

British Interrogation of Survivors of U-887 Report of actions that led to the capture of the entire crew after the sinking by HMCS St. Thomas, December 27, 1944

Excerpts from British Interrogation Report

.I.D. 1/PW/REP/17

REPORT ON THE INTERROGATION OF SURVIVORS FROM U 413, U 1209, TWO 500-TON U-BOATS, U-877, A 740-TON U-BOAT, AND U 1199, A 500-TON U-BOAT SUNK ON 20 AUGUST, 18TH DECEMBER, 27TH DECEMBER, 1944 AND 21ST JANUARY, 1945, RESPECTIVELY.

V. SOLE PATROL AND SINKING OF U 877

(i) Departure from Kiel

U 877 left Kiel at midnight on the 11th November 1944, escorted by two R-boats and two armed trawlers. Before leaving Kiel a G.B.T. was slung beneath her keel amidships. The escort vessels had G.B.T. fitted to a spar from the bows and streamed about 20 m. (67 ft.) astern. All U-boats leaving Kiel have G.B.T. fitted until they reach Horten.

(ii) Lying at Anchor in Kattegat

Soon after leaving Kiel the weather deteriorated and seven or eight days were spent off Kalundberg and Frederikshaven. After about five days U 297 (ALDEGARMANN) joined her and about ten or fifteen merchant ships lay in the vicinity, all waiting for the weather to clear. One prisoner stated that, apart from the weather, the reason they lay off Denmark on the way to Horten was because the channel was not clear of mines.

(iii) Schnorkel Exercises at Horten

U 877 arrived at Horten on 19th November and there carried out Schnorkel exercises and also made one deep diving test. A measured mile was also covered. Six days were spent in Horten, during which time U 877 lay at Pier 19 (See C.B. 4416 Plan No. 23).

(iv) Departure from Kristiansand and Attack by Aircraft

From Horten U 877 proceeded with U 297 (ALDEGARMANN) and one other Type VII C boat without escort to Kristiansand S. arriving about 0200 on 26th November. They lay at the pier marked 6 (see C.B. 4416 Plan No. 38). At about 1600 on the same day she sailed with the other two U-boats in convoy. The convoy, consisting of a few merchant ships, was escorted by a Sperrbrecher and four escort vessels. At 2000 to 2200 that evening two twin-engined aircraft approached the convoy, which was proceeding up the coast, and were contacted on the "Hohentwiel". The aircraft were engaged but succeeded in dropping two "bombs" some 500 to 1000 yards off U 877's port quarter. (N.I.D. Note: H.Q. Coastal Command Narrative for 27th November 1944 reports that attacks were carried out by Beaufighters P and F/489 Squadron

and U-boat sightings made by S and F/489 Squadron between 2053 and 2059 on 26th November). U 877 then dived, but before the C.P.O. Telegraphist could unship the mattress aerial, which had jammed; consequently the set was out of action for the rest of the patrol. Immediately after this attack the U-boats left the convoy and U 877 proceeded for one hour at full speed on the surface. After one hour she submerged to Schnorkel depth.

(v) **Passage through the Rosengarten**

For the next twenty days U 877 proceeded by day submerged and by night at Schnorkel depth. She set course for approximate position 65° N., 07° W. and then the course followed was through the Rosengarten. On passage from Kristiansand U 877 averaged between 60 and 100 miles per 24 hours. When Schnorkelling her speed was six knots and on her motors two and a half to three knots. During the patrol the boat surfaced regularly at night, usually for about half an hour at a time, depending on G.S.R. contacts. There were, however, so many aircraft contacts that on no occasion did they surface for longer than half an hour.

