**SHOT DOWN IN BAY OF BISCAY**

**AND**

**BECAME PRISONER OF THE JAPANESE**

by Arthur W. Arculus

**INTRODUCTION**

At the completion of writing a summary on an airman, F/Sgt. Maxwell C. Patterson, his brother, Mr. Carl Patterson, in Durban, Republic of South Africa, wrote the following:

Let me end this with a wartime circumstance which must, at the time, have been very confusing to the people-at home. At the latter end of the war, I was moved to a POW camp in what was then Batavia, in Java. One of the occupants there was an RAF type with one leg-and thereby hung a tale. This man had been part of a Sunderland flying boat crew on patrol over the Bay of Biscay. Flying through low cloud, they came into a clear area immediately above a German freighter running the blockade. The gun crew on the ship were prepared for them, as they could hear the plane and with great accuracy, promptly shot down the Sunderland.

This man was the only survivor who also sustained severe injuries to a leg, sufficiently bad enough to leave the German doctor on board no option but to amputate. As a blockade runner, the first port of call was Batavia and so our friend, mysteriously as it seemed, landed up in the Far East. Funny things happen, but always have an explanation.

Could have been reminded of this in a crossword answer that I encountered last week – the word “carrack” turned out to mean an armed merchant ship in days gone by.

My own immediate thoughts on this were that I would like to know more. Perhaps this was in Carl's mind as well, as he is the type of person who likes to know answers when he has a problem.

Carl Patterson was taken prisoner by the-Japanese following the sinking of HMS *Jupiter* (1,375 tons and built 1934) during the Battle of the Java Sea on 27 February 1942.

**THE SEARCH**

To begin with, I have no idea of the date the Sunderland was shot down, no name of the airman concerned or squadron he served with. In fact, a project with very little to start off on and one therefore, which gives me something to get my teeth into. If 1 may take a liberty in assuming (something a researcher should not do), but under the circumstances, I have to start somewhere. I have a list of Sunderland fates: a photocopy list of which I have no idea where it came from, or what date that it was made up. I proceeded through it, plane by plane, until I came to one that could, but by no means being certain at this stage, to fit the Sunderland we are looking for. This is:

Sunderland DV971 of 119 Squadron RAF - Lost 15 December 1942

Aircraft missing, on patrol at 47" 50 N 08° 40'W. Search failed to locate aircraft - presumed enemy action. 11 crew missing. Cat "E" Base, Pembroke Dock.

The co-ordinates give it to be just outside the Bay of Biscay. They may have signaled their position on locating the blockade runner, which, of course, would depend on how soon they spotted the vessel and then being shot down. If the account had been taken from the Squadron Operational Record Book (ORB) which is written at the time of the incident, they wouldn't have known that there had been a survivor.

On 8 September 2002, I posted a plea for assistance on the Internet in a web site called “RAF Commands” ([www.rafcommands.com](http://www.rafcommands.com)), run by a very efficient person by the name of Ross McNeill. The text of my post was as follows:

Biscay Patrol / ending as a Jap POW

While carrying out research on an airman some time ago, his brother, a former Japanese POW from HMS Jupiter, told me that while in a POW Camp at Batavia, Java, he met an airman who had had his leg amputated onboard a German “blockade runner.” The story is as follows.

This man had been a crew member of a Sunderland flying boat on a Bay of Biscay patrol. Flying through low cloud, they came into a clear area immediately above a German blockade runner. The gun crew on the ship were prepared for them as they could hear the aircraft and promptly shot down the Sunderland. The first port of call for the vessel was Batavia, Java, where the airman, the sole survivor, was taken into captivity. When lifted aboard the German vessel, his leg was so badly injured that the ships doctor had to amputate.

Is there anyone who has heard of this episode? I do not know if it was a Sunderland for sure, or any dates of the encounter, the trade of the airman concerned, which leg was amputated. In fact, all very vague. I rest my case in anticipation.

