

THE SINKING OF HMS WARWICK 20 February 1944

(From Lt Commander Henry Lehmann, then a Petty Officer on HMS Wensleydale) "On the 20th February 1944 HMS Wensleydale was Senior Officer of a convoy escort with two armed trawlers. was steaming towards Lundy Island. off Trevoze Head. The speed of advance was 3 to 4 knots. A 'W' class destroyer steamed towards us on an opposite course. It was about midday and I was enjoying my pipe standing on the port side by the after '5 mounting. We passed each other about 100 yards distance and waved to each other. When we were about 500 yards apart I saw a small mushroom of smoke on the starboard quarter of the 'W' class destroyer and then in seconds heard a muffled explosion; the stern broke off and immediately passed down the starboard side of the stricken ship as she slowed down and began to settle by the stern; the props were still turning in the air. Men began to dive overboard. I moved further aft and stood against the stern guard rail, I thought the destroyer had been mined. At that moment the klaxon sounded for action stations. As I turned to run down the starboard side of the upper deck - out of the corner of my eye I saw a very indistinct track of something coming towards our stern. The Wensleydale had begun to turn port. The track missed our stern by about 10 yards as we began to increase speed. Wensleydale made contact with a U Boat and delivered a depth charge attack, it was unsuccessful. Wensleydale was ordered to stay with her convoy and not to stop to pick up survivors. I can still see them in the sea as we steamed through them to make our attack. Just like the story by Monserrat 'The Cruel Sea'. So we returned to our duties. All the Chief Petty Officers and Petty Officers except the Petty Officer Steward, sixteen of us, messed together in the after part of the ship. I cannot recall that anyone of us discussed the sinking of H.M.S. "Warwick", or that we had left our comrades in the sea. It seems callous but we knew the same could happen to us" Petty Officer and Radar Mechanic Robert Benson was having a peaceful Sunday lunch. At about 11.55 there was an enormous explosion. "We all rushed up on deck to see the Warwick with its bows just sticking up from the water"

Birmingham youth, Ernie Moseley was celebrating his 19th birthday, and not allowed to draw his tot of rum until he was 20. Ere you are Brum, take that up to leading seaman Coalville (Belfast man) in the director tower. "We was in convoy and I noticed this destroyer off starboard bow, and I got this tot of rum and as I got to the top of the ladder, I shouted hookey, cos it was illegal taking tots round, you were supposed drink it when it was issued by the rum bosun. As I said here's your tot they was this almighty explosion on the starboard quarter and this ship went up in the air. You just sort of kick into action. Action stations went and the tot went straight in the air. I ran for my tin hat and collided with another bloke coming out of the forward mess deck, as I was going in. I saw stars, but you didn't worry about that when the bell was going. I got to my Action Station and said what's up Jock. He said, it's the Warwick. Anyway, we settled down later on for the grub. All of us around a confined space and Coalville got up and it all went quite. He shouted "WHERE'S MY TOT" and all the heads looked at me. I said "I

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dropped it" He shouted "YOU WHAT" "WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T LET HIM GET HOLD OF MY TOT AGAIN".

EXTRACT FROM THE CORNISH GUARDIAN THURSDAY MARCH 8th 1984
THE DAY A WARSHIP WAS SUNK OFF PADSTOW
By Lieut. Cmdr. David Harries (RN Retd)

It was a wintry morning off the north Cornish coast in February 1944 and out beyond Trevoze Head a cold wind was blowing from the south west. Two Destroyers HMS Scimitar and HMS Warwick are on patrol. HMS Warwick fought with the famous Dover Patrol and was Admiral Lord Keyes flagship at the raid on Zeebrugge in the First World War. Now she has spent over 3 years in the battle of the Atlantic.

On shore at St. Merryn Fleet Air Arm Station duty air crew are on standby and in a matter of minutes as a result of a distress signal, they will be air borne heading out to sea - the radio call that set them running for their aircraft is the last wireless signal that one particular naval telegraphist will ever make.

