it, then seal it with a little piece of dough. We still have to bail as the floor is always wet and we can only lie down on the thwarts. Nobody can stretch themselves, but lying on the thwarts becomes something nice to look forward to.*

*There are ten men in our life-boat and someone is constantly on watch. We all hope that sometime soon, something will show up. Suddenly someone gives a shout saying he has seen a submarine. The excitement is great and everyone looks in the direction he is pointing, but it's only a piece wreckage and everyone is distraught.*

*Our boat is moving slowly through the water and I suddenly realize that we are in the middle of the INDIAN OCEAN with limited supplies of food and water. Is there any hope that we will be saved? Everybody has the same thoughts, but will not voice them and we all pretend to be optimistic. As night falls everybody tries to find a place to sleep. I am not so lucky as all the thwarts are occupied. I have to lean my shoulder against the stomach of one sailor and my legs over another. The sun has dried the gas oil on my skin and it burns like a fire.*

*During the night a wind and sea builds up and high waves constantly wash over us and we are frozen. Suddenly the night is over, the wind falls away, the sun comes out and our world looks much better. We use, a pole to dry our clothes, soaking wet from the nights storm and get our food ration for the day. A small amount of water, two little pieces of hard bread, a small amount of corned beef and a few drops of lemon juice.*

*The sun is rising to its zenith and is burning us again and as we sit in agony, we can only guess what is ahead of us. Our basic need is to conserve energy, to do this we rest and make no unnecessary movement. Once again it is time for a little food, but I can hardly eat, only drink a little because my stomach is upset from the gas oil I've swallowed. I have to say it is no different for the others, as some oil has got into the drinking water. However, the longing for water is getting stronger and stronger.*

*I note with interest that the boat is slipping gently through the sea and taking us slowly to our unknown destination. With the help of my watch - which survived the sinking - and the sun, we manage to calculate a speed of 6 knots through the water.*

*The terrible heat goes on and on and our ordeal becomes greater and greater. Our thirst is almost unmanageable, but we dare not distribute any more of our precious water. Our mouths, tongues and lips are covered with a thick crust and we can hardly eat. Our mouths are so dry that when we try to eat a little bread we cannot swallow. To moisten our mouths we gargle with a little sea water and then chew the bread quickly and force it down. Sometimes the temptation is too great and I swallow sea water. This brings some relief, but then the thirst comes back stronger than ever.*

*The joints in my arms and legs become very painful, my whole body begins to ache. Sores begin to appear and they weep with pus. God, how much more of this will we have to endure?*

*Day after day drags on. Sometimes for a change we see a rain cloud drift overhead. If it rains, we try everything to collect the water. We hold tin cans against the sails, but the water collected is of little use, as it is full of salt washed from the sails. Some hold paddles up to the rain and drink from them, but this is like water dripping on to a hot stone.*

*After the rain storm we are soaking wet and cold. My whole body is in pain from the sores and I believe my head is bursting. Days and nights pass like this and I lose track of time and days.*

*We are all becoming tense and bad tempered. In the beginning we all tried to talk; now even that has ceased. Unwanted contact with others makes us bad tempered and angry, and hard words are spoken, but everyone knows we have to depend on each other. The nights are particularly difficult. With darkness, a feeling of complete loneliness comes over us: above us the stars and around us only the water. Our strength appears to leave us more and more, but we have to steer the boat. Two men are now required for this as one cannot manage any more on his own.*

*Some of us start to hallucinate and we hold up our hands for imaginary drinking cups. If we speak to each other during the day the only subject is food and drink. Every conversation comes to this and eventually we have to restrain the cook from jumping overboard. The poor devil is now just sitting there, either in a trance or hallucinating.*

*For the first time the word 'death' is being spoken aloud. Some of us have been thinking we can't go on anymore. I must admit for the last few days I have toyed with the idea of jumping overboard and*

*letting the sun sparkled waves peacefully wash over me. Yes, I have to admit this is a very tempting thought. How wonderful it would be to be free of all this. However, during the hours of darkness this thought leaves me and I find the idea terrible. The cold sea at night without the sun brings me back to my senses.*

*I now begin to hallucinate and all thoughts of my family are erased and I see pictures of 'death'. Sometimes I can hear church bells ringing quietly and see a summer meadow covered with flowers. Somewhere deep inside me there must be a tiny fraction of hope, but why cannot I change these thoughts into reality. It is only pain and thirst that is reality.*

*The wind gets stronger. Thank God it's from our stern and the waves are from behind us. However, nearly every third wave breaks over us and we fall into each other. We can only hope that nobody is knocked overboard as we don't have the strength to save ourselves, never mind our friends.*

*Then it happens. A wave dashes our helmsman against the tiller and throws him overboard. At the last minute he holds on and we just manage to pull him back into the boat. Now the sail begins to tear and we wonder how much longer it will last. We don't care any more, as we are consumed by thirst and there is no room for other feelings.*

*After a few hours the wind dies and the sea calms down, but we don't know whether to lie down, sit or stand up. There is no part of our bodies which are not sore and horribly painful.*

*By now, if our calculations are correct, we should be in the area of the Mauritius and Reunion Islands. The shape of the clouds and the sighting of a single bird makes us believe that land must be nearby. Our helmsman decides to continue on our course for another day, but can we depend on our calculations? Perhaps we are north of Madagascar. We lose our nerve and change our course at lunchtime to the north west so that if we are north of Madagascar we can get to East Africa.*

