

The Sinking of the Bradford City

It was 0600, local time, on 1st November 1941. Captain Henry Paul was the only person left aboard the Bradford City. The crew of the port lifeboat, under the command of Mr Loutitt, Chief Officer, had been having difficulties controlling the boat; it was on the weather side, in way of the gaping hole in the shell plating below the bridge, and the boat was being drawn into it. The crew had managed to pass a painter up to Captain Paul, and he had secured it around a cleat on the focs'le head. This allowed the crew of the boat to haul it forward, and be clear of the damage.

By now, the vessel was ablaze, and amidst the shattering sounds of exploding drums of raw rum, the Captain made his way across the deck to see that all was well with the starboard boat; it was, and he decided it was time enough to join the rest of his crew already in the boat. The port lifeboat and her crew made their way around to the lee side where they joined up with the starboard boat. The ship was sinking rapidly by the head, amidst a mix of fire and steam, the deafening roar of the whistle, and the exploding drums of rum; fuel tanks were also alight. Finally, at approximately 0615, she went under in a depth of over 2500 fathoms, in position Lat.22.59 S: Long 9.43 E. (The Longitude has always been given as 9.49 E, but Capt Paul's own log states 9.43 E)

The two boats planned to remain together, and head for the coast, but whilst making their plans, a submarine was sighted at about a half mile distance, and heading towards them; it was clearly displaying the logo "Ace of Clubs" on the side: had their nemesis returned to inflict further damage?

A little under thirty four months earlier, a 21 year old third mate, was carrying out his anchor watch duties aboard the Bradford City, whilst she lay quietly in the Outer Harbour of Yokohama. As was so often the case, in such circumstances, these "duties" included personal letter writing. However, in this case there was at least a small element of official duty. Amongst the mail that the agent had brought out to the ship was a batch letters, all similar in content, but addressed to several deck crew members from the previous voyage. The Chief Officer had decided, in case there was anything of relevance in these missives, and since it would be unlikely that they would ever catch up with the mostly Glaswegian crowd, he and the third mate, would open them up. The latter, twenty one year old David Owen Lewis, with a recently acquired Second Mates Ticket, decided to throw himself whole heartedly into the task. This is part of his story that has survived, and these are his own words...

*M/V Bradford City
Reardon Smith Line
At Yokohama
Jan 6th 1939*

Dear Miss Ahreus

I don't know whether I am quite justified in writing this to you, but here it is—rather obvious I suppose—and it is for you to judge.

MacDonald, who was a sailor here last trip, and to whom you wrote, has left the ship, and I have no forwarding address. Knowing your letter to be one written in answer to "Ranch Romances", and having several others on our hands, the Chief Officer and I decided to open them to see whether there was anything that required special attention and reply.

However, there being nothing of importance, and it being impossible, or at least impractical to reply to them all, we decided to burn the lot, but yours seemed a decided cut above the rest – spare the blushes please – so I thought that possibly you would write to me instead.

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Should you care to do so, I'd be most pleased to carry on a correspondence with you and would try to make my letters as interesting as possible.

As for myself – I'm the Third Officer here – about 5' 7", inclined to be dark and I am 21. (oh, I forgot – and I adore blondes)

I'm afraid I'm not Scots (Scotch is incorrect, by the way), so, if it's a "braw heiland laddie" you want to write to, I'm afraid I'm right out of luck. I am Welsh by parentage and birthplace, but have lived in Liverpool for the last twelve years.

We are lying at anchor in the outer Yokohama harbour, and I am writing this while on watch on the bridge, so if this letter is a trifle disjointed, please blame it on interruptions from various people.

I won't write much more now, either about the ship or myself, in case you do not care to reply, but will mention before closing, that I have been to New Jersey – some years ago – and would very much like to go back there again.

Sincerely

Owen Lewis

P.S. Should you reply, which I sincerely hope you will, please remember that to reach me your letter has to go to Cardiff, and is then sent out to me, so that by the time I receive your letter, it is fairly old. Consequently, by the time you receive my reply, you'll be just about fed up with writing; I was going to say you'll have grown whiskers, but I hope not.

Also, if we are going to correspond, we might as well use first names Eleanor, so until I hear from you, cheerio and the compliments of the season.

*D.O.Lewis
3rd Officer
m/v/ "Bradford City"
Reardon Smith Line
Merthyr House
James Street
Cardiff*

P.P.S. If you'd care to send a snap, I'll return one with my next letter.

A little over four months later....

*M/V Bradford City
Reardon Smith line
San Francisco/Los Angeles
May 15th 1939*

Dear Eleanor,

I was most pleased to receive your letter in San Francisco just prior to sailing. I had almost given it up, but apparently mail from Shanghai takes longer than I had anticipated.

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Regarding the snap—I'm holding a telescope—land-lubber! You say you feel like a million now—personally I think you look like a million too (Compliment, not insult). I'll send a post card photo when, and if I get one. I'll try and get one, but we have to keep such rotten hours, that by the time we get ashore, everything (except the beer-parlours) is closed.

I don't quite get that bit about Venus. You end up with " what's more I've got arms"—I can't make out whether it's reproof, sarcasm or promise.

I think the person who thought that about the Martians invading New Jersey was rather smart—or rather the idea of announcing it as news was smart. However, I can quite see how serious it might appear if you were on the spot at the time. While I remember, "septer" is spelt "sceptre".

We had just a day in San Francisco, so we didn't see anything of the fair—except from the outside, but we will probably be back there in about three months, so we might see it then.

We've been nearly worked to death on this coast. A typical example was arriving in 'Frisco. I had been working from 8 am and then got told (after a day's work) I was to go on night duty. When I came off duty at six the following morning, I was kindly told that it wasn't worth turning in as we were shifting to Porto Costa—another port in 'Frisco Bay—at 8 am. Well, with one thing and another, I was up again until midnight—about forty hours non-stop. And yet there are still fools who come to sea!—but I still wouldn't leave it.

Three of the sailors "jumped ship" at Seattle so we are rather short handed at the moment. I think I told you about having to put our cook ashore in Shanghai, didn't I? Well, his successor is hopeless and as there is one of our ships in Los Angeles, we are trying to get the second cook from her.

I'm afraid there's no chance of meeting up for quite a while yet, but we'll "discuss it more thoroughly when the time comes".

Well, cheerio now, and please write to m/v Bradford City / c/o States S.S.6oy / Kobe / Japan.

I'll be waiting to hear from you again

Always

Owen

P.S. It will be a few weeks before my next letter.

Six weeks later...

2nd Instalment of the Book!

*M/V Bradford City
Reardon Smith Line
At Nagasaki
June 25th 1939*

Dear Eleanor,

Many thanks for you ever welcome letter which I received at Yokohama a week or so ago. It was all the more pleasant insomuch as it was unexpected.

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Thanks for the snap. It's jolly good, but I can't make out what you've written on the back—"Eleanor back....." (looks like "yad"—maybe "yard") then "pardon thelook". That looks like "bed-pan", but it's hardly that!

I will be getting some prints done in Shanghai, so will send one on from there—we'll be there in about four days, so I'll hold on to this letter until then.

It's dangerous to mention photography at all in Japan at the moment, otherwise I'd have them done here.

We have just come through the Inland Sea of Japan and are now at anchor at Nagasaki—the prettiest port in Japan—although a naval port.

I wish you could see it—we are in the middle of a landlocked harbour with high mountains, covered with thick green vegetation, all around us. In and amongst the green, the terraced cultivated patches make a pleasant contrast with the trees, and the lighter spots of almost yellow foliage—the bamboo—give the whole effect an almost camouflaged appearance.

Down on the breeze is sounding the strains of a taisho-koto—a sort of Japanese mandolin—the tone and tune of which, while not exactly pleasing to our ears, is yet somewhat soothing and typifies the scene as Japanese.

But—and there's a very big "But"—on the far side of the harbour the grim shape of war shows itself.

There are red-cross ships discharging their wounded from China, more soldiers embarking, and everything is hidden under a camouflage of paint and dummy trees.

We are not allowed ashore here, but even if we were, I hardly imagine that anyone would go because all our money went in Kobe, which is probably the best place for amusement in Japan—there are better beer-gardens there, and more people speak English—some of them can even manage American—a thing I can never do, although I can usually pick up foreign languages.

We had our first swim this year whilst we were at Kobe. We weren't quite sure whether it was warm enough so we all stood on the top of the gangway saying to each other "what's the matter? Scared to go in". Eventually, someone braver than me went in, and on his recommendation I followed.

At Shanghai July 2nd

I had to break off the letter rather abruptly, owing to the Old Man coming on the bridge—so am carrying on at Shanghai.

We have been here two days now—and this time are lying right up against the blockade that the Chinese put across the river. All that can be seen of the 12 ships that they sank (to prevent the Japanese going any further up the river) is three funnels and the masts of three others. It's rather a pathetic sight, really, especially as it was ineffectual.

We are discharging our American timber here—it is brought up out of the hold and is lowered over the side and made into rafts. These are floated down to the mills by the current.

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One of the men on the rafts today jumped out of the way of descending timber and fell in between two logs which formed part of the raft. The logs came together with a “crack” and the coolie between them. He let out one quick, awful shriek and then passed up out. Unfortunately for him he wasn’t killed outright, because when the coolies pulled him out it was obvious he only had a minute or so to live and to my surprise and horror, disregarding the fact that he was mangled to pulp, they picked him up, shook him, pulled his hair, slapped him and yelled at him. I learnt afterwards that this was to drive out the evil spirits. He was dead before I got there.

Well—I suppose one coolie more or less doesn’t matter much, but it was rather rotten all the same, you know.

I’ll pack up now dear, so cheerio and best wishes.

Always

Owen

Sadly, the words of Owen Lewis, written to Eleanor Ahreus, from Shanghai, and posted to her from there on the 4th July, are the last we have from him. It was letter number 6, the previous two being numbered 1 and 5; how many more there were, we will never know. It has been our good luck that we have been able to read three of them.

Only in that last letter from Owen Lewis, did we get a glimpse of the darkening of the world, when, as a carefree young man he witnesses the backdrop of a war that was already happening between China and Japan. He was not to know, that two months later, he himself would be a helpless soul in the worst of all wars. There seems little doubt, that after clearing China, the Bradford City returned across the Pacific to the West Coast of USA/Canada. Britain had declared war on Germany on 1st September, and by 26th of the month, she was under the control of MOWT loading a timber/grain cargo in British Columbia for the UK. Owen Lewis would have continued his deck and bridge watches, and he probably had plenty more to tell Eleanor about. By the time the ship cleared the Panama Canal, he was very much part of a very big war himself. Most probably, he went on leave when the ship reached the uk, and we can only speculate his future.

Though the words of David Owen Lewis are penned in just three short letters, it is clear that he was a keen observer of events. He mentions the 1939 San Francisco Exposition, which he hoped to visit on his next call there. He comments upon the “Martians landing in New York” the year before: a spoof by Orson Welles that he broadcast on his radio show. He gives a vivid description of the death of a dock worker in Shanghai; and by far his most telling words were of his description of Nagasaki, just months before the outbreak of WW2; though he notes the hospital ships landing injured soldiers from the conflict with China, he still calls the city the most beautiful of all Japanese ports; compare his words with those of Capt Mark Higgins, a contemporary of Owen Lewis, who visited the port less than six months after the atom bomb had been dropped: “just a black wasteland, and even the ground still felt hot”.

In so many ways, his words sound just like those of many a third mate, before and since, and we can all recognise something of ourselves in him. And how often was there someone aboard who was always quick to correct your speech or spelling? I wonder what Miss Eleanor Ahreus thought of that?

For the record, she lived at 161 Sayre Street, Elizabeth, New Jersey; the street is still there to this day.

