

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 2nd February, 1944 by Rear Admiral C. B. Barry, D.S.O., Admiral (Submarines). 2nd February, 1944.

With reference to my submission of 8th November, 1943, be pleased to lay before the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty the following further report on operations by X-craft against the German main units (Operation "Source").

2. It is now possible to reconstruct the attacks carried out by His Majesty's midget submarines on the battleship TIRPITZ on 22nd September, 1943, and to make some assessment of the damage sustained by this ship as the result of the attacks.

3. Three X-craft, X.5 (Lieutenant H. Henty-Creer, R.N.V.R.), X.6 (Lieutenant D. Cameron, R.N.R.), and X.7 (Lieutenant B. C. G. Place, D.S.C., R.N.), failed to return as a result of the operation, and, while it was known that one or more of these craft succeeded in carrying out a successful attack on TIRPITZ, at the time of my previous report no information was available as to which of the craft had succeeded in this daring attack, nor were there details of how it was accomplished.

4. It was the intention of each of the three Commanding Officers, all of whom had TIRPITZ as their target, to close the entrance to Kaafiord at first light on the morning of the 22nd September, having fully charged up their batteries during the night. Having negotiated the A/S* net at the entrance to Kaafiord they would then attack TIRPITZ by passing under the A/T† nets surrounding her, drop their charges set to detonate at approximately 0830 G.M.T., and then retire to seaward, hoping to be well clear of the fiord by the time of the explosion.

5. P.R.U. photographs had shown that the close A/T nets around TIRPITZ consisted of three lines of nets. The flotation indicated that the nets were for anti-torpedo protection, and it was considered unlikely that they would reach the bottom in the depth of water, twenty fathoms. In fact it was estimated they would only extend downwards about fifty feet.

6. The following is a reconstruction of the movements of these three X-craft in their attacks, as far as is known at present.

X 6 (Lieutenant D. Cameron, R.N.R.)

7. At some time unknown the periscope of X.6 became flooded. The Commanding Officer was therefore completely "blind" with no means of conning his craft when dived.

Having negotiated the A/S net at the entrance to Kaafiord and entered the fleet anchorage, Lieutenant Cameron, with a complete disregard for danger, proceeded on the surface in broad daylight astern of a small coaster through the boat gate entrance in the nets, situated only two hundred yards away from TIRPITZ.

After passing safely through the entrance on the surface, X 6 dived, and steering straight for TIRPITZ, proceeded to attack.

8. X.6 had, however, been sighted from TIRPITZ off the port bow, as Lieutenant

Cameron must have realised that he would be. The time of sighting is reported as 0800 G.M.T. The alarm was raised, and hand grenades thrown at him from the deck of TIRPITZ, and a pinnace started to drop depth charges.

9. Lieutenant Cameron continued to carry out his attack, and on passing under the bridge of TIRPITZ, he probably released one charge. Having passed under the ship, X 6 failed to turn to starboard in time and ran into the nets on the starboard side of TIRPITZ before he could carry out the second run of the attack.

Finding himself foul of the nets Cameron was obliged to go astern to clear himself, and in so doing went astern into TIRPITZ.

10. Lieutenant Cameron, realising that he had been sighted, released his second charge, and surfaced his ship almost alongside the TIRPITZ. Cameron then saw all his crew safely out of the craft before scuttling her.

Lieutenant Cameron and the crew of X.6 (Sub-Lieutenant J. T. Lorimer, R.N.V.R., Sub-Lieutenant R. H. Kendall, R.N.V.R., E.R.A.4 E. Goddard, C/MX 89069) were picked up and taken on board, the time being then approximately 0805.

X.7 (Lieutenant B. C. G. Place, D.S.C., R.N.)

11. In the meantime X.7 had also attacked. Proceeding according to plan, X.7 penetrated safely past the A/S nets at the entrance to the fiord, and Lieutenant Place decided to attack by passing under the close A/T nets.

Here he met unexpected difficulties, for instead of the expected gap under the nets he found that they extended to 120 feet, which, with a depth of water of only twenty fathoms, meant that the nets were almost, if not quite, down to the bottom.

Lieutenant Place was not to be deterred, and at the third attempt he managed to worm X.7 along the bottom under the nets to carry out a successful attack, dropping one charge under the funnel and one under the after turret.

12. In negotiating the A/T nets he was able to ascertain its details which were fine wire 4" mesh—a most formidable type of A/T net.

13. Having completed the attack undetected, Place was then faced with the difficulty of getting through under the nets again to make his escape. To add to his difficulties the tide was by then ebbing, which meant that the nets would be even nearer to the bottom than before.

Once again X 7 found herself foul of the nets; and as they were only 170 feet from TIRPITZ and from the line on which the charges had been laid, and with the time for the explosion drawing nearer every minute, the feelings of those on board while they were struggling to extricate themselves may well be imagined.

As it was, X 7 cleared the nets with only a few minutes to spare, as at 0830, when the explosion took place, X 7 was only some 400 yards to seaward of the nets.

Even at this distance the force of the explosion so damaged X.7 that she was put out of action, and Lieutenant Place decided to remain on the bottom for the next hour and await events.

Around about 0930, when depth charges were being dropped indiscriminately about the fiord, although they did no damage to the craft, Lieutenant Place realised that owing to damage

Admiralty footnotes—

* A/S—anti-submarine

† A/T—anti-torpedo