



TORPEDOED!

George G. Breed, who is on leave from the Information Department while serving in the Merchant Marine, tells of the end of the *Charles C. Pinckney* and of his subsequent 11-day ordeal while in a lifeboat. As a result of an infection on his left hand, which started during the "abandon ship" operations, George was in and out of the hospital for several months after his return to New York. Now, however, he is ship-shape once more and back at sea helping to deliver needed materials to our fighting forces on distant fronts.

THE ocean is sometimes a very lonely place. But it is better to be lonely than in bad company. And an enemy submarine is bad company indeed for a merchant ship.

The *Charles C. Pinckney*, the Liberty ship on which I was serving as second mate, had been separated from her convoy in a storm and was seeking to rejoin it that morning when a lookout reported a German submarine on the horizon to starboard. While we felt that Jerry would have a wholesome respect for our guns and stay at a distance during the day, we knew that nightfall would bring unpleasant possibilities.

Upon sighting our unwelcome companion, the captain of the *Pinckney* ordered the chief engineer to work her up to top speed and, by noon, the engine was pounding away at its best. But it was no use; the submarine was fast and, despite our changes of course, she remained on our beam.

Throughout the day, our gunnery officer—a graduate of Dartmouth in the class of 1940—haunted the crow's nest, hoping that the submarine would come within range of his guns. From his enthusiasm, you would have thought that it was we who had tracked down this undersea enemy and not vice versa.

Although the sub remained at a discreet distance, the gunnery officer did decide early in the afternoon to take some shots at it. With the target invisible from the decks, the

gun pointers were placed in the position of the English boxer who, with both eyes battered shut, was urged by his second to "it 'im from memory." The guns were put at maximum elevation and fired in the general direction of the submarine. As expected, the splashes were considerably short, but we all felt better about it.

Late that afternoon, we changed our course directly away from our uncongenial travelling companion. However, at about 7:45 P.M., that evening, we felt and heard that "thump!" that leaves no doubt as to its cause. Within a few seconds, the gongs sounded "Abandon Ship."

Being scheduled to go on watch at midnight, I was trying at the time to get a few hours shut-eye. When I heard the torpedo strike, I grabbed my life jacket and flashlight and rushed to the bridge to get any instructions the captain might have.

At this time of night, the wheelhouse usually was a place of Stygian darkness into which you felt your way. Now it was brilliant with the glow of a gorgeous sunset, only it wasn't a sunset but a tall column of orange fire set by the torpedo, which had hit near the stem. The wheelhouse was deserted, except for the captain, the engine-room telegraph was on "stop" and the wheel was hard right where the helmsman had left it when he went to his boat station.

I received my instructions from the cap-

tain and then descended to the starboard boat deck, where boats were being lowered in the glow of floodlights. As the ship was still moving ahead, I ordered the falls held and then went forward to move the boats' "sea painters" to a safe distance from the fire. These lines, by which boats are held alongside after they take to the water, were heavy and slippery with oil blown onto the forecastle by the torpedo blast.

By the time I got back, one of the boats had been dropped bow first and swamped. The men assigned to her distributed themselves among the other boats, all of which had been launched.

Meanwhile the Navy gun crew had gone to their battle stations. I, therefore, released two of the life rafts, on one of which I put navigating equipment. While I was thus engaged, I was startled, I mean I was scared stiff, by a burst from one of the after rapid-fire guns. "Now we're in for it!" I thought, and waited not at all stoically for the return fire that would atomize all of us. A moment later, the deeper voice of the large-calibre gun was heard, and then silence. Both had been firing to port so I saw nothing of their target or the results.

A few minutes later, the men from the battery hit the rail like a flock of crows lighting on a telephone line and, followed by the gunnery officer and the captain, came down the cargo net that hung over the side and boarded the raft. As we shoved clear, we passed the swamped lifeboat.

"Mr. Breed, take some men and man that boat," the captain said. The raft was paddled alongside of it and he told off six men to jump in with me.