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He most probably wrote many more letters to Eleanor Ahreus, and the pity is we have but only three of them. For certain, he would have had much more to describe to her in the following months. And did they ever meet? Did they marry, even? We shall probably never know, but the search is ongoing!

At the outbreak of WW2, on 1st September 1939, the Bradford City was already on her way from The Far East to the West Coast of Canada, and by 26th of that month, she was berthed in Cowichan Bay, partway through a timber loading run. From there, she proceeded to Port Alberni to continue loading for the UK. It is interesting to note, that despite puzzlement in some quarters many years later, at the naming of the last of the 840's, as a tribute to that City, it at least confirms a connection with the port all those years ago.

From Port Alberni, she called at Los Angeles, departing for the Panama Canal on 6th October which she transited on 15th and headed north to Halifax. It seems extremely likely, that the intention, once there, was to join Convoy HX7, which was due to depart for Liverpool in early November. In fact, she arrived at Halifax on 28th October, and it would seem that she decided, or was instructed, to cross the Atlantic under her own steam, as she departed from there on 31st and HX7 did not leave Halifax until 2nd November. The convoy consisted of 30 allied merchantmen, plus escorts. Both the sister ships, Tacoma City and Victoria City, themselves elder sisters of the Bradford City, were part of that convoy, the former with a cargo of pig iron and the Victoria City was loaded with cotton. The convoy reached Liverpool on 16th November, whilst the Bradford City, unescorted, contacted Prawle Pt on 12th November, and docked in London for discharge three days later. Upon completion, she was fixed for another voyage to the West Coast to load timber products and grain for London and Belfast.

There is no knowing whether Owen Lewis signed off the Bradford City when she berthed in Surrey Commercial Dock on 15th November 1939; he may have remained for a further voyage. We do know, however, that another young man, William Cross, in his brand new uniform, climbed up the gangway that day, and reported to the Master. Willie, as we all knew him, was beginning his apprenticeship with Reardon Smith Line, and he would spend the next twenty three and a half months aboard the vessel. It would however, be a fascinating thought that Owen and Willie may have at least shared some time as shipmates.

The Bradford City departed the Port of London on 3rd December 1939, anchored at the Nore on the 4th, and cleared Southend on 6th, arriving Colon on Xmas day 1939. Once through the Canal, she was directed by MOWT to take a "special route" to Vancouver. However, she actually arrived at New Westminster on 10th January 1940, to commence her loading sequence: Vancouver, Cowichan Bay, Victoria, finally Port Alberni where she departed on 25th and arrived San Pedro on 30th and sailed south to the Canal on 31st. There she arrived on 10th Feb and, making a quick transit, arrived Halifax in time to join Convoy HX 22 on 20th, the convoy departing on 22nd. As a whole, the convoy, as usual, was destined for Liverpool, but at the time of departure, Bradford City was to proceed to Southampton. The convoy reached Liverpool on 9th March, but on the 1st March Bradford City's discharge orders were reverted to her original ones, and she was ordered, once more to London. Sailing unaccompanied, she arrived and boarded the Thames Pilot at Gravesend at 1500 9th and berthed, somewhere in the London Dock system early on 10th March.

When the Bradford City set off in Convoy HX 22, in which there were 35 allied vessels, she took up the front rank position of column 7, two places to starboard of the main escort, HMS Royal Sovereign. At some point during, or at one of the splits of the convoy, Bradford City came into contact with the Nyanza, who was stationed at P82, on her starboard quarter. Owned by Maclay and McIntyre, of Glasgow, she was a similar sized vessel to the Bradford City, but about eight years her senior; she survived the "bump" and continued on until scrapped in Spain in 1960.

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As a result of the collision, repairs to the Bradford City were required upon the completion of her timber and grain discharge, and these were carried out in London. During that time, she was again fixed for a voyage to the West Coast. By 31st March, she was anchored off Southend, when progress had already begun on fitting up Shifting Boards. She signalled Dover on 1st April, in code, that she was bound west to the Panama Canal, and expected arrival there about 21st April. In fact, she made good time and arrived there on 20th, and cleared Balboa for BC on 21st, arriving Victoria on 14th May.

Subsequently, she arrived at Port Alberni, on 16th, and it appears that the majority of her forest products were loaded at this port. She departed on 20th and arrived at San Pedro on 23rd. There is no indication whether grain was loaded here or in BC. However, she departed for the Canal the same day and arrived Balboa 4th June, cleared the Canal on 5th and arrived, this time, at Bermuda on 11th June, and joined Atlantic Convoy BHX 50, which departed on 12th June and joined up with HX 50 on 17th June. Bradford City's identical sister, Cornish City, was also in this convoy with a similar cargo.

On this occasion, Bradford City stayed with the convoy to Liverpool, where she was initially designated to discharge at Garston (hopefully, with some lightning beforehand – writer's comments). However, upon arrival, on 28th June, she was ordered to cross the Mersey and proceed up to Manchester via the Canal. She arrived in Salford Docks on 29th, having made the best of the daylight hours along the Canal. All her West Coast cargo was discharged in Manchester, and by 19th July, she had collected her Funnel top from the quay at Eastham Locks, raised her topmasts and entered the Mersey.

During her time in Manchester, she had once again been fixed to load timber products and grain from the West Coast. However, on 12th July, these arrangements were changed, and she was ordered to proceed to the ECUS to load a cargo of steel and scrap. She left the Mersey on 20th July and arrived Norfolk Va on 4th August. There she loaded a part cargo, and departed the following day for New York where she arrived on 6th, and continued loading until 17th when she sailed for Halifax to join Convoy HX 67, arriving there on 18th. The Convoy departed on 20th and arrived Liverpool on 4th September. This time, Bradford City was stationed at Position 2 Column 6.

On 27th August, Bradford City received orders to join up with Convoy FS274, and to proceed to Hull, presumably for repairs. She joined this North Sea coastal convoy at Methil Roads and sailed from there, in company with nine other vessels, on 6th September and arrived at Hull on 9th. Repairs were carried out between 12th and 19th, and she sailed on 24th, going North About, calling again at Methil Roads, and arrived Liverpool, her original destination, on 4th October.

During her eastbound Atlantic crossing, her next business had first been set for another ECUS voyage for steel and scrap which soon changed, no doubt as a result of her need of repairs, and was instead to load grain from Australia. Finally however, she was fixed to load 9000 tons of oil seed feed stuff from Marmagoa/Karachi range: laydays 1-31st December, and set to sail from Liverpool to Calcutta under the MOWT liner division, and would load at Ellerman Bucknall berths.

After discharge of her cargo at Liverpool, she actually sailed for Bombay on 16th October, dropping the Mersey pilot at around 1500 17th. She thence proceeded, unescorted to Table Bay (CapeTown) for bunkers, arriving there on 15th November and sailed the same day. She arrived at Bombay on 2nd December 1940, part loaded, before calling Karachi, Navalckhi and returning to Bombay on 14th. She finally sailed Bombay on Xmas Eve and arrived at Table Bay on 11th Jan for bunkers and sailing the same day, she arrived at Freetown on 22nd, where she took on further supplies and bunkers, and waited for details of any likely enemy movements, before being given the

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all clear to depart on 31st for Greenock, arriving Tail of the Bank on 22nd Feb, obviously having experienced engine problems en route.

Repairs were carried out whilst in the Clyde, before calling Belfast 9th/10th March and after awaiting orders, arrived Newport, Mon, 15th where she had been fixed to load Coal and Trucks for the Middle East.

By now, the Mediterranean was proving a difficult sea to operate in, and the Bradford City was once again ordered out to the sub-continent, and sailed Barry Roads on 5th April, bunkering at Milford Haven on 6th. From there she arrived once more at Freetown on 28th, bunkered, departed on 29th and arrived at Durban for further bunkers on 15th May before departing up the East Coast of Africa for Aden where she arrived on 28th May. Here, she discharged her part cargo of Welsh Steam Coal and sailed on 2nd June for Suez. After transiting the Canal on 7th, she arrived in Alexandria on 10th June. This was a congested port, and it was almost a month before she completed the discharge of her military vehicles. There is a suggestion that the vehicles were intended for the Crete Landings, and were probably late in arriving.

By this time she had already received orders for her next voyage. Again assigned to the MOWT Liner Division, she was fixed for a voyage from India, The Middle East or Persian Gulf.

She sailed from Alexandria on 12th July and transited the Suez Canal on 16th and arrived at Karachi on 27th where she remained until 5th August before returning across the Arabian Sea to arrive once more at Aden on 13th, bunkered and sailed for Suez on the 15th, where she arrived on 21st. There is little detail available of what cargo she loaded in the Sub-Continent, but it was discharged at both Port Said and Kantara (in the Canal). She sailed south from Suez on 23rd September.

On 14th August, Bradford City had been informed that upon completion of her Middle East discharging, she had been fixed for an October cargo of Sugar from Mauritius to the UK; thus it was, on 11th October she arrived at Port Louis and took just one week to load her bagged consignment, together with barrels of rum. From there, she sailed on 18th for Table Bay, where she called for bunkers on 27th and departed on 28th October for Freetown.

The following words, are those of Mr Blackwell, who joined the Bradford City, when she was in the Clyde undergoing repairs. They give some insight into part of the outward passage from the UK, as well as giving his impression of the trip from Mauritius to South Africa. Mr Blackwell was a 17 year old ordinary seaman, and some of his narrative was probably written many years later.

On February 26 1941 we left the shores of Old Blighty, as it was affectionately called, and headed out to sea, not knowing as usual where our destination was, but once the sealed orders were opened by the captain all was revealed - Freetown for stores, water, etc. As was the case in the early part of the war, we travelled in convoy for a couple of hundred miles or so, got a 'Bon Voyage' from the escort commander, the convoy dispersed and we all headed for our various ports of call. Full speed ahead. We were lucky if we managed 12 knots.

A zig - zag course was given by the powers that be, hoping, no doubt, to deceive the enemy submarines that might be in the vicinity. That in itself prolonged the journey to our destination. So we settled down to the long haul to Freetown through the notorious Bay of Biscay and onwards. Day turned to night, night turned to day. Whenever you woke up in the morning, all was the same. Sea and sky - very monotonous. Days and dates didn't really matter.

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Low and behold after many days, land was sighted. We were heading, into Freetown, where we got quite a reception from the natives in their canoes - pretty fierce looking characters. It was their practice to bring all manner of fruits in the canoes to barter for whatever was of use to them. I remember getting a huge bunch of bananas for a pair of socks. One of their specialities was to dive for money thrown from the ship's side. They would dive in to retrieve it. Fantastic swimmers!

The heat was awful - very hot and humid. After a few days we left Freetown and continued to steam down to the Southern Hemisphere.

What a relief to make the green sea and its freshness. Cape Town here we come. Thought we would never reach it. What a distance. Seemed strange being in the hot weather and with Christmas not far away. This was their summer. Anyway land came into view. As we drew nearer the land took on a significant shape. A tall and what appeared to be a large, flat, piece of land turned out to be a mountain. Table Mountain by name. It was as we drew nearer to the place of our berth in the docks, high and very flat.

Once tied up at our berth and all the necessary customs officials and the ship's agent had done their business we stocked up with more food and fuel. Couldn't go ashore as we would be sailing pretty soon. Next stop was Durban. Can't remember how long we stopped there, but what little I can recall was that it was a lovely place-----

Later-----and sailed down to the Island of Mauritius. Once there we loaded up with sugar and drums of liquid which I thought was undistilled rum or something like that. Off Mauritius I can only remember that huge cockroaches crawled about all over the place. If you stood on one what a splatter!

