

Evidence of Temporary Lieut. Ralph Edmund Blows, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. - H.M.S. "MERCURY". - (Cont'd.)

66. Q. Will you describe its buoyancy?

A. The buoyancy of the float? Running half on the surface of the water. Half of the float is visible on the water.

67. Q. ~~What action was taken with the sweep wires.~~ Was any action taken with the sweep wires between the time that the obstruction was sighted in the otter and the time of the explosion?

A. No, sir.

68. Q. Was any action taken with regard to the depth charges?

A. Yes, sir. When the order to insweep was given the primers were removed.

69. Q. Why were the primers removed from the depth charges?

A. Well, we had been sweeping on a known minefield, sir, and there was a possibility that there might have been a mine as well as anything else in the otter and to take all precautions for the safeguarding of the ship I ordered the primers to be taken out.

70. Q. What books, if any do you carry on board that deal with minesweeping?

A. C.B. 1937 1935 and the opposite number Manual of Minesweeping.

(Two books, C.B. 1937 1935 and O.U. 6350 1940 handed to the witness)

71. Q. Do you recognise these two books?

A. Yes, sir.

72. Q. Will you read paragraphs 146 and 147 of O.U.6350.

A. "During the heaving in of the last 40 fathoms of sweep wire, the Sweeping Officer must be on the look-out to see that no mine is dragged in close enough to touch the ship. A mine may foul the cutter or the otter slings and if one is sighted the sweep wire should at once be veered to about 50 fathoms and the sweeper go ahead at full speed and endeavour to part the mine moorings. If this fails the sweep should be hove in slowly until the mine is at a safe distance and then the wire cut through. If, as is usually the case this results in the mine clearing the otter may be recovered by sinking by the attached line to the float and picking up from that end. The area must be re-swept for the uncut mine."

73. Q. Were you aware of those instructions?

A. Yes.

74. Q. What means had you in the ship of putting those instructions into effect?

A. We had a large axe on the Sweeping Deck.

75. Q. What was the state of the winch and the brake on the 25th December, 1940?

A. Perfect condition, sir.

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"MERCURY"

76. Q. What were your movements after the explosion?

A. I went with the Accused and the Chief Engineer below and inspected the damage.

77. Q. And what did you find?

A. We found she was making water aft, sir.

78. Q. Can you give any more details?

A. Well, sir, I think there are people better qualified than me to answer that.

(By the Deputy Judge Advocate - "You must answer the question".)

She was making water aft, sir.

79. Q. What steps were taken to save the ship?

A. Pumping operations were commenced immediately. The main steam pipe had been ~~manned~~ and the hand pump on the sweeping deck was manned and a chain bucket party commenced work. Bulkheads were shored, coal was bagged and used as stiffening

80. Q. Will you say the usual behaviour of an otter as it is being hove in to the ship during its last 50 fathoms. I would like to produce a model for the purpose of the reply. The model consists of a mark one kite otter pattern number 8711 and an oropesa float pattern number 8718. The float is attached to the towing bar of the otter and a string representing the sweep wire is attached to the towing bar as well.

A. Certainly, the otter does not move in a straight line towards the ship; it moves from side to side with the movement of the water on the planes of the otter.

81. Q. Will you explain whereabouts on this model you saw the obstruction in the otter?

A. All that we could see was a dark object, - was a blurred outline against a white background, the otter being painted white. There was something there and we could not sight it.

Cross-examined by permission of the President by the
Accused's Friend on behalf of the Accused.

82. Q. What is your experience of sighting the otter when your engines are going ahead?

A. You cannot sight it clearly, sometimes not at all, - depending on sea conditions.

83. Q. Can you say at what time sunset was on this day approximately?

A. About 1745, sir, approximately.

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"MERCURY"

By the Accused's Friend.

84. Q. Can the Commanding Officer in "MERCURY" see the Sweeping Deck from the Bridge?
- A. The aftest part of it.
- (The Deputy Judge Advocate drew attention to the fact that this question was liable to misinterpretation and that it would be better to say "Is it possible to see...etc.")
85. Q. Is it possible to see the sweeping deck from the bridge of the "MERCURY"?
- A. If you are tall enough to look over the dodger, sir. It is a high dodger.
86. Q. In what direction was the sweep wire growing when the otter was inspected by the Accused?
- A. At an angle of about 45° on the port quarter.
87. Q. In what position relative to the stern would the explosion take place?
- A. Away from the stern. Not under the stern.
88. Q. What did you consider the obstruction was?
- A. Well, it might have been anything, sir. We treated it as the worst.