Arthur “Digger” Arculus, New Zealand

I only had to wait until the 15th when I received a reply from a Martin Gleeson, which read:

Hello Arthur,

A most interesting story. I do not recall any such incident off hand. Can you help with some further questions in order that we might identify the participants? Do you know the name of the rescued airman or that of the blockade runner? Or the nationality of the airman? Did he survive the war? I think the correct name of the port should be Batavia.

Regards,

Martin Gleeson

Martin was quite correct. I should have written Batavia.

Then on the 16 September I received the following from Ross McNeill, the author of 'Coastal Command Losses' and Web Master of RAF Command.

Hi Arthur,

The story of the loss does not fit with what I know, but try Sgt. E Davidson, 1195435, 12/07/43.

He was the only survivor of a Sunderland loss into the Bay of Biscay. I do not have access to any Japanese POW records, so cannot trace if he is listed there.

Regards,

Ross

From the above information, I checked out a list of Sunderland fates from, 'Short Sunderland' by Andrew Hendry. The one Sunderland I came across of that date was DV977 of No. 238 Squadron based at Pembroke Dock. It all looked quite hopeful. My next move being to see if there had been a New Zealander aboard when it was lost, so I looked up, “For Your Tomorrow” by Errol W. Martyn and sure enough there was. His name being F/Sgt. Richard Clyde Armstrong, NZ405770, one of the Air Gunners, age 31, who had 489 flying hours and was on his 36th operational flight.

I was then brought to a halt on this aircraft when I read the following:

Sunderland III DV977/Y took off at 0717 captained by F/Sgt. R.D.E. Codd, RAF and was shot down by an enemy fighter over the Bay of Biscay at 1518 hours. An RAF airman was later rescued by the Royal Navy as the sole survivor. His ten comrades are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial.

The same day I received another reply on the website from Martin Gleeson, it reads:

Hallo Arthur and Ross,

I do not think it was Sunderland DV 977 of 228 Squadron RAF, lost on 12 July 1943 over the Bay of Biscay. By all accounts, this was shot down by Ju 88's of V./KO 40 (ref. BLOODY BISCAY, THE SHORT SUNDERLAND (C. BOWYER), Tony Wood's website (Luftwaffe Fighter Claims 1943), etc.). FOR YOUR TOMORROW, Vol. 2 agrees and further states that Davidson was rescued by a Royal Navy ship.

I have little on German blockade runners, but few enough must have journeyed successfully from Europe to the Far East. The “Petrii Orseolo” left Bordeaux on I October 1942 and reached Djakarta on 12 November 1942, however, there is no reference to such an encounter as you describe (THE STRIKE WINGS). Two more ships, the “Alsterufer” and the “Osomo,” left France in the first quarter of 1943 and arrived in Japan on June 19th and June 4th respectively. (HITLER'S U-BOAT WAR: THE HUNTED 1942-1945 by Clay Blair). Such a journey from France to Japan took approximately two months as far as I can make out.

There is a book titled AXIS BLOCKADE RUNNERS OF WORLD WAR 2 by M. Brice published in London by Batsford in 1981. I do not have this unfortunately, but it may be of help if you could obtain a copy. Library perhaps?

Hope this helps.

Regards,

Martin Gleeson

Before I totally dropped the idea of DV977, I sent an email to Errol Martyn to ask if he was dead certain that the RAF airman was picked up by the Royal Navy. I have known Errol long enough to feel he had given the correct information in his book, but it is often a good idea to double check, just in case.

The answer from Errol Martyn is well worth recording, because of the efforts of the sole survivor, Sgt. Davidson, in his help to save the navigator of the crew, Sgt. Harding.

Hello Arthur,

Armstrong's bio states that his a/c was shot down 'by enemy fighters' and goes on to simply state - "There was one survivor, an RAF member of the crew, who was picked up by a naval vessel." I am certain that if this were other than Allied, it would have been so stated, also that he therefore would have become a POW. A paper on Armstrong's file gives Davidson's statement [although does not mention him by name, and is undated] as follows:

"After the crash, opened the dinghy and saw the Navigator Sgt. Harding in the water. I attempted to get him into the dinghy, but he died before I could do so. Sgt. Harding was the only member of the crew I saw during the nine hours I was in the water."