Nevertheless, cargo duly loaded, we left Mauritius and headed back to the Cape. Often wondered why it is called the 'Cape of Good Hope'?

We weren't very sure where we were heading. Secrecy was of paramount importance to our safety as well as information to the enemy.

Into Cape Town, for a short spell again. Then off again leaving the "Mountain" in the distance as it slowly disappeared from view and sank below the horizon.

There is one very vivid memory still etched in my mind. As we sailed in the waters of the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic Ocean, the swells created by the two oceans were enormous, and without a breath of wind to disturb the waters it was uncanny. I remember too that during the night watch under a moonlight sky giant whales used to surface close to the ship and blow water through their spouts. The first time I saw them I got a terrific scare. It was just like a submarine surfacing, large, black and shiny.

Once round the Cape, the captain told us we were heading back to Britain. That was good news, as sometimes the ships could be away for as long as a year or more. So now we settled down, to the tedious journey northwards and home.

We hear from Mr Blackwell later.

At approximately the same time that the Bradford City was departing Port Louis, Mauritius, on 18th October 1941, u-68, a type ICX u-boat, under the command of Kptn.Karl-Friedrich Merton, was in the adjacent South Atlantic at 12.27S; 10.27W, and proceeding at full speed, in a south-easterly direction towards St. Helena. She arrived off there on 22nd, and whether by intelligence, or chance,

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briefly entered the harbour of Jamestown and torpedoed and sank, the oil laden RFA tanker Darkdale.

From there, she made a hasty exit, and sailed due south until noon on 25th, when in position 21.27S 05.03W, she made definitive alteration to port, setting off almost due east. Three days later, and slightly south of this course, she encountered the Charlton, McAllum tramp steamer, the Hazelside. Torpedoed, she too was sent to the bottom at 0400 28th October.

From there, U-68 sailed almost due east along the 23 parallel, until the early hours of the morning of Saturday 1st November. Then in the first light of dawn, whilst surface steaming, the U-boat saw the outline of a merchant ship, about 4 points on her port bow, heading in a north westerly direction at some ten miles distance. Kptn Merten set a convergent course and closed the vessel to within about a half-mile, and then fired three torpedoes.

Mr Blackwell's words take up the story again:

On November 1 1941 between the hours of 4am and 7am there was a terrific explosion, and a huge column of water cascaded down onto the ship, the smell of cordite filled the air. It was a strange thing. I was up and washing my clothes in the bathroom when the strike occurred. All of a sudden there was complete silence. The engines had stopped. It was as if time stood still. Then there was commotion everywhere. Not panic. But it was obvious the ship was in a bad way.

She caught fire right away. Whatever was in those drums must have been highly inflammable, not only so but sugar would burn as well.

I remembered to run to our cabin and pick up my great coat and make for my lifeboat, which was on the starboard side - luckily for us I suppose, the torpedo struck just forward of the bridge into the No.2 hold.

We were all allocated our positions in the lifeboat, and mine was to secure the plug, as normally it would be out, so as to allow any rain or sea-water to drain out. I recall a moment of panic. I couldn't find the plug! However before the lifeboat entered the water I could see it was already inserted. We had no difficulty launching it as we were to the lee of the weather.

The order was given to abandon ship. All credit to the captain. He was the last to enter the lifeboat. We drew away from the stricken vessel but later we heard that the other lifeboat had had difficulties owing to the weather and the gaping hole in the side of the ship, which was causing water to pour in and at the same time creating a certain amount of suction.

Thankfully there were no casualties. Once clear of the ship we could only wait and see how long she would stay afloat. Gradually we could see her settling low in the water and down at the bow. Suddenly the stern rose high into the air, still burning fiercely. Slowly she began to sink, bow first as she went down, the siren started to blow, as if in defiance, as she went under there was an explosion as the tanks exploded, water rose into the air and the MV Bradford City went down to her watery grave with her precious cargo.

All that was left on the surface were two lifeboats and two anxious crews. Suddenly and without warning, the submarine surfaced and came very close to us. He had been, unknown to us, observing all that was happening. The conning tower opened and the captain appeared. Now what? We thought. Having heard of crews being machine gunned we all sat very still.

And Apprentice William Cross, in the port lifeboat tells us:

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Saturday 1st November 1941 Torpedoed at 0530 am position Latitude 22° 59'S., Longitude 9° 49'E in the South Atlantic Ocean, about 350 nautical miles west of Walvis Bay. The torpedo struck amidships, on the port side beneath the bridge. The boat, once in the water, faced great difficulty getting away from the ship's side, owing to a strong swell running on the port (weather) side, and the lifeboat was being sucked into the large hole in the ship's shell plating, made by the exploding torpedo.

A boat painter, (line), was thrown up onto the deck, where the Master, Captain Paul, was supervising the launching of the starboard lifeboat. Captain Paul led the line forward along the well deck and made it fast on the fo'c'sle head. The boat crew hauled the boat forward until they were clear of the damaged hull. They made away at last, shipping a lot of sea water. They had to throw 2 cases of oranges overboard, as the lifeboat was so low in the water.

The "Bradford City" was now on fire and sinking by the head. The port lifeboat, commanded by Chief Officer, Mr Loutitt, joined the starboard lifeboat commanded by Captain Paul which had remained alongside the ship, in better sea conditions under the lee of the ship's side, on the starboard side. Finally, the "Bradford City" sank, going down with her whistle blowing, in about 2600 fathoms depth of water, 25 minutes after being torpedoed.

Jochem Brennecke was a journalist who joined the U-68 in Lorient for her second Patrol. After WW2, and having spent time aboard other U-boats and German naval vessels, he wrote a book called "The Hunters and the Hunted". These were his words he wrote after the torpedoes had been fired:

Quote "U-68 submerged as quickly as she could. A quarter of a mile further on, Merten cautiously raised his periscope again. It was just possible that those fellows over there had pulled themselves together again and had manned their guns.

Merten had not yet got the ship in the periscope's eye when a murderous explosion rent the air,

'So that's it, by God!' cried Merten.

'Surface'

Merten leapt up to the bridge. A vast mushroom of thick black smoke covered the spot where the freighter had been. The force of the explosion must have been terrific, for the columns of water rose well nigh three thousand feet into the air. The ship seemed to have burst like a soap bubble.

It was only later that U-68 obtained any details. The ship had been the Bradford City, with a few thousand tons of aviation petrol aboard! That, then, was the reason for the panic-stricken flight."
Unquote

(There is no reason to believe that she was carrying aviation petrol, so it must be assumed that the barrels of rum reacted in a similar manner.)

It was still only 6.30am local time as U-68 nudged up closely to the two lifeboats, themselves quite close to each other. Kptn. Karl-Friedrich Merton was clearly visible, with other German Officers on the Conning Tower platform. Using a Loud Hailer, he addressed the 44 British survivors in the two boats.

Mr Blackwell tells us:

The submarine captain spoke in perfect English, and asked us where had we come from, what was the name of the ship, where were we bound for, what cargo had we been carrying? Our captain was

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very reluctant to answer. One and all sighed with relief when he gave him the information. The submarine captain shouted "Good Luck", closed the conning tower and disappeared from view beneath the waves.

And Apprentice William Cross describes the moment as follows:

A submarine was then seen surfacing about 2 nautical miles distant. It closed the two lifeboats and the survivors could see the "Ace of Clubs" painted on the conning tower. The submarine was U-68. The Germans, manning the conning tower asked a number of questions of the survivors including a demand that they identify the captain. No acknowledgement was given by the two boats and Captain Paul was not identified to the U-boat. The submarine moved off and then submerged.

Once the U-68 submerged, Capt Paul in the starboard boat discussed the situation with Chief Officer Loutitt in the port boat; all awhile both sets of crews frantically bailing water from the boats. They also had to jettison valuable items, including two crates of oranges from the port boat.

It was agreed that rather than try and make for the Island of St. Helena, for fear of overshooting the small island, both boats would endeavour to remain together and make for the South West African coast. Neither boat had an engine, and they would rely on sail power, and rowing if necessary. The starboard boat possessed an emergency radio, but presumably the port boat did not. We now know that Captain Paul and the Second Mate, in the starboard boat had at least a sextant and a timepiece. Amongst the several Newspaper articles that were written after the events, both in the UK and in the South African Press, there was also the suggestion that the port boat, under the command of Mr Loutitt, also had a sextant and watch, but this is not mentioned in Willie Cross's account.

Before setting off, the two boats were given code names: the starboard boat was called **Seagull** and the port boat was called **Cygnnet**

There now follows the three separate accounts of the time the crews spent in the lifeboats, and their experience after landing.

(1) The Ordinary Seaman's Tale (Mr Blackwell's Account)

It transpired we were approximately 200 miles west of Walvis Bay. We hadn't been able to get an SOS out as mast and aerial had been blown away. The most pressing item at that time was to bail the water out of our lifeboat, caused by the timbers shrinking, having been out of the water so long. Very tiring work. This I may say went on for a few days until the wood swelled. If we hadn't air tanks all round the lifeboat it would have been curtains. Not only so we didn't have the luxury of motor engines either.

As a young lad of 17, I didn't really appreciate the seriousness of the situation.

As we came to terms with our situation it was decided to try and keep the two lifeboats in touch with each other. Looking back now and thinking about it, it wasn't very easy, especially when we hadn't any engines. We had a sail which was better than nothing.

As dusk approached on the first night we were in contact with the other lifeboat. The wind increased a little and being in a small boat the motion was very erratic, quite a few of the hardened seamen were sea-sick. It didn't affect me thank goodness, as on my first trip to sea I was seasick and it was a horrible experience!

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The night was very dark, as it was starless and there was no moon. In all a miserable night as the water in the boat was still creating a nuisance, it was a case of continually bailing. Looking back now we had no earthly idea of how long we were going to be in this predicament or how long it would be before someone on patrol would spot us from the air and arrange for our rescue. Dawn broke, daylight came in and we were looking forward to seeing our shipmates in the other lifeboat. Not a living thing in sight! Where on earth were they? Could they have capsized or what? All manner of thoughts prevailed. Suffice to say we had the ocean to ourselves, and a very lonely place it was too.

As the day progressed our immediate priorities were food and drink. Little did we realise how meagre were the rations. Two small casks of fresh water and tins - what we affectionately called dog biscuits. They were about 2 - 3 inches square and quite thick. The captain took control and started to dish them out. What I do remember was the small amount of each we were given.

So the first day passed reasonably well, but little did we know what lay ahead - thank goodness. So much for day 1.

Night descended, still bailing, still keeping our spirits up, even though there was an air of gloom which was to be expected. With so many men together little was said. Two men each took a two-hour watch.

Day 2 and daylight came in, which was a welcome sight. Night always can be long and lonely. Still no sign of the other crew, by this time our mast and sail had been erected, and we headed north with wind and current in our favour. Still bailing, but water penetration much less as timber was expanding with the water continually soaking the wood.

Thinking about eggs and bacon and all the good things we could have been enjoying. Time dragging. Still looking for signs of deliverance.

Night drew in and so we settled down and made ourselves as comfortable as possible. Slept until my turn for watch came around. Nothing else to do.

Day 3 dawned, weather similar. Still hoping to see a plane or sky. A little bit of depression setting in, but snapped out of it and trying to be content with our lot. Making steady progress up coast of Africa. Water level in the boat well below the duckboards. Got our daily ration of "water and dog biscuit".

Darkness again. Weather not too cold, getting used to being exposed to elements. Sky clear. With the stars twinkling brightly, one or two lads thought they were plane lights. Even that gave us a little encouragement.

Day 4. Breakfast same as yesterday. Only thing that bothered us was that we had a job to swallow the biscuit through lack of liquid. Settled down again and keeping eyes peeled for any sign of plane or ship. Continued sailing on. Limbs getting rather stiff, feet beginning to swell. Day came and went, night-time was upon us again.