The night was gloomy and overcast, but wind and sea were moderate. From the focsle, the fire stretched skyward like the column that led the Children of Israel. So far, there had been nothing worse than a rather heavy clatter when ammunition for

the forward guns went off, but in view of the nature of some of the cargo in our forward holds, I felt that we'd last much longer at a respectable distance from the ship, so, as soon as we'd cleared the boat of some water with buckets, we headed out into the blackness astern of the ship.

The fire appeared to spread aft and envelop the entire ship. Frequent explosions sent tongues of orange fire upward. Then, about three-quarters of an hour after we had left the ship, one of the men called my attention to a bright light near us. I thought at first it was a submarine, but some time afterward, the sky lighting a little, I got a silhouette of it and realized it was the *Pinckney*. I could scarcely believe my eyes. Nearly a mile astern of us was a great wall of flame which we had taken for our ship in her death throes. And yet here, a half mile or so ahead of us, was the ship herself, still afloat, without a spot of fire on her save for this single light.

We pulled toward her. She was drifting almost as fast as we could row, so we had to chase her all night. Meanwhile the mass of flame and explosions, which we had thought was the *Pinckney*, continued in sight until about 2:00 o'clock when it disappeared over the horizon—still burning and exploding.

It was daylight when we came alongside the *Pinckney*. The fact that she was still afloat lent color to the story of the gun's crew, which was this: About 20 minutes after the merchant crew left the ship, a U-boat surfaced some 200 yards on the port beam. They had let him have it with a 20mm and the heavy-calibre gun and he had disappeared after the fourth shot. Since U-boats are not in the habit of allowing so vulnerable an enemy to drift off unharmed, especially after such an attack, we felt pretty certain that the sub had been sent to the bottom.

Anyway, there was the *Pinckney*, very much afloat. What had put that fire out? We climbed aboard. There were two other lifeboats in sight, but no sign of the raft. I signalled them to come alongside. Walking forward, I crawled over the wreckage of the bow. It had obviously taken several heavy blows—first the blast of the torpedo, then a series of explosions in the cargo in No. 1 hold. The last one must have blown the remaining cargo from that hold into the sea where it flamed and exploded for hours afterward. The same blast must have put out the fire on the ship. Yet the after bulkhead of No. 1 hold appeared intact and the ship had not settled any since we quitted her. Indeed, except for a concave bow where the water rushed in and out of the forward hold, she was still seaworthy.

I went up to the bridge where I collected a sextant, a chronometer, navigation tables and the ship's compass and had them put into the boat. In the radio shack, I found a

portable transmitter. One of the bluejackets was a radio operator of sorts. We set the transmitter up on deck and sent out an SOS.

My boat's crew was loading supplies into the boat when suddenly one of the group shouted: "Submarine!" I walked to the rail and there, a scant 100 yards away, was a big cream-colored monster gliding slowly by us, her conning tower full of Jerries.

Our position was not an enviable one, and I was more than dimly aware that it was perhaps due to my own lack of forethought. An apparently empty ocean and the too readily accepted idea that last night's assailant was on the bottom had made me less watchful. Had I posted lookouts when we first came aboard, we might have seen this fellow in time to make different dispositions; in which case, he would certainly have been caught off first base—on the surface, within pointblank range of our after gun. As it was, with my crew in the lifeboat and the radio man and myself like a pair of sitting ducks at the rail, he had the drop on us. We picked up our transmitter and got into the boat.

The sub captain then ordered us to come alongside. So we waddled over, while he did things with his engines that complicated the maneuver. But at length we got our nose within a few feet of his conning tower. In response to a bark from the captain, two German seamen in trim khaki uniforms had taken their posts at the rail some twenty feet apart, manipulating their boat hooks with the mechanical exactitude which suggested two robots worked from the same camshaft. They hooked us bow and stern and we and the U-boat wallowed together in the lumpy sea.

