

ENCLOSURE 2 TO F.O.C. DOVER'S LETTER.

FROM ... Senior Officer, 9th M.T.B. Flotilla.

DATE ... 27th September, 1943.

To ... Senior Officer, H.M.M.T.B.s,
Dover.

I have the honour to submit the following report of the action on the night of 26th/27th September off Point du Haut Banc between a combined Motor Torpedo Boat and Motor Gun Boat force and an escorted enemy convoy.

Own Forces.

2. Force A, M.T.B.s 202 (S.O.), 204 and 231, and Force B, M.G.B.s 108 (S.O.), 118 and 117. S.O. Force A was in command of the combined forces.

Object.

3. To intercept and destroy northbound convoy which was expected to be on passage from Le Havre.

Weather Conditions.

4. Visibility moderate to westward, poor to eastward, due to clouds and land giving no horizon; sea moderate; swell short; wind N.W. force 4*; squally.

Narrative.

5. Forces A and B slipped at 2325/26th and proceeded in accordance with Vice-Admiral, Dover's signal timed 1545 on 25th September (copy attached). AA buoy was passed at 0046 and course was set through swept channel until Point du Haut Banc was bearing east, when course was altered to east. When forces were 9 miles east of Point du Haut Banc, radar was switched on and M.T.B.s came in single starboard cruising line. M.G.B.s were in single port cruising line. This formation is always used when approaching patrol line as no signalling is allowed by me unless in emergency, and speed can be reduced or increased without danger of collision.

6. Forces stopped in position Point du Haut Banc 5 miles at 0202 and engines were cut. Position was checked with bearings from Etaples and Point du Haut Banc lights and constant radar watch was kept. As the horizon to the westward was far better than to the eastward and it was suspected that northbound convoys used the inshore route, I decided at 0245 to move $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles more inshore, where forces stopped and cut engines at 0251. Although the weather was too bad for proper use of hydrophone, watch was kept as well as with radar. A faint "ping" noise was heard in the hydrophone and at 0307 a faint propeller effect was obtained through the interference. By this time the radar as well was giving echoes and "hydrophone up" was ordered. The ship was rolling too much to use the radar echoes for plotting the enemy movements accurately.

7. Enemy was sighted at 0308 when clear of a low dark cloud obscuring the horizon. Immediately after the first radar echoes were obtained fast signalling with a blue light was seen on the same bearing as given by radar and hydrophone, being south 20 degs. west, thus confirming by visual contact the

technical ones. As it could be seen that under the present circumstances the enemy would be passing too close to the seaward of us, I ordered both forces to start up at 0309, and proceeded on course north-east to get more inshore. I steered north-east and not east so as to prevent showing more silhouette than was necessary. Speed at first 12 knots and later increased to 20 knots for reasons of wash. The enemy was expected to do 9 knots. Enemy was kept in radar touch all the time.

8. At 0317 forces were stopped in position 290 degs. Point du Haut Banc 1.8 miles and the ships' heads kept pointing in the direction of the enemy to keep the silhouette small.

At 0319 the enemy was sighted again in the form of several still, small, dark shapes.

9. At 0320 several starshells exploded dead above us. Immediately afterwards a most violent battle started in the direction of the enemy. Radar gave a range of 2,000 yards to the enemy. I ordered the forces to start up and proceeded on course north-west, speed 36 knots, in order to get to the seaward of the enemy forces and the shore batteries. An attack under these circumstances was out of the question. It could not be observed where the starshells were coming from. No small arms fire was directed at us except some stray bullets. Shell fire, however, was experienced. At 0323 speed was reduced to 22 knots so as not to damage the engines. Boats were bumping heavily against the swell.

10. In the light of the starshells the bows and bow waves of nine E or R-boats* forming a screen ahead of the convoy could be seen in line abreast, six of which seemed to be pointing in our direction, giving the impression of being in pursuit of us. No fire from these ships however seemed to be directed at us. The whole situation was rather puzzling.

11. When the enemy convoy was south of us the gunboats on our starboard quarter swung into attack to create a diversion, passing astern of the M.T.B.s to the south-west, in accordance with plans discussed previously. When the M.T.B.s had cleared the light arc of the starshells and I considered that the gunboats had attracted the attention of the enemy effectively, course was altered to the north and later to the north-east, speed 30 knots, and east at 0328. Speed varied between 30 knots and 18 knots as convenient. Radar touch was kept all the time. Force was stopped at 0337 in position 350 degs. Point du Haut Banc 4.2 miles, when range was 4,500 yards and M.T.B.s were well inshore of the enemy route.

12. When the inshore position was reached, Force B was ordered to attack from the seaward. By the time, however, Force A attacked, no diversion from seaward took place. When the enemy came up north the M.T.B.s slowly closed in, keeping well out of sight of the screen ahead. The enemy, however, silhouetted against a fairly light horizon, could be observed with ease from about 1,800 yards. As soon as the screen ahead of the convoy passed, the M.T.B.s increased speed to between 8 and 12 knots, closing in to about 1,400 yards.

Admiralty footnote:

* Wind force 4—moderate breeze (11-15 m.p.h.).

Admiralty footnote:

* R-boats—motor launches.