

Report of Interrogation of Survivors of UB 68 Sunk by H.M.S. SNAPDRAGON on 4th October 1918

TNA ADM 137/3900, P.93-101. Much of the first document is very indistinct. Uncertain and illegible passages have been indicated in the text.

There is unfortunately little to be got from this interrogation as the submarine had almost entirely recommissioned just before coming out from Pola and while the officers were exceedingly reticent, the men were so inexperienced that they could give little evidence of value.

Last Cruise of UB 68

UB 68 proceeded out of Pola at midday on Saturday, September 28th. She proceeded on the surface, doing diving practice daily and is presumed to have passed the Barrage at night on the surface. A convoy was sighted in the early hours of the morning of October 4th. A long br???ing shot was fired from the bow tube and the boat dived. (British s.s. "COPACK" torpedoed and sunk in 35.59 N. 16.49 E. I.D. Note) After this, the submarine appears to have developed some fault (possibly the jamming of the horizontal rudders) which caused the Captain to blow his tanks and rise to the surface. The Officers will not say what this was, and the men do not know.

The Warrant Officer Meinke was in the engine room and did not know of any unusual occurrence, so the evidence appears to be against a defect in the engines. From the state of mind of the Commander it would seem probably due to bad luck of himself.

UB 68 was apparently quite uninjured when she rose to the surface but being unable to dive in the presence of the enemy craft the Captain ordered the crew to abandon ship and to open the sea cocks. The submarine then came under heavy fire and owing either to this, or to drowning, the Engineer Lieutenant and three of the crew were lost.

Previous History of UB 68

Arrived from the North Sea on January 18th 1918. After ??? she did three cruises and re-entered Pola for refit in July or early August.

Crew

The crew were almost entirely new to the boat, and the majority were also experiencing their first cruise on a submarine. Several of them had suffered from sea sickness during the voyage. Some of them had only been in Pola a very short time before the cruise began.

Oberleutnant zur See Dönitz

At first refused to answer any questions whatever, and even had to be persuaded to write his name. He was very moody, and almost insolent at times, and it was very hard to make him talk at all. This frame of mind, it appears, has been partly caused by the incidents connected with the loss of his boat and it seems he was not very cordial even with his fellow countrymen. As he had previously said he was done with the sea and ships, it seems probable that the loss of UB 68 was due to the direct fault of the Commander.

Steuermann Bohrmann

Speaks English well and is of a good type. Thoroughly conscientious (?) in refusing to answer any question likely to give useful information. Was in the Hansa Line before the war, and has been in

the German Navy since the beginning of the war, but had seen no action. Before coming to the Mediterranean ??? ago he had been in the Light Cruiser BERLIN. This was his first trip in UB 68 and he refused to ??? submarines he was in before, but (?) he had never (?) been to the Aegean or in the Oran (?) area. He had never observed ??? in the Straits of Otranto and they had no trouble in passing through. Denied that any damage had been done to submarines by air attacks on Cattaro. Then asked what he thought of the Allies various anti-submarine measures he said he wouldn't express an opinion. What he was most ??? of was trouble with their own engines.

Obermatrose Konitzko

Was at the wheel when UB 68 dived after firing the torpedo. Stated that there was no water in the central compartment. He left when the order to abandon ship was given.

Maschinistenmaat Gerhard Visser

Was on board the minelayer "Pelikan" before he came to Pola four or five months ago. From that time till the beginning of this cruise he had been in hospital.

Obermatrose Wilhelm Schneider

One of the few members of the crew who had previous submarine experience. Was in the Courland Flotilla till it was broken up in December of last year. Had never before been in a submarine when it was attacked. Had no opinion of the Austrians. Stated that Spanish Influenza was very bad in Pola.

List of Officers and Men of UB 68.

