

O/Tel. G.O. Sykes. P/JX. 153323.
43 Moss.
H.M.S. Ark Royal.
c/o. G.P.O. London.
14.12.39.

Dear Mum, As we have been informed that we may give an account of our movements up to our arrival at Cape Town, I'm going to have a good try at it.

When war broke out we were in the north of Scotland doing exercises, these were continued for quite a while, it mainly consisted of patrolling the North Sea between Scotland and Norway and until German aircraft shook us up we saw nothing. Early in the afternoon of September 26th we sighted three unidentified flyingboats low down on the horizon shadowing us, we immediately flew off a number of Skua fighters and /or dive bombers, these shot one sea plane down forced a second into the sea where the crew were picked up by a destroyer the third was damaged but got away as our planes had little fuel. About two hours later we heard that 81 aircraft had left Germany and were looking for the fleet. Either by design or accident three aircraft got separated and these three found us and the battlefleet. Before we knew we were sighted a British Hudson reconnaissance plane flew by was challenged and gave the correct reply a few minutes later a similar plane appeared was challenged and gave an incorrect reply this put us off and just before we opened fire the German bomber machine gunned the flight deck and regained height, she then returned amid H.E. shell burst from our guns and dropped a 1,200 lb H.E. bomb which had we not altered course would have landed on the fore end of the flight deck and would have blown our bows pretty well off, as it was it exploded in the sea about 20 yards from our port bow and the force of it lifted our bows clear of the water. Four more bombs of a smaller calibre were dropped by the aircraft all falling well clear. At the same time we were attacked the other two aircraft attacked the rest of the fleet. During the attack there were no casualties on either side. The German pilot who attacked us certainly knew his stuff as he flew outside the range of our short range armament and at too close a range for the 45° to be fully effective.

After the North Sea patrol and the air attack we turned our attention to an anti-submarine patrol down the west coast of Ireland we had one or two successes.

September 30th was spent in fuelling and storing ship to maximum capacity at a secret rendezvous we slid out late that night steaming north then west with a screen of destroyers these left us the following day and the day after we rendezvoused with the Renown about half way across the Atlantic. Then we turned South avoiding shipping routes. As soon as we came opposite the North Coast of Africa we steamed south-east and on the 11th October arrived at Freetown Sierra Leone, having sighted no land since leaving Scotland. On Friday 13th I went ashore and had a lookround bought some postcards and tried the beer which turned out to be bottled in Manchester. The following night (Saturday) we sailed and on the 18th crossed the "line" (a very short ceremony being held) going south then west on the 20th we were less than 100 miles from Pernambuco, South America returning to Freetown three days later. The following Wednesday the Crossing the Line ceremony was held and was followed by a concert in the Hangar. Three days later we left Freetown on a patrol again.

crossing the line and returning on the 6th November. On the 10th we commenced to paint ship and on the following Tuesday left in a hurry but returned two days later. The night of the 17th was spent in storing and refuelling and at 10pm on the 18th we left. Just after we crossed the line our screen of destroyers left us and of course the Renown remained with us.

Saturday 25th two of our aircraft crashed in a cloud four were saved one was killed and the other is missing. The sea burial was held in the evening. This was our second accident as a submarine shot down two aircraft with machine gunfire four were killed or missing the sub was afterwards destroyed and the crew of 45 escaped and were taken prisoners. You may remember that at about 8. pm.g.m.t. on the 2nd of Dec. the B.B.C. announced that the German ship Watussi set herself on fire to avoid capture by a British cruiser. This cruiser was in our force and was despatched to capture the German ship she found it abandoned and on fire she picked up the crew and passengers when we arrived at about 5pm local time (7. pm.g.m.t.) she was still burning and was a danger to shipping so we and the cruiser had a few practice shots at her then the Renown finished her with a 15" shell and she sank immediately that was at 5.45pm local time quarter of an hour later the B.B.C. announced it as having been sunk an hour previously.

We arrived at Cape Town the following morning. Leave was given from 1.0pm to 11pm. but I was unable to go ashore. The white ~~British~~ residents turned up in their cars and offered to take us rides etc many went and were well entertained besides travelling round the surrounding districts in cars they returned loaded with fruit and cigs having thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Whilst they were ashore we were refuelling and getting in more supplies etc. We left early the following day (4th).

We have had a pretty good time and have captured the Venhals ?spelling and caused the Adolf Woerman to scuttle herself and of course the Watussi.

I am afraid this is as far as I am allowed to tell you.--

You should receive another letter at the same time as this. The other is registered and contains 30/-

As there is nothing more I can think of I'll close

With love from

Gordon.