In Newquay people are going about their familiar wartime routine. The congregation at St. Merryn Parish Church is filing up to the communion rail - but before the blessing at the end of the service is pronounced one of the destroyers will have been sunk with heavy casualties.

The time is 11.40 AM and the date is Sunday, February 20, 1944. For the previous two days the "enemy below " has been lying in wait on the seabed off Newquay and now the German submarine U413 is moving stealthily into an attacking position.

Ten minutes earlier, her captain, Kapitan Leutnant Gustav Poel had sighted the two British Warships and had brought the larger of them, HMS Warwick into the centre crosswires of his periscope sight, at the same time ordering the forward torpedo tubes to be brought to the ready. These house the very latest German acoustic torpedo which, once fired, will automatically steer itself on to the noise of a ships propeller.

The time is now 11.41 and in HMS Warwick the ships doctor, Surgeon Lieut. Lindsay Sandes, a South African from Cape town, and the Royal navy coder King are busily decoding a secret message - but they both have less than three minutes to live.

At 11.42 Kapitan Leutnant Poel fires his torpedo and it starts its sinister voyage of destruction towards the warship. In her messdecks the ship's company are getting ready for their midday meal - they will never start it and many of them will shortly be trapped inside her sinking hull

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On the bridge are three people. one is her commanding officer Cmdr. Denis Rayner, DSC, RNVR - he has another 25 years to live. With him is Sub lieut. Peter Whinny, recently married - he has less than an hour to live. The third is the navigating officer - I am still here today to remember it all and to write of the last minutes of those who are about to die.

It is now 11.43 and the Petty Officer Telegraphist William Porter is pulling open the sliding door of his W/T Office, prior to going down to his mess - he never gets there because at exactly at 11,44 am the torpedo explodes against the hull just by the starboard propeller.

There follows a searing flame and a second but much more violent explosion as the after four-inch ammunition magazine and all the fuel tanks blow up.

William Porter, a very brave man and in the finest traditions of the Royal Navy, steps back into his wireless office and calmly starts to send out the distress call which is to alert the aircrew at St. Merryn Fleet Air Arm station.

He sits at the morse key tapping out the message. As he does so the stricken ship starts to roll quickly over to port and the door of his office slides shut, its slowly distorting frame jamming it tightly closed. Perhaps it is still closed today with its solitary occupant.

It is 11.46 am and in accordance with Naval Emergency Instructions the Navigating Officer destroys the secret charts he had been using that morning and, with his captain slides down the ship's side into the chilling water and begins swimming away from the foc'sle that is towering vertically above, before it sucks them both down with it.

Seconds later and only three minutes after she was hit, at 11.47 am, HMS Warwick is gone. An ominous silence settles over where she has gone down but slowly another deadly enemy starts to take its toll of those who are swimming for their lives - thick black oil fuel from her shattered tanks rises to the surface and finds its way into eyes, ears and mouths making it hard to distinguish the living from the dead.

HMS Scimitar came into the rescue and the Fleet Air Arm aircraft are soon on the scene, dropping self-inflating liferafts. A fishing vessel called the "Christopher Columbus" was close by and the Belgian fishermen that manned her risked their own lives by jumping over her side to rescue survivors who, having by now been swimming for nearly three -quarters of an hour, were reaching the end of their endurance of surviving in such cold seas.

By 1 PM when no more could be found the journey to Padstow was began and where, in the early afternoon, local people came down to the harbour to help us

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up the stone steps in the wall there. I am told that we were first taken to a local school hall, but of this I can remember nothing.

That night we were looked after by the Fleet Air Arm at St. Merryn but not all lived to see the next day - six more died during Sunday night. They were Petty Officer H. Ford, J.L.Bell, J.C.R.Tower, C.G.Chappel, W.K.Morgan and F.S.Young, and they are still at Padstow buried in the little War Graves Cemetery St. Merryn Church. Nearly half of those onboard were killed and their names are inscribed on the Naval War Memorial on Plymouth Hoe.

