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Air Ministry News Service

Air Ministry Bulletin No. 11498

BLAZING SUNDERLAND SINKS U-BOAT AND CRASHES

With fire spreading from the port wing to the galley and bomb bay and his front turret shot away, the pilot of a R.C.A.F. Sunderland of Coastal Command recently flew through a vicious hail of flak and dropped his depth-charges across a U-boat in the Atlantic.

A few seconds later the flying-boat crashed into the sea and as the six survivors swam desperately away from their blazing aircraft they saw the mortally damaged U-boat they had attacked sink only 150 yards away.

The survivors of both Sunderland and U-boat were rescued four minutes later by a destroyer. Flying Officer A.A. Bishop, of Erskine, Alberta, the Canadian pilot of the flying-boat, was awarded an immediate D.F.C. for "gallantry and determination of a high order", in supporting a wounded member of his crew in the water. He was himself injured in the right arm.

Among the survivors of the U-boat were the pilot and one of the crew of a Blohm and Voss flying-boat which was damaged by a Coastal Command R.C.A.F. Beaufighter in the North Sea some days before. They had "ditched" their aircraft beside the U-boat.

It was just after dawn when the Sunderland, on anti-submarine patrol, sighted a fully surfaced U-boat heading for the open Atlantic. The aircraft immediately dived to attack and heavy fire was opened by the U-boat.

For some minutes the Canadians manoeuvred for position. Then Flying Officer Bishop brought his aircraft to within a few hundred yards of the U-boat and with the sun behind him the Sunderland's front turret gunner opened fire at extreme range.

A quarter of a mile from the target the German gunners brought their anti-aircraft guns to bear on the flying-boat. The front turret was half shot away and a hail of bullets and cannon shells raked the Sunderland's port side. Fire broke out in the port wing roof and spread rapidly to the galley and bomb bay. The aircraft was badly holed, two of the four engines were put out of action, and the controls were practically severed.

"I managed to keep her straight on the target", said Flying Officer Bishop, "And then we dropped our depth-charges. One seemed to hit the U-boat. I had to force-land immediately. We bounced twice on the swell and the next moment I was under water swimming to the surface".

When the Sunderland crew, free of their aircraft, broke surface they saw flames and smoke from the aircraft rising 600 feet into the air. Three hundred yards away the U-boat, settling by the stern, was slowly approaching the aircraft. Then, 150 yards away from the survivors, the German crew hurriedly clambered on to rafts and Carley floats. A huge explosion shook the U-boat; it came to a standstill, the bows lifted and it slid stern first below the sea.

Close by, Flying Officer Bishop saw the head of Sergeant H.E. Finn, a wireless operator/air gunner, of Sydney, Nova Scotia. Finn was badly injured in the right arm and his Mae West had been blown off. "It was amazing how Finn kept his head and floated on my right arm," said Bishop afterwards. What Bishop neglected to add was that he first pulled Finn over to a petrol tank which sank almost immediately. He then held Finn up for 45 minutes until the destroyer arrived, and used his own badly injured right arm to do it.

Each of the six survivors had difficulty in getting away from the Sunderland. Flying Officer A.E. Mountford, of Regina, Sask., another wireless operator/air gunner, was surrounded on three sides by flames. He saw the blackened and badly injured face of the second pilot, Flying Officer D. Wettlaufer, of New Toronto. Keeping an eye on

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the lowered guns of the U-boat which was approaching, the two men helped each other to such good effect that they beat the closing ring of flames.

Flight Sergeant J.L. Richard, of Hull, Quebec, a third wireless operator /Air Gunner, who had the front turret blown half away while he was in it, helped fight the fire in the wardroom and galley. He remembers nothing of leaving the aircraft but once clear of the flames found that his Mae West had been punctured by flak. He found a piece of wood which kept him afloat until rescued, just in time by the destroyer's whaler.

The U-boat survivors on their rafts and Carley floats made no attempt to assist the aircrew who were struggling in the water. The body of one of the Sunderland's crew was taken aboard the destroyer and later buried at sea with a German engineer officer who had died aboard. German officers and petty officers were present at the burial.

Three of the six Sunderland survivors were seriously injured and the destroyer's doctor performed three operations before reaching port.

The Blohm and Voss survivors said they had been attacked and badly damaged by a Beaufighter some days before. The Beaufighter had shot down another Blohm and Voss which was with them and had then attacked them.

The first Blohm and Voss went down in flames. "I approached from dead astern", said the Canadian pilot of the Beaufighter, "and opened fire at 400 yards. I kept my finger on the button until I had closed to 100 yards. He didn't have a chance. The port engine and hull caught fire and in a twinkling were burning fiercely".

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NOTE The official announcement of Flying Officer Bishop's Award is contained in Air Ministry Bulletin No. 11454 (Awards 637 Part 111) issued for 0030 Monday, September 13.

When the Sunderland crew, two of their aircraft, broke surface they saw flames and smoke from the aircraft rising 600 feet into the air. Three hundred yards away the U-boat, settling by the stern, was slowly approaching the aircraft. Then 100 yards away from the survivors, the German crew suddenly clambered on to rafts and Carley floats. A huge explosion shook the U-boat; it came to a standstill, the bows lifted and it stern first fell the sea.

Class by Flying Officer Bishop saw the head of Sergeant E.R. Finn, a wireless operator/air gunner of Sydney, Nova Scotia. Finn was badly injured in the right arm and his Mae West had been blown off. "It was amazing how Finn kept his head and floated on my right arm," said Bishop afterwards. What Bishop neglected to add was that he first pulled Finn over to a petrol tank which sank almost immediately. He then held Finn up for 15 minutes until the destroyer arrived, and used his own body to support Finn.

Each of the six survivors had difficulty in getting away from the Sunderland. Flying Officer A.E. Montford, of Regina, Saskatchewan, another wireless operator/air gunner, was surrounded on three sides by flames. He saw the blackened and badly injured face of the second pilot, Flying Officer D. Westfahl, of New Toronto. Keeping an eye on

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CORRECTION TO AIR MINISTRY BULLETIN NO. 11498 (ISSUE NO. 45 of 12.9.43)

Please note that line one, of para three should read "were rescued forty-five minutes later" not "four minutes."

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