*Again uncertainty, hunger and especially thirst. We gain some relief when we pour sea water over our heads. Sometimes a flying fish ends up in our boat. The one that catches it will clean it and eat it raw - it doesn't taste bad at all.*

*We don't know any more which is worse, the daytime with the hot sun or the night time, when our thin bodies are exposed to the cold. At night, the water which soaks us and the cold, feels doubly unpleasant. It is similar when it's raining. On the one hand we are happy because of the additional drinking water and on the other we start to shiver in the cold.*

*It is now day 24 of our journey and our supplies are getting very low, and the hopes of rescue are fading away. Someone makes the proposal that from the day when all the supplies run out, we continue our journey for another two to three days and if we do not see land or are rescued, we take down the sail pull it over us and await the end. As the will to live has got smaller and smaller everyone agrees.*

*During the afternoon of the 26th day, we can hardly stand it any longer. Our limbs are maddeningly painful and our heads feel like they want to break apart. Our last food is handed out consisting of a small handful of hard breadcrumbs soaked in salt water.*

*Suddenly someone shouts 'land ahoy', but nobody believes it. Everyone moans at him and tells him to shut up, even though they would like to believe it. But now, someone else claims to have seen it and this time our attention is held, our hopes raised. Can it be true!*

*We are all watching intently - there IS a coastline - nobody speaks. Cramp and pain disappear. In this moment, we have even forgotten about our thirst. We are getting closer and closer. Soon we are able to recognise mountains and trees, and in front of them the high surf. Even houses are visible standing above the beach.*

*Our tongues become loose again, joyfully everyone starts screaming and shouting. The thought that there ahead lies rescue, water and food is driving us mad. Meanwhile night has descended upon us and we come closer and closer to land. We then notice a British ship lying at anchor close inshore.*

*Our helmsman keeps a clear head and talks us out of attempting to land at night. He's right, because we are much too weak to make it through the surf at night.*

*We stay offshore and await the dawn. The rain pours down on us without interruption but with the certainty of being rescued the next day, we cower together in the smallest space and wait.*

*Dawn begins to break and we are instantly alert, it is time to find a way through the surf. We believe we have arrived off the coast of Portuguese East Africa, a neutral country, and we would rather try and land on the coast, than be taken aboard the British ship and be made Prisoners of War. The crew on the British ship, the AFRICAN PRINCE, are signalling us and advising us not to attempt the surf, but to come on board.*

*We can find no entrance through the surf and no possibility of reaching the shore, so we turn and try to reach the British ship. We find this isn't possible because of the wind and the British up anchor and come closer to us. A Jacob's ladder is hanging down the side and we see the crew at the rail waiting to help us. We come alongside and the first men are trying to climb aboard and they soon disappear behind helping hands.*

*With the last of my strength, I am trying to climb and helping hands grab me and pull me over the rail. They try to stand me on my feet, but my legs give way and I sink to the deck. I lay on the deck unable to move, but straight away British sailors help and carry me on their shoulders to another deck.*

*I learn we are in MANAJARY, the middle of the east coast of Madagascar. With this information I am relieved that we did not attempt the surf. We might all have been drowned.*

*The British had noticed us for some time before we had seen them and realized we were German, because of our white sail - British lifeboats have red sails - and had prepared for our arrival. Our eyes grow wide when we see what they have prepared for our reception. On deck are canisters of biscuits and pot after pot of tea and coffee. The food and drink seem never ending and we cannot get enough. The crew really look after us and provide cigarettes as we tell them of our ordeal. They bring us fresh water and soap and help clean our aching bodies. This is not easy because the sun has burnt the dirt into our skin. We are given a mirror and my own reflection frightens me. I cannot recognise myself with sunken eyes and body burnt by the sun and gas oil, surrounded by a wild growth of hair. Can this be me?*

*All survivors are given an English sea rescue parcel, which contains a woollen jumper, woolly scarf, a pair of trousers, underpants, canvas shoes, woolly socks, handkerchief and a belt. In spite of the heat we put everything on, but our bodies are so weakened, we still feel the cold.*

*Before long we are hungry and thirsty again, but we need not worry as there is more food awaiting us in the mess. The steward, FRANK DAWSON, who himself survived a sinking, takes a lot of trouble for us and the crew as a whole do everything they can to make us comfortable.*

*The British Captain, K.L.KOILE, arrives to see us and his first words are 'as long as you are on board my ship, you will be treated as shipwrecked sailors and not POW's'. We are very grateful for this. Our cook and one sailor have fist sized holes in their backs and are totally exhausted so they are sent to the ship's hospital for treatment.*

*We spent 14 days on board the ship, and due to the care given to us are able to recover our strength. We are even able to stand on our own legs and lend a helping hand here and there.*

*Meanwhile, Captain KOILE receives orders from the Admiralty in London, to hand us over to the Military authorities in DIEGO SUAREZ.*

*We arrive there, but our stop is only a short one and the first officer and myself are separated from the rest of the crew and flown to a camp in the Highlands of Kenya. There we are amazed to meet others of our crew who had been picked up by a British destroyer after we were sunk.*

The approximate position of the sinking of CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN is some 1,000nm east of Mauritius, about 1,600nm from Madagascar and about 2,400nm from Australia. The feat of seamanship in rowing and sailing that distance without navigational aids is quite remarkable and that even two boats made it independently, even more so.

*Sam185 - March 2013*

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