(By the Deputy Judge Advocate. -

89. Q. The question was "What did you consider it was". Would you answer that question.

A. Yes, sir. I did not know.

By the Accused's Friend.

90. Q. Was anything unusual found on board the "MERCURY" after the explosion?

A. Yes, sir. A piece of mine casing about 8" square was found on the boat deck aft.

91. Q. Did you see this?

A. Yes, sir.

92. Q. Would you explain it to this Court?

A. Yes, it was a piece of mine case or casing. It had several round holes in it and some indentations also.

93. Q. In your opinion what might this indicate?

A. It was part of a mine that had been shot at by rifle fire.

Evidence of Temporary Lieut. Ralph Edmund Blows, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. - H.M.S. "~~SCAWFELL~~". - (Cont'd)
"MERCURY"

By the Accused's Friend.

- 94. Q. What did the Accused do after the explosion?
- A. Came aft, sir, and with the Chief Engineer and myself inspected the damage.
- 95. Q. Had "MERCURY" previously been subjected to any undue strain or damage likely to weaken the ship structurally, in your experience?
- A. I joined the ship three days after she was bombed on the foredeck at Portland.

By the Deputy Judge Advocate.

- 96. Q. " After she was bombed, - you weren't there at the time?
- A. No sir, but I saw the result, and for the following 8 weeks we were subject to air attack; several bombs dropped in the vicinity of the ships whilst lying in the basin. On passage to Ardrossan we had heavy weather round the Lizard in the middle of October, 1940, and when we arrived at Ardrossan she was found to be making water in the after peak. We had exploded three mines in our sweep which shook the ship during this clearance operation and were very close, - another one the previous day which exploded off the port bow.

By the Accused's Friend.

- 97. Q. After the explosion did the "SCAWFELL" come alongside you at any time?
- A. Yes, sir.

98. Q. Can you give ~~me~~ the Court any details of her coming alongside?

A. Yes, sir, She came alongside the port side and hit us a glancing blow off the starboard sponson, which smashed the gripping spar of the number three lifeboat and bent the forrard davit so that the lifeboat's bow was at boatdeck level.

99. Q. Can you tell the Court where in relation to the under water structure of the ship this blow was delivered?

A. Yes. About where the engine room bulkhead is.

~~XXXXXXXX~~ The Court adjourned at 1 o'clock.
Court re-opened at 2.15 p.m.

Witness Re-examined by Prosecutor.

100. Q. You have stated that you could not define the obstruction when you saw it in the otter. Could you see the otter clearly?

A. Not the entire otter, sir.

101. Q. Why?

A. Well there was still a ripple on the surface of the water making the object change shape from time to time.

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"MERCURY"

Re-examined by the Prosecutor.

102. Q. Can you estimate the amount of the otter that you could see?

A. No, sir.

103. Q. But you said you could see the otter.

A. I could see the white mass of the otter, sir.

104. Q. And there was an obstruction in it?

A. Between the line of my vision and the otter there was a dark object.

105. Q. Can you estimate the shape of the object?

A. No, sir.

106. Q. Not at all?

A. No, sir.

107. Q. Do you know the approximate size of the mines you were sweeping that day?

A. Yes, sir, - I think so.

108. Q. What were they?
- A. About 3'6" in length, sir, diameter about 3' I should think, sir, - very difficult to judge because they were not covered at all they were only floating.
109. Q. What is the size of an otter mark 1 pattern number 8711?
- A. About 4' square I think, sir.
110. Q. Where was the otter at this time?
- A. Which time was this, sir?
111. Q. At the time that you sighted the obstruction?
- A. Off the port quarter, sir.
112. Q. Was there anything attached to it?
- A. The sweep wires.
113. Q. Was there anything else?
- A. The float wires.

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"MERCURY"

Re-Examined by the Prosecutor.

- 114. Q. What was the state of weather during Christmas day, 1940?
A. Visibility was good. The sea was very slight. Wind moderate.
- 115. Q. The wind was?
A. Light I should say.
- 116. Q. Was the state of the sea sufficiently bad to harm the ship?
X (The Court ruled the question out as the President stated "It has already been expressed that the see was slight.")
- 117. Q. What was the effect of the explosion near the ship on the previous day?
A. Severe shock to the whole ship, sir. It was felt very severely below.
- 118. Q. Whereabouts, relative to the ship, was the explosion?
A. About 3 or 4 points off the port bow.
- 119. Q. Distance?
A. 150 to 100 yards.