

H.M.S. TRUCULENT'S LAST WAR PATROL 1944

June 12th sailed from Trinco for our 4th Far Eastern Patrol, which was to be in an area off the southern reaches of the Malacca Straits. After the usual passage on the surface, we dived by day when nearing Sumatra and proceeded down the Straits. Any Junks or small vessels sighted were boarded, prisoners taken, or if land was not too far away, set adrift in their sampan with a jar of water. Demolition charges were laid and set off. More of that later.

June 21st the first of our operations was to capture the mayor of a certain village. We had on board a team of Dutch Commandos' consisting of three Dutch military ranks and three local troops all in charge of a Dutch officer. They were landed and picked up again on the same night their mission, to capture and return with the village mayor. They were successful in getting to the correct location and back again undetected, but since the mayor was not to be found, they had to make do with the local 'Bobby'. The purpose of the operation was to gain intelligence.

On June 24th a reconnaissance was carried out at the southern entrance to Klang Strait. Several small junks were in the offing, but there were no other signs of activity. This was the start of the minelaying operation, but all did not go according to plan. Immediately after firing the third mine, we grounded at 32 feet. By stopping and flooding 'Q' tank, to ensure the submarine would not break surface, we gradually 'screwed' our way out and laid the fourth mine. The captain remarked at time that he regretted that having laid eggs it was thought necessary to hatch them out!. At 1545 we bottomed to reload, then at 1700 we commenced the second lay which proceeded uneventfully, after bottoming for the last time to reload, we came back up to 32 feet. The sun had set, but the light was considered to be good enough, the edges of land were still distinguishable to enable us to carry on with the last lay but it was a struggle against the failing light.

June 26th at 1000 Smoke was sighted and an aircraft was circling on the same bearing. We increased speed and closed the target, it was almost a flat calm and cloudy. As the range closed, the smoke resolved itself into a convoy consisting of three small ships of about 1,500 tons and one of 4,000 tons escorted by two large submarine chasers, one motor launch and one aircraft. At 1100 fired four torpedoes at the larger vessel at 3,500 yards. The vessel described by the Skipper as rather like H.M.S. Titania, as she was a two-deck old passenger type, and painted a light greenish gray and looked like a depot ship of some kind. Two hits were scored and the target considered to have been sunk.

We hit the bottom at 58 feet whilst turning away from the firing position and depth charging commenced with a pattern of six which were quite close. Having speeded up to get off the bottom, two more charges were dropped that were much closer. These assisted the submarine on her way and enabled us to draw clear and continue the turn at 50 feet. One charge threw the Asdics off and the last three charges were dropped unpleasantly close and did some damage to our after planes and the engine 'muffler' valves which, became apparent later. It was 1200 before the Asdics were in order again and the first thing heard was the enemy 'passing over'. However they must have been unaware that we were directly below them because no further charges were dropped.

Later, on coming to periscope depth, two aircraft were sighted searching astern and the two chasers were `hull down` on each quarter. There was no sign of the convoy so we continued withdrawing to the northward. Whilst on the surface that night the port engine had to be stopped because of a sheered breech end stud and progress was made on the remaining engine.

June 27th. Mid-morning, surfaced to board a likely looking junk. The Master and his papers were seized. The remaining three men were put in their boat, and given water and two paddles. Sank the junk with charges, and she went down very quickly as she was laden with earthenware. Spent the remainder of the daylight hours dived, until surfacing at dusk. The port engine was still under repair. And we were motoring on the port main motor with a standing charge on the starboard engine with the tail clutch out.

The bridge thought they spotted something and immediately rang down `stop starboard` and all went quiet. After two or three minutes it was evidently a false alarm and they rang down half ahead starboard. The standing orders for restarting the engines was "If the engine had been stopped for twenty minutes or longer the engine must be `blown round` before restarting" to remove any likelihood of water entering the cylinders through the exhaust system. In this case they had only been stopped for three minutes at the most and the ERA on watch commenced the starting routine. The PO LTO who was in the motor room at the time when the stop order came, broke the charge and went forward to try to find out what was going on. On hearing the clang of the telegraphs again, made his way aft to resume the charge. Meanwhile the ERA recharged the `air start bottle` and shouting `Mufflers` to the attendant stoker, banged over the Air start lever. The PO LTO goes on "The engine seemed to do a convulsive half revolution, then hesitate, with a thud which shook the entire boat, appeared to do another half turn with another thud, again shaking the entire submarine". As he continued his way aft between the main engines towards the motor room he was sprayed with warm sooty water seemingly coming from every joint in the engine. The ERA jumped back in horror and after two or three more jolting thuds everything went quiet again. The above series of events was thought to be a direct result of the heavy depth charge attack received after our successful attack on the convoy, distorting the sealing rings of the engine exhaust muffler valves. With the battery only half charged, the Skipper ordered the Auxiliary drive to be used, a separate small motor on the starboard shaft which was capable of giving a speed of about a knot and a half, not enough for most young Officers of the Watch to maintain a level trim so consequently was seldom used. But now it was really needed. The submarine was virtually stranded on the surface in enemy waters and a thousand miles away from Ceylon. The starboard tail clutch was re-engaged and Jock Murray our Killick LTO banged in the first of the Aux Drive tiny starter switches only have it blow up in his face. On this occasion it was fortunate for us the Malacca straits were mostly shallow water so we were able to dive again and sit on the bottom. The next day whilst the engine room staff brought the port engine back into commission, with wooden shoring and wedges to hold the two breech ends down either side of the broken stud, with loads of emery cloth put in to stop the wedges slipping out. Of course it was necessary to have a stoker standing by with a mallet ready to replace the wedges, as they were displaced by the vibrations of the

engine. As for the starboard engine, it's con rods, were bent into bows and engine was a total write off.

June 28th. At 1700, sighted a junk, surfaced, boarded and sank the vessel which was loaded with rice, using the now accepted method of placing demolition charges. The crew was given their choice of freedom or being taken on board. They chose the latter.

June 29th. 0300 sighted the light of a small vessel and gave chase and two hours later it was sunk. As she also had a sampan, all the crew was sent away by our Skipper as he considered we had enough prisoners already. The junk proved very difficult to sink, four charges only settled her, and she had to be rammed twice. The danger of this procedure was apparent when her yards and sails became entangled with our bows and they had to be cleared off. When clear of the Straits a signal was sent explaining our situation, and as a result the ever welcome recall signal was received within a few hours and we crawled back to base on our remaining patched up engine arriving in Trinco on July 5th.

(Extract from "The Sumatra Railway" by H. Neumann & E. Van Witsen)

"25th June 1944 a convoy of six ships sailed at 1130 from the harbour of Belawan with destination Singapore. One of these vessels is the "HARIKIKI MARU" 3,800 BRS with 720 POW's aboard. She is actually the former K.P.M steamer "VAN WAERWIJK", captured by the Japanese. The following day 26th. June 1944, at 2 p.m. the British submarine H.M.S. TRUCULENT opens a torpedo attack on the convoy. The VAN WAERWIJK and two other vessels were hit and sunk. Despite attempts by the other remaining vessels to save the drowning people 178 POW's succumb. Those that were saved are transferred to Singapore and after about one month shipped off to Pekanbaru".

Recent research has unearthed a signal dated 27th. May 1946 to the War Office from a survivor giving the time of the sinking as 1347. 720 POW's were onboard of whom 220 were British and of these 69 failed to survive.