Prisoners of War

Dönitz, Karl	Ober-Lieut
Müssen, Karl Wilhelm	Ober-Lieut
Ohlerich, Heinrich Ludwig	Bootmanns Maat
Raters, Heinrich	Steuermanns Maat
Mauback, Karl	Heizer
Ludwig, Bernhard	Heizer
Visser, Gerhard	Machinister
Bisadixen (?), Martin	Matrose
Schneider, Willy	Ober-Machinister
Radecker, Fritz	Oberbootsmann
Burwitz, Franz	Machinister
Bohrmann, Wilhelm	Heizer
Kuhl, Adolf	Machinister Maat
Horn, Paul	Matrose
Keil, Paul	F.T. Gast
Herzfeldt, Hermann	Matrose
Konitzko, Karl	Obermatrose

Zothe, Alfred	Obermatrose	
Schlickum, Karl	Heizer	
Schobert, Kurt	Machinister Maat	
Sayk, Willi	Obermatrose	
Klinke, Martin	Machinister	
Hoffmann, Wilhelm	Machinister	
Musche, August	Ober-Masch-Maat	
Hermann, Oscar	Matrose	LOST
Meinke, Fritz	Maschinist	Engr. Lt. Jaschow
Siskermann, Heinrich	Bootmannsmaat	Obermatrose Thelen
Seyfried, Richard	Machinister	Heizer Fachert
Joh, Alfred	Machinister Maat	
Saufert Karl	F.T. Maat	
Gunther, Edward	MaschinisterMaat	
Schneider, Ludwig	Torpedo Heizer	
Thalman, Gustav	Matrose	

Report of Interrogation of Certain Prisoners from "U.B.68"

The information contained in this report was obtained from the following prisoners of war of the German submarine "U.B.68":-

Wilhelm BOHRMANN	Navigating W.O.	(station conning tower)
Fritz MEINKE	Eng. Room W.O.	(station engine room)
Fritz BEDECKE	P.O. 1st Cl.	(station control room at forward hydroplane)
August MASCHE	E.R.P.O. 1st Cl.	(station control room)
Willy SCHNEIDER	E.R.P.O. 2nd. Cl.	(station engine room)
Kurt SCHOBERT	E.R.P.O. 2nd Cl.	(station aux. engine room)
Willy GAYK	Leading Seaman	(station control room at after hydroplane)
Bernhard LUDWIG	Stoker	(station control room at order transmitter)
Ludwig SCHNEIDER	Stoker	(station at stern torpedo tube)

The bulk of the information was derived from the navigating W.O., Bohrmann, who gave an impression of candour and honesty. Practically all his statements were confirmed by one or more of the other informants. Only one (Schobert) attempted to prevaricate.

Bohrmann, who kept the middle watch on 4 October, stated that during the night U.B.68 had proceeded on the surface. At about 1 a.m.* he sighted a convoy from the bridge and took up a position for attack. One of the bow tubes was fired, and a steamer was hit aft [S.S. COPACK], but not observed to sink. To protect the submarine from attack by the destroyer seen escorting the convoy, orders were given to dive and to keep periscope patrol. After proceeding submerged for about half an hour, U.B.68 came to the surface again, and, steering a course parallel to the convoy, on the starboard hand of the latter, overhauled the steamer furthest astern and fired a bow torpedo at a range of about 500 yards. The torpedo was seen to pass across the steamer's bows, the miss being attributed to an overestimate of the speed of the target [estimated at 9 km. actual speed 8 km.]. Remaining on the surface, the submarine thereupon took up a position on the port side of the convoy, maintaining an approximately parallel course at a distance of 600 yards. In this position she proceeded till daylight, which appeared to come with surprising suddenness. As it had already been decided to proceed submerged during the hours of daylight and to follow the movements of the convoy until a favourable opportunity for attack should present itself, orders were given to dive.

This dive is, according to our informant, the first link in the "chain of circumstances" (Verkettung der Umstände) which brought about the loss of the submarine.

Tanks were flooded as usual, and an attempt made to trim the boat for proceeding at "attacking" or periscope depth. However, she suddenly plunged to a depth of 15 m., (49 ft.) and an effort was at once made to bring her up. The remedy was worse than the disease. The forward and

* German time throughout.

after hydroplanes were put to "rise", and U.B.68 shot upwards, breaking surface with her conning tower and jumping wires. Bohrmann attributes this all too rapid rise to the fact that the rating who worked the forward hydroplanes put them hard to "rise", but Redecke, the man in question, while admitting that he may have given the hydroplanes too much helm on receiving his orders from the Engineer, lays the chief blame upon the excessive ballasting of the regulator tanks. Gayk, who worked the after hydroplanes, likewise seeks to exculpate himself by suggesting that the speed of the main motors was too high. In any case, to use the expressive slang of the informants, a bad "Tauchpanne" had occurred.