Day 5. Understandingly we were down a bit in our spirits but there is always a bit of a comedian in a company of men. Getting more thirsty than hungry. The captain kept strict control over the rations, It was good to see that discipline was adhered to. There was never any sign of dissent. The day wore on still hoping for a sign of life to rescue us. No such luck! Nightfall was again upon us and as before we were like dogs trying to settle down in a comfortable position. So night came and went.

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Day 6. More or less followed the pattern of Day 5. The captain suggested that if we sucked a button, it would help to generate saliva. It did too. Food we could do without, but water was a necessity. During these last six days there was never any complaining or grumbling.

There was just one incident. One of the lads was tempted to drink his own urine. A close watch was kept. Advice was accepted. He didn't do it again.

It did not occur to me at any time that we would never survive.

So much for Day 6. As I am writing this many events and happenings become very clear, even although its over 50 years ago. An experience like this is etched into one's own mind.

It must, I am sure, have been night 6 that we all generally began to realise that no matter what, there was a higher power than what was on earth. It was a brilliant night, of clearness and stars. They were shining in all their glory and without any prompting somebody started humming "Nearer My God to Thee". It was taken up by the remainder of us. Then we sang 'The Old Rugged Cross' and 'The Lord's My Shepherd'; but in which order I am not sure.

I, for one, vowed that if we came out of this alive. I would go to church and no matter what I was offered to eat, it would never be refused. Strange that God always comes to mind when man's in an extremity. Not really, when God created the Heaven, Earth and Mankind.

Days, 7, 8 and 9 followed more or less in the same pattern, getting more thirsty. About the eighth or ninth day I was experiencing sore legs feet and arms, a kind of numbness.

Day 10 came and went. Night drew in. Excitement in the lifeboat. Somebody said they saw a light. The feeling was, oh, it must have been Imagination. But no. "There it is" Someone again shouted. Sure enough there it was. Our horizon was limited as we were low in the water so it wouldn't have been all that far away.

Again "Lead Kindly Light" was rendered. The captain sailed towards the light, but kept a safe distance until daybreak. We were beside ourselves with excitement. Patience was paramount.

Dawn broke. Daylight came, and we saw land, beautiful land. After 10 nights and 11 days it was marvellous to behold. As we approached the beach, there wasn't a lot of dwellings. Slowly we drifted onto the beach and jumped into the water just off the sand and although we didn't feel very strong we managed to beach the lifeboat. Legs pretty wobbly. The captain had his camera with him. Lined us up and took a snap of us. A pretty scraggy, but happy bunch.

Then we made our way up to the first building and a man came to meet us. He must have been very surprised. It turned out that he was the radio officer for that area. The land we were upon was called Cape Frio. The man spoke perfect English. What we wanted more than anything was a big drink of water. We were not allowed to just guzzle, but kept to a small amount to start with and then increased gradually. I remember I had to cut my rubber boots off. Feet very swollen. Events are a bit hazy as to what we did after we landed and settled down.

We were told that the other lifeboat had survived. The radio operator must have been in touch with the powers that be to get that information. They had made their way to the coast and landed. It was a barren part of the coastline. A message completed in stone, SOS, was apparently formed. The SOS was spotted, from the air by patrolling aircraft, the crew were rescued and taken to Cape Town.

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I remember we didn't get a lot to eat until our stomachs got adjusted. I know we were taken up to a place in Portuguese territory called Mossamedes. There we had a medical check-up and put on a strict diet. My arm was giving me a lot of pain, very swollen. Salt water boil. Had it lanced - "oh the pain"?

After nearly a week of rest we were to travel down to Cape Town on a neutral liner. As we made our way to the docks and preparing to board there was quite a number of passengers lining the railing, and spontaneously applauded and broke into song with "You cannot beat the boys of the bulldog breed", etc.

We were a bit worried at night as we sailed with all lights burning after the black out conditions. Even being a neutral ship didn't always immune yourself from attack.

On arrival at Cape Town we were taken to a lovely hotel "Hotel Ritz." It was indeed the lap of luxury. Too good to last. Expecting to be told we would be flying back to Britain, but we were due for a shock. The captain called us all together and said there was a ship lying in dock minus a crew. We were to crew that ship! It was called S.S. Botlea. When we saw it. Oh dear! It was an old Q ship, which is a tramp converted into a naval decoy ship and manned by naval personnel.

POSTSCRIPT It was this and other experiences during the war years that I came to realise that the Lord had preserved me and kept me from all harm, that I knew that if I trusted him with my life, all would be well, He has never let me down.

The Apprentice's Tale (Capt W G Cross)

Saturday 1st November 1941 – 1st Day

The submarine moved off and then submerged. Our position about 350 nautical miles from the S.W. African coast, sails set, course easterly. Stores on board: 3 casks of water, corned beef, biscuits and milk. Both boats agreed to keep together and steer for the African coast. Heavy weather blows up, and shipping water as night falls. We are very sick and cold. Night very bad, shipping much water, all soaked to the skin. Lost sight of other boat during night and never saw it again.

Sunday 2nd November 1941 - 2nd. Day Very rough sea conditions. Decided to heave to and remained so all day, hove to on our sea anchor, wind from south west. Rations: 2 biscuits, half a dipper of water per man, twice a day.

Monday 3rd November 1941 - 3rd Day Under way again. No sign of other boat or land. Everybody cheerful, except boatswain who is very ill and can hardly move. Sores breaking out on his legs from sea water. Me and Paddy Neil, apprentice, on 12-4 watch. No sleep for anyone, too uncomfortable. Continuous bailing and keeping lookout. Boat taking spray on board.

Tuesday 4th November 1941 - 4th Day Underway and proceeding. Holding course. Boatswain very bad, calling out for water all the time. We can do no more for him - we have no more medical supplies. Fair conditions, continuous bailing. Everybody wet from spray. Tried to catch seabird and finally accomplished it. Later, sun warm. We take watches at bailing, and also Mate Loutitt, 3rd Mate, and Paddy Flynn at steering. Mate and 3rd Mate and self caulked up leakages today. Still a lot of water in boat, wind still blowing from south west, our course east north east, making much leeway. Rations now 2 biscuits each per day with half dipper of water twice a day.

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Wednesday 5th November 1941 - 5th Day We sighted land at dawn this morning. Paddy Flynn saw it first, still anything up to 20 nautical miles away. Becalmed this morning - taking turns at rowing - tried to light some paper in a tin to make a smoke signal - no success. Lots of seals around. Bosun still ill. Closed land in the afternoon. About 1600 hrs, we were near enough to see the bareness of the beach. We were all agreed to attempt a landing; made three attempts at landing, all unsuccessful due to many submerged rocks and heavy surf. Hove to for the night, very loud surf, weather not too bad. Cold during night.

Thursday 6th November 1941 - 6th Day Lit flares during night. Nothing or no one about. Made an attempt to land at first light at dawn. Unsuccessful due to very rocky coast line. After breakfast, saw short piece of beach, sand, about 100 yards wide clear of rocks. Boat steered for it, Mate manoeuvred the boat nicely through heavy surf breakers, eased in stern first - as soon as we were through the breakers, I jumped overside first to steady bow, but was thrown over by surf and tossed up on the beach and cut about on sharp stones. Other crew members brought line ashore and we pulled her up on the beach as far as possible, without a drop of water getting into her. We quickly stripped the boat of all gear and built a camp with stores and gear from the boat. We constructed a water condenser out of old cans, as our water supply were running low. The electrician and Joe Betley, Radio Officer volunteered to walk to Walvis Bay, about 200 miles south, to bring help. In the afternoon about 1600 hrs an aeroplane came over, but probably mistook us for a fishing party. The two men cancelled their walk. In the hope of other planes coming over, we lit a big fire, watches were kept. I was on 12-4. Very cold - made tea.

Friday 7th November 1941 - 7th Day We wrote S.O.S. in the sand in large letters (6ft high). Very windy on beach, many seals on rocks, but no other living thing. At about 1000 hrs South African Air Force Plane dropped emergency rations and a note saying "be back later". Chocolate bars and cigarettes in the ration. Our water condenser is turning out about a bucket of water a day. The dry tea in the rations came in very handy for our tea. The plane returned dropping plenty of stores from low altitude, including fresh water. Dropped message, gave us our position and asked if we knew whereabouts of the Captain's boat. Message ended "Love and kisses. S.A.A.F."

Saturday 8th November 1941 - 8th Day During night two South African Navy minesweepers arrived off the beach. They saw our beacon and anchored off. Two small boats from the minesweepers attempted to come ashore, but the surf was too heavy. They sent a floating line ashore from a raft in an effort to salvage lifeboat but unsuccessful, as the line broke and they gave up the attempt. Later four soldiers arrived, having walked seven miles, the nearest they could bring their lorries. Made a final meal, then packed up all our clothes and gear. One party led by 3rd Mate and 4th Engineer set out early in the day to reach lorries. We rigged up a stretcher out of sail and oars for the bosun. We set out at 2.00 pm for the lorries, carrying the bosun, luggage and stores etc. in turns. Heavy going over soft sand. We carried him 7 miles and then waited for the small lorries to return for us.

We set out at dusk in a small lorry, with about half of our second party with the bosun. The truck took us 40 miles to a dried up river bed. There, we got out of the lorries and walked a further 4 miles carrying bosun to an ambulance and then 2 more miles in the dark to the camp where the heavy lorry was waiting. There was hot coffee waiting for us. We slept out on the desert.

Sunday 9th November 1941 - 9th Day We got up early to make an early start. First, dig out lorry, stuck in sand. All together now in one big lorry. Bosun gone in ambulance. Stopped at Cape Cross. One man living here, sealing. Went down to Seal station, saw thousands of seals on rocks. A further 200 miles to Swakopmund. Had a good meal, then onto Walvis Bay that night, where we slept. Next day by lorry over 200 miles to Luderitz where a train took us to Cape Town".

Captain Cross (Bill Cross)'s narrative/diary ended here.

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The Captain's Log

Saturday 5-45 am Torpedoed 22.59N;9.43E

Decided to steer towards coast.

All crew saved. 22 in each of 2 boats.

10 pm Gaff of mainsail carried away and when repaired Mates boat out of sight

2nd Sunday nothing uneventful happened

Sparks sent message by boat radio but unable to ascertain if received on account of faulty receiver

Monday 3rd Sparks again sent message

Tuesday 4th Sparks again sent message

Wednesday 5th Arrived off coast and hove to until morning and then proceeded slowly down coast.

No sign of habitation.

Sight taken noon giving 21.00S Lat but this is calculated by approximate Declination from memory.

Thursday 6th No sign of rescue no habitation no suitable landing. At daylight decided to proceed north as no chance of making progress against headwinds and current.

3pm Saw aircraft everyone jubilant but he passed us by without any signs of recognition. Everyone fairly well under circumstances. 2 biscuits per day, ½ dipper of water and milk (1 tin between 22 men twice daily). Fortunately, the chief had 5lbs of butter which he threw into boat. This is a Godsend on the biscuits. 1 tin 3 days. Water shortage is our main difficulty

Sent W/T @ 11-30am (5 times) saying what we intended to do. Sent again at 1pm 6 times, repeating above (3 times).

Friday 7th Nov.

Estimated Suns dec 16.23S. will try noon Latitude

Proceeding along coast at about 4kts. Becalmed @ 9am. Big fish jumped into boat today (about 11lbs), but landed on thwart and got back to sea again before anyone could catch it. Now trying to catch fish with bent nail as hook and white rag. Everyone suffering with sun burnt lips.