Though it was the conventional undersea raider in appearance, it had unexpected touches. One was a coat of cream-colored paint. The other was two rows of quaint birds and fishes in black silhouette on the conning tower. Its appearance was distinctly different from the bluejacket's description of last night's assailant.

"What ship?" demanded the captain. He spoke fluent English but with a marked accent. As "*Pinckney*" was stencilled on practically every piece of the boat's equipment, we might have replied "Can't you read?" but we saved that one. He then inquired as to the health and whereabouts of the captain, chief mate and chief engineer. To my relief, he seemed satisfied with vague and misleading answers. In reply to our questions, he stated that he had not torpedoed us.

Then he said: "Keep away

from the ship, I intend to use artill-ery."

He steamed off and with a few salvos at short range sent the ship to the bottom. We set about taking advantage of the fair wind for, we hoped, the Azores. The sea was moderate and the weather mild.

Along with the rudder, the boat's sail had apparently drifted off while the boat lay awash. As a substitute, we hung up a heavy canvas "weather screen." One of the other boats had set her red sail and was already well to the northward. The other waited for us. We took five men out of her, including "Sparks," the ship's radio operator, bringing our number up to 14. We planned to keep together, but as the other boat had a better sail she drew slowly ahead. She disappeared the next day. The third boat was out of sight by daylight. Neither boat has been heard of since.

After squaring away we took inventory. In many respects we were well equipped for a long voyage. Upon returning to the ship we had supplemented the water supply in our two built-in metal tanks with two wooden casks. The emergency rations had been supplemented by two crates of oranges and one of apples. Beside the six blankets with which the boat was equipped, every man had brought at least one along. In fact, one provident young bluejacket, thinking the voyage might be long, had brought a suitcase full of clothes, which I regretfully consigned to the Great Deep.

Next morning it commenced to blow from the southwest. Soon we were obliged to douse sail and heave to. We had discovered to our dismay that our "sea anchor," a canvas



cone which when dropped over the side on a long line helps you to keep the boat into the wind, was also missing, as was a gallon of "storm oil." When poured on the sea, this oil tends to prevent rollers from breaking. Our repair kit having also disappeared, we were handicapped in fashioning a substitute.

After an unsuccessful attempt to keep the boat's nose into the seas with the oars, I had swung her around to take them on the quarter, and dropped over a bucket in lieu of the sea anchor. Later on—during that awful night—I can remember looking back on the tumbling waste of water and foam. Just astern of us was the one cheering sight in that grim panorama: the phosphorescent glow about that bucket as it seemed to dig its heels in and pull back on the bridle.

By daylight it had been easy to spot oncoming breakers and swing the stern into them. But in the dark it would be next to impossible to see them. And as the gathering gloom announced that the sun was, as the Azoreans say, "going to bed," I no more expected to be there when he got up than if I had just stepped off Bunker Hill Monument.

It was probably around three o'clock in the morning when the gale reached its full fury. From astern of us came a continuous menacing roar. Peering back I saw the white fangs of seas converging on us from each side, like the pack of wolves pursuing the Russian nobleman's sleigh. Which of those ravening crests would reach us first? Often my first guess was wrong and we had only a few seconds to get her swinging in the right direction. Half a dozen times the boat careened at a fearful angle as a sea broke against her side, and time and again the oarsmen sat in a bath of foam as a sea swept us. Every one of our oarlocks was broken and we had but three good oars left. All hands—some of them actively sick—were continuously at work, bailing or at the oars.

Soon after daylight the wind began to moderate and within an hour we knew that the worst was over. After thirteen hours at the helm, I practically fell asleep in the middle of a command to the oarsmen. I awoke that evening to find my left hand greatly swollen and agonizingly painful. During the gale I had been aware of a pain in my thumb, on which there had been a small burn. Now it was obvious that a virulent infection had developed. At any rate, that was the end of my left hand for the voyage as far as any further use was concerned. What's more I was "off my trolley" for the next twelve hours or so.

