

MTB-Loss in the Northsea (1951):

A Dramatic Experience as I Remember it

Henry Nielsen, radio man on **T 58** (MUSVAAGEN), here describes his experience of the fateful collision between an English and a Danish MTB during the night of 26. February 1951.

By Henry Nielsen

On 1. January 1951 I was transferred to **T 58** as radio man, a German S-boat. Together with **T 59** we were to take part in various exercises in England, as it was said, to show the effectivity of the English reporting system.

CO on **T 59** was Kaptajnløjtnant Kaj N. Bang and Second in Command Løjtnant S. Laub. On **T 58** the CO was Løjtnant Schou (Lofty) and Second in Command was Løjtnant Wolden-Rætinge.

The voyage through the Kiel-Kanal was smooth. A stop at Brunsbüttel was abbreviated because of the good weather. The crew was to rest after the long searide, which had mainly been night-sailing.

Surprised by Storm

After one hours voyage out into the Northsea we were surprised by an unexpected storm. **T 58** we re-christened into cabbage worm or the „Flexible“, because it moved like such. She squirmed herself so much, that the water came in all over. All cupboards in the radio room sprang open, so that it was a chaos and since the power supply was filled up with salty water and it came to a short-circuit was the radio room practically out of operation. I got the permission of the CO to close down the station.

Quickly my bunk was pulled out and taken in use. All the confidential papers I had under my arm, a small box with spareparts for the radar under the other arm, my lifevest under my head and the helmet between my knees as a vomit-bucket. Surely a pityful view. My freshly pressed uniform, hanging at the bulkhead, looked like a floorcloth. It was so dreadful, that the COs agreed to enter Den Helder, the Netherlands navy base as a harbour of refuge.

Here we stayed some days, to lick the wounds. After the power-supply had been washed with fresh water and had dried, it was useable again..

Nightly Collision

In England we had our base at Felixstowe, those days a smaller town in the Thames estuary. Today Felixstowe is one of the biggest container-harbours of Europe. The exercises we took part in always took place at night. Normally we had to attack English ships. During the last exercise before our stay came to an end collided **T 59** with an English MTB. Both boats sailed without navigational lights and because of the high waves the boats did not see each other on radar. The radar was a new appearance in the navy and had been installed just before leaving Holmen (Navy Arsenal at Copenhagen), so that the phenomenon “sea clutter” was unknown.

The English boat was the entire forecastle ripped off. Unfortunately two crewmembers were staying here and were lost. The English control station asked immediately after the collision what speed she made and got the answer: “Zero knots, searching my forecastle!” Typical for a British.

Danish Crew Rescued

We were quickly alongside **T 59**, which took much water. As many as possible equipment, also private property as coconuts and bananas, things to which one had no access in Denmark after the war. We had almost emptied Felixstowe for such goods.

I do not know how long **T 59** held herself floating, one hour perhaps. The only injured was Søløjtnant Laub, who had some bad grazes at his face. Since I was the only one with reasonable clean hands, I had to clean his wounds, probably with neat spirit

Thereafter we had both to calm down our nerves with the Jamaika-rum of our CO (73 ½ Percent).

The English boat had watertight bulkheads and escaped in to Felixstowe.

In English Uniformes

The day after the crew of **T 59** was sent home with something what was similar „Uniforms“. There had not been time to redress. There were not two who were wearing the same uniform.

MTB-folks were rather undisciplined, louts as it is said. The officers were young people, discipline a town in Russia, the circumstances on board indescribable, but as balance a fantastic comradship prevailed on the single boats.

Some Danish navy men were appearing in English uniforms the next day because they were to participate in a session of the maritime court.

T 59 was raised and repaired later.