

tion of any action by DORSETSHIRE to stop scuttling and capture the enemy ship.

Action taken by Enemy to Abandon Ship and Scuttle.

13. Within a further three minutes, i.e. at 1730, the enemy turned to starboard, stopped and commenced to lower boats. I decided to withhold fire and continued zig-zagging at high speed outside his gun and torpedo range, while within ours. In this I had in mind the possibility that the enemy was a Raider, with British merchant seamen on board, and that he should be allowed sufficient time in which to get the boats clear and thus save the unnecessary loss of British lives.

14. At 1744, by which time DORSETSHIRE had crossed the enemy's bows, the boats were seen to be moving away from the ship, which had a definite list to port. Range of enemy 8-9 miles. A faint flashing light was seen from her bridge, which was impossible to read.

15. At 1751 smoke commenced pouring from the bridge and foredeck, indicating she had been set on fire. This fire took hold rapidly, flames reaching the height of the funnel, with occasional minor explosions probably caused by ammunition. By 1805 she was heavily on fire when a large explosion in the forepart of the ship settled the business, and she sank at 1821 leaving only a trail of smoke behind and a number of survivors in boats.

Action taken by DORSETSHIRE Subsequent to Scuttling.

16. When at 1805 it was evident that the self-destruction of the enemy was certain, I altered DORSETSHIRE'S course to one at right angles to the enemy's line of advance so as to clear the area as soon as possible and recover our aircraft. This was effected at 1910, and the aircraft refuelled and flown off again at 1930 to make a further reconnaissance of the area of the boats.

Reports from Aircraft.

17. Observation by the aircraft was not easy as the light was failing, but it was definitely established that there were fourteen boats, one large raft painted white, and one large raft painted red in the position where the ship had gone down. It was estimated that each boat contained between 25 to 30 survivors at least, plus those on the raft painted white. The raft painted red had a five foot staff with a red ball on it, and was being used either as a sea-anchor or a rallying point for the other boats which were clustered around it.

18. As the aircraft circled the boats at a height of between 400 and 500 feet no demonstration was made or action taken, neither were any survivors seen in the water.

19. The aircraft proceeded to examine the second lot of boats, which had been first sighted by the ship at 1708. These were closing the scene of the survivors' boats—distant by now, four to five miles—and consisted of one large power boat (possibly two) with two tows of two cutters each. These boats were fully loaded with what appeared to be packages and crates, and manned by about three men in each. It is considered that they were actually transferring these stores to a U-Boat,

or about to do so, at the time of "first sighting", as the enemy could not have had time to hoist them out between 1653 and 1708, and remain steaming at the speed she did. No U-Boat however, was sighted by the aircraft.

Other Observations.

20. Enemy did not fire on DORSETSHIRE and no torpedo tracks were observed. The smoke screen attempted—if it was intended as such—was a poor effort, and supports the supposition that it was a signal and not a smoke screen. In any case, at 18,000 yards or more, she would have had little chance of doing DORSETSHIRE much damage, before she herself was out of action with heavy casualties, while there remained two hours of daylight. My own opinion is that the enemy was relying on U-Boat protection, and with the large number of men on board decided to abandon ship at the first opportunity, hoping DORSETSHIRE would close to pick up survivors, when perhaps an opportunity for attack by U-Boat would present itself.

21. The efficiency and speed with which she abandoned ship shows that this evolution must have been practised frequently, as must also have been the arrangements for scuttling and setting fire to the ship.

22. The large number of survivors—estimated by aircraft to be about 500—is significant. If she was a Raider this would account for British merchant seamen prisoners, otherwise the only explanation offered is that they were spare crews for U-Boats.

Final Remarks.

23. Now that U-Boats are known to be operating in the South Atlantic as far south as 30 degrees, in company with Supply Ships and Raiders, the problem of dealing with them hinges almost entirely on one of identification. In this case the enemy, by definitely acting in a suspicious manner, helped us to solve the problem and take action accordingly but there are many cases where the contrary is the case.

British and Allied merchant ships, independently routed, are frequently met at sea often hundreds of miles from the position where they ought to be on the plot. Their identity can only be established by signalling, which is extremely difficult outside a range of 8 miles. In these circumstances the temptation to close to signalling distance (5 miles or less) is very great, especially if the course of the vessel to be identified is in the opposite direction to that on which the cruiser wishes to advance, and the more so if daylight is running short. A more detailed memorandum on this matter is being forwarded as a separate submission.

24. Although this encounter did not fulfil our expected desire of an action with the enemy, its successful result is, I submit, due primarily to your initial dispositions and orders.

After spending over a hundred days at sea during the last four months, mostly on this particular kind of operation, it is at least some satisfaction to the officers and ship's company that at last a "dividend" has been earned, and both your signal, and that made by the Admiralty of "Well done" is much appreciated.

(Signed) A. W. S. AGAR,
Captain, R N.,
Commanding Officer.