

NOT FOR PUBLICATION BEFORE THE MORNING PAPERS OF SATURDAY DECEMBER 7,  
OR BROADCAST BEFORE 7 a.m. ON THAT DATE.

THE RETURN OF THE "KELLY."

A German official communique last May claimed that in operations off the German coast a British destroyer was torpedoed and sunk by a German motor torpedo boat.

In actual fact the Flotilla leader KELLY, was torpedoed by a motor torpedo boat and badly damaged, but she was not sunk. She was towed across the North Sea to England, where she has been repaired and is now in service again.

On the evening of a Thursday in May KELLY was leading a destroyer flotilla operating against a German minelaying force off the enemy coast. An escorting aircraft having reported a submarine ahead, KELLY and a sister destroyer, KANDAHAR, proceeded to hunt her. A further report from the aircraft of having sighted the enemy minelaying force presently decided the Captain of KELLY to abandon the hunt and rejoin his flotilla, by then passing out of sight over the horizon. While overtaking them another destroyer, the BULLDOG, joined KELLY and KANDAHAR. She had been detached from another force to sink a floating mine and having done that attached herself to the nearest unit in sight.

It was now 10.30 p.m. Twilight, and windless, with banks of mist forming on the calm surface of the sea. A quarter of an hour later a blurred object was sighted in the mist from the bridge of the KELLY some 600 yards away on the port beam, and simultaneously the track of a torpedo was seen advancing swiftly towards them. It passed under the bridge, and then came the explosion. A sheet of flame rose above the level of the bridge. The KELLY lifted bodily with the force of the detonation, which blew a large hole in her side, extending downwards to the keel.

The foremost boiler room was blown open to the sea. The entire ship was enveloped in steam which escaped with a deafening roar, and in black smoke and fumes from the explosion. Everybody in the foremost boiler room was killed instantly. The men in the after boiler room and engineroom remained quietly at their posts until ordered on deck.

BULLDOG, who had been some distance astern, presently re-appeared, and the smoke having cleared somewhat, sighted KELLY lying like a log on the water, down by the bows and with a heavy list to starboard. By this time the fog had become very thick, but BULLDOG with assured seamanship took KELLY in tow and was heading for home in an incredibly short time.

In the meanwhile torpedoes, depth charges and all moveable topweight were thrown overboard, and wounded men were being extricated from the tangle of twisted metal and wreckage amidships. They were transferred to the after superstructure, as the sick bay had been completely demolished, and in the darkness working with a few hand-torches, the surgeon laboured just as in days past they worked in the cockpit of the VICTORY. One man he mentioned specially, a stoker, terribly wounded and bleeding, who lay for hours without uttering a groan or a complaint. An 18 year old telegraphist forced his way through a small hole into the main wireless office where five men were trapped, and gave injections of morphia to the wounded, knowing that if the ship had foundered he could not escape.

Shortly after midnight a German motor torpedo boat came streaking out of the fog, travelling at about 40 knots, struck BULLDOG on the quarter, bounced off on to KELLY'S bows and shot down the starboard side, tearing away her whaler, motor boat, davits and guard rails. She then cannoned off into the fog again, her crew shouting like maniacs, and judging by the amount of interesting wreckage she left behind and the sudden silence, she presumably foundered.

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Early next morning KANDAHAR rejoined and the wounded were transferred to her. Her Volunteer Reserve surgeon did marvels for the seriously hurt. During this operation, while the two ships were lying alongside each other, the first German bombers appeared. They were beaten off by gunfire and by an air escort of three Hudsons which had just arrived. Later two more destroyers joined as escort, and in the afternoon two cruisers as well. Repeated bombing attacks were made by the enemy and were beaten off.

During the afternoon those of the dead who had been recovered from the wreckage were buried at sea, volleys being fired as each shotted hammock slid overboard. The service was conducted on the quarterdeck, in the profound silence of a ship whose machinery no longer functioned.

Saturday wore on, the wind and sea rising steadily. The KELLY was labouring with a heavy list, and yawing from side to side almost unmanageably.

As her list had increased and it seemed as if she might sink at any moment, the Captain of the KELLY decided to send everybody out of the ship not required to fight the guns. The other destroyers had stopped and sent boats to transfer these men, when the enemy made another and their heaviest bombing attack. No hits were scored.

Eighteen officers and men, volunteers selected from a whole ship's company that volunteered to remain on board, were left in KELLY. The tow had repeatedly parted and further attempts at towing were abandoned until the weather moderated. KELLY was then lying waterlogged and stationary, when aircraft reported two enemy submarines in her direct path, and her Captain, realising he was merely a sitting target for their torpedoes, decided to transfer his volunteer party temporarily to BULLDOG.

All through the hours of darkness the KELLY lay abandoned, with the seas churning through her boiler rooms, silent but for the splash of water and the grinding of distorted frames and buckled plates as they complained against the sluggish roll and scend of the hull. And all through the night the escorting destroyers steamed in an endless chain patrol round their stricken leader.

In the dawn two tugs arrived and the volunteer party returned to KELLY and got her in tow. The wind and sea, which had dropped in the night, rose again, and waves swept her from end to end. At noon further bombing attacks were carried out by the enemy, who this time nearly succeeded in hitting, but did no damage.

The whole electrical system of the ship being out of action the guns were worked by hand, the crews scrambling over the wreckage from one gun to another as each came to bear on the attacking aircraft. The able seaman who had volunteered to act as cook kept rushing from his stew pots to his gun and back again in the lulls to his cooking. He persisted in wearing a large white apron and steel helmet throughout these activities.

The spirit of this ship's company was dauntless throughout. Even when darkness fell for the fourth night and every moment increased the risk of capsizing or foundering, the little band of volunteers remained cheerful and enthusiastic. Much of their enthusiasm must have been for the men who designed and built the ship so well and staunchly, every rivet holding to the last a strain undreamed of by the nameless men who welded them.

On the Monday afternoon, having been <sup>two</sup> ~~two~~ hours in tow or hove to, KELLY and her escort arrived at a repair yard through miles of cheering spectators.

She had beaten the most determined Nazi onslaughts from the air, dodged submarines, evaded surface craft. She had won through. And that grim old Admiral whose name she bears, if he watched from the Halls of Valhalla that triumphant progress to her berthing place, must have been satisfied that she had borne his name worthily for England.

#### NAVAL AFFAIRS.

A PHOTOGRAPH MAY BE OBTAINED FROM B.I.P.P.A. 89, FLEET STREET, E.C.4.