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THE WAR ILLUSTRATED

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Edited by

**SIR JOHN
HAMMERTON**

Editor of THE WAR ILLUSTRATED (1914-1920)

Writer of the famous War Film FORGOTTEN MEN

His First Shot from the Old Paddle Steamer Brought Down a Dornier

'San Demetrio' was Worthy of the 'Jervis Bay'

One of the 33 ships in the convoy that was attacked in mid-Atlantic on November 5 by a German surface raider and which owed their preservation to the sacrifice of their escort, H.M.S. "Jervis Bay" (see page 567), was the tanker, "San Demetrio." Below we give the story of her escape—in itself a thrilling deed of daring on the high seas.

SOON after they sighted a German raider, about 4.30 on the afternoon of November 5, the "San Demetrio" and the 37 other ships forming the convoy received the signal to scatter from their escort. When the men of the "San Demetrio" saw the "Jervis Bay" for the last time she was "standing up to the enemy like a hen standing up to a great tom-cat, while her brood of chickens made off." They saw the gallant ship turn first to port and then to starboard, so as to bring her broadsides to bear on her gigantic adversary. They saw her steering straight for the raider and holding her fire, while the merchantmen in her charge slipped away under cover of smoke in the gathering dusk.

The "San Demetrio" sheered off, but blazed away with her guns at the German warship until shells started to fall around her and she was badly hit. She caught fire, and the order was given to abandon ship. Having taken to the boats, her crew dropped astern, and ten minutes later they saw her start to blaze. As the shells whined over the boats the men pulled away.

That night they saw four burning ships—one of them the "Jervis Bay"—and a great flare in the sky which they took to be a magazine exploding. Every now and again star shells burst as the raider continued its hunt for other of the convoy's ships.

In one of the boats were 16 officers and

men, among them an American seaman and a seaman from the Shetland Islands. The weather had been fine, but by midnight a full gale was blowing. They lay to a sea anchor, keeping the boat's head up to it with the oars. The Shetland Islander sat at the tiller; the Second Officer said "he knew all about small boats." By dawn great seas were running. They sighted a "Swede," which may have been the ship that so gallantly turned back and picked up survivors of the "Jervis Bay" (see page 583), but they could not reach her, nor did she see the boat—at one moment buried in the trough of the sea, and at the next running on its crest.

At midday they sighted a tanker to leeward, and at 5 p.m. they got alongside. It was their own ship—the "San Demetrio"! She was still burning and gasoline lay on the water all round her, so they decided not to board that night, and pulled ahead, hoping to drift with her through the night.

What was their disgust when, at daybreak, she was not in sight! But the weather had moderated, and it was now possible to get a sail up. Then, by one of those extraordinary chances of the sea, they fell in with the "San Demetrio" again. Though she was still blazing, the men decided that it was better to board her than to freeze to death in the lifeboats, so they got aboard.

She was white-hot amidships, her bridge and accommodation were gutted. There was a fierce fire still burning aft, and she was down by the bows. Down below the engineers set about getting steam on the pumps in an engine-room flooded to the floor plates, while on deck the remaining hands fought the fire with buckets and fire extinguishers, chipping off the burning cork insulation. There was gasoline washing

over the decks, and every time she pitched more gasoline gushed up through the shell splinter holes.

By 5.30 p.m. the Chief Engineer had 80 lb. steam pressure and the hoses could be used instead of buckets. By daybreak next day all the fires were out and most of the rents in the decks and upper works were plugged.

Practically all the food had been destroyed, but they found a joint of beef and four cases of eggs already cooked by the flames—both quite good when the outside was chipped off. The Chief Engineer cooked potatoes and onions by steam, and there was plenty of tinned butter.

The main difficulty, when once the engines had been got going and she had been brought to an even keel, was the compass, which had been shot from the binnacle and, though replaced, behaved in a peculiar manner. The bridge, indeed, was gone; there were no charts but only a 6d. atlas, and only four spokes were left on the steering-wheel. That night, when steering north by compass, they found the Pole Star dead astern, so after that they gave the compass up and sailed by a mixture of stars and weather. The American sailor cheered everyone up by saying, "we are bound to hit something sometime between Narvik and Gibraltar."

Eight days after the raider's attack the "San Demetrio" made a landfall. She had no signalling flag; they had all been burnt. The only flag she had left was her Red Ensign, and that had been flying throughout her voyage—a symbol of the Merchant Navy's courage and determination.

Then to the intense satisfaction of her Chief Engineer she was able to discharge her cargo through her own pipes with her own pumps, and, furthermore, it was 11,000 tons out of the 11,200 with which she sailed.