Lat 19.35S

Lat 20.30 at noon on day before we decided to go North

55 of Lat abot 55 miles dist

(1oz Meat, 1 biscuit with butter, milk and water

4pm Fresh breeze from SSW. Everyone in better spirits

Saturday 8th Nov

Land changing, more rocky less sand also darker, wind continues light ssw during last night, might not be so cold. Appears nothing seriously wrong with everyone.

Breakfast 1 biscuit with spread of syrup usual water and milk (one tine of milk mixed with 11 dippers of water)

Sparks says there is a Portuguese W/T Station he estimates is within 150 miles. Up to present have seen no signs of life on the land. Plenty of porpoises and black fish, numerous birds but the albatross are now absent. Plenty of sea duck. No luck with the fishing equipment.

Corrected alt 18.45

Zd .5

Appx Dec 16.38

Lat 18.50 N(??)

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(Estimate 15 days water, 4 lbs butter, 30 tins milk , 15 days 20 lbs corned beef 2 lbs syrup, 13 apples 30 oranges)

Sunday 9th November 1941

Fresh breeze throughout the night of 8th and continued until 7am when becalmed in a large bay.

Light breeze sprang up at 1030am

Coast changed slightly, more bays that before and difficult to navigate during darkness hours. Have to be guided largely by the noise of the surf on the shore. Fortunately for us this is continuous.

About 10pm got inside edge of off shore breakers. Fortunately managed to get through. Boat behaved splendidly. We have not yet found any place to land a boat and to be able to get it afloat again. Hopes for a good sun today.

Lat Noon Sunday 17.28S dis run 83 miles

Meals today. Breakfast 1 biscuit buttered, milk and water.

½ orange issued at Dinner time

Tea 1 biscuit buttered with corned beef spread, milk water, usual wack.

7.30pm picked up the light loom of Faral Basry Ligaros. Everyone jubilant an extra wack of water issued to celebrate the occasion. Everyone now in extra good spirits.

Monday 10th Nov

I am arrived off Farut Basry Ligros Lt

Lay off during the night

6.15 am Ran boat in on to beach on the lee side of Island and pulled up the boat on the beach as far as possible.

All crew then proceded up to the lighthouse where they made us coffee. Afterwards they made us a hot meal. The assistant at the light house then walked to the town 5 miles away in a very short time they came to fetch us in two fishing boats bringing food, wine also a doctor. When we arrived at the town six families took charge of us and I can only say that the hospitality of these people is wonderful. They gave us changes of clothes and washed our own. I cannot find words to describe their kindness.

Everyone suffering from boat cramps in fingers and feet, also sun burnt lips, sore eyes, ears, nose etc, stomach trouble.

Tuesday 11th Nov

Boat came from messamedes bringing letters and stores from HBM Consul. Unable to leave today as boat required repairs to machinery.

Wednesday 12th

It is decide to sail for Messamedes Midnight.

I went around the homes today to thank the people for their kindness for giving us shelter. Before we sail we all went to the Chef-De-Post's home for coffee. Afterwards, the whole occupants of village came to see us off.

There is little doubt they were sorry to see us go.

Messamedes

13th Nov.

The Sinking of the Bradford City

Landed at Messamedes. Had a good welcome from the populace also met by HBM Consul. We were later taken to hospital where we are to sleep. Afterwards went to restaurant for meal and came back to sleep at 9pm.

Doctors at hospital attended to all ailments. Everyone exceptionally kind.

14th Nov

10am After breakfast went to consulate with Chief. Afterwards distributed clothing and cigarettes supplied to us by the Red Cross.

The crew taking things quietly, sitting in gardens etc, Myself feeling rotten went to bed

15th Nov

Everyone feeling better with exception of Chief who today went to bed

Crew taking things easy and getting cleaned up. Hair cuts, shaven etc.

16th Nov Sunday

End.

Mr Blackwell's account has already told us of their horror when Capt. Paul informed the crew of the starboard lifeboat that they would not, after all, be flown home to the UK from Cape Town; instead they were to join the s.s.Botlea, that just so happened to be lying alongside in Table Bay, awaiting a crew!! The s.s.Botlea, it should be pointed out, had been allocated, by the MOWT, to Reardon Smiths in 1939, along with two other vessels, the Botusk and the Botavon. Initially, she was operated as a Q ship, but in late 1941 she was converted back to a general cargo ship. All she needed in November 1941 was a crew. The final part of Mr Blackwell's account describes their journey back to the UK.

Next thoughts were, whatever happens to us next? It transpired that we were going to Lorenzo Marques. Cargo was iron ore. Couldn't have been a worse one. When loaded it was like a half submerged submarine. One thing we knew for sure was if we were struck, we wouldn't stand a dogs chance. It would sink like a stone.

So off we sailed into the deep waters, with butterflies in the stomach. Many ships had gone down with many precious souls lost, and sailing along in this old tub didn't give us a lot of hope.

Progressed up the South Atlantic, crossed the Equator once more, and headed north to link up with a convoy heading for the UK.

Eventually met convoy and thankfully there were a few more escort vessels, which made us a little happier not that they could guard every vessel.

Had a number of attacks, whether false alarms or not, never knew. Depth charges, going off periodically. One could feel the dull thuds as they exploded. Neither did we hear of any losses, as the ships in the convoy covered a large area. There were always a few stragglers which in case of attack were sitting ducks.

One night, which was for a change calm and still, there was an almighty crash and the ship shuddered. Rushed up on deck to see what had happened. A greek tramp steamer came too close and hit us and scraped along our side. The noise of steel scraping against steel was horrible.

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The notorious Bay of Biscay was looming, sometimes it was calm, but this time we struck a severe gale. Very heavy seas, and being low and heavy in the water, rather than ride the waves they crashed down on us. One huge wave caught us amidships ripped the lifeboat from the davits uprooted the vents or cowls as we called them. The deck planks were uprooted, water poured down into the cabins. What a mess! Water everywhere. Thought we were going to founder, but the old tub kept going.

Weather eased, home drawing nearer. The Good Lord had been with us, although at the time we didn't realise it. Home at last, never thought we would see it. Ready for a good holiday, and prepare for our next trip. It was now April 1942.

Although there appear to be some contradictions of each other within the three narratives, there is little doubt that together, they give a very good account of the events that took place after the Bradford City went down.

And, importantly, now that Capt. Paul's log has come to light it has been possible, with the aid of modern mapping technology and with access to details of the Nautical Almanac for the period involved, to plot, with some accuracy, the tracks of both the lifeboats. The noon latitudes calculated by Capt. Paul and the 2nd Mate, appear amazingly accurate since they had to estimate the sun's declination, and would seem to have been no more than three minutes out in their calculations.

Undoubtedly, the agreed intention of both boats was to sail east and try to make the coast of South West Africa as soon as possible. Considering they became detached almost from the start, both boats brought up the coast on the 5th day of their ordeal, 5th November. And, more amazingly, they both appeared to make land around about dawn. In the case of Capt. Paul's boat we now know this to have been in the region of 20 50S 13 23E. This was obviously at a point on the coastline that would not allow for a safe landing and beaching of the boat. They then proceeded south along the coastline, but by dawn the following day, Capt. Paul turned about and sailed north, since they were making poor progress against the Benguela current and the strong southerly wind. It would be another four days before they would be able to make a safe landing.

The port boat, on the other hand, was able to make a direct landing on the part of the coast that she first reached although she stood off until the following morning, before successfully achieving this. Subsequent pointers from Willie's diary indicate that their point of contact with land was in the region of 20 20S 13 13E. This put the port boat only about 30 miles NNW of the starboard boat!

Now, this may only be speculation, particularly since there is no firm evidence of where the boats did first make the coast, particularly the port boat, but assuming that by the morning of the 6th, the port boat was already hauled up, and preparations were being made to encamp, the starboard boat was moving slowly south against current and headwinds. This continued until dawn the next day, when the boat turned north. At 1500 that afternoon Capt. Paul's crew spotted an aircraft, though despite their frantic waiving, there was no acknowledgement. Soon afterwards, at 1600, the encamped crew of the port boat also spotted a plane. We know that aircraft were searching, and it seems that both crews must surely have seen the same plane.

Despite both crews believing they had not been seen, the same plane returned next morning above the land crew and dropped supplies and messages; even asking if they knew the whereabouts of the other boat.

If the above positions are anywhere near correct, then the starboard boat must surely have passed the port boat and crew, at their encampment, sometime between the 6th and 7th, as they continued northwards.

The Sinking of the Bradford City

The Seagull continued up the coast, keeping just outside of the offshore breaker line, until the night of the 9th. Having seen the loom of a lighthouse in the evening at 730pm, which Capt. Paul states was Farul Basry Ligarus, though we now know that this was the Farol de Baia dos Tigres. The lighthouse was situated on the north facing peninsular of Baia dos Tigres. Some two and a half hours after raising the loom, Capt. Paul managed to get the boat inside the offshore breaker line which allowed him to sail round the western side of the peninsular, and then head for the northern entrance of the bay. Arriving there at 1am on 10th they hung off until 630am when they landed and beached the boat close to the lighthouse, where they achieved a good lee.

Had they been alive today, I wonder what Capt. Paul, Capt. Loutitt, Captain Cross, and the other 41 brave survivors would have thought if they knew that the Skeleton Coast is now a Namibian National Park.

Once ashore, all three narratives describe their journey back to Cape Town, and there is no further elaboration required in that respect. However, it must be pointed out, that as far as is known, neither boat crew met up before returning to the UK. In fact, in the case of Capt. Loutitt's crew, which included young Willie Cross, we have no knowledge of how they did return. We do know, however, that John Nash, the "inventor" of their evaporator, possibly remained in South Africa and reached considerable rank in the South African Army.

As for their assailant, after U-68 had sunk the Bradford City on 1st November, she spent the next four or five days in waters quite close to where both lifeboats were making towards the coast, and on 4th November was probably very near to them. She was, no doubt, hoping to come across a vessel that might have come to the aid of the two boats.

For the next month she remained in an area to the east of St. Helena, slow moving and obviously awaiting further targets. Then, on 5th/6th December, having made no further kills, she received orders to return to base, and 20 days later, after a patrol of 106 days, she arrived back at Lorient, on Xmas day, to something of a festive welcome.

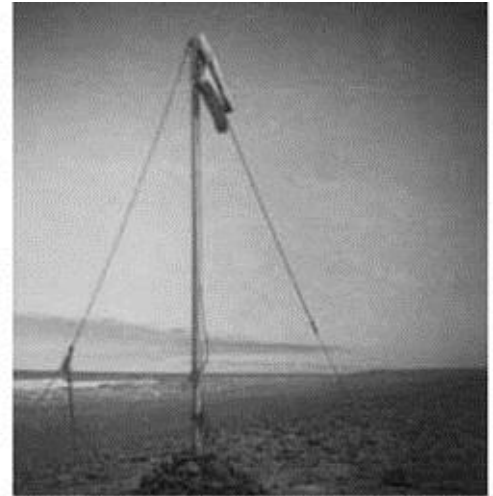
See below for video footage of her return to base.

The Sinking of the Bradford City

A member of the South African Army team that rescued the crew of the port lifeboat took the following photographs. They were given to Captain Willie Cross at the time, and at least one other set was given to John Nash, the Second Engineer.



