

= Action of 1 November 1944 =

The Action of 1 November 1944 also known as the Ambush off Pag Island was a naval engagement in the Kvarner Gulf of the Adriatic Sea , between the islands of Pag and Lussino (present @-@ day Ložinj) on 1 November 1944 . It was fought between a British Royal Navy destroyer flotilla and a Kriegsmarine force of two corvettes and a destroyer . The German flotilla was deployed to escort a convoy retreating from Šibenik to Fiume (present @-@ day Rijeka) . The British managed to destroy all three German ships in return for no loss .

The action caused the death of more than 200 German crewmen . The attacking force rescued 90 , and an additional 20 sailors were rescued two days later by German vessels sent to search for survivors . The convoy of 19 landing craft , which was expected to be escorted by the three vessels sunk by the Royal Navy , was not intercepted and it reached its destination by 2 November .

= = Background = =

After the Italian capitulation of 8 September 1943 , following the Allied invasion of Italy , the Yugoslav Partisans captured most of the eastern Adriatic coast in the region of Dalmatia . The Germans however rushed to occupy these areas particularly the northern Adriatic ports of Trieste , Fiume (present @-@ day Rijeka) and Pula and established the Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral (German : Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland ? OZAK) , with its headquarters in Trieste on 10 September . Since an Allied landing in the area was anticipated , OZAK also hosted a substantial German military contingent including newly formed German naval units which consisted of many captured Italian warships . As result an engagement with the Royal Navy seemed to be inevitable .

In the second half of 1944 the Royal Navy sent a flotilla into the Adriatic , both to secure the area and to attack German coastal shipping . The coastal shipping became increasingly significant for the German forces deployed in the Independent State of Croatia , and especially Dalmatia ? as road and rail routes became unsafe for use because of activity of the Yugoslav Partisans . To deny that option , the Royal Navy initiated Operation Exterminate , primarily aimed at destruction of German corvettes . On 26 October , the Yugoslav Partisans informed Lieutenant Commander Morgan Morgan @-@ Giles , commander of the coastal forces in the north Adriatic , that there were two German destroyers in a cove on the south coast of the Rab Island .

= = Prelude = =

The German withdrawal from the Dalmatian cities of Zadar and Šibenik to Fiume , codenamed Operation Viking (Operation Wikinger) involved transporting troops and materiel on board two ship convoys , protected by the Kriegsmarine . The withdrawal was a consequence of imminent capture of Zadar and Šibenik by Yugoslav Partisans . The Wikinger II convoy set sail from Šibenik at 17 : 00 on 1 November . The convoy consisted of Marinefährrahm landing craft MFP 522 , MFP 554 , MFP 484 and MFP 354 , representing group " A " of the convoy , and 13 Combat engineer Landing Craft (Pionier @-@ Landungsboot) and two large Sturmboot assault landing craft , arranged into the group " B " .

In the first part of the route , the convoy was protected by the 2nd Group of the 3rd E @-@ boat Flotilla , before the escort duty was turned over to the 2nd Escort Flotilla (Geleitflotille) based in Fiume . The 3rd E @-@ boat Flotilla originally consisted of S 154 , S 156 and S 158 E @-@ boats , but during the 25 October Royal Air Force attack on Šibenik , de Havilland Mosquitos sunk S 158 and damaged S 156 , leaving only one operational E @-@ boat for the convoy duty . At the time , the only operational vessels of the 2nd Escort Flotilla were Torpedoboot Ausland destroyer TA @-@ 20 (ex @-@ Italian Urakaze @-@ class destroyer Audace) , with a crew of 113 , and U @-@ Boot Jäger corvettes UJ 202 and UJ 208 These were ex @-@ Italian Gabbiano @-@ class corvettes Melpómene and Spingarda , with crews of about 110 each , and fast minesweeper R 187 . The TA 20 was commanded by Oberleutnant zur See der Reserve (Sub @-@ Lieutenant) Heinz Guhrke ,

the UJ 202 by Oberleutnant zur See der Reserve Heinz Trautwein and UJ 208 by Oberleutnant zur See der Reserve Klaus Wenke .

The TA 21 (ex @-@ Italian destroyer Insidioso) remained in port due to problems with fuel quality . The fuel problems also caused the force to depart the port at different times . The corvettes left at 16 : 00 , R 187 sailed a half an hour later , while the TA 20 left port at 19 : 00 , with the flotilla commander Korvettenkapitän der Reserve (Lieutenant Commander) Friedrich @-@ Wilhelm Thorwest on board .

= = Action = =

Acting upon the information provided by the Yugoslav Partisans , the Royal Navy sortied two Type II Hunt @-@ class destroyers , HMS Avon Vale and HMS Wheatland , from their base at the Ist Island at 17 : 00 on 1 November . Wheatland was under command of Lieutenant Hugh Askew Corbett , while Avon Vale was under Lieutenant Ivan Hall . The destroyers were accompanied by motor torpedo boats MTB 295 , MTB 287 and MTB 274 , motor gun boats MGB 642 , MGB 638 and MGB 633 and motor launch ML494 . The destroyers were tasked with landing a team of South African coast watchers on the north tip of Rab , the MTBs with patrolling the Kvarner Gulf between Rab and Krk islands , while the rest of the force loitered southwest , near Premuda . Morgan @-@ Giles commanded the force .