Your move, Laddie!

Cheers,
Errol

The following signal was sent to the RAF Commands website on 21 September 2002:

Greetings Ross & Martin,

Following our exchanges on the Biscay Sunderland / Blockade Runner search, I have been through my files and landed up with 9 Sunderland's of interest lost in the B of Biscay area; T9113 (01.09.42); DD837 (15.05.43); DD864 (14.12.43); DP177 (11.08.43); DV968 (13.08.43). DV971 (15.12.42). DV993 (17.11.43). EK572 (11.11.43). & JM709 (06.01.44).

I have put aside for the moment, those which I know to have been shot down by aircraft, leaving, DD837; DD864; DP177; DV971; EK572; JM709, for me to look into.

Sunderland's that I am not sure how they were lost are; DD837; DD864; DP177; DV971; EK572 & JM709. From these aircraft, I am looking for total crew losses, or where there may have been more than one survivor, thus eliminating that aircraft.

Of course it is always possible that the Luftwaffe had some form of air coverage of a “blockade runner.” I am keeping this in mind.

I received an email from Carl Patterson (20.9.02) now living in Durban, who is the sailor who met the one-legged airman in the POW Camp. He is in his 80's and very reluctantly (having been pushed by his sons) using email and keeps clear of the Internet. I quote a relevant portion:

I have given you a problem with my one-legged airman! He was real enough and even if my memory hesitates at times, I would not forget the explanatory document written in German by the ship's doctor who amputated the leg. (My highlighting - Arthur) And you probably know as well as myself, that all that is written in war books is not necessarily correct. When in Florida, my son Stuart produced a book written by a fellow POW who was also on Haruku Island and some of what was written was completely contrary to my recollections. Being personally involved in some of the episodes, I am not likely to have a complete collapse of memory.

So there is a Doctor's report floating around somewhere....where?

Arthur 'Digger' Arculus

Again Martin Gleeson posted another reply on the website:

Hello Arthur,

Concerning your last message on Sunderlands.
DD 837 was shot down by V./KG 40, crew all killed.
DP 177 was shot down by V./KG 40, crew all killed.
EK 572 was shot down by I./ZG 1, crew all killed. (This was a re-designation of V./KG 40).

Both DD 864 and JM 709 are listed as missing on missions to the Biscay area. Admiral Donitz ordered an end to the blockade runner programme on 17 January 1944. I do not know the date of the last outbound sailing of a blockade runner, but it may have been prior to these two losses in December 1943 and January 1944. Just a guess.
Sources: THE SHORT SUNDERLAND (BOWYER), BLOODY BISCAY (GOSS) and THE STRIKE WINGS (NESBIT).

FOR YOUR TOMORROW, Vol.1 has an interesting entry for DV 971. If the position of the SOS is correct, then it too can be ruled out. The location seems too far north and west for a ship attempting a journey to the Far East from France. Just my opinion again.

We must look at other possibilities. Could the ship in question have been a surface raider or a supply ship? Or could the wounded airman have been transferred at sea to another ship? Very possibly it was another type of aircraft rather than a Sunderland. Or was it actually the Bay of Biscay where the incident happened? Sorry I am not really helping that much!

What we really need is to tie down dates for all German surface ships sailing from anywhere in Europe to the Far East from 1941 to 1944. This would help establish their outbound routes also. I think some may have sailed from Germany or Norway. The Martin Brice book on blockade runners would really help.

I have checked the 10 OTU operational losses from August 1942 to July 1943 in Bill Chorley's book on OTU losses. Nothing found to match. However in BLOODY BISCAY, page 204 there is a 502 Squadron Whitley loss, Z 9365/'A', again to V./KG 40. Five crew missing, but one POW. This was a Sgt. T.J. Edwards. Nothing in the main text concerning this loss or about how he was picked up. A possibility?

Regards for now.