PART OF CREW BY CAMP.
LEFT TO RIGHT: BACK ROW: J. STOTT, APP.
MR. LOUTIT, CHIEF MATE, IN CHARGE, J. NASH, 2/ENG
J. HALLIDAY, ELECTN. DONKEYMAN, W. CROSS, APP.
F. ROWE, JNR. ENGR., CABIN BOY, P.T. FLYNN, APP.
LEFT TO RIGHT, FRONT ROW: P. O'NEIL, O.S. 4/E J. BETLEY, R/O



LIFEBOAT MAST. RIGGED UP ON SHORE AS SIGNAL,
WITH JUNIOR ENGINEER'S PYJAMAS ON IT.
TYPICAL LOCAL SCENERY



SOUTH AFRICAN ARMY & NAVAL OFFICERS
CONFER BEFORE SETTING OUT.
SEEN HERE ARE THE LORRIES, ONE OF WHICH
TOOK US TO WALVIS BAY.



VIEW OF BEACH WITH BOAT & CREW IN BACKGROUND.
TO THE RIGHT - THE ENCAMPMENT.
NOTE FOAM FROM HEAVY SURF.

The Sinking of the Bradford City



GROUP, JUST AFTER ARRIVAL OF S. AFRICAN SOLDIERS. ARMY CAPTAIN IN FOREGROUND, WITH GOGGLES ON, SAMPLES OUR BISCUITS AND A TINFUL OF TEA.

F. ROWE, JNR. ENGR. WITH BACK TO CAMERA.



MR. LOUTITT, MATE & 2ND ENGR. J. NASH WITH WATER CONDENSOR. FUEL WAS DRIED UP TREES & DRIFTWOOD.



BEACH WITH 2 SOUTH AFRICAN MINESWEEPERS IN DISTANCE. PETRIFIED WOOD, WITH WHICH THE BEACH WAS COVERED, IN FOREGROUND.

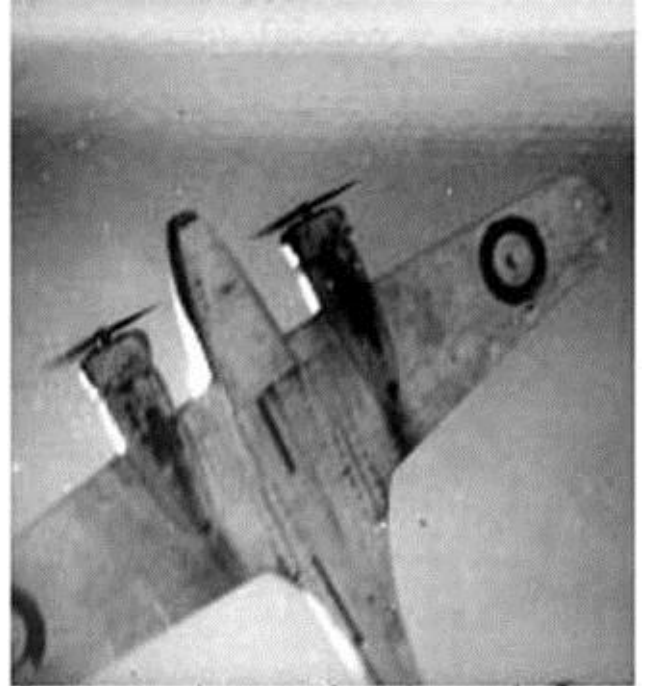


CH. MATE LOUTITT SEEN HERE WITH RESCUERS. Left to Right: CAPTAIN, S. AFRICAN ARMY, IN CHARGE OF PARTY. CHIEF MATE, SERGEANT & SERGEANT-MAJOR IN BACKGROUND IS OUR ENCAMPMENT.

The Sinking of the Bradford City



WATER CONDENSOR : SALT WATER IN TIN WITH FIRE UNDERNEATH, PIPE HAS HOLLOW DODGER STANCHION, BUCKET TO RECEIVE FRESH WATER STANDING IN A BUOYANCY TANK FULL OF WATER. ONE BUCKET OF WATER, SLIGHTLY BRACKISH, WAS OBTAINED ON FIRST DAY. 2ND. ENGR. IS TENDING FIRE & THE MATE IS BY THE TANK.



PLANE IS AIRCRAFT OF SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCE, WHICH CAME OVER FIRST ON FRIDAY MORNING, DROPPED SUPPLIES BY COMING DOWN TO 20 FEET ABOVE GROUND. UNABLE TO LAND ON ACCOUNT OF SOFT SAND.



PREPARING THE LIFEBOAT FOR SALVAGE. OFFSHORE, A BOAT FROM THE MINESWEEPERS ATTEMPTS TO FLOAT LIKE ASHORE.



PART OF BOAT'S CREW, TAKEN BEFORE DEPARTURE. Left to Right, BACK ROW: J. STOTT, APP., P. T. FLYNN, APP., DONKEYMAN, J. NASH, 2ND ENGR., W. CROSS, APP., J. BETELEY, PAW/OH. ELECTRICIAN, MR. LOUTITT, CHIEF MATE. Left to Right, FRONT ROW: CABIN BOY, P. O'NEIL, O. S. F. ROWE, JNR. ENGR., 4TH. ENGR., STEWARD.

The Sinking of the Bradford City



The crew of the port lifeboat spotted by a SAF plane. They were in the process of making an "SOS" out of driftwood



BOSUN, BEING CARRIED ON STRETCHER, MADE BY USING TWO BOAT OARS WITH SAIL LASHED IN BETWEEN

SEEN ON NEAR SIDE : 2ND. ENGR., ELECTRICIAN, SENIOR APPRENTICE, CHIEF MATE, JNR APPRENTICE, JNR. ENGINEER.

The Sinking of the Bradford City

Postscripts and Updates

The Ships

The Bradford City, built in 1936, was the fourth of five similar vessels built by the Furness Haverton Hill Shipyard at Stockton-upon-Tees. The others were Devon City, 1933, Houston City 1934, Dallas City 1936 and the Cornish City, also 1936. Two further similar, but more modern vessels were delivered in 1940. These were the Madras City and Orient City.

Technical details can be found on the WebPages.

Of the first five pre-war ships, Houston City, Dallas City, Bradford City and Cornish City were all lost to enemy action. It was perhaps ironic, that it was the first built Devon City that survived the hostilities and when sold to new owners in 1958, she was renamed Cinderella! She was wrecked off the south east coast of South Africa in 1967.



The Sinking of the Bradford City

The Boats



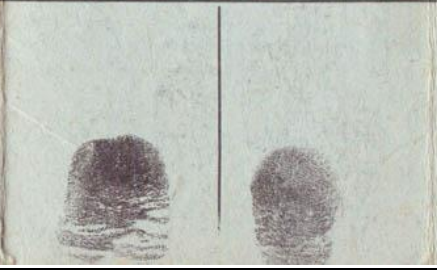

One can only wonder and speculate about how many lifeboats became “second-hand” during the two world wars. I can recall personally, when staying on Bardsey Island in the 1950’s, being transported to and from the Island in a ship’s lifeboat that had drifted there during the war years of the 1940’s.

When the crews of the Bradford City were rescued, both boats must surely have found new owners; in fact, Richard Paul informs me that his grandfather made a special point of giving the starboard boat to the people of Sao Martinho dos Tigres, as a thanks for all they had done for them. He was, however, subsequently reprimanded by the authorities for doing so. Nevertheless, he was able to bring the boat’s trusty compass back to the UK; surely a piece of wartime memorabilia to be cherished.



The Sinking of the Bradford City

Captain Henry Paul

2 Particulars (1) Surname <u>PAUL</u> (BLOCK CAPITALS) (2) Christian or First Names <u>Henry</u> (3) Date of Birth <u>7th September 1886</u> (4) Place of Birth <u>Exmouth</u> (5) Colour of (a) eyes <u>Blue</u> (b) hair <u>Grey</u> (6) Complexion <u>Fair</u> (7) Height <u>5</u> ft. <u>10</u> ins. (8) Distinguishing Marks <u>Ship on right forearm</u> <u>Snake on left forearm</u> (9) Nationality—see Panel 7.	3 Photograph of Holder  Signature of Holder <u>Henry Paul</u> C.R.S.53 M.M.O. Embossing Stamp 390812	4 Particulars—continued (10) Dis. A. No. <u>390812</u> (To be entered in all cases.) (11) Certificates held— Grade <u>Mate</u> No. <u>003773</u> (Including E.D.H., Ship's Cook, Lifeboat, etc.) (12) Rank or Rating if not a certificated Officer (If A.B. Supt. to verify and initial). (13) National Service Registration No. (14) Is holder an Armed Forces Reservist? <u>.....</u> (Reservists include R.N.S.R. and H.M.S. "Gordon.")
LEFT-HAND FINGERPRINTS (Plain impressions of four fingers)	THUMBS—PLAIN IMPRESSIONS LEFT RIGHT	RIGHT-HAND FINGERPRINTS (Plain impressions of four fingers)
		

Henry Paul was born in Littleham, Exmouth, on 7th September 1886. Unlike many Devon Seafarers, Henry was from farming stock; his parents, Zacharius and Martha were farmers, as too were his grandparents, upon whose farm, Woodlands, Henry was raised.

However, no doubt influenced by the proximity of the sea, on 24th March 1902, Henry Paul became indentured to a small London Tramp company, owned by Galbraith, Pembroke and Co. Ltd, but who traded under the name of The Austin Friars Steam Shipping Co.Ltd, taking its name from the London street where their offices were situated. He completed his apprenticeship three years later, on the 31st March 1905, whilst serving aboard the s.s.Winchester in Calcutta. He continued aboard that vessel as AB until 15th May of that year.

After making a further voyage as AB, and returning to the UK, where he obtained his 2nd Mates Ticket, he joined the Cardiff company of W.& C.T.Jones, as 2nd Mate, and remained with them until at least 1913, by which time he was sailing as Mate. He most likely joined Smiths sometime between then and 1917. By 1919 he was master of the Leeds City, a recently acquired vessel from Pyman Brothers.

Over the coming months, we hope to dedicate a separate article to Capt Henry Paul, since we have been extremely fortunate in making contact with his grandson, Richard Paul. Richard has supplied us with an enormous amount of detail and artefacts relating to his grandfather, including Captain Paul's lifeboat log, which has been reproduced in this article. It is hoped to find a suitable depository for his collection.

Almost one year before the sinking of the m.v.Bradford City, Capt. Henry Paul's son, Peter Paul, who as 3rd Mate, survived the sinking of the Fresno City by the Admiral Scheer. A young apprentice by the name of Jake Vaughan was also a survivor.

Richard Paul informed me that his father had told him, more than once, that there were no atheists in ship's lifeboats! This was quoted at Peter Paul's funeral some sixteen years ago.

The Sinking of the Bradford City

U-68

U-68 was a type IXC U-boat that was built at AG Weser, Bremen. Though she was launched in October 1940, she was not commissioned until 11th February 1941. Her first commander was Karl-Friedrich Merten. He remained with her until January 1943. During that period she undertook 5 active Patrols, mostly in the Eastern and South Atlantic. They were to be extremely successful days for both U-68, and her Commander. In the time of his command, she accounted for the loss of 27 allied ships sunk, with a total tonnage 170,151 GRT.

The remainder of her career lasted until 10th April 1944, when she was sunk off the Canary Islands by depth charges dropped by aircraft belonging to the USS Guadalcanal; 56 of her company of 57 were killed.

In her final year, she added further sinkings to her tally, and her total of 32 ships amounting to 197,453 GRT, was the ninth highest amongst the whole fleet of U-boats. Her most notorious sinking took place a year after accounting for the Bradford City, when she sank the Ellerman Hall passenger cargo liner, *City of Cairo*, in a similar area off South West Africa. It was that sinking that immortalised her career, as well as that of Karl-Friedrich Merten (See below)

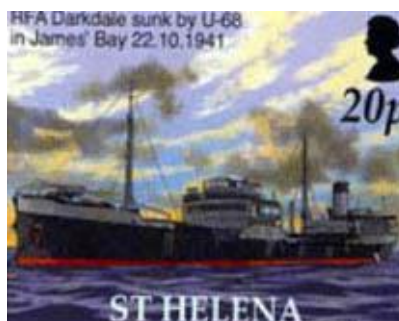
As indicated in the diary narratives, her iconic motif was the Ace of Clubs.



