

They were well lit up by the flames and steering southwards in single line ahead. All my guns fired on the middle one and then the last one, and fires were started on both. All three were seen to be engaged by H.M.M.T.B.s 637 and 638. Astern of the southgoing F-lighters, what looked like an E-boat, bows on to us, appeared. This was engaged by the port .5-inch turret and was seen by me to explode and disappear.

On rejoining, the flak-lighter of the northbound group was seen to sink in a cloud of smoke and steam, half-a-mile to seaward of the engagement and all the remaining F-lighters appear to have been driven south by H.M.M.G.B.662."

H.M.M.T.B.637's Narrative.

22. H.M.M.T.B.637 says—"At 2306, the enemy opened fire and H.M.M.T.B.634 altered course to port to attack with torpedoes. The Senior Officer and H.M.M.T.B.634 were engaging targets unseen by us, but fires could be seen breaking out. My pom-pom gunner was engaging a northbound F-lighter, but as H.M.M.T.B.638 was on the port beam, no other guns could fire. (This was due to the fact that I was manoeuvring to keep station on H.M.M.T.B.634's gun flashes.) However, in a few seconds I opened fire with all guns on a target which was headed northwards. It was bows on to another burning F-lighter. The range of the target was about seventy-five yards and every detail of the vessel was discerned. At this range none of our guns could miss. She immediately caught fire. The after superstructure of this vessel resembled Wembley Stadium on a dark night, except for the Nazi flag. The gunners reduced it to a blazing wreck, and another large target seen abeam of this blaze was being engaged by H.M.M.T.B.638 with accurate fire.

At 2317 two large objects were observed on the port beam and turned out to be upturned vessels."

H.M.M.T.B.638's Narrative.

23. H.M.M.T.B.638 says—"At 2305 the Senior Officer signalled enemy ahead. They were invisible to us at this moment. The boats ahead opened fire. My pom-pom illuminated with starshell as previously arranged. An F-lighter was set on fire, fine on my port bow and this illuminated two F-lighters, a Pi-L Boat and an E-boat on my port beam, steering southwards. We sank the Pi-L Boat with Oerlikon and concentrated on an F-lighter at two hundred yards. Shells could be seen ripping open her side. This target was left burning fiercely, and fire was directed on another F-lighter which was hit with all guns and set on fire. An E-boat appeared on the starboard quarter, and was hit with Oerlikon. We sustained one 20-m.m. hit in this engagement."

24. At 2314 the situation was resolving itself and a sweep was carried out round to the west and south to discourage any of the enemy from returning to Zara. An active F-lighter could be seen to seaward of the scene of the action, steering south, but he turned inshore, and I was confident that we would easily find him again: I somehow felt that none of the enemy would try and push any further north, and was mostly concerned with the southern flank.

25. At 2346, when about one mile from Vir light, an F-lighter was seen close inshore; it turned over and submerged, and was thought to be the one that had been damaged by H.M.M.G.B.662's six-pounder. There was another possible small target here also, but I was looking for the other F-lighters and decided not to investigate. It was probably a wreck anyhow.

26. At 2353, targets were sighted at Green 20°,* and H.M.M.T.B.637 was ordered to illuminate with starshell. This was done well, and H.M.M.G.B.662 opened fire with all guns on an F-lighter and a Pi-L Boat or E-boat lying close inshore, near Vir Point. The F-lighter was seen to sink; the smaller craft was also hit. The enemy now opened heavy fire from a position abaft the beam, almost certainly one or more F-lighters lying very close to the beach, well north of Vir light and completely invisible. All boats returned fire at the flashes, and some damage may have been inflicted, as the enemy craft ceased fire until we were going away to the northward, when they fired vigorously at nothing to the south-west.

27. It was thus decided to go away and lie off until the moon got up, and the light improved, and then come back and torpedo the remaining enemy. This entailed some risk of losing the enemy if he crept close to the coast, but I decided to place complete confidence and reliance in my radar set and its experienced operator, and to lie off, stopped at about four thousand yards. I felt certain that we should be able to pick up any F-lighters that tried to move, but had to admit that if a Pi-L Boat wanted to get away—well then it could; but I did not want to risk losing any boats by taking them into a dark coast with a belligerent group of well-armed vessels lying on the beach, when there was a big improvement of visibility due in two hours' time.

Various echoes were plotted during the next two hours but they turned out to be ghost or aircraft echoes in the centre of the channel.

28. It was now planned to approach the coast just north of Vir light in very broad single line abreast to starboard, on a north-easterly course with torpedoes ready for immediate firing. H.M.M.G.B.662 was to illuminate the coast line with starshell, and the first M.T.B. to sight an F-lighter was to fire torpedoes and say so at once on the inter-communication; no other M.T.B. was to fire torpedoes until the result of the first attack was observed. By spreading out the unit, danger from enemy fire was reduced and perfect inter-communication ensured that good control could be maintained.

It is at this point worth noting that during the waiting period there were several little explosions from two positions on the coast between Vir Point and Vir light.

29. At 0151 the moon was giving moderate light and it was decided to carry out the third attack of the night. All went according to plan until 0221 when H.M.M.G.B.662 opened fire with starshell. Then the first hitch occurred, in that under the light of the shells that did

Admiralty footnote:

* Green 20°—20 degrees from right ahead on the starboard side.