

14. At 1730, a conference was held with the local authorities and it was decided to repeat the previous night's patrol, with the additional proviso that if any shipping at all was sighted near Ist, a pre-arranged pyrotechnic signal would be made from the Partisan look-out post.

Having thus secured the rear, the unit proceeded to Vir at 1825.

15. It had been decided that the big demonstration put up by the enemy the previous night (which included torpedoes fired by E-boats at Mulat breakwater) was aimed at eliminating some "tigers" and/or M.G.B.s and that it was probable he would try and run a big convoy north this night. Hence the unit closed Vir Island and was disposed along the coast to meet a northbound convoy.

16. Some flares were seen to the southwards, and there were lights and flickerings in the sky over Nin—all appeared to be set. At 2215 some vertical tracer was seen off Zara.

At about 2220 H.M.M.T.B.634's starboard outer engine pushed a conrod through the crank case and most of the engine-room crew were overcome by fumes.

At about 2245 all the boats started rolling, as if a lot of ships had passed by to seawards, so at 2300 the unit proceeded northwards, a guess that eventually proved correct.

17. The visibility was now very low, due to widely scattered low cloud, but I was not prepared for the shock of suddenly seeing enemy ships on the port bow, at about four hundred yards' range.

The unit was at once stopped and the boats headed into the shore just north of Vir light. The targets were now seen to be four F-lighters, of which one was altering course towards us: he appeared to be higher out of the water than the others and was possibly an escorting flak lighter: he had probably sighted one or more of the unit and was closing to drive us off.

18. H.M.M.T.B.634 was ordered to try and carry out a snap torpedo attack on this target, whilst H.M.M.G.B.662 ordered "single line ahead, speed 8 knots", and went ahead in order to engage the remainder by gunfire.

The flak boat opened fire on H.M.M.G.B.662 at 2306, at once killing one of the pom-pom loading numbers. Fire was returned from all guns and H.M.M.T.B.638 illuminated with starshell.

19. It is scarcely possible to describe the next ten minutes. The visibility was such that the leading boat in the line had a completely different picture from the fourth boat, and the slight offshore breeze was blowing the smoke from H.M.M.G.B.662's gunfire across the line of sight of our ships and the enemy convoy, which was, of course, much more of an advantage to us than them as we had the inshore position and knew where to expect them, while the only ship that they could see was H.M.M.G.B.662. But it will, in fact, be easier to give the impressions of each boat during this phase of the action and try to paint the picture that each one saw, than to give a coherent account of what the unit did.

H.M.M.G.B.662's Narrative.

20. H.M.M.G.B.662 had drawn ahead of H.M.M.T.B.634, who had manoeuvred for a torpedo attack, and was engaging many targets on the port side, including F-lighters, Pi-L Boats* and E-boats. Very heavy 88-m.m. and 20-m.m. was coming our way, all high, from a variety of enemy vessels and this fire had a strong blinding effect on my bridge. Nevertheless, I saw a Pi-L Boat hit by the 6-pounder and blow up, starting a petrol fire on the surface of the water.

In the light of H.M.M.T.B.638's starshell ahead, I saw F-lighters being hit by my pom-pom and Oerlikon. I saw an E-boat in the light of the petrol fire hit, set alight and blow up—a victory achieved by the bridge .303-inch Vickers, and on the port quarter I witnessed an inspiring display of 6-pounder gunnery. An F-lighter, at about four hundred yards, was steering away from us, unilluminated and almost invisible, even through binoculars, yet the 6-pounder fired nearly thirty rounds that scored hits in about a minute. The 6-pounder also hit and sank a Pi-L Boat with an inert cargo.

Meanwhile, H.M.M.G.B.662 had crossed the northern end of the convoys and was lying stopped, waiting for the other boats to rejoin, and trying to ensure that no enemy got away.

It had been intended to work round to the west of the enemy immediately and engage them against the fires of their burning vessels, but this was not possible until all the boats had come round.

Everywhere on the port side there were burning ships and explosions. There were visible many more ships than the original four F-lighters. The sight was fantastic.

H.M.M.T.B.634's Narrative.

21. H.M.M.T.B.634 says—"The Senior Officer signalled single line ahead speed 8 knots and opened fire on the enemy, which now appeared clearly as four F-lighters, three of which were stopped or proceeding slowly northwards in single port cruising line. One was closing. I prepared to attack the flak-lighter with torpedoes, but the range had closed to one hundred yards by the time the sight was on and I decided that it was too close, so I altered back to starboard, and opened up with all guns on the flak-lighter who was firing at H.M.M.G.B.662. As I turned, less than fifty yards from the flak-lighter, H.M.M.T.B.634 was hit in the port pom-pom ready use locker which exploded and went up in flames. The fire was promptly extinguished. All our guns continued to pour an intense fire into the flak-lighter which burst into flames from stem to stern, by the light of which every detail of her could be discerned. She appeared to have an 88-m.m. amidships, a quadruple 20-m.m. aft and many 20-m.m. in sponsons down the starboard side. Her bridge collapsed and she appeared to be breaking in two. I steered parallel to the enemy who was turning slowly to port, at less than forty yards. Then another F-lighter, followed by two more, appeared very close to seaward of the burning flak-lighter.

Admiralty footnote:

* Pi-L boats—Pioneer Landing Craft.