H.M.S. 'SHARP' AND H.M.S. 'BLUNT'

A TALE OF TWO TYPE 42 DESTROYERS

BY

COMMANDER R. A. BALLER, B.SC., C.ENG., M.I.MECH.E., R.N.
(Staff Marine Engineer Officer, Flag Officer Sea Training)

The events described in the following account of two Type 42 destroyers are based on reactions observed during NBCDXs at Portland. Whilst no one ship has made all the errors attributed to H.M.S. Blunt, at least one ship has matched the performance of H.M.S. Sharp.

At 1300 H.M. ships *Sharp* and *Blunt,* two Type 42 destroyers operating in support of an amphibious landing, were despatched to proceed at maximum speed 40 miles north to give fire support to a company of allied troops pinned down by an enemy position. There was no allied air cover available and the enemy were known to have aircraft and submarines in the area.

Soon after increasing to full power both ships came under rocket attack from enemy aircraft and both were hit, causing fires in the vicinity of the PO's mess on 2 deck aft, loss of lighting aft, and loss of normal and alternative power supplies to both steering motors.

In H.M.S. *Sharp* the QM in the tiller flat quickly reported the failure of normal and alternative supplies and the OOW gave the order to change to hand pump steering. On the bridge they changed to bridge control of main engines and managed to keep the ship roughly on course whilst maintaining about 20 knots. The change to hand pump steering was rapidly executed by the MEM, and extra hands were sent from the galley to assist with hand pumping. HQ1 was informed of the failure and as soon as hand pump steering was established the OOW set both telegraphs to 100 PCL and, having reminded the QM of his rudder limits, gave him a course to steer.

In H.M.S. *Blunt* things were not going so well. The OOW's initial reaction on loosing steering was to reduce both engines to slow. The loss of steering was diganosed as a controls failure and he gave the order to change to mechanical wheel. This was effected but after some confusion the tiller flat reported that both motors had been 'lost'. The OOW then ordered 'Report when ready to change to hand pump steering'. In the confusion, the tiller flat crew did not hear the order and whilst the bridge waited for the QM to report

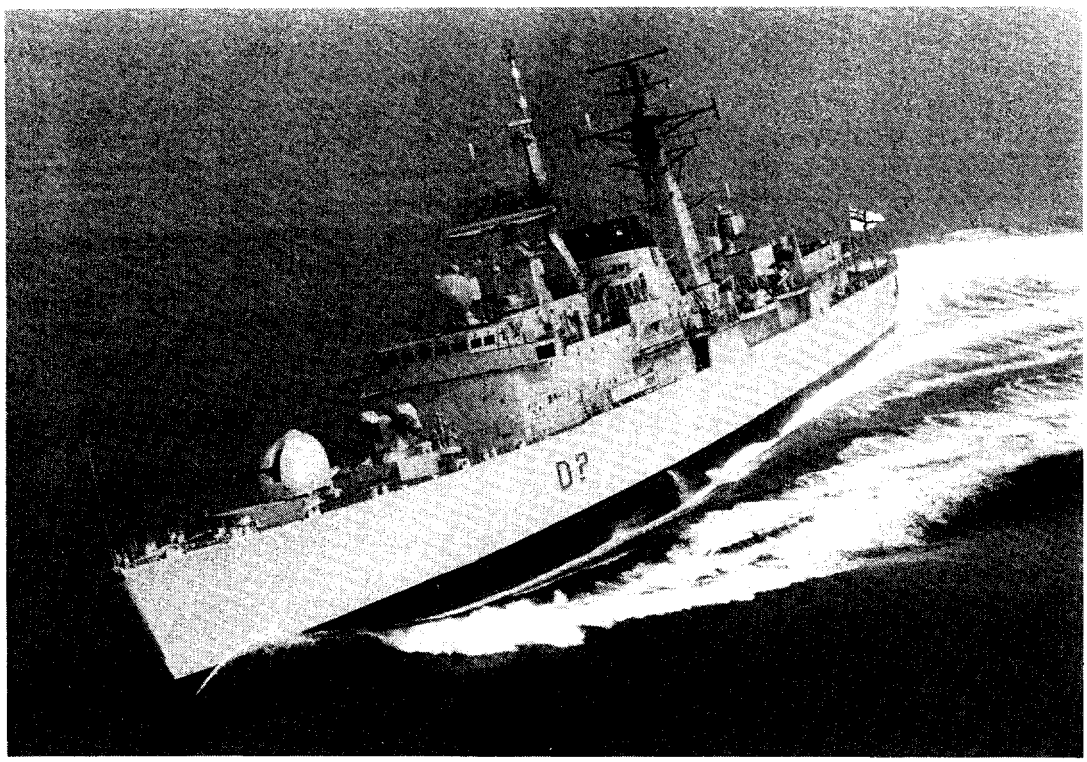
that he was ready the ship slowly drifted round to the south. The OOW then became preoccupied giving telegraph orders to try and turn the ship back out of the wind and to head north again. It was not until the Captain curtly enquired what was going on that the OOW asked the tiller flat for a sitrep. The order to change to hand pump was eventually given and received but having no torches the watchkeepers had great difficulty finding the correct valves. Just before they had completed the change both ships were again attacked by aircraft.

H.M.S. *Sharp,* which was already some 4 miles to the north, although still in hand pump steering was able to manoeuvre just sufficiently to open up 'A' arcs and managed to shoot down one aircraft but not before she had suffered further damage resulting in a main lub oil failure on the port gearbox.