The "San Demetrio," 8,073 tons, is a sister ship of the "San Alberto," torpedoed in December, 1939 (see Vol. 1, page 603). The helmsman of the "San Demetrio" (top left), who, despite the wheel being broken, steered the ship to safety. Second Officer Hawkins (below left) brought the tanker—"by guess and by God," as he phrased it—through her hazardous course to a British West Coast port. The ship's bridge is seen below.

Photos, J. Hall and "Daily Express"



Eye Witness Stories of Episodes and Adventures in the Second Great War

I Saw the Fight from 'Rangitiki's' Bridge

One of the main targets of the German raider which attacked the "Jervis Bay" convoy (see pages 567 and 583) was the 17,000-ton liner "Rangitiki," which, however, docked safely. Her commander here tells the story of his ship's ordeal under shell-fire and of the "Jervis Bay's" heroic fight which enabled her to escape.

WHEN his ship reached port, Capt. Barnett of the "Rangitiki" said: "It was at four o'clock in the afternoon that an unidentified ship was sighted hull down on the port beam and steering gradually closer to us.

The look-out in the crow's nest passed the message and the top masts of the enemy must have been 20 miles away when we first sighted her. By 4.45 we could see she was a warship of heavy calibre.

The whole convoy was doing about nine knots. About 5.15 the enemy suddenly opened fire with her forward turret at a range which I should estimate to be nearly 15,000 yards.

It was obvious that the target was the "Jervis Bay" or the "Rangitiki," as we were the largest ship and our 17,000 tons and our two funnels must have made an attractive target. At the same time the

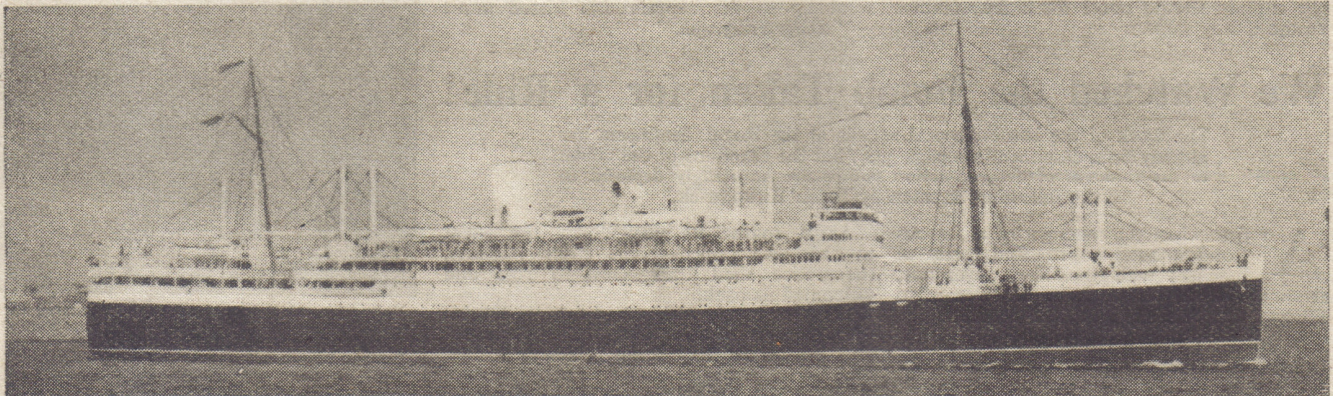
convoy, acting swiftly to orders, turned to starboard and dispersed.

It seemed lucky, although it really wasn't, that no one ran into another ship. While this operation was going on the enemy had turned to a parallel course to the convoy and began to concentrate its fire on the "Jervis Bay," which had commenced to steam towards the enemy.

She was firing all the time, but her salvos appeared to fall short.

The raider's second salvo hit the "Jervis Bay" amidships on the port side, evidently putting her engines out of action, as she lost way immediately. The third salvo struck her just before the bridge and the fourth aft, setting her afire.

Then the enemy concentrated its fire on our ship, but she did not have so much luck. Her first salvo fell on our starboard quarter about 400 yards short. The second straddled



Here at sea is the "Rangitiki," the largest ship in the convoy under the escort of "Jervis Bay." Top is her commander, Captain Henry Barnett; below left, her purser, Mr. A. Swift, with Mrs. B. Lee, stewardess, on his left and Miss W. Taylor on his right, photographed on board the "Rangitiki" after she had reached port.

