

Reginald Johnson, continued...

them owing to the gale and the high sea. There was a lot of wreckage floating about which must have come from my ship. I decided to remain at anchor until the weather moderated and commenced rationing the food and water.

9. Fortunately we had a good supply of drinking water and I was able to allow a dipper full to each man every day. I would here like to comment on the excellence of the new concentrated food, which sustained us very well during the time we were in the boat. I had 33 of the crew in my boat, including the 3<sup>rd</sup> engineer, an apprentice, 5 gunners (2 Navy, 3 Army) and 26 Chinese ratings. The 3<sup>rd</sup> engineer reported that the Morris motor in the lifeboat was out of order as the magneto was wet and too near the bottom of the boat, where the water was a foot deep.

10. We succeeded in pumping out the water with a semi-rotary pump which was in the boat, but by that time our feet were wet and as it is freezing cold during the night, and we had no dry sea boots we suffered from extreme cold. I'm sorry to report that one Chinese member of the crew had to have both feet amputated. Most of the crew suffered from sea-sickness.

11. I had trouble with the Chinese ratings, who seemed to be under the impression that the white men were going to claim the food and they announced their intention of throwing overboard all the white men in the boat. The situation became dangerous for a time although there remained an undercurrent of dissatisfaction amongst the Chinese during the whole time we were in the boat. I reported their behaviour to the Naval authorities at Halifax, but I do not think any kind of disciplinary action was taken against them.

12. On the 24<sup>th</sup> March, after being laid to the sea anchor for 3½ days the weather moderated so I set sail and steered to the westward hoping that I could reach the American coast in spite of the northerly set of the current. The peak of the lug was well topped up and the boat made good headway through the water.

13. About 23.00 on 26<sup>th</sup> March I sighted a ship on the port bow about ½ a mile distant and burned the remaining two flares, flashed my torch and ordered very man to switch on their life jacket light. The ship altered course and steamed towards us. She turned out to be the Norwegian tanker M.V. Havsten. I steered the boat alongside her starboard side where the pilot ladders were put out. I managed to climb up the ladder but to my surprise, on reaching the ship's deck, I could not stand up because my feet were frostbitten.

14. We were treated with every consideration on board the HAVSTEN and were landed at Halifax on March 28<sup>th</sup> 1942 where most of the crew were treated for frostbite. Only 10 Chinese members of the boat's complement escaped the affects of exposure. I had distributed the massage oil amongst the crew but was not produced until 3 days had elapsed and I regret not having used it earlier. I was admitted to the hospital at Halifax. All members of the boat's crew with the exception of myself and the 3<sup>rd</sup> engineer wore protective suits. My suit had been stolen shortly after I got in the boat.

15. The apprentice had only one a pair of trousers under his protective suit I do not know what happened to the other life boats or the raft and can only conclude that they must have capsized during the gale.

16. Finally I would like to suggest that there should be a bigger clearance space for the propeller, there was only one eighth of an inch between the propeller and the stern-post and the propeller became jammed against it.

Report by Reginald Johnson  
8<sup>th</sup> June 1942

Reginald Johnson was awarded a Disability Allowance on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1942. This allowance was discontinued on 22 October 1942.

The Honours and Awards Committee has considered the claims to recognition of Reginald Johnson, 3<sup>rd</sup> Officer of SS Thursobank and submits that the Appointment shown below be recommended to the Treasury Committee.

S.S. THURSOBANK, was attacked and sunk by an enemy submarine in March 1942. Her Third Officer, Mr Johnson was in charge of the starboard lifeboat in which there were 34 survivors. Although only twenty, he showed great skill, leadership and resource in a boat voyage of five days until they were picked up. For most of the time the weather was bad, and the Chinese crew were troublesome. To his seamanship, discipline and unwavering resolution the 34 survivors owe their lives.

Dated 8<sup>th</sup> July 1942

The London Gazette, 18<sup>th</sup> August 1942 states:-

Reginald Johnson Esq., Third Officer

"The ship was torpedoed. The Master stopped the engines and ordered the crew to the boats, one of which was in charge of Third Officer. A gale was blowing so he decided to lie to his anchor till the weather moderated. After 3 ½ days they were able to sail and two days later they were picked up.

By firmness and tact the Third Officer though only twenty years old, maintained discipline and the 34 survivors owe their lives to his seamanship and unwavering resolution."

SECRET - SS Tursobank.

The ship was torpedoed. The Master stopped the engines and ordered the crew to the boats. The port lifeboat had been destroyed by the explosion but the three other boats and one raft were successfully lowered with most of the crew. The Master insisted on staying on board till all the crew were clear. He ordered his Third Officer to get his boat away and was not seen again. A second torpedo then struck the ship and she sank quickly. A moderate gale was blowing so the Third Officer decided to lie to his anchor till the weather moderated and started rationing the food and water. After 3½ days they were able to set sail and two days later were picked up by a Norwegian ship.

There was some trouble with the 26 Chinese ratings due perhaps to the period of forced inactivity, but by firmness and tact the Third Officer (though only 20 years old) maintained discipline. To his seamanship and unwavering resolution the 56 survivors owe their lives.

*Maurice Barrick.*