ICX Class U-68



ACE OF CLUBS BADGE



Sunk by U-68. RFA Darkdale, was the first allied vessel to be sunk south of the equator in WW2

Further details can be found here:

<http://www.uboaat.net/boats/u68.htm>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zcf6vQHfS_c

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFtDQP8mV7c>

The Sinking of the Bradford City

Karl-Friedrich Merten

Karl-Friedrich Merten was born in Posen in 1905, then part of the German Empire. After initially serving on warships, he joined the U-boat arm of the Navy in 1940, and though his only active service was 5 patrols in command of the IXC Class U-68, he achieved, in that short space of time, the ranking of 7th most successful U-boat ace of World War 2. He was amongst the elite who accounted for over 100,000 tons of allied shipping, with 27 ships sunk (170.151 tons). He was one of the few U-boat commanders to be decorated to the level of Knights Cross with Oak Leaves.

The Bradford City was his fourth “kill”, and was, coincidentally, only the fourth Merchant Ship to be torpedoed south of the equator.

His final victim was the Ellerman Hall Line passenger cargo ship *City of Cairo*. Torpedoed a year after the *Bradford City* on 6th November 1943, in a location also to the west of South West Africa, she had on board over 150 passengers, many whom were women and children. Much has been written about the incident, and it remains a much-debated subject all these years on. Further details can be found at the excellent City of Cairo WebSite www.sscityofcairo.co.uk/



A wealth of books and articles have been written on the subject; many being personal memories of the survivors; TV and film videos have also been made. It was whilst questioning the occupants of the lifeboats, that Merton uttered his famous words “Goodnight, Sorry for Sinking You”. Many of our members will have read the book of that name by the late Ralph Barker.

After Merten left U-68, in 1943, he became very much responsible for the final training sessions of newly appointed U-boat commanders.

After WW2, Karl-Friedrich Merten, was, somewhat ironically, involved in the raising of sunken ships in the Rhine, before becoming involved in the German post-war shipbuilding industry.

In later years, he spent time giving interviews about his time in U-68, often defending his actions, and there are several clips of film and video of him. In particular, there is footage of U-68 having just arrived back at Lorient on Xmas day 1941, at the end of the second Patrol when the Bradford City was sunk.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zcf6vQHfS_c

He was very critical of the TV film, “Das Boot”, insisting that it was far from reality.

He died on 2nd May 1993, aged 87.

The Sinking of the Bradford City

David Owen Lewis

We said goodbye to Owen Lewis, with the last of his letters posted from Shanghai on 4th July 1939. However, such was the coincidence of coming into the possession of those letters he wrote, and how it became clear that they fitted into the story of the loss of the Bradford City, I felt duty bound, to try and find out more about him. Initially, it was not easy, but eventually, I discovered that there would be no fairytale marriage to Eleanor Ahreus; instead, five years later he married Ivy Patricia Roy, herself a recent widow! I guess he was always something of a ladies' man!

At the time of the marriage, Owen was living with his parents, in Waterloo, Liverpool; the house, in Fir Road is still there, and is seven miles from where I live. So far, no evidence of children but with this saga, who knows?

By then, he had acquired his master's certificate and was sailing as second mate; unfortunately, we do not know with which company. His father was also a Master Mariner, with a Masters Ticket; Alfred Owen Lewis. He was born in Pembrokeshire, as too, was David Owen.

The Sinking of the Bradford City

The Landings

With the appearance of Capt. Henry Paul's lifeboat log of the starboard boat, we now know with certainty where they landed. Having arrived at the coast of South West Africa (Namibia), at almost the same time as Capt. Cross's boat, they were unable, like the port boat, to make an immediate landing. Having reached the coastline in about 20 50S 13.23E, early on 5th November, they initially sailed southwards along the coastline, before turning northwards in about 21 30S 13 51E on 6th November. Staying with the coastline, just outside of the offshore breakers, they continued for a further 4 days.

As mentioned in the main text, the noon latitudes taken by Capt. Paul and, presumably, his second mate, appear in retrospect, remarkably accurate; remember, they had no Almanac. In particular, the latitude for 7th November appears to be of particular importance in respect of their positions: the complete calculation, including sextant altitude, correction and zenith distance, together with the "assumed" declination, are neatly shown in Capt. Paul's handwriting on the inside cover of the original manila folder that encloses the log. That sight clearly showed them at 19 35S 12 48E. Longitudes, have of course, been added by the writer, and taken directly from modern satellite projections relative to the coastline.

For the first four days, it would seem that the weather was overcast at noon, and hence there are no latitudes shown, but in reality, their object was solely to make for the coast. From Capt Cross's account, the weather did not look good for the first three days, though he mentions the sun on 4th November. The area is also notorious for poor visibility.

In transcribing Capt. Paul's words, his handwriting is remarkably clear and steady. Only when it came to figuring the name of the lighthouse, was there some difficulty. It is mentioned on both the evening of the 9th and the morning of the 10th and appears to be either Faral Basry Ligaros or Farut Basry Ligros Lt. In fact, the "L" is a "T" and therefore is obviously Tigres, which undoubtedly refers to the lighthouse that was at the north end of the western peninsular of Baia dos Tigres. Though he refers to landing on the lee side of the Island, it was, in fact still a peninsular; today it has separated and become an island.

After much searching, it has been possible to locate a 1943 Portuguese admiralty chart for the area and this confirms the lighthouse, known then, also as Ponta da Marca. There appears no satellite evidence of the structure today, and this would seem to apply to much of this area of southern Angola, that was devastated in the fighting of the 1970's. However, the chart includes a small inset picture of the light. Both this and other images can be found below. Keen eyed navigators will note that the chart appears to have been hand corrected!!

The village that was so hospitable was undoubtedly Sao Martinho, which today is in ruins, and the island is uninhabited.

Messamedes, on the mainland, and some 55 miles further north was where the crew were next taken. Today, it is a district of Namibie, the capitol of the area. The district is now known by its old Portuguese name, Moçâmedes.

Both Baia dos Tigres and Moçâmedes, were and still are, part of Angola; the border between there and South West Africa being about 30 miles south of the island.

Based upon the descriptions given by Captain Cross in his diary, their landing place, and subsequent encampment, was about 50 miles north of the dried Ugab River bed, so this, in fact would place it at Torra Bay in 20 20S 13 14E, rather than 20 miles south of the latter, as has previously been suggested.

The Sinking of the Bradford City

Whilst plotting the noon positions of the Seagull, it became evident, that at some point on 6th/7th November, whilst sailing north along the coast, she must have passed the point where the Cygnet and her crew were already encamped. Allowing for some error in the positions of both boats, this most likely happened during the hours of darkness. One wonders whether Capt Paul and Capt Loutitt ever had an opportunity later, to consider this likelihood.

The area in which both boats landed, has always been known as the Skeleton Coast, so named because of the abundance of seal and whale bones; a legacy of the whaling and sealing trade. Today, the area is reserved as a National Park, and appears in the brochures of the more exotic travel companies. Its main attraction is for the wild life. Imagine telling all that to 44 shipwrecked sailors in 1941!

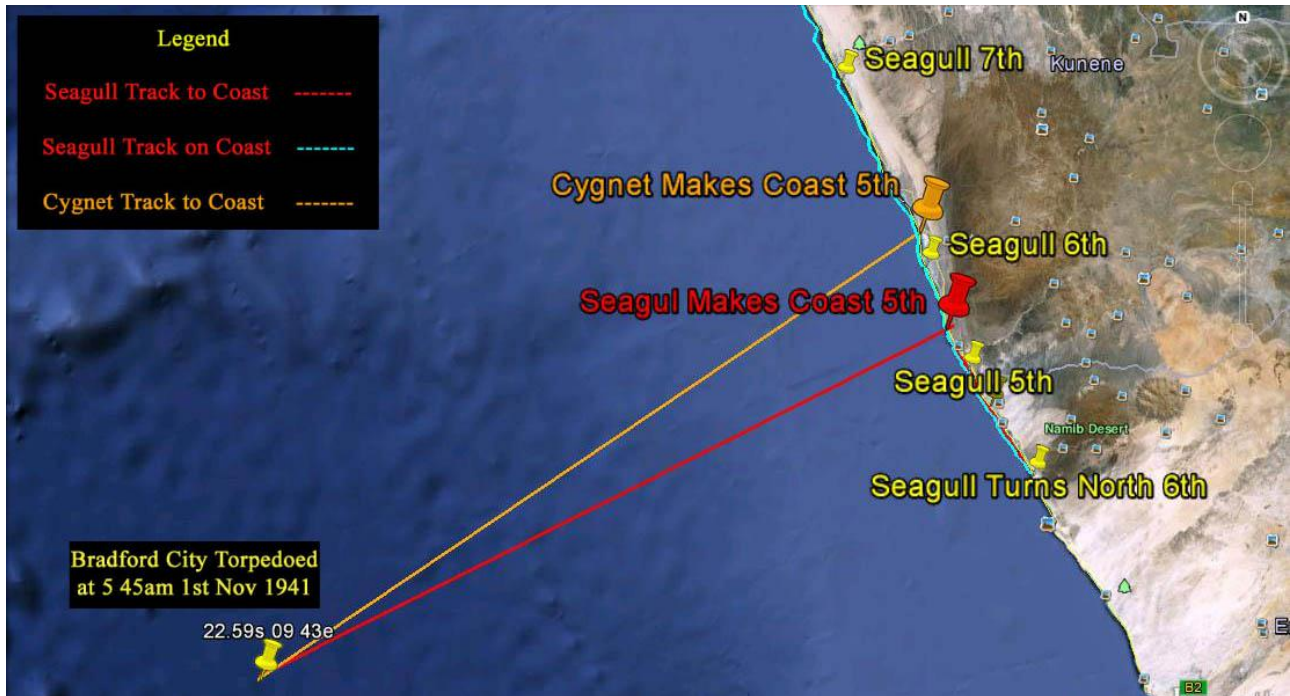
The most likely route taken by the vehicles that rescued Capt. Cross and his shipmates is probably the one used today by 4x4's on their safaris; the southern entry into the Park crosses the dried up Ugab river bed some miles inland from the coast.

In more recent times, though currently in decline, diamond mining has been carried out on the coast and Bryan Boyer informs me that Willie Cross once told him that during their encampment, he picked up a large piece of dark, glasslike stone, but subsequently threw it away!!

The Sinking of the Bradford City

The Maps

The following three maps have been created, upon digital images, using the data that is given in the Log and Diary Accounts of Capt Henry Paul and Capt W G Cross respectively.