Exactly six months later to the day - Sunday August 20th 1944 - at midday whilst patrolling in the English Channel, HMS Wensleydale, HMS Forester and HMS Vidette were hunting a U Boat and before the day is out they destroy it. Six months earlier, when Kapitan Leutnant Gustav Poel watched HMS Warwick being torn apart by his torpedoes, he was not to know that his U Boat and nearly all of his crew had only 120 days to live.

HMS Warwick had been sunk by an acoustic torpedo fired by U-413, captained by Lt Gustav Poel. The sub had sailed from Brest with orders to inflict damage on shipping traffic in and out of Bristol. "I remember that day under the coast of Cornwall in the neighbourhood of Trevoise Head. I had been there with the boat U-413 for several days but owing to the changing of your convoy routes I had no opportunity of making an attack. As I was surrounded by a screen of steam fishing vessels and fishing fleets the stay there gave me the chance of surfacing at night to charge my batteries and freshen up the air in my boat. Early on the morning of 20th February I went into the area of Trevoise Head in the hope of meeting up with Co southbound convoy. Unfortunately for me this convoy also took a course outside my range, however. I ascertained the presence of two Protecting Destroyers, HMS Warwick and HMS Scimitar without knowing the actual names at the time, merely recognising the type of vessel. The Warwick was apparently searching for a U-boat by means of his asdic, without any success. This was because in the area in question different layers of water and currents changed the density causing a layer of water, which affected the asdic by giving false echoes. As I kept the narrow part of my silhouette towards the Warwick, I was able to escape despite the close proximity of my vessel. After Warwick had turned away and steamed off at moderate speed I came into an attacking position. I waited, however, until Warwick had settled down to a constant course when I found myself a position to attack from astern and fired two torpedoes, which turned on opposing courses one running off. Only one of the torpedoes found its target and hit abreast of the funnel. It is possible that the blowing up of the boiler caused the second explosion on Warwick because the second torpedo missed altogether. I immediately withdrew well back and laid still while Scimitar searched further south for my boat his search was fruitless and I was able to observe his efforts. A little time after the explosion the first of the trawlers came on the scene apparently to pick up the crew, while aircraft appeared also. Thus I was unable to remain at periscope depth any longer and

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after the sinking of Warwick I retired submerged. I had a difficult time during the next four days as a constant air reconnaissance made it impossible to surface and I was obliged to submerge. After two more days I was able to take advantage of a severe thunderstorm to charge my batteries and freshen the air in the boat. Two days more after this I was able to escape from the danger zone." (letter from Gustav Poel, former Captain of U-413)

"We sighted a convoy and decided to attack. After a while we became aware of some ships right around us. After listening to their radio messages we realized to our horror that these ships were not a convoy, but a search group of 3 destroyers. To this day, I can still remember their call signs, they were, PROGRAMME, PILGRIM and STANLEY. Despite the great danger we were in, the commander decided to attack, the result of which was that one of them was sunk. U-413 moved away from the area as quietly as possible. We then decided



to return to the position which we had sunk the first ship and here we detected a very strong smell of oil. In a radio conversation which I will never forget, I overheard the remark "I have picked up 29". After this we were recognized and attacked, we fired a torpedo and then dived to the seabed. The sounds we made as we dived and those from the attack above I can still recall today" (extracted from a letter from Karl Hutterer (ex U-413 chief engineer to David Harries, ex Navigator of HMS Warwick 3.6.85)

LEFT: The Captain of HMS Warwick, Denys A Rayner DSC RNVR. Later to describe his navy escapades in the book "Escort: The Battle of the Atlantic" (Many thanks to Martin Rayner for permission to use this photograph.)

Extract from an eye witness account of the sinking of H.M.S. Warwick, 20th February 1944 By Victor Crisp Skipper of the "Lady Luck"

On the morning of the 20th which was Sunday, the wind was blowing strong. The day was bright, with a wintry sun, bitterly cold, and almost at freezing point. After breakfast we hauled and shot the trawl, the crew washing and gutting the fish. I saw to the north of us two of the larger type of Milford trawlers, heading in the same direction as ourselves. One Ostend ship was proceeding to the eastward, probably making for Padstow for shelter. To the south, almost hull down, was a small convoy with escort ships. Owing to their being so far inside their route, I wondered why. Our hauling time was 11 a.m.