Photos, Planet News and Fox



us amidships, but the third, instead of finishing us, straddled us again just forward of the bridge.

One shell went right over us less than 50 yards away, and it smothered the bridge with spray and shell fragments, which struck the ship forward but did no appreciable damage. The enemy by this time was apparently bringing its secondary armament into play, as we have found since small pieces of shell on the deck.

Meantime all the ships in the convoy were using their smoke floats, and if it had not been for a light wind from the south-east which enabled the smoke to screen us, I think we might not have escaped, and nor would a lot of others.

The other skippers carried out a very gallant action with their manoeuvres, and fortunately as night fell with only a quarter-moon we made good our escape.

Capt. Barnett paid a high tribute to all his officers, engineers and crew. He also spoke

highly of the conduct of his passengers: They were all magnificent. The passengers on board included seven women. Although the ship was at times enveloped by shell fragments and spray they were calm throughout.

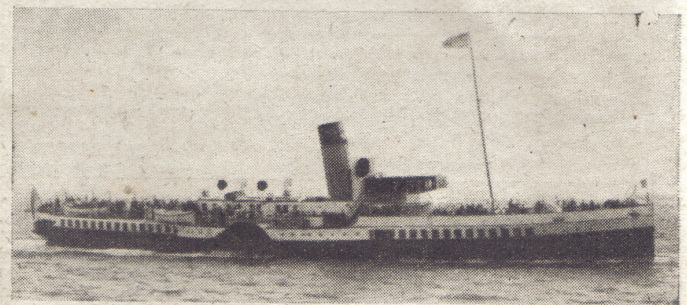
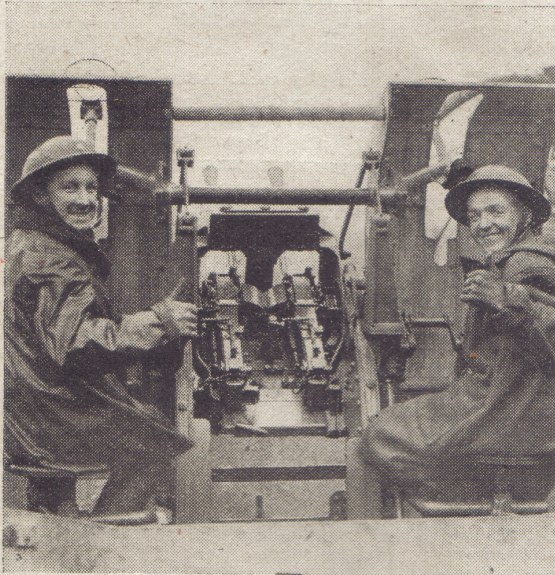
MISS RUTH SHANNON, who was a passenger returning from New Zealand to do war work, told a graphic story. She said:

I was just getting up from afternoon rest when I heard a terrific crash on the starboard side, where my cabin was situated. In a few minutes stewardesses told us to put on our lifebelts and we were taken to the port alleyway.

Later a sing-song was arranged by the officers and we all joined in singing such songs as "Roll out the Barrel." Everyone was very cheerful and there was absolutely no panic of any kind.

At dinnertime, some two hours later, we were told that dinner would be served in the ordinary way in the saloon, and we sat down with our lifebelts on, although I am afraid

I WAS THERE!



THOUSANDS of holiday-makers have crossed the Solent in the Southern Railway's paddle-steamer "Southsea," above right. She is now H.M. minesweeper "Southsea," commanded by Lieutenant C. C. M. Pawley, R.N.R., and has earned fame by bringing down an enemy aircraft. On November 17, 1940, she was attacked by a Dornier 17, and her 20-year-old gunner secured a direct hit with his first shot. His mate is 22 years of age. Left are the two gunners.

Photos, Wright & Logan and Topical

we did not make as good a dinner as we usually do. The only difference in the dining-room was that the lights were lowered, but the service was, as usual, excellent.

When the immediate danger was over and the passengers were able to resume their normal life on board there was a feeling of gratefulness to the captain and officers. On the last night before they reached the West-coast port the passengers insisted that the captain should come for a few minutes to the dining saloon.

Miss Shannon concluded:

The captain had been on the bridge for many hours. In fact, I was told he had not taken off his clothes for seven days. We had dinner, and then it was proposed that we should sing "Auld Lang Syne," and we joined hands, skipped around the tables and chairs, and sang.

I do not think I am giving away a secret when I say that all the women passengers went up to the captain and kissed him! — "Daily Telegraph."

We Watched the Bomb Taken for a Ride!