H.M.S. *Blunt* was caught dead in the water and also suffered a main lub oil failure on the port side. The MCR carried out an Emergency Stop routine on the affected shaft and told the bridge that they required all way to be taken off the ship to lock the shaft. This the OOW agreed to do without consulting the command. The ship was quickly stopped but the OOW failed to inform the MCR when all way was off and the EOOW did not ask for confirmation until both telegraphs had been at 'stop' for several minutes. The engine room showed little sense of urgency in inserting the turning gear as they were completely unaware of what the ship was trying to achieve and it took nearly 10 minutes. When ready to get under way again the OOW ordered 'port 20' as the ship had drifted into wind and was again heading south. After much frantic pumping it was admitted that the rudders would not move and the MEM, who had been doing nothing for 15 minutes, had to recheck his change-over routine. The error was found and rectified and the QM and MEM set about pumping on 20° of rudder. The OOW rang on 70 PCL on the starboard shaft and the ship started to turn back to the north. As she passed 030° the OOW ordered 'midships' but the tiller flat watchkeepers had unwittingly pumped on 25° of rudder as the rudder indicator was not visible from the hand pump position. They were too exhausted to make much impression on taking it off and, as the turn tightened and the bows swung through north, control of the rudders was lost and they started to run away. The tiller flat crew, unaware of what was happening, failed to put the hand pump selector valve to the mid position and the rudders went hard over to port. H.M.S. *Blunt* turned through a further 270° before a very alarmed OOW stopped the ship. It took a further 10 minutes to close up extra hands in the tiller flat and to pump the rudders to midships. The OOW not wishing to repeat such an alarming experience ordered the locking pins to be inserted. He then reported to the Captain that the ship was unable to proceed on one shaft. Following a heated discussion between the Captain, OOW, and MEO (who was unaware of the loss of power to the steering) the order was given to remove the locking pins and get under way again. Unfortunately, following the locking of the rudders the tiller flat crew had volunteered their services to assist with fighting the fire in the PO's mess and the tiller flat had been abandoned. When hand pump steering had been re-established H.M.S. *Blunt* was able to make about 8 knots but frequently had to slow down to enable the OOW to regain course (the Navigating Officer had advised him of the rudder limits but had failed to add that they applied either side of the helm required to steer a straight course). Maintaining a straight course was not helped by the failure of the MCR team to apply pitch to the locked shaft and this was also reducing the ship's speed by about 2 knots.

Some 14 miles to the north H.M.S. *Sharp* was making good 14 knots having locked the port shaft and applied full pitch whilst under way at 70 PCL on the starboard shaft. Repairs to the damaged lub oil pipe had been speedly effected by the action watchkeeper backed up by the mobile repair team and by 1410

she was ready to bring the port shaft back into use. This she again did at 70 PCL on the other shaft before starting the second Olympus and increasing to 100 PCL. No sooner had this been achieved then a fire broke out in the starboard Olympus module. The BCF was fired, emergency slow routine initiated, the engine tripped and the stand-by engine started—all in a matter of seconds and without dropping below 14 knots.



THE RUDDERS WENT HARD OVER TO PORT AND H.M.S. 'BLUNT' TURNED THROUGH 270°

H.M.S. *Blunt* suffered the same problem but, having carried out all the initial reactions correctly, the MCR asked permission to start the stand-by engine. The OOW, not wishing to upset his captain again, passed on the request to the command. Meanwhile, with no engines running the ship again lost way and turned into wind.

The lub oil system repairs in H.M.S. *Blunt* were being held up for the want of some codline. The Buffer's store was locked and the key could not be located. A patch was applied using rubber insertion and Jubilee clips. This was unsuccessful and a further repair had to be undertaken. Once the lub oil leak had been successfully repaired and tested the bridge were told to take all way off the ship so that the shaft could be unlocked. This the OOW did and again the Captain found his ship dead in the water as enemy aircraft approached. The only damage on this occasion, however, was the OOW's pride as the Captain impressed upon him the need to refer such decisions to the command.

The ship got under way again on both shafts at 1445 but still in hand pump steering. It had taken 30 minutes for HQ1 to learn about the loss of power to the steering and because of the fire aft the cable run had been abandoned. In H.M.S. *Sharp* the fire had been extinguished but the steering gear emergency cable run had been achieved by an alternative route over the upper deck and steering was soon back in bridge control.

At 1500 both ships suffered near misses which put the main propulsion controls out of action. In H.M.S. *Blunt* the MCR put both telegraphs to slow ahead and local control was taken of the pitch and throttle of both shafts. The engines were brought to idle and the pitch reduced to slow ahead. The operator on the port CPP pump, however, was inexperienced and the pitch continued to move astern until it was on the astern stop with the relief lifting. Unable to hold the ship on course using the hand pump the OOW rang down 'stop' on both shafts. After several minutes control was re-established but not before H.M.S. *Blunt* was again heading south.

In H.M.S. *Sharp* the 'Emergency Slow' on both shafts was rapidly followed by a sitrep from the EOOW whilst local control was being established. He confirmed that telegraphs could be obeyed but that response would be slow. The OOW therefore ordered both telegraphs back to half ahead and the ship continued uninterrupted at 15 knots. Control of pitch and throttle was confirmed by a slight movement of each.

A re-entry into the starboard Olympus module was rapidly organized and effected in H.M.S. *Sharp* and the cause of the fire identified as a split burner hose. A spare was quickly obtained and fitted thereby restoring full power and manoeuvrability. By 1500 H.M.S. *Sharp* was within range of the enemy position and commenced a shore bombardment.

At about the same time H.M.S. *Blunt* was still some 30 miles from the gun line and having been ordered to abandon her objective she was limping back to the task group.