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I had not noticed the two destroyers approaching from the westward at that moment. They were not travelling at speed and passed us on our starboard side, heading toward Trevoise Head. We were now heaving our trawl net up, and, taking the fish out of the codend, we shot again, heading to the eastward. The wind was now blowing from that direction. Our position was now some 12 to 14 miles W1/2N from Trevoise Head. The crew were on deck, gutting and washing the catch ready for stowing down the fish-hold in ice. Glancing ahead, I could see the destroyers had turned and were coming back towards us. They would pass some two to three miles on our starboard side. My crew had finished what they were doing, and were walking aft towards the galley. The two trawlers were two to three miles on our north side, their names were "Trumpeter" and "St. Vincent". At this time the destroyers were on our starboard beam. The nearest, swung to starboard and was stemming us. I immediately went to a flag locker, where our flag signals denoting our ship's name was always bent on the halyards, to hoist on the approach of one of our warships. This was a standing order given us by the Naval Control.

Noting the destroyer turning on to her original course, I picked up the ship's binoculars and focused them on to the ship, curious to know what she was up to. The destroyer was now in bold relief. - Then it happened!! The time was approximately 11.55 a.m. There was a cloud of smoke tinted with flame and a tremendous explosion from her stern. She was before the wind, causing the smoke to envelop her for a moment. This soon cleared. The ship was nosing her way through the water. At the time she seemed alright, then the second explosion came just aft side of her funnel. With the same the after part of the ship rolled over to starboard, and sunk beneath the waves. Hardly anyone could have got clear of the ship. The suddenness of the two torpedoes could not have given them a chance. I was dumbstruck. The gear was hove up in record time. It was bundled on board in a heap. The destroyer was very close at this time.

The fore end of the destroyer, from her bridge to the stem, was floating high and on a level keel. It lay broadside to the wind and swell, with her head pointing north. It was then I saw the U-boat's periscope only yards from us. We were heading towards the destroyer at full speed. She was approximately one mile distant, when the bulkhead gave way. She rolled over to port. We could see her men running and sliding down her starboard side into the icy water. The destroyer had now almost disappeared, except for part of her bows, which pointed to the sky. This floated for some considerable time after the men were picked up.

As we approached where the sailors were in the water, our small boat was made for launching. At the time, my ship was short handed. Three of the crew were over sixty years of age. I decided against the small boat launching, owing to the choppy sea and the ages of the men who would have to man it. They were not really fit for the job to be done. Another factor was the time it would take to get the boat in the water. Our own vessel was low in the water, freeboard amidships,

knee high. We could reach over the side and pull the survivors on board. {Most trawlers of our class had a low freeboard.}

We were now approaching the scene of the catastrophe. The oil fuel from the destroyer was covering the area. Men were calling for help, Their plaintive cries could be heard. I had to be cautious , as we came amongst them. The Lady Luck's engines were now stopped, and we were in the middle of the thick oil and men. I decided to pick up the ones who were in the water. How many, I could not see at first. There was one Carley float filled with men, and a smaller one with two sailors clinging to it. Each man was wearing a life jacket. There was no other raft or boat, only the mentioned.

As we began to pull the men on board, I saw the terrible mess with which they were covered - thick, sticky oil. One could not tell their rating, owing to their clothes and faces being thickly coated with it. After we had the men out of the water, We turned towards the two men on the raft. We could see one man who seemed lifeless. My crew , to a man, were helping the men into the galley or down into the cabin to get warmth into their bodies. I, myself, could not tell if any were injured owing to my having to cox the ship and jumping on to the deck to help pull the men on board. - then we had to manoeuvre to where the rafts were, I was back into the wheelhouse again to steer the ship. The small raft was now alongside The man who seemed lifeless was at one end. As our boat rolled, I grabbed him under the armpits, the mate holding on to my legs. The strain on my arms was too much, and I had to let go, as the ship rolled away from the raft. As she came back again, we had a rope with a bight in it, ready to slip over him. This was done with three of us pulling the man aboard, but the weight was too much for us. It was then that we saw that his legs were through the hand life line around the raft. This line was cut, and he was safely on board. I saw he was alive, but the cold had got him, and he was in a stupor. The other man with him was pulled on board. They were both taken aft to the cabin. It was at that moment that one of the other trawlers arrived on the scene. She was so close, that her stern crashed into ours - slight damage was done.