Martin Gleeson

This signal gave me one or two things to work on. The information that Admiral Donetz having ordered an end to the blockade running on 17 January 1944 gives a time frame of say, when Java fell on 9 March 1942 until 17 January 1944. Earlier than that, any ships would have carried on to Japan with the prisoner. Martin was able to eliminate three of the Sunderland aircraft. I have sent off to Chris Goss author of “Bloody Biscay,” to find out where the sole survivor from the Whitley (Z9365/A) was taken to, Europe or Far East and by who?

After receiving this signal from Martin Gleeson and reading the very last paragraph of his signal, I sent one off to Chris Goss asking if it were possible the POW mentioned on page 204 of “Bloody Biscay” could be our airman who was aboard the 502 Squadron Whitley (Z9365/A) and was taken to the Far East as a POW? The reply came back as follows:

Arthur

Edwards (who was alive when I wrote the book, but did not want to contribute) was a victim of V/KG 40. I am not aware of any RAF chap being shot down by a blockade breaker. Glad you are enjoying the books and I am sure you will enjoy “Bloody Biscay.”

Chris

This was a breakthrough, Chris obviously noncommittal and not wishing to invade the privacy of the former Sgt. T.J. Edwards. I feel now there is a strong case that Edwards is our man and the Whitley was the aircraft concerned and not a Sunderland as first thought. The other point being that it was an aircraft of V/KG40 (Ju88) that shot them down and not the “blockade runner.” No date yet, as I do not know when the Whitley was lost.

I will now try and tie up any loose ends in confirming the above. Before I commenced sorting out the above information, I received another e mail from Chris Goss informing me that Edward's was picked up by a French fishing boat ,then this email was followed by another, this time from Ross McNeill together with the date, crew list including names of two New Zealanders and more on the Whitley. Had I had the date earlier from Chris Goss, I would have automatically looked in Errol Martyn’s, “For Your Tomorrow,” found the two New Zealanders and saved myself quite a lot of bother. The loss of the remaining Whitley crew was a very sad story, which can be found in appendix. "B".

I had posted my latest thoughts on the RAF Commands web site and said I had come up with two Sunderlands that could fit the bill - they were DD864 and JM709.

Again, it wasn’t very long before I received crew lists of DD864 and JM709 from Ross McNeill. One of them, DD864 caught my eye as being the best to start on:

24/12/43
No.228 Sqn
Sunderland III
DD864

F/L W H E Fitzearle
F/O R J Hodges
Sgt R M Bond
F/Sgt R K Chapman
F/Sgt E Weiland RAAF
F/Sgt J B Mullin
F/Sgt G W Gordon RAAF
F/Sgt A H Foxley RAAF
Sgt G E Wilks
Sgt E J Lock
Sgt P E Gander

Op: A/S Patrol, Base: Pembroke Dock, Time Up: 07:15 hrs

Took off for a Percussion T3 patrol but diverted to look for an enemy force. Last heard at 12:25 hrs reporting the course and speed of a merchant vessel then nothing more heard. At 13:20 hrs U/228 reported burning wreckage in position VJGK 2520 consisting of a survivor on a Sunderland float and dropped a dinghy, but the survivor disappeared. All are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial. (Note CWGC errs in listing some of the crew as No.229 Sqn. but does list all the crew).

In order to obtain more on the above statement, I sent off a signal to the German Maritime Museum in Bremerhaven, outlining the event as known by us. I now await their answer. I also contacted No.228 Squadron Association about a week later and received this reply from Mr. Eric Harrison. Although he replied that he couldn’t help me very much, he took the time to enlighten me with the following, which is quite interesting relating to the 24 December 1943.