Seagull and Cygnet Make the Coast of South West Africa



Seagull sails up the Coast line and into Angola

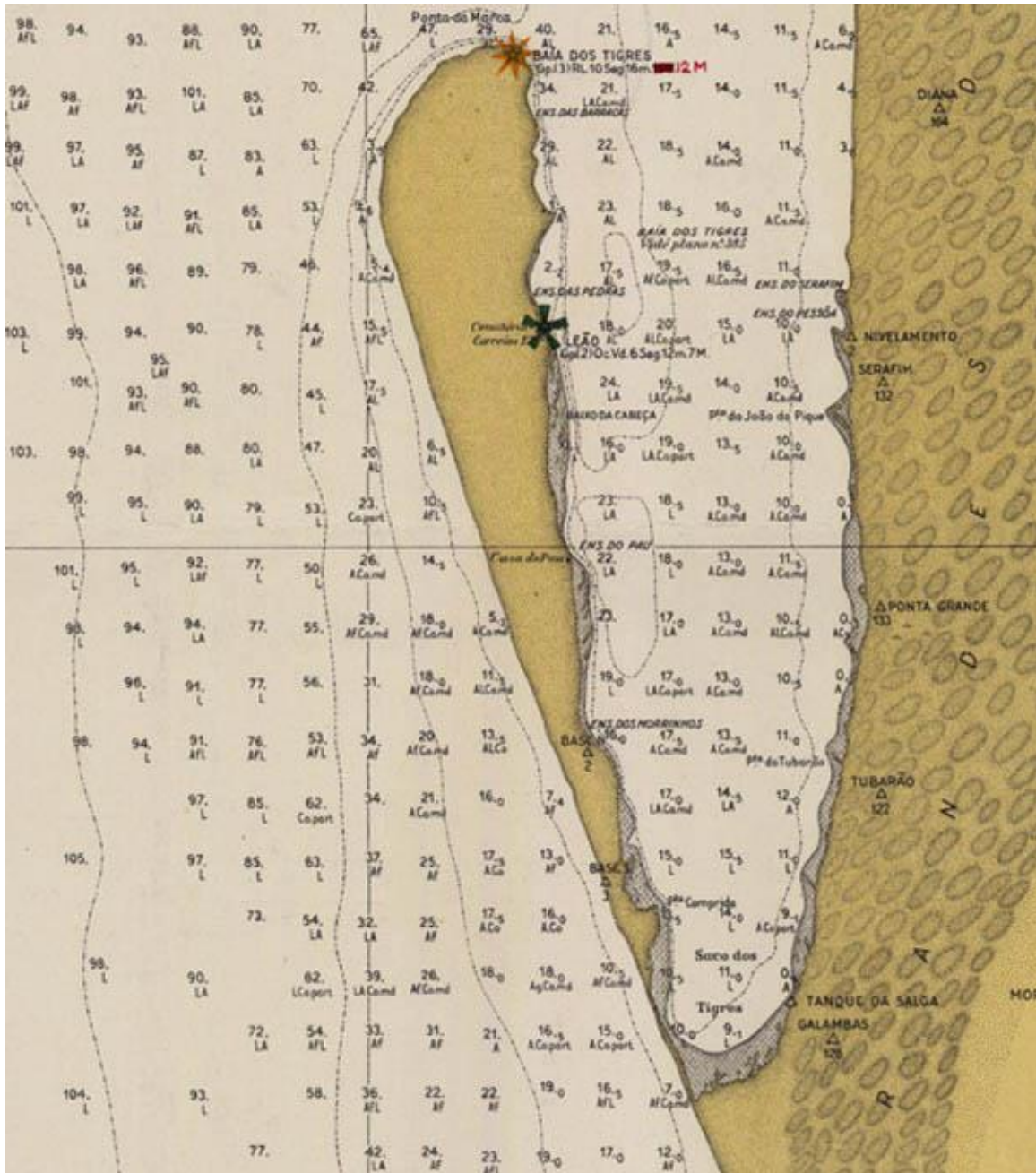
The Sinking of the Bradford City



Seagull makes landing at Baia Dos Tigres

The Sinking of the Bradford City

The following map is a section of a 1943 Portuguese Admiralty Chart, showing the Baía dos Tigres still as a peninsular attached to the coast of Angola.



Map courtesy of Tvciencia.pt

The Sinking of the Bradford City

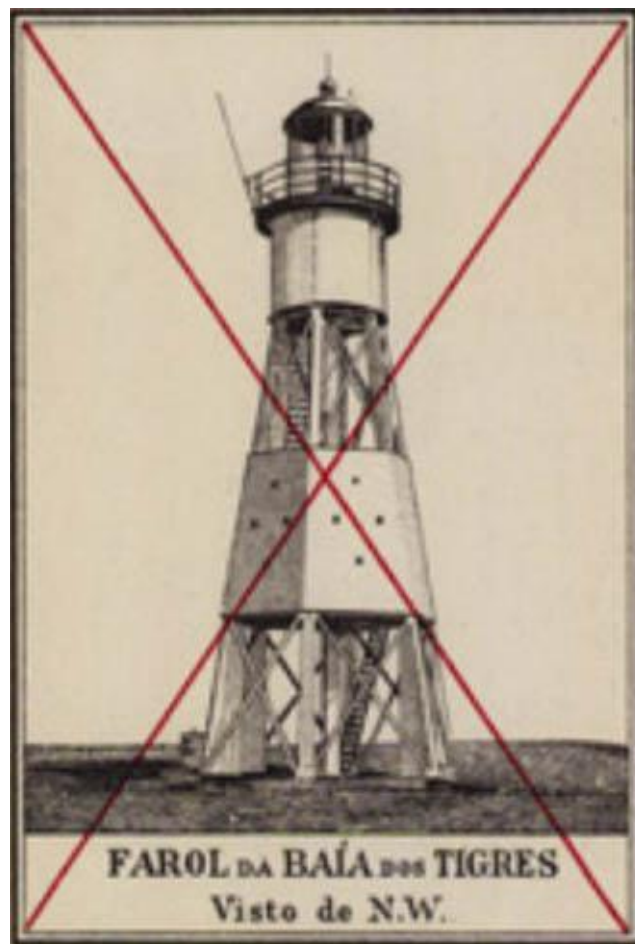
The Pictures

Farol da Baía dos Tigres. This is a drawing of the lighthouse at the northern end of the Baía dos Tigres, taken from an inset on the chart for the area, where the Seagull landed on 10th November 1941. Being “crossed out” would indicate that by 1956 or 1959, when small corrections to the chart were made, that the lighthouse, in this form, no longer existed. This is born out by a correction made to the characteristics of the lighthouse, clearly visible on the chart itself, and made at the same time. However, it was most likely this is the same structure that Capt Paul and his crew first went to when they landed. It was also known as Ponta da Marca lighthouse.

There is little, or no evidence of a structure remaining today, according to data

Posto Administrativo, Sao Martinho da dos Tigres

Though this photograph appears to have been taken in 1960, it would have been the office of the Chef-de-Post who Capt Paul mentions in his log. Some of the older figures in the photo may well have belonged to the families that looked after the crew when they were in Sao Martinho.



Posto administrativo - 1960

Copyright @carlos morais

The Sinking of the Bradford City

Sao Martinho dos Tigres as the deserted village appeared in the mid 1990's. Somewhere, perhaps, amongst the ruins, would have been the village homes where the crew of the Seagull stayed before being taken on to Messamedes.



Copyright @carlos morais

The Sinking of the Bradford City

The S.S.Botlea

Along with two other “Bots”, the Botavon and Botusk, the s.s.Botlea was operated by Reardon Smiths for MOWT.

She was originally built in 1917 as the Glennevis, and was operated by Furness Withy for one of their subsidiary companies, Rio Cape Line. In 1922 she was renamed African Prince.

In 1936, she was bought by Counties Ship Management, and renamed Pentridge Hill.

In 1939 she was acquired by the MOWT, and handed over to Smiths.

Between September 1939, and March 1941, she operated as “Q” ship HMS Botlea, code named RFA Lambridge. She was manned by Royal Naval and Royal Naval reserve personnel. For the next few months she operated under the White Ensign, as an Armed Merchant Cruiser, before being returned to commercial service in September 1941. She appears to have had a colourful two years.

Despite all the problems that Reardon Smiths appeared to have had with the vessel, she survived the remaining war years.

On 30 December 1945, having come to the end of her useful life was scuttled in position 55.30 N 11.00 W loaded with a cargo of poison gas shells. This was part of Phase 1 of Operation Sandcastle.

How the officers and crew of the Bradford City must have felt that the Botlea just happened to be in Cape Town days after their rescue!!



S.S.Botlea, as she was as the African Prince.

Photo copyright of RFA Historical Society.

The Sinking of the Bradford City

And Finally

Despite extensive research, there had been nothing written down, in any of the three narratives, in archived Newspaper reports, or other less reported hearsay accounts, to firmly establish the place where Capt. Henry Paul and the starboard lifeboat actually hauled up in: until now. My thanks, once more, to Richard Paul, for allowing me access to many of Capt. Paul's letters. Five months after the sinking of the Bradford City, by which time Capt. Paul was then in command of the s.s.Botlea, he wrote a letter to Merthyr House in which he refers to his stay at Bahia Tigres.

In other letters, written at about the same time, it can be seen that the Chief Engineer of the Botlea, was Frank Rowell, so presumably he had also been the Chief Engineer of the Bradford City. Several of our older members will recall sailing with Mr Rowell in more peaceful times. Perhaps much more surprising, is that the 2nd Mate of the Botlea was J D Lloyd. Was he also 2nd Mate of the Bradford City? In fact, we now have reliable confirmation that in fact, Danny Lloyd was 2nd Mate of the Bradford City, but would seem not to have spoken much about it.

These letters also reveal that the Chief Officer of the Botlea was Mr Loutitt, and this would seem to confirm that the survivors of both boats did meet up in Cape Town. However, it should be remembered that in many cases, during WW2, the pay of Merchant Navy personnel ceased once their ship had been lost. This could have meant that not all the officers and men of both lifeboats did actually return to the UK aboard the s.s.Botlea.

There are also letters, written after the Botlea reached Workington that include copies of log extracts that relate to the collision with the Greek vessel, referred to by Mr Blackwell; the vessel involved was the "Georgios". There is also a log entry relating to the weather damage sustained by the Botlea in the Bay of Biscay. The damage was quite extensive.

It is our intention to produce a separate article about the Botlea, at a later date, but there is one letter from her that I quote here. Some things never change, even in times of dire straits!!

"s.s.Botlea"

26-2-42

Cape Town

Sir William Reardon Smith & Sons Ltd
Cardiff

Gentleman

I beg to enclose accounts for "Bradford City" and "s.s.Botlea". I also enclose supplementary deck overtime account August to November 1941.

Yours obediently

Henry Paul

Master

The Sinking of the Bradford City

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the help received in researching and preparing this article from the following sources and people:

The National Archives, for the data on wartime merchant ship movements.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/bt389.asp>

Steve Robinson, Editorial Manager, Sea Breezes Publications Ltd., for his kind permission to reproduce extracts from Mr Blackwell's article "A Voyage to Remember on the m.v.Bradford City 1941"

<http://www.seabreezes.co.im/>

Captain Bryan Boyer for his kind permission to use the words and photographs from Capt W.G Cross's Diary.

Richard Paul, for his considerable background information on his grandfather, Capt.Henry Paul, and for allowing us access to Capt.Paul's Lifeboat Log, and many other artefacts and photographs.

Chris White, Editor, RFA Historical Society for his kind permission to reproduce the photograph of the s.s Botlea, from The RFA Historical Society Photographic Archive. All you need to know about the RFA

<http://www.historicalrfa.org/rfa-historical-society>

The photographic collection of Harold Appleyard, for the photo m.v.Bradford City

uboat.net for their wealth of information on every aspect of u-boats in two world wars.

<http://uboat.net/boats.htm>

Sharkhunters International, Inc for their comprehensive information on u-boats and their crews. Many archived film clips.

<http://www.sharkhunters.com/>

The Arnold Hague ConvoyWeb for their comprehensive WW2 convoy data.

<http://www.convoyweb.org.uk/>

Capt. Mark Higgins for his fascinating insight into the dark days of Merchant Ships in WW2.

Google Earth for their digital mapping resources.

The Sinking of the Bradford City

TVCiencia, a Portuguese online TV site, dedicated to scientific knowledge, and from where the chart of Baia dos Tigres was sourced. An excellent site

<http://www.tvciencia.pt/>