The large raft was drifting towards us. On this were eleven men. One I particularly noticed, was lying in the oil and water, which covered the raft floor. He looked to me to be in a very bad way. My mate threw a heaving line, which fell across the raft. It fell across the body of the injured men. He grasped this line by his own hands, as we pulled on it to draw the raft alongside. Each man had to be helped off, and carried or helped aft, owing to their condition. These were about the last to be saved. We, ourselves, were wet through, and smothered with oil from contact with the sailors and the sea. I now had a chance to look round. The other destroyer was searching to locate the submarine well to the south. There was also a Government T-class trawler now on the scene. We had been too busy to see what was happening around us. At this time I did not know the name of the destroyers.

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I saw the naval trawler taking a man out of the water. She was going ahead on her engines. I believe this was the rule when enemy submarines were in the vicinity, where a naval vessel has been hit. They must not "stop" to pick up survivors. The man was hanging on to the end of a rope looped under his armpits and was swinging backwards and forwards from her fo'castle head, which was high out of the water. Flying overhead were aeroplanes, which had been sent out from the base, some ten miles distant. Rubber dinghies were dropped by them, but they came too late. All the survivors were now picked up.

When we found we could do no more, I went to the wheelhouse, ringing the engineroom telegraph for full speed. As we turned to come on to course, I noticed a lone man was still in the water, not far from where the nose of the destroyer was still pointing to the sky, although lower in the water now. Heading towards this man, we stopped as we drew alongside. Going on deck to pull him on board, I noticed he was in a bad shape, and at first thought he was dead. His uniform was saturated with sea water and the messy oil, and, with the inertness of his body it took all four of us to pull him up over the rail and on board. He was taken aft to the engine room. The cabin and galley were full with these men. We got under way again, telling the chief to step on it to save the tide into Padstow, eighteen to twenty miles distant. Telling the mate to take the wheel, I went aft to the cabin. I asked where the man was who had been in the raft. They told me he was in the cabin. Going down, I saw he was lying prostrate, His uniform scorched at the front, his eyebrows and hair at his fore lock burnt off. He was blinded, and could not see. He was moaning with pain. There was nothing I could do. My knowledge of first aid was not enough to attend to him. All I could do was make him as comfortable as possible, and get him to harbour for professional attention. All my crew's spare clothing and rugs were given to these men. I did have some whisky, which I always carried for colds or 'flu. This was passed around but did not go far. I forget how many we had saved, but it was between forty or more.

Going on deck I looked into the engineroom. Some men stood close to the boiler for warmth to thaw out after their dreadful ordeal. It would not have been long before they succumbed to the iciness of the sea. From the time the warship was sunk, to the time we were steaming to harbour was not much over the hour. Going back to the wheelhouse, after satisfying myself all was done that could be done, I saw one young fellow with a rug draped over his shoulder, standing in the alley-way. He had a nasty gash in his leg. I asked him if it hurt. He replied "Not much, I'm not worrying about that, I'm thankful to be alive ". A bandage was put round his leg for the time being. Most of these men had swallowed a lot of the oil and sea water. The sooner we got them in, the better. I noticed my chief in the engineroom was trying to get some of the oil off those who were down there.

Arriving at the wheelhouse, I saw the two Milford trawlers coming astern of us. We, having the tide in our favour, were drawing near Trevoise head. The medical W-flag had been hoisted, denoting that we needed medical assistance. One of the survivors had come up to the bridge. He was in very good shape. The top of

his uniform was hardly soiled. I saw he was a three-badge coxswain, P.O. He told me his ship's name, and that of the other ship. They were "H.M.S Warwick" and "H.M.S. Scimitar" - the first being the ship sunk. (He began to talk after this, and owing to what he said, I told him to button his lip and shut up) He told me we had saved his skipper.