Hi, I'm sorry I cannot be of much help. I have a lot of 228 data. I have a copy of the Sqdn. line book and a book of our history, but neither mention the point you raise. A 1939-45 history booklet does say the following, "24th Dec 1943....F/Lt Armstrong and crew, patrolling with Flt Fitzearle, sighted the blockade runner "*Orsono*" with a group of 5 enemy destroyers and other vessels. The Sunderlands circled the enemy force and took up different positions to shadow. During the patrol, F/Lt Armstrong heard a feint SOS which quickly died away. Later, however, wreckage burning on the sea was seen and investigated. The crew saw a Sunderland wing-tip float and a survivor. A dinghy was dropped ,but the survivor had disappeared. F/Lt Fitzearle and crew did not return. Armstrong was killed 2 months later. Sorry I cannot help further. I have a lot of books referring to that period of the war, but nothing about this incident features. I personally can’t imagine this man was picked up, mainly because the Germans didn't pick up survivors!!!!!!!! Regards, Eric

Thus, F/Lt. Fitzearle’s Sunderland being DD864 and F/Lt. Armstrong’s 228/U. We now know that the *Orsono* had quite a strong escort at the time it was sighted by the Sunderland’s, therefore I assume that it could have been the escort that shot the Sunderland down and not the ‘blockade runner’. We also know that the *Orsono* arrived in Japan on 4 June.

Where do we go from here? My only hope at the moment is that I will receive a reply from the German Maritime Museum.

Unfortunately, the German Maritime Museum were unable to assist, but they did give the Bundersarchives address for me to try.

Further information has come to hand from Errol Martyn on the blockade runner with the name corrected to *Osorno*. From the world’s Merchant Ships 1939’ by Roger Jordan, the *Osorno* was the Hamburg-Amerika Line’s diesel-electric 6,951 grt. which would could carry 58 passengers. She subsequently became the blockade runner *BURNAU*, being scuttled in the Gironde estuary, 25 August 1944 - later raised and broken up. We do not know when she changed her name and the book mentions “she became a blockade runner,” before or after the name change?

Prior to this project, I had contact with Mr. Glynn Griffith, present curator of the RAF Millom Museum in Cumberland, and is also the webmaster of their website. Glynn has been most helpful to me in the past and became interested in this Bay of Biscay project giving me some very useful suggestions when I became stuck. He posted a message on a German website with reference to the “blockade runner” *Osorno* and for information on other “blockade runners.” He received a very quick answer from a Mr. F.Almeria of Portugal, who posted a list (Ref Appendix ‘C’) of vessels used on the route between France and Japan, which included sailing dates in each direction and fates of some of those vessels. In all, there were some 58 sailing's covering from 29 December 1940 to 4 October 1943, 19 of which were from Bordeaux. This is a most useful list indeed.

I can now put the *Osorno* action with Sunderland DD864 (288 Sqn) out of my mind, as we now know that the *Osorno* was inbound to Gironde, France, at the time. My task now is to locate an action with the loss of a Sunderland following within a reasonable date in that list.

The second answer to Glynn’s posting was from a person signed as Visje from The Netherlands, who referred to a book, “Swarze Shiffe - Weite See” (Black Ships - White Sea) by Jochen Brennecke.

My next move was to outline my Biscay story on this German website and see what it comes up with. I didn't have to wait too long before the answer arrived from Visje:

Hi all,

I think I have found the incident in Brennecke's book. The freighter *Weserland* left France in mid-September 1942. She was attacked by a Sunderland flying boat, which the ship brought down with her Flak. There were apparently two survivors of the aircraft, which were picked up. One had heavy burns, the other had been shot in the legs. One leg was amputated. The ship apparently docked in Yokohama, but I don't have any dates to go with it (not a strong point of Brennecke's book).

*Weserland*, ex-Ermland was a Hapag ship of 6,528 tons. Master was Kapitän Krage.

HTH,

Visje

This was quite a breakthrough, as I now had sound information that a blockade runner had shot down a Sunderland aircraft and the name of the vessel, *Weserland* involved, plus that there were two survivors taken aboard and not one as first thought, its Master, Kapitain Krage and sailing date from Bordeaux. Now to locate the Sunderland involved and the date that the action took place.

I am finding it very difficult to tie down this aircraft as none of the Sunderland fates have occurred following the sailing date up until say, the end of the month. The only one, a “rank outsider” could be L5805 (95 Sqn) which was lost on 8 October 1942, some 20 days after the sailing of the *Weserland* and somewhere south well out of the Bay of Biscay.

