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Hornshell

Hornshell 12.400 tons. No record exists of how tanker men endured, survived, and returned to their occupation 'The Sea' would be complete without referring to an incident in July 1941, involving the **Hornshell** of the Anglo Saxon fleet under command Captain A. MacDougall proceeding in ballast from Gibraltar to Trinidad. On 26th in position mid-Atlantic she was torpedoed without warning at 9pm. the submarine remained undetected. The damage was severe the engine-room flooded, anticipating further attack Captain MacDougall ordered the boats away and to keep well clear of the ship. The master remained on board in an attempt to send a radio message on the emergency radio gear as the radio room had been destroyed. He was then joined by the Third Officer and Second Radio Officer who had returned after seeing the last boat away. Messages giving position were sent on the emergency transmitter, and then three more torpedoes exploded in the ship, the last one after the Captain and both Officers had abandoned the ship.

Hornshell like San Florentino had suffered the full explosion of four deadly 'fish'. She turned turtle during the night, yet remained capsized and afloat. The boats then set sail for Madiera but soon had parted company, No1 boat the Captain's was sighted and rescued by the Brazilian ship Cuyaba and landed safely at Recife, Pernambuco. No2 boat in charge of the Chief Officer, was never seen again and all occupants were lost without trace bringing the casualty list to seventeen, No3 boat with the Second Officer was picked up on 6 August by the Africa Occidental and crew landed St Vincent in the Cape Verde Islands.

The determined struggle for survival is epitomized by the experience of No. 4 Boat in charge of Mr Harvey Third Officer and his day by day record of the last nineteen days, he reported squalls and progress with continual bailing of the lifeboat '150 buckets of water an hour to remain afloat'.

29 July 'rain rough sea and swell. lost sight of other boats. Rations two dippers of water. two biscuits per man, one tin of sardines, one tin of milk, one tin of corned beef between 14 men.

30th July Boat bumping and shipping water. No sleep Chinese refuse to do any baling scared of the seas.

31st July 5th Engineer assists with steering as the finger on my right hand has turned septic and I have a fever.

7th August Moderate sea fine and clear, Mr Walker delirious. my arm very swollen , I have difficulty writing.

8th August Mr Walker died this morning, consigned his body to the deep at 22 hours with a few short prayers, crew superstitious now for to-day is our 13th day in the boat and 13 of us are left alive. The boat has not sighted Madeira or the Canary Islands so altered course to head for the African Coast.

12th August Very trying day making no headway. Very hot.

13t August Moderate Sea. Food getting low.

14th August Rough sea making good headway, the sea changes color from blue to grey indicating we can't be far from land. About 21 hours sighted a light. The vessel that came alongside in response to S.O,S signals made by electric torch was steam trawler 'Maria Leonor' of Lisbon, whose Captain and crew treated the survivors with great generosity.

Extracts from "The War Story of the Shell Tankers" and the Merchant Mariners who manned them by Stanton Hope. London 1948.

The Mediterranean was still closed to the Allies as a through route, supplies were still being conveyed despite enemy naval forces, the German Luftwaffe, and Italian Regia Aeronautica. Ammunition and cargo ships and oil carriers, including British , Norwegian, and Dutch tankers of the Shell Group constantly ran the gauntlet of the Mediterranean, maintaining the British war potential, though not without grievous losses. Hardly had Tobruk fallen to the Australians on the 22 January, but to find the harbour was cluttered with the sunken wrecks of Axis transports and supply ships. In the wake of the Royal and Allied Navies White Ensign, came the ubiquitous old "Red Duster" and Allies flags of the Merchant Navy. Oil was a priority cargo, and one of the first consignments was taken to Tobruk in The Anglo-Saxon Crista of 3,800 tons under command Captain J.H.Hems. Moored at an innermost buoy, she was attacked by German and Italian aircraft. January 6.30pm a bomb exploded astern, hostile aircraft and Stuka dive-bombers attacked the ship, discharge of her cargo continued when a second bomb exploded in the forward section causing internal damage to the engine room and hull. Repairs were made with the help of Naval and Army Engineers, which enabled Crista to proceed to another port for major repair.