Somebody shouted to me, telling me I was wanted down in the cabin. Going aft again, I asked what was wrong, thinking one of the survivors had had a bad turn, or something. I was told the destroyer's commander wanted me. I asked where he was, and was told in the after-port bunk. Going towards it, I saw a man lying on his back with a rug covered over him up to his shoulders. He had a small beard, and on his face were streaks of oil. He did not look very old. What I saw of his face was very pale. He asked if I was the skipper. I replied "Yes". He then said "I have been blasting you trawlers while on this patrol, but thank God you were near. I don't know for sure if we were mined or torpedoed. If we were torpedoed, the submarine we were looking for got us first. I advise you to keep in the swept channel." As I turned to go back on deck again, he leaned out from the bunk, asking one of his men as to the fate of some member of his crew - was he a survivor. He then said something about the "Asdic" which I did not catch.

When I got back on the bridge, We were almost abreast of Trevoise. Coming from the direction of the river Camel entrance was one of the Air-sea rescue launches, stationed there, and which had been detailed to help in the rescue work, as happened years ago on the occasion when thirteen unarmed sailing trawlers had met their doom, and I was a survivor, only a very few miles from this position. "Too late again", I thought. History had repeated itself. They had been refuelling at the time they were wanted, and then got stuck in the mud for six hours, between half flood or ebb.

As the two boats closed with each other, the launch closed down. A voice over the loud hailer shouted "Lady Luck, stop your ship. I have orders from the C. in C. St. Eval, to transfer your survivors to my boat." This did not make sense to me. We were flying the W-flag, I needed a doctor. With the scanty requirements from my first aid box, and a knowledge there was nothing more could be done, I was concerned with the badly burned sailor and whether he would live. I went to the cabin and spoke with the destroyers commander stating what had transpired on deck between the launch's skipper and myself. The man asked me how his men were, and how long before we would be at the quayside. I answered " As well as can be. In another half hour we will be moored to the quay, and I am worried regarding the severely burned man, and we should just make it as the ebb was now running out of the river". He replied "Ignore him, and carry on".

The Lady Luck had a full head of steam, the white feather coming from her steam exhaust. If I stopped her now, she - the boiler would blow off. It was always advisable to give the chief engineer 10 minutes to close all the dampers to ease the steam back to avoid the strain on her steam valves, and stopping the noisy

rushing of steam from her exhaust.

As we entered the river, the ebb tide had made, and was fast running. We would just make it to get alongside the quay. The two boats astern of us would not get a quay berth, in fact, they both stuck in the middle of that dock. One had two, the other, nine survivors on board. There were several conveyances waiting, some for those who were able to help themselves, others, Royal Naval ambulances for those that were not so fortunate.

Mr. Harry Westcott came to the quay. The Mission Room was only a few yards from where we were laying. His wife, and himself, had prepared for the survivors, some of whom were by this time aboard the conveyances. Hot water for baths and tea urns had been got ready, but red tape stopped this. The sailors had to wait for some while, before being taken to the R.N. Airfield, some 5 miles outside the town.

I went on the quay almost in my birthday suit, wearing a vest and a pair of long underpants. It was icy cold standing there. The holdup was caused through the burned man being attended to before being strapped on to a stretcher, owing to the height of the quay from the ship some ten feet below. I was standing there, shivering like an aspen leaf, I was so cold, when a man took off his overcoat and put it over my shoulders. The few clothes I had on were saturated with oil and sea water. The suit I wore for going ashore I had given to the Commander, who came ashore wearing it. He was taller than me, and the trouser bottoms were some four inches above his ankles, the sleeves short on the wrists. One could see he was suffering from shock by his drawn features, and the way he walked.

The different clothes and rugs we had given to those survivors were sent back to the "Lady Luck", and lay near the berthing masters hut. They lay a sodden mess, wringing wet with oil from the sea, which had escaped from the stricken destroyer. They were not fit for any man to use again. I had to send my son home to get a spare outfit of clothes to put on before I could go into the town.

