

THE SINKING OF THE H.M.H.S. "LLANDOVERY CASTLE"

That one boat survived is not the fault of the enemy, for at least three efforts were made to run it down, in addition to shell fire directed towards it.

On June 17 the *Llandoverly Castle* had arrived at Halifax with six hundred and forty-four military patients. She started on her return voyage on June 20, carrying her crew and hospital unit establishment of seven officers, fourteen nursing sisters, and seventy-six other ranks.

Ideal summer weather prevailed. All went well and uneventfully until Thursday evening, June 27.

"At 9.30 p.m. the night was clear," states Major Lyon. "All lights were burning, with the large Red Cross signal prominently displayed amidships. Most of the medical personnel had not yet retired. Without previous warning or sight of any submarine the ship was struck just abaft the engines at No. 4 hold.

"There was a terrific explosion, badly wrecking the afterpart of the ship. Immediately all lights went out. The signal to stop and reverse the engines was without response, all the engine-room crew evidently being killed or wounded. Consequently the ship forged forward, but was gradually forced down by the head.

PARADED IN PERFECT ORDER.

"Quickly the captain found by investigation that No. 4 hold was completely blown in, and the ship could not remain afloat. The order was given to lower the lifeboats on either side.

"In perfect order the officer commanding, Lt.-Col. T. H. MacDonald, paraded his personnel at the various boat stations. The extreme slope of the decks by this time, and the continued forward movement of the ship, made the launching of the lifeboats a matter of great difficulty."

According to the survivors, at least two boats were swamped in this operation.

With reasonable certainty, however, it can be stated that in the brief ten minutes before the ship submerged every one had been taken off save those killed by the explosion.

Major Lyon was one of the last to leave the ship. He had gone to his cabin to obtain a torchlight. Approaching the deck he met the captain and the second officer. They discovered a boat hanging in the falls, with its after-end in the water.

They launched it successfully, pushed away with the captain, the second officer, the fourth officer, Major Lyon, one C.A.M.C. other rank and a few of the ship's company on board. They had moved on but thirty or forty feet when the *Llandoverly Castle* disappeared.

The boat at once proceeded to rescue work, cruising about in the midst of the floating wreckage and picking up survivors.

Living eye-witnesses of the tragedy assert that at least two other lifeboats got clear of the sinking ship, and it is possible that others were successfully launched on the other side.

The appalling scene in the water in the two hours following the disappearance of the *Llandoverly Castle* baffles description, and the mind is stupefied by the exhibition in that period of savagery and callousness on the part of the commander and crew of the submarine.

On all sides survivors were crying for help. Many were clinging to pieces of wreckage floating about the area of the disaster. Within twenty minutes the captain's boat had picked up eleven from the water, including three other ranks of the C.A.M.C.

They were going to the rescue of two others when the submarine appeared, and according to Major Lyon ordered them to leave these drowning men and come alongside, threatening to fire with the submarine naval gun in case of refusal.