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Interviewed at AFHQ - July 1944File as app. to
June/44 diary of
162 Sqn.

How many of you are on leave? - Five. How many in the crew? - Eight. Which gun were you on? - The port blister on a Canso of 162 Squadron.

The sighting took place about 1900 hours (G.M.T.). We were just coming off a patrol lasting about 12 hours and were returning to base. I sighted the submarine on the port side about four or five miles from the aircraft. I told the Captain and asked him if he saw it. He had, and we turned in to attack. The light was good and the submarine was fully surfaced. We were flying about 1500 feet at the time and the submarine was moving very quickly.

The submarine had seen us at the same time and opened fire. We took evasive action but the flak was very heavy and we were hit a number of times. We did not know that the engine was on fire but we could feel the flak strike. Before we reached the target the starboard engine of the aircraft was shot off and fell into the sea and the aircraft shook violently. The attack was carried out about 50 feet over the submarine and four 50 lb. depth charges were dropped - I didn't see where they dropped. In passing over the target, I would say the speed of the aircraft was 80 knots an hour. One of the guns on the aircraft had jammed before we got in to attack. I believe the submarine crew ceased firing as the aircraft passed over but before that they kept up a continuous fire.

All the gunners opened fire on the submarine.

The pilot tried to bring the aircraft back to its normal cruising height but the controls were damaged and it was impossible and it was decided to ditch the aircraft, and we struck the water about 3 miles from the scene of the attack.

After we had been in the dinghy for about four hours we sighted a Catalina whose crew signalled by Aldis lamp that we had sunk the submarine as they had seen survivors. They also stated that they had signalled to base and help was coming.

The water was fairly rough and the pilot made an excellent landing under the circumstances, almost like a normal landing, and no one was hurt. I went to get a dinghy out on the starboard side but that side of the ship was afire - this was the first I knew of the fire. I went to the port side and helped Scott launch his dinghy and when I went back to get mine, St. Laurent had launched it, through the flames, on the starboard side. St. Laurent was the only one who left the aircraft from the starboard side - the remainder of the crew left from the port side. We all wore Mae Wests. The dinghy inflated beside the aircraft and we stepped into it from the a/c. Scott and Cole were in the dinghy - the other four were in the water. St. Laurent's dinghy overturned in inflating but he crawled onto it. We saw him about 100 feet off and paddled toward him with the four in the water hanging onto the dinghy. We righted the dinghy and tried to help St. Laurent aboard but the dinghy exploded. We took him into our dinghy and began taking turns boarding the dinghy and hanging on to the sides. Hornell stayed in the water and hung onto the sides most of the time. The aircraft remained afloat about 20 minutes. We were all, apparently, in good condition when the aircraft sank except that we all could not get in the dinghy. Later, we managed to get all eight in the dinghy at one time by each keeping one foot in the water but most of the time we took turns hanging onto the sides. We threw away the rations because of the sharp edges on the tin boxes and because of their weight and the space they took up in the dinghy. We had three distress signals - similar to a Very pistol - which release, by hand, two red flares. We used them when we saw the Catalina about 4 hours after ditching - it was still light.

We baled water out of the dinghy continually using the baling bucket which was in the dinghy and Mr. Hornell removed his trousers, tied the legs together and used them for baling. Matheson used his flying helmet to help bale out the water. The dinghy did not leak but it was so low in the water that the water came in.

The air was not too cold but the water was very cold. We drifted about 30 miles - I think we were about 170 miles from Scotland between Scotland and Iceland.

Twenty one hours passed before we were picked up. The Catalina stayed with us and signalled our position for about 14 hours. They kept losing us because the sea was so rough they could not see us some of the time. Flares and smoke floats were dropped to mark our position.

We were thrown out of the dinghy by the rough sea but managed to hang onto the side and board it again. I don't remember, clearly, what happened, but about an hour after that I heard that St. Laurent had died and his body was being put overboard. We lost the baling bucket and our drinking water when we fell out of the dinghy.

About two hours before we were picked up, Scott died and his body was put overboard.

About 2 o'clock in the afternoon, a Warwick aircraft dropped us an airborne life boat but it was too far away and we could not get to it. We were all pretty weak at the time and were sitting on the edge of the dinghy which was about 3/4 filled with water as we had nothing with which to bale out the water.

A Sunderland spotted us and homed an RAF Air-Sea Rescue launch to us.

We were operating from Wick at the time. The number of our aircraft was C9754. It was the first time I had seen a submarine - it was a 400 or 500 tonner.

When the Air-Sea Rescue launch arrived, Mr. Hornell was unconscious. Campbell and Matheson were very weak and we kept rubbing their hands and feet to help them.

We tried to keep up a conversation and we sang for awhile. I don't remember feeling hungry or thirsty - I guess I was too frightened. Denomy and Cole were the only two who were able to board the rescue boat without assistance. The others were pulled up with a pulley. I think the boat was about 20 feet out of the water. When we got aboard we were given warm clothing and food and put to bed. They worked on Mr. Hornell for four or five hours and I believe he coughed a little but did not regain consciousness. I couldn't say, but I think he died from exposure - he had been in the water longer than the other lads.

The crew left Canada together and knew one another pretty well.

We landed at the Shetlands and were sent to hospital. Three of us were discharged from hospital after four days and Matheson and Denomy remained a week. We were flown back to Wick and then to Iceland where we were given a month's leave and flown in an American transport to Canada. When we arrived at Wick we were advised of the awards of the DFM. We heard rumours of the VC for Mr. Hornell but didn't really know about it until we saw the press releases.

I have been in the Air Force two years. Trained at Calgary and Mountain View and have been with 162 Squadron since August, 1943. This is my first operational squadron - we were stationed in Yarmouth before moving to Reykjavik.