Orders came from the Naval Authorities that no vessel was to sail until further orders. They were still hunting for that U-boat, and the rumour was that the accompanying destroyer "Scimitar" had depth charged the U-boat and destroyed her. But this was only a rumour. It was the following year when U-413 was attacked and sunk, during the preparations for D-day. I learned of this when I carried out a programme in research concerning the events of "Warwick's" loss. Through this I discovered a Captain Lieutenant Gustav Poel was in command of the German U-boat, and he escaped from the Trevoise after lying "Doggo" for some hours, and then made his way to Brest, where he was relieved, the U-boat finally lost whilst in command of another Commander, in the English Channel.

At the time, when approaching the end of the month, it was Monday the 21st. The day was warm with a brilliant sun. Although we had four days fishing, we had

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the catch on board. Being concerned about this, I telephoned Milford Haven to see what I should do, and enlighten them as to what had happened. I needed advice. Telling them I had fish on board, which was perishable goods, and also that we were not allowed to sail, not knowing how long we should be detained. The man to whom I was speaking was an under-manager, and was very rude to me, saying that I should have taken my ship with the survivors to Milford. I replied "It's alright for you people, you just sit on your arses, and don't realise there's a war on". With that I hung up the phone.

It was Thursday, the 24th when a messenger came to the dock and informed "All ships can sail". We sailed with the evening tide, and arrived at the Haven next day. On going to the office, I was greeted by a curt "Good Morning, Skipper" then the manager began to carry on about my not obeying orders etc., finishing with the phone conversation. "We cannot stand insubordination from Skippers in the firm. You had better sign off the log book." Telling him of those men with injuries and shock, also the state of my ship, which two days to clean up, owing to the oil that had stunk everywhere, both on deck, and down below, and which had saturated the bodies of the men and their clothing I then said "Give me the pen". I signed off the "Lady Luck's " log book and caught the next train to Padstow.

On arriving home, I found a letter was waiting for me from the Fishery Officer who was in charge of the South West Area Fisheries, ruled by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries. He asked if I would go and visit him at his office which was the Citadel, Plymouth Hoe. Arriving there, he congratulated me on my rescue work, and said he would write to the head office for an award, which I never received. Neither did I get a mention in dispatches from the CO. Plymouth, although others concerned in the rescue did, following the enquiry to do with the warship's loss.

Why I was not asked to attend that enquiry I shall never know. Being an eye witness, and very close to the Warwick, I knew her movement from her first appearance on that Sunday morning to the very end. It was due to the "Lady Luck" being in such close proximity that had saved so many lives. Any longer spells in that icy water and there would have been more dead bodies than live ones floating in the area.

(C) David Allen Nov, 2006

From: http://www.hmswensleydale.co.uk/sinking_of_hms_warwick.htm

I am probably the only survivor who can give his complete experiences on Warwick in this story. As an eleventh hour replacement for a rating who had gone astray, I was sent up to join the ship in Ardrossan and had barely stepped on board when we were under way back to Plymouth.

Being brand new, I was in contact most with the Buffer and the Gunner's Mate but managed a Radar watch on the way to familiarise myself with the set, which