(vi) **Weather Reporting**

On arrival in approximate position 55° N., 30° W. U 877 endeavoured to make her report but discovered that it was impossible to transmit. U 877 remained in this area for some time, surfacing three times a day, from 0200 to 0400, 0600 to 0700, and 2030 to 2130. In the area in question U-boats consider themselves fairly safe from aircraft attack, and U 877 neither sighted an aircraft nor had any G.S.R. contact. When in the northern part of this area she was ordered to proceed to a position approximately 50° N., 32° W. to act as a weather reporting boat over an area 200 miles radius from the centre of the position allotted to her. The importance of these weather reports was stressed by a later signal, addressed to U 870 (HECHLER) stating that their weather reports had played an important part in enabling the Germans to choose a suitable moment to begin their offensive. U 877 reached her new position some five days before she was sunk and spent about three days in this area, during which period she remained a considerable time on the surface and once spent a whole day without submerging. In this area she proceeded at half speed on one diesel, and charged batteries with the other.

(vii) **C.O. Operates at his own Discretion**

U 877 started out on the W/T wave-band of "Kuste" and then went over to "Ireland". Finally they went over to "Diana" but were instructed to keep a constant watch on "Ireland" as well. Because U 877 could not transmit there was a period of some twelve days before 27th December, when she was unable to report to Control, although she received all signals addressed to her. After a number of days, Control reckoned that U 877, at first believed lost, might not be signaling on account of difficulty with her transmitter, and accordingly a signal was made ordering the C.O. to operate at his own discretion. It was decided that U 877 should operate somewhere off the American coast and the officers subsequently held a conference to decide on one of the following areas of operation: off New York, off Halifax, off Philadelphia or off Boston. Course was set in a westerly or south-westerly direction and a decision had not been reached when contact with Allied forces was first made.

(viii) **Sinking**

On 27th December 1944 U 877 was proceeding surfaced in daylight for the third time since leaving Kristiansand, when a contact was received on the "Fliege" and the boat dived. Screw noises were reported in the vicinity on the hydrophones. These warnings were, however, disregarded by the C.O. who considered that the G.S.R. warning must have been an aircraft one and that the hydrophone noises were from the boat itself. The first contact was about 0700 and about two hours later the first depth charges were dropped. These were estimated to have been at a depth of 60 m. (197 ft.) and fairly far astern of the U-boat, which was at 20 m. (66 ft.). No damage was done, except to the lamps in the P.O.'s Mess. One prisoner stated that the hatch over the Diesel room had not been properly secured during the dive, and water had entered the Diesel room.

The U-boat had reached a depth of 80 m. (262 ft.) when a second pattern of depth charges fell, causing a leak aft, which began to flood the stern compartment and the boat sank at an angle of 40° - 45° to a depth of 340 to 350 m. (1115 to 1148 ft.)

(N.I.D. Note: At 0600 on 27th December H.M.C.S. EDMUNDSTON obtained a contact, held it for ten minutes and then gave it up as being non-sub. At about 0615 H.M.C.S. ST. THOMAS obtained a contact, and after some hesitation because of fish noises classified it as submarine. At 0630 she fired squid set to 100 ft. Asdic gave the boat's depth as 520 ft. At 0700 contact was regained and an attack was made with squid at 6 knots, the U-boat's depth being established as 400 ft. Contact was lost after the attack and never regained).

After this attack a great excess of pressure developed in the boat and the pumps were out of action, but tanks were blown and both motors put to full ahead. The boat rose to about 160 m. (524 ft.) and the C.O. ordered the Engineer Officer to reduce to dead slow and to keep her at that depth. However, this was not possible and she started to slide back again. The blowing of all tanks and the assistance of three quarter speed brought the boat violently to the surface. The Captain was thrown out on deck through the conning-tower hatch, severely injuring his head, and the C.P.O. Navigation also was injured.

The C.O. at first ordered the crew to man the 37 mm. guns, but apparently his order was never carried out and the next order was to abandon ship. One prisoner said that two destroyers were in sight when he got on deck, and that they fired over the U-boat before the crew abandoned her.

The last to leave was the Engineer Officer, who scuttled the boat by opening the vents. The crew were for two hours in one-man dinghies before being picked up.

(N.I.D. Note: At 0800 the U-boat surfaced, the ship's company abandoned her and she settled by the stern).