Seeing the obvious danger of coming completely to the surface in close proximity to the convoy, the Engineer immediately gave orders to flood the regulator tanks. Here the second hitch occurred, for in his anxiety to get down speedily he gave the boat an excess of negative buoyancy, and, to make matters worse, sent all available hands to the fore compartment. The result was that the boat took a considerable inclination forward and dived in an alarming manner. At a depth of 60m. (197 ft.) an attempt was made to set matters right by blowing No.VI tank and pumping out the regulator tanks. However, the submarine did not react in either case. According to Bohrmann and Masche (Eng. Room P.O. 1st Class), the main ballast pump broke down, whereas Schobert declares that it was working correctly, but could not cope with the excessive quantity of water in the regulators[.] Masche said that the pump had been fitted in the boat just before the last cruise, and that it was not reliable. He added that the auxiliary ballast pump was started, but proved wholly inadequate to meet the needs of the situation. When a depth of 80 m. (262 ft.) was reached, all tanks were blown, and this time the boat took a considerable inclination aft as she rapidly rose to the surface. Another critical situation had arisen, and on the depth gauge registering 30 m. (98 ft.) so strong was the fear of "breaking surface" that all vents were opened again and the boat dived again. On this occasion there was no stopping her till she reached a depth of over 100 m. (328 ft.) (as read by Bohrmann and Redecke on the depth gauge).. Her inclination forward was stated by several informants to have been as much as 45°, causing the battery floor plates to break loose, but not resulting in any overflow of acid. As might be expected, U.B.68 (which had been tested for a depth of 60 m. (197 ft.) sustained considerable damage.

Through the failure of a pressure hull connection right aft, water began to penetrate into the the [sic] stern compartment. The torpedo rating stationed there informed the Engine Room Warrant Officer, who, however, could not easily locate the leakage owing to the great inclination of the boat. Not much water could have come in altogether, for the engine room was not affected. However, further injury appears to have been sustained by a tank (possibly on the port side; (see below), giving under the pressure, for several informants heard a loud report. Once again all tanks were blown, and the submarine shot up to the surface, still maintaining her forward inclination of 45°. As a result she emerged stern first with her screws racing in the air, but righted herself immediately afterwards. The

Navigating Warrant Officer at once opened the conning tower hatch, and to his consternation saw that he was in the middle of the convoy! He jumped in again, shutting the hatch after him, and called down to the control room to dive. That was, however, out of the question for two reasons; firstly, the supply of H.P. air had been almost completely exhausted in raising the boat and counteracting (überbrücken) her inclination forward and aft; secondly, according to Masche and Redecke, the boat had a considerable list to port, possibly owing to a tank leaking on that side.

No sooner had U.B.68 broken surface than the convoy opened fire. Several of the informants claimed to have heard five or six detonations, while most of them stated that the boat was only hit twice, the first shot penetrating the thin plating of the bridge high up on the starboard side, and the second ripping away some of the plating of the superstructure right forward. All were positive that no damage whatsoever was sustained by the pressure hull as the result of gunfire. They were, moreover, one and all sceptical as to the ramming incident reported by S.S. WAR QUEEN. At any rate, no impact was felt, and the jumping wires were alleged to have remained intact to the end.

Seeing the impossibility of escape, the Commanding Officer, Lieut. Dönitz, thereupon gave the order to abandon ship, and sent the Engineer below to open the vents. All hands went on deck except the latter, and the majority jumped into the water, leaving the dinghy (lashed aft) to the non-swimmers. Lieut. Dönitz himself took a header from the bridge. There was no time to lose, as the submarine sank in about 8 seconds from the time of opening of the vents. The Engineer was never seen again. Either he did not allow himself time to get clear, or, as Masche suggested, he purposely stayed on board. In the latter case, it is hard to avoid the belief that, rightly or wrongly, he felt himself responsible for the loss of the boat. Three of the crew were drowned while swimming for safety; the remainder were picked up by a boat launched by H.M.S. SNAPDRAGON.