Some time around noon the next day my temperature fell enough for me to think and talk lucidly. I found that the wind had dropped to a moderate breeze and, while the boat still bounced around a good deal, we shipped no more seas. So we set our sail and I undertook to find out where we were.

My hand being out of commission from gangrene, I had to teach a lad from Texas to operate the sextant. It took him a couple of days to get on to it—which was pretty good, for using a sextant in a boat that size is no pipe. The chronometer had water in it and the navigation tables were soaking wet, so that the pages stuck together as if glued. But at length we got sights which put us in the vicinity of the Azores and I swung the boat toward one of the islands.

Until the morning of the gale, we had subsisted on the fruit and peanut bars, but by now we were on the emergency rations—a very dry and hard cracker officially known as the C-type ration, malted milk tablets, chocolate and pemmican. The first three give you a savage thirst but pemmican—which resembles plum pudding—goes down quite easily. Our water allowance was six ounces daily—more than many shipwrecked seamen get, though little enough.

At about 9:00 o'clock on the eleventh night after the torpedoing, we sighted a flashing light far ahead of us. For nearly three hours, it teased us, seeming to duck beneath the waves and then to bob up a mile away. At length we caught a rhythm to it and realized it was a navigational light.

Then we sighted another light, steady white, and swung toward it. Realizing it was a ship, I set off a parachute flare and sent the signalman forward to call her by "blinker." What he sent I don't remember, but they came back with "What do you want?"

The light of another flare must have given them their answer for in a few minutes we were basking in the glow of a great rectangle of lights on the sides of the *Caritas I*, a Red Cross ship engaged in carrying food and clothing to prisoners-of-war.

We pulled alongside and my crew scrambled up a "Jacob's ladder." Then the ship's boatswain, a bronze, lean Portuguese who had once lived in Brooklyn, came down and took me on his back, for it was a job for two

good hands going up that swaying ladder. Near the rail other hands grabbed me and pulled me over the side. I landed spread-eagle on the deck. As I stood up I saw a steward standing before me, with a bottle of cognac poised above a huge goblet. "Will you have a drink, sir?" he asked.

Practically everyone who had been in our lifeboat suffered from "immersion feet" caused by wet feet that don't get enough exercise. Five men were hospitalized with it.

We were in Horta, in the Azores, for a month before five of us were "excavated"—as one of the men termed it—by air to England. We landed in London late at night and I borrowed a half-crown from a fellow passenger to take us to the Embassy. Our host that night was the American Red Cross. With this organization and the United Seamen's Service you couldn't be in better hands if you ran into a rich and kindly uncle. They are both doing a magnificent job in the United Kingdom.

My companions continued homeward the next day while I was sent to the U. S. Army's hospital near London for ten days. This place is staffed largely by New York's Presbyterian Hospital. Indeed, the "admitting officer" the night I arrived was my own doctor from New York and the surgeon was an old yachting comrade.

The voyage home from England wasn't as long as it seemed—it couldn't have been—and one day I found our ship steaming in through the Narrows of New York harbor. Near me were two passengers arguing violently. "Why of course it's New Jersey," insisted one. "Not at all," said the other, "it's Brooklyn." They appealed to me and I told them it was Staten Island. I don't think either of them believed it, but I didn't care. I knew it was Staten Island. I also knew that in an hour or two we would be tied up to some part of the United States—and we were.

Background to Stardom

In the picture at the right is Marguerite Chapman who is currently regarded by her movie employers as their "biggest investment." Miss Chapman, a former telephone operator at White Plains, N. Y., credits her engaging manner of speaking to her training at the switchboard.

"I got a great kick out of achieving the 'voice with a smile,'" she says. "I would listen to myself intoning, 'one moment please,' and I still find myself using the phrase constantly. The telephone company was my voice teacher."

Miss Chapman, who has four brothers in the armed forces, is now playing the feminine lead in "My Kingdom for a Cook," with Charles Coburn and William Carter.