The coast watchers landed at 19 : 50 , the same time the MTBs reported sighting of two enemy " destroyers " sailing south ? in fact the two corvettes . Using radar , the corvettes detected the destroyers on their port side at 20 : 15 and ordered general quarters , while UJ 202 fired two star shells . The crew of R 187 saw this as she followed the corvettes from afar . The destroyers engaged the German corvettes at 20 : 20 , at a position due west of Lun on the island of Pag , assigning a corvette each as a target . The first British salvos scored hits on the corvettes , using their 100 @-@ millimetre (3 @.@ 9 in) guns , from a distance of 3 @.@ 700 metres (4 @.@ 000 yards) . UJ 202 was hit directly by several shots , knocking out its 100 @-@ millimetre (3 @.@ 9 in) gun , a bow @-@ mounted quadruple 20 @-@ millimetre (0 @.@ 79 in) gun , and a stern @-@ mounted 37 @-@ millimetre (1 @.@ 5 in) gun . Her bridge and radio room were also hit . She continued to return fire while attempting to sail to Rab . UJ 208 was also quickly hit , and its 100 @-@ millimetre (3 @.@ 9 in) and bow @-@ mounted 20 @-@ millimetre (0 @.@ 79 in) guns were knocked out of action . Her crew managed to put out fire on her stern , but another blaze amidships blocked all communications between the forward and aft sections of the vessel . By 20 : 30 , she rolled to the port and began sinking . UJ 202 sank at 21 : 00 .

The Royal Navy force took only ten minutes to disable the corvettes . They then began to pull survivors out of the sea , but the rescue was suspended at about 22 : 30 , when the TA 20 was picked up by radar and fired upon . The first salvo hit her bridge killing all officers , and knocking out her fire @-@ control system . She sank close to Pag Island . Neither TA 20 , nor the corvettes managed to radio news of the attack .

R 187 had maintained radio silence and sailed east to evade detection . It linked up with the convoy sailing from ?ibenik at approximately 23 : 45 , and proceeded to escort it north . The combat engineer landing craft reached Kraljevica , except for two which made port in Senj due to poor weather conditions . The rest of the convoy reached Fiume on 2 November . The Royal Navy destroyers sailed back to Ist with empty magazines .

= = Aftermath = =

As weather conditions worsened , Royal Navy destroyers were only able to rescue 90 survivors from the three German ships . Before the rescue operation was suspended to engage TA 20 , Wheatland pulled out of the sea three officers and 68 seamen ? most of them crew of UJ 202 . The Kriegsmarine sortied TA 40 and TA 45 corvettes as well as S 33 and S 154 E @-@ boats to look for survivors , finding seventeen TA 20 crew members on the islet of Trstenik on 3 November . The group included seven wounded , tended by a local lighthouse crew . Besides them , the ships

rescued one UJ 202 and three UJ 208 crew members from the sea . The deteriorating weather also prevented retrieval of the coast watchers for four days . More than two hundred Germans perished in this action , including the flotilla commander and all three ship commanding officers .

Corbett was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and Hall the Distinguished Service Cross for their " bravery , resolution and skill " in the battle . All four Kriegsmarine commanders involved in the action were posthumously awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross , and Thorwest was promoted to the rank of fFregattenkapitän (Commander) .

Yugoslav Partisans captured ?ibenik and Zadar by 3 November 1944 , but the war in the Adriatic continued until April 1945 . Allied destroyers never engaged large Kriegsmarine vessels in the Adriatic after November 1944 . Dwindling German naval assets in the area resulted in limited action , while the last recorded loss was TA 45 torpedoed by Royal Navy MTBs in April . Only four Kriegsmarine ships survived to be captured or scuttled when German forces in Italy surrendered at the end of April to advancing forces of the British 8th Army .

The shipwreck of TA 20 was found by Italian wreck divers in 1999 , she lies on a part of sea floor near a commercial trawling zone , and is regularly obscured by large quantities of silt . The two corvettes were located in 2000 . Since divers who found them could not identify them as UJ 202 or UJ 208 specifically , they became known as the " northern " and the " southern " corvette . The northern corvette rests on her keel , with her bow pointing to Rab and her stern partially destroyed , either from hostile fire or secondary explosions from her own depth charges . The divers ' description of the wreck indicates that she is UJ 202 . The southern corvette lies on her starboard side covered in silt . Several depth charges are still found on her stern in Gatteschi @-@ type racks indicating that the southern corvette is the wreck of UJ 208 . The three shipwrecks are a part of " the Ghost Fleet of Pag " (Croatian : Sablasna pa?ka flota) together with the wrecks of HMS Aldenham , and Austro @-@ Hungarian steamships SS Albanien and SS Euterpe .