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was new to me. On arrival at Plymouth, the “natives” as usual were ashore as quick as we could tie up but before we had time to settle down we were on our way again minus “natives” on a sub hunt with two “S” boats ‘Saladin’ and ‘Scimitar’ in the Bristol Channel. We were not on station very long when we had Asdic trouble and the ship had to slow down while repairs were carried out, at this stage we were very much a sitting duck. An enquiry was heard later as to why a listening watch, which should have heard the torpedoes running, was not kept but I do not remember hearing the result. We were down in the mess preparing for dinner, the rum ration was being dished out aft when there was a terrific explosion which seemed more felt than heard, all the lights went out and the mess table with all the crockery dropped on my legs. By the time I sorted the debris out and got to the hatch ladder everyone else seemed to have beat me to it and realising I had no lifebelt with me went back to look for it. When I got back to the ladder it was clear though at an awkward angle so I climbed up and made my way aft to the upper deck passing the canteen manager on the way who was going back to his office safe for some papers or something. I arrived on the upper deck on the starboard side beside the Gunner’s Mate and the first thing I saw was the stern of a destroyer apparently down by the head, almost alongside us. I assumed it was one of the other two and asked the GM who it was to be told in no uncertain manner it was us and realised the complete stern from aft of the 25 pounder was torn off by a torpedo in our after magazine. Although my body was completely numbed, my brain and everything else seemed to be functioning and I began to take in the fact that the boats were on fire and quite a few hands were already in the water to the annoyance of the Buffer. Whether the order to “Abandon Ship” was given or not was all irrelevant as just then she rolled to port and abandoned us shooting me through the space left where the forward funnel had originally been. As I landed in the sea by the mast I became entangled in a wire rope and at much the same time someone with no lifebelt grabbed onto me but as I was being pulled under with the ship I managed to push off my fellow traveller hoping he would find a better insurance risk. I seemed to spend hours under water trying to free myself when suddenly I was aware of brilliant lights all around me and as my head broke the surface I realised it had been shafts of sunlight in the bubbles I was creating. When I looked around I was surrounded by debris, bodies, oil which was ablaze in places, and deciding this was no place for me started swimming my way through. The burning oil was the biggest hazard as when to swam into a clear lane you had no guarantee there was a way out but the bodies were the most upsetting and I remember on in particular which I automatically Identified as the buffer but could not explain why as he was face down. By now our partners were on the hunt and dropping depth charges, which were another hazard as the concussion was like someone kicking you in the stomach but in any event turned out, to be harmless though at the time I made a few uncomplimentary remarks. Eventually I arrived at a Carley Float and although it was pretty crowded they managed to squeeze me in. It was all pretty miserable and uncomfortable but when I took in the fact that the person beside me, who turned out to be Bill Clay had a mass of raw flesh for a head all things slipped into perspective and survival was all that mattered. By now the R.A.F

were flying over dropping rafts and eventually one of the fishing fleet we had been operating amongst pulled up alongside our float. We were smartly brought aboard the appropriately named “Lady Luck” shoved down below with towels and dry clothing to clean up and thaw out. Shortly after this the skipper joined us and I felt quite flattered when he enquired if the new bloke had made it as if he was responsible for my change of fortune.

When we climbed ashore at Padstow the whole village seemed there waiting for us and we were whisked off in a bus to the R.N.A.S. On the way we were issued with emergency clothing, which we changed into after having a hot bath and at this stage I discovered I had no jersey. Thinking there had been a mistake I went to the supply store where I was informed it was just my bad luck and found out having lost everything is no insurance against thieving. My faith in humanity was slightly restored by a Wren who insisted that I borrow hers till we were leaving in the morning. Strangely I cannot recall us being fed but we went to a memorial service then headed for the canteen where we were told the drinks were on the house but after one pint I was violently sick and went back to our hut where most of the lads seemed to be anyway. In the morning we were bussed back to barracks where we were messed about in general prior to going on leave.

From the newspaper cuttings there are facts that puzzle me — where did I find the third destroyer “Saladin” — why no mention of Asdic failure — if the ship went down in three minutes how did I do so much in such a short time — how was Bill Clay picked up alone when we were all with him packed like sardines. The memory of Bill has been with me all those years and I think the most important part of all this is knowing he has come out of it reasonably well.

When I saw the TV programme on the Welsh lad from the Falklands, in comparison he was relatively unharmed and I thought of the suffering Bill must have tolerated. My problem now is what happened to the lad I pushed off in the water, if he survived did he realise I was trying to help him or if not in hindsight could I have saved him.

As a longstanding emotional part of my life this has been more difficult than I could have imagined and I believe I could have filled a book with minute details I left out. Most of this has been locked up for over forty years, maybe it is time for it to come out but I could never get through a lump in my throat when I thought of all the really young lads we lost that day, the ball is in your court now, you have got to the bottom of the barrel, the “Jonas” has spoken.

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