

APPENDIX No. 23.

OFFICIAL REPORT OF THE RESCUE BY AUSTRALIAN DESTROYERS OF THE ITALIAN TRANSPORT *ORIONE*,¹ AND LETTER OF APPRECIATION.

The Commanding Officer,
T.B.D. Flotilla,
Brindisi,
19th November, 1917.

The Commodore Commanding,
British Adriatic Forces,
Through The Commodore Commanding,
8th Light Cruiser Squadron,
H.M.S. *Weymouth*.

Submitted,

Patrol Report of Australian T.B. Destroyers,
From 15th to 19th November, 1917.

Thursday, 15th—11.30 a.m.—

Parramatta, Yarra, Huon, and Warrego, patrol destroyers' division, patrolled together during the night.

Friday, 16th—a.m.—

After visiting drifter line, detached *Huon* and *Warrego* to patrol western area, *Parramatta* and *Yarra* patrolled eastern area.

11.10 a.m.—Received "S.O.S." from Italian steamer *Orione*, latitude 49° 28' N., longitude 18° 46' E. Proceeded to position at full speed. Arrived at 0.20. *Yarra* circled convoy as ordered. *Huon* and *Warrego* already arrived and taking off troops and crew; *Warrego* alongside *Orione*, but had had to leave owing to ship working in the swell.

Ordered *Huon* to circle convoy; *Warrego* recovered her boats and circled the convoy. *Parramatta* examined ship, which did not appear to be making any water; rudder was gone, and explosion had torn away the counter and upper parts of the stern. Sent 1st Lieutenant and Engineer Officer on board, with a signalman, to examine and report. Picked up remaining boats with the master of the transport and members of the crew and some soldiers; several men taken out of the water in the last stages of exhaustion.

1st Lieutenant reported ship making no water. Prevailed on master to return to ship and take his crew; a few went with him. Proceeded to take ship in tow. At 1 p.m. observed track of a torpedo coming straight for the ship; passed under ship and must have passed ahead of *Orione*. Destroyers searched to north-east with no result. At 1.15 p.m. got hawsers on board and commenced towing; placed *Yarra* on starboard quarter to steer ship, but Commanding Officer

¹ See pp. 321-2.

reported damage to his ship through working in swell and had to leave; *Yarra* took hawser on board aft. At 2.30 French destroyers arrived, and Commanding Officer sent on board and asked if he could assist; asked him to circle convoy; detached *Varrego* to proceed to Brindisi with rescued. Hawsers parted twice during afternoon, and second time when we had managed to square ship on her course and were proceeding satisfactorily, which was most unfortunate. But the difficulties of steering her were enhanced by a large piece of rudder still remaining and jammed over hard a-port. Got a third hawser out and used *Parramatta* towing wire. Again got ship in tow, when *Yarra* parted hawser aft at 5 p.m. Hawsers all parted due to chafe at tow astern, which was considerable as ship was yawing so badly—especially aft, where they caught on the jagged edges of damaged plates. At 5.30 p.m. tug arrived and took ship in tow. *Parramatta* had to slip, as it was impossible to haul in long length of hawser out and necessary to clear tug. Officers and men had worked like Trojans all the afternoon, hauling in parted hawsers and getting on board new ones; but Lieutenant Hill and Lieutenant-Engineer Bridge, with a few hands on board the *Orione*, must have had a most strenuous time. At 6 p.m. transferred the rescued men that were on board *Parramatta* to *Huon* and despatched her to Brindisi. At 6.40 p.m. ship being well in tow of tug, our services were no longer required, so left convoy with escort and returned with *Yarra* to carry on patrol. Reported by W/T to *Etna* actions taken.

The escort consisted of Italian torpedo-boats and one torpedo-boat-destroyer, two French T.-B.-destroyers and a tug. The weather at the time was fine, with a slight northerly swell. As ship was going ahead at about 6 knots, and everything appeared satisfactory, I decided to leave my officers and signalmen on board, and told them to remain and rejoin me in *Huon* on patrol on the following morning. At 9.30 p.m. wind started to freshen and sea and swell increasing. 11.30 p.m. Weather continuing to get worse, left patrol line with *Yarra* and proceeded to the northward in case assistance was required. Informed S.N.O., Brindisi, by W/T, of actions taken and reasons. Nothing sighted during the night; wind increased to a moderate gale with high seas.

Saturday, 17th—

Neither received nor intercepted, by W/T, any reports from escort. Daylight sighted three destroyers, closed, and found they were part of the escort. Asked where convoy was; replied they had no news. Proceeded south at high speed before the sea to pick up convoy, which appeared to have been left by the escort.

8.30 a.m.—Passed mine (horizontal-bar type); delayed some time in destroying same, being impossible to get ship steady in the seaway, and mine only appearing occasionally on the crest of a wave. Proceeded at 9.15; sighted ship right ahead at 10 a.m. Closed, and found *Orione* at anchor, 5 miles north of Otranto. A heavy swell running in, but ship appeared to be lying quite comfortably, and in exactly the same state as when last seen. Prepared to lower boat to take off crew, as signal still flying "Require immediate assistance." No signs of life on board. At 10.45 a.m. *Parramatta* and *Yarra* returned to patrol. At 3.30 p.m. met Italian steamer *Flamingo* with one trawler escort; escorted her till dark.

Sunday, 18th—

Weather moderating, but still considerable swell. Sighted drifter line at 4 p.m. off Fano.

Monday, 19th—

Sea increasing rapidly. Left patrol line at 7 a.m. Sighted *Orione* some distance away, but still apparently at anchor. Returned to Brindisi.

The following letter from the Italian Rear-Admiral Alfredo Acton was received by the Senior British Naval Officer at Brindisi:—

“Yesterday on the occasion of the torpedoing of the Italian steamer *Orione* on passage from Valona to Brindisi, I had the opportunity of appreciating the zeal and seamanlike qualities, combined with the spirit of camaraderie, of which the Australian T.B.D's under your orders gave ample proof.

“In expressing my grateful thanks for the prompt and effective action rapidly executed by them, which has been reported by me to H.E. the C.-in-C. of the fleet, I beg you to warmly thank the senior officer, captains, officers, and the brave crews of these ships, to whom I send my warm praises.”