

I FOUGHT FOR LIFE AS GALATEA SANK'

WAR CORRESPONDENT TELLS OF HUNDREDS IN SEA

Following is an eye-witness account of the sinking of H.M. cruiser Galatea (5,220 tons)-just announced by the Admiralty. Cabled yesterday by Mr. Larry Allen, A.P. war correspondent, who was on board, it reveals that the captain, some 300 of the crew, and Mr. A. M. Anderson (see <http://www.newseum.org>), a Reuter correspondent, are feared to have lost their lives.

Alexandria, Saturday, - H.M. light cruiser Galatea, struck by three torpedoes fired by an Axis submarine, flopped over like a stabbed turtle and went down within three minutes off Egypt.

The torpedoes, launched at close range in pitch darkness on Dec. 15, clanged in lightning succession aft, amidships, forward and port-side, and ripped into the cruiser's interior with load blasts and spurting flame.

I was on board the cruiser (cables Larry Allen, A.P. war correspondent) and clung to the starboard rail of the quarterdeck until flung into the sea as the warship heeled over. I battled through thick oily scum for 45 minutes before being rescued.

It was at midnight, after having beaten off dive-bombing attacks for more than seven hours while patrolling with a squadron of cruisers and destroyers off Cyrenaica that Galatea's loudspeaker ordered gunners to stand-by.

A young Marine roused me from sleep in the captain's cabin. I ran to the commander's cabin and informed Reuter's correspondent Mr. Alexander Massy Anderson. Adjusting lifebelts, we raced towards the bridge.

"TORPEDOES CHASED US"

We had hardly started to run when the first torpedo clanged into the ship with a burst of flame, rocking the cruiser.

Torpedoes seemed to chase us along the deck. A second projectile crashed through amidships. A third struck forward just under a six-inch gun turret. The cruiser listed quickly, and the whole ship shuddered.

I knew it was too late to reach the bridge, so dashed behind a six-inch gun turret forward over the starboard side quarter-deck as the entire ship dipped deeply into the sea on the port side.

I caught hold of the starboard deck rail as the cruiser rapidly turned on her port side, unscrewed the nozzle of the lifebelt hung around my neck, and blew into it with all the breath I could summon.

The cruiser flopped completely over to port, sending me sliding down into the sea. Hundreds of officers and ratings poured into the water. I heard Anderson at the rails shout something to a ship's officer. I never saw him again.

Knowing I could not swim, and fearful lest the old lifebelt I retrieved after the bombing of H.M.S. Illustrious on Jan.10 would collapse, my body slipped deep under the water with scores of others as the cruiser, with a tremendous suction, disappeared in a huge lake of oil.

HUNDREDS IN SEA

I feared, too, that the torpedoes' fire might have reached Galatea's magazine, and that the explosion would blow us all to bits, but there was only a muffled blast as she took the death plunge.

I felt I must have swallowed gallons of oily scum and water before I bobbed to the surface and tried to float, holding my lifebelt high close to my chest. Around me there were hundreds of bobbing heads.

I tried to battle my way as far as I could from where the cruiser sank. Several sailors had succeeded in getting off a small motor-boat. I attempted to propel myself toward it but went under again, coming up with lungs feeling as if they would burst. I gasped a cry for help.

A sailor helped me clamber aboard the boat, but a score of others had the same idea. Her rear section rapidly filled with water and was pushed down by the weight of a dozen more bodies.

I struggled forward to the starboard side. Several sailors followed me. The boat dipped and suddenly turned over.

Again I went under, then, groping blindly, grasped the wheel of a motor launch and pulled myself into the front cockpit.

Then the launch sank. A lone sailor and myself hung on the tip-most point of the bow until she slipped beneath the waves.

CRIES IN THE DARK

Desperately I tried and succeeded in getting hold of a small floating spar. I tucked it under my left arm and joined scores of others in cries for help in the pitch darkness, hoping to attract the attention of the destroyers. But no one had a torch.

At that moment I saw a huge black silhouette of a destroyer about 75 yards ahead.

"Help, I am drowning." I heard a sailor in the water near me cry. "Keep going" I gasped. "Look, theres a destroyer ahead."

That seemed to give him a new burst of energy. He swam towards it. I tried hard, but could not get an inch closer.

A big wave swamped me again with a mouthful of oil. Then, almost miraculously, there was a wave from behind that carried me almost directly under the propeller of the destroyer Griffin.

I shouted for help until I felt all the glands of my throat burn. Suddenly a long oily rope was flung over the destroyer's side. I grasped it, but there was no strength left in my hands.

"Hang on" a ship's officer shouted. "We will pull you up". "I can't, I answered, as the rope slipped through my fingers.

SAVED BY SAILOR

At that moment a life-raft drifted against the destroyer's side. I repeatedly banged my head against the warship until I cried out time and again. "Stop it, you are killing me."

Sailors boarded the raft and clambered up safely. Several unknowingly stepped on my head, pushing me down again into the water.

Then a young British sailor aboard the raft saved my life. He passed a heavy rope under my armpits, tied it around my neck, and flung the end to the quarter-deck of the destroyer. Three others slowly pulled me out of the oily mass and flopped me aboard like a wet fish.

They cut off all my clothes and carried me to the mess deck below where there were nearly 100 other survivors. I felt a sharp sting in my left arm as the ship's doctor gave me an injection, and for the next ten hours lay on a mass of greasy rags, too weak to get on my feet.

During that 10 hours the destroyers and cruisers furiously searched a wide area of the Mediterranean trying to find and destroy the submarine which torpedoed Galatea.

In addition to nearly 100 survivors rescued by Griffin, another destroyer, Hotspur, picked up about 75.

Galatea's normal complement is 580. Her commander, Captain E.W.B.Sim, R.N., is among the missing.

Anderson, Reuter's correspondent, is also missing. He was one of the most widely-known newspaper men in the Middle East and particularly noted for his bravery and devotion to duty in face of enemy attacks. He always stayed on the bridge to see action.

Anderson and myself were the only two correspondents to see the biggest mass dive bombing attack on H.M.S. Illustrious on Jan 10 last year.

This dispatch was written from the bed of my hotel, where I shall probably remain several days. - A.P.