The work of the bomb-disposal squads of the Royal Engineers has already been described (see page 338), but the reactions of the public to the removal of delayed-action bombs are amusingly depicted in the following dispatch by Helen Kirkpatrick.

AT first when the manager of a famous London hotel approached tables of lunchers with the news, everyone, from the Chief Whip, Capt. Margesson, to lowly correspondents, looked startled.

"What do you mean?—the police have ordered everyone out of the hotel during the procession?"

"That's the order," said the manager, spreading his hands in deprecating fashion. "Actually the police said that everyone must go thirty yards from the street for the procession, but I'd advise three thousand yards."

In good order the guests paid their bills and left by the back door, not, as might be thought, in fear of what first seemed the Gestapo-like activities of the British police, but in genuine respect for a procession which was to pass down a famous London thoroughfare on the stroke of three.

Peeping out behind a solid stone building a good 30 yards from the street, we watched the mysterious procession passing.

Slowly from unseen crowds equally well hidden behind buildings all along the street came cheers. Not from windows which had been left open and untenanted, but muffled by yards of stone between them and the majestic sight.

There on a large Army lorry, escorted by outriders, sat the biggest bomb we had ever seen that close, and, sitting beside it, seeming to stroke it into a brief quiescence, sat the calm figure of an Army engineer.

As it roared its way down the street towards—we hoped—some eager marshes, the police shed their Gestapo role and welcomed us back.

(From the story by Helen Kirkpatrick, London Correspondent of the "Chicago Daily News," printed in the "Daily Telegraph".)

Kipling Would Have Enjoyed My Journey

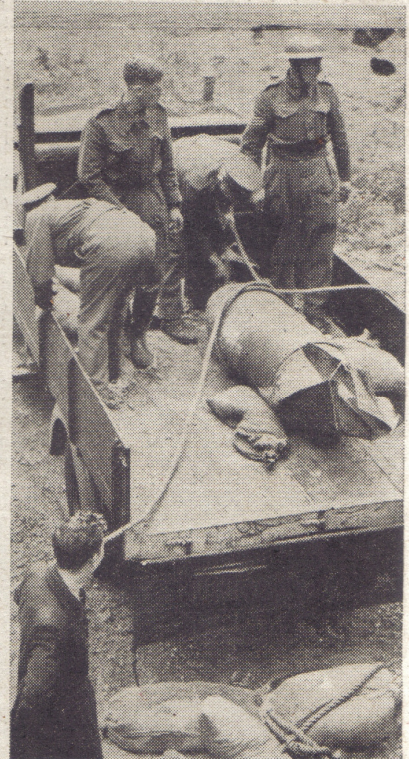
Among the unsung heroes of wartime England are the lorry-drivers who "deliver the goods" in fair weather and foul and are not deterred from driving through nightly air raids. Mr. Campbell Dixon, the "Daily Telegraph" reporter, who spent a night with north-bound drivers, wrote the following note of appreciation of their work.

KIPLING should have written this story. He loved machines, the traffic of high seas and highways, and men in greasy overalls doing a brave job of work.

Yes, Kipling should have ridden in my place the other night and seen how the lorry drivers of England are pounding nightly through blitz and fog and darkness, carrying food for the housewife, spare parts for the factory, and raw materials to keep a million wheels turning.

The lorry I rode in was one of Tillings', said to control more lorries and vans than any other company in the world. It weighs seven tons and carries a 15-ton load from London to Manchester between darkness and dawn.

It was bright moonlight when we crossed the Thames, shimmering like a Whistler Nocturne, passed the blind houses of northern



This apparently harmless bomb reposing in a lorry is actually a delayed-action bomb ready to pass in "procession" to some "eager marshes." Photo, Fox

suburbs, and roared through sleeping villages set in a fairyland of oak and grass, silver beneath the moon.

Soon came disenchantment. At one place a board at a junction said, "Air Raid." Sirens and even gunfire were drowned by the roaring Diesel engine, but there was no mistaking the import of the searchlights.

Often the lights followed a 'plane along our road. Then the driver would reach under the seat for a steel helmet. Nothing dropped and one by one the lights went out.

These night drivers know the roads of England as most of us know our street. Every now and then my driver would indicate a local landmark: "Sleepy hollow"; "Our boys have supper there"; "Café on the right is where I saw two girls fight with razors. Bit rough."

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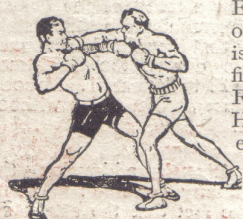
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