Then it dawned upon me that this was the aircraft I had done a project on some years ago (Jack Pybus RNZAF), so we can write that one off the list.

As the year 2002 petered out, I was left with no Sunderlands to match up with the *Weserland*.

What aircraft could I now concentrate on? I do not have a very good listing of Coastal Command aircraft operating within the Bay of Biscay, therefore I decided in January 2003 to have another go at two of the websites as follows;-

This to RAF Commands Website 15.1.03

I am trying to trace all aircraft losses (with the exception of Sunderlands) over the Bay of Biscay between 19 September 1942 to say, the end of the month.

This would be the approximate time taken for the German blockade runner, *Weserland* (Kapitan KRAGE), leaving Bordeaux and clearing the Bay en route for the Far East.

During its passage through the Bay, it shot down an aircraft and picked up two survivors, one having a leg amputated on board and the other with serious burns. One or both, being disembarked in Batavia, Java.

The publication, “Schwarze Schiffe, Weite See” by Jochen Brennecke, has the aircraft as a Sunderland, no dates. This cannot be correct, as there are no Sunderland losses tie up with this.

Any info? Thanks.

Arthur Arculus. N.Z.

The next to Feld Grau website 17.1.03:

Can anyone tell me if there were any survivors from the German Blockade runner *WESERLAND* (Kapitan Krage?) when it was sunk by *USS SOMMERS* on 2 January 1944 in the South Atlantic?

My reason for the request is I am attempting to find the survivors she picked up after shooting down a British aircraft in the Bay of Biscay from about 19 September (Left Bandeaux 19th) to say, the end of September 1942, when on route to the Far East. One survivor was badly burnt and the other had a leg amputated by the ships doctor. Any names or information would be appreciated.

Also, has anyone a photo of the *WESERLAND*, most interested in what she looked like.

Thanks,

Arthur Arculus N.Z.

Having sent the posting to Feld Grau on the 17 January 2003, I received a very quick reply from a fellow living in Austria, signed Peter K. The whole text of his signal can be found in Appendix “D.” This contains references from five books:

Die deutsch Handelsschiffahrt bei Kriegsausbruch 1939. By Cai Boie / Bernd Oesterl.

Die deutsche handelsflotte 1939-1945 2 Band. By Hans Jürgen Witthoft.

Die deutschen Kriegsschiffe 1815-1945 4 Band. By Erich Gröner.

Schwartze Schiffe - Weite See. By Jochen Brenneke.

Blockadebrecher. By Martin Brice.

The *Weserland* was launched on the 18 February 1922, under the name of *Ermland* and she was about 11,150 tons.

We take up our part of the story when the *Ermland* reached Bordeaux 4 April 1941 from Kobe, Japan. After this date she was renamed the *Weserland.*

Between 17-20 August 1942, the *Weserland* (Kapt. F.Krage) attempted to sail to Japan having been loaded with machinery and armed with 1 x 10.5cm and 4 x 2cm guns. At Cape Ortegal, Spain, and just leaving the Bay of Biscay, she had an encounter with three aircraft. Two, according to the book were shot down and one escaped. Following this, the crew of the *Weserland* watched an attack on the *Uckermark*, then when it was clear, the *Weserland* proceeded into the port of Finisterre, later to return to Bordeaux again. So ended the first attempt to head for Japan.

The date I have of the particular sailing of the *Weserland* has been taken from “Blockadebrecher 1941-1943” (ref. Appendix “C”). This was given as 19th September 1942 from Bordeaux; perhaps I had taken this rather too literally and therefore worked my aircraft losses two or three days “from” that date and should have flung the net wider covering a few days before that. Every time I used that date and try to reconcile the loss of an aircraft, I seem to have drawn a blank. Perhaps the sailing date is suspect.

I have tried POW websites to no avail. The one very big thing in my favour has been the interest shown in this project by Ross McNeill, author of “RAF Coastal Command Losses” and the webmaster of the RAF Commands website. Ross has been delving very deeply into POW lists for as very long time and he has come up with one or two names in the hope that one of these will shed some light on the problem.

Returning to this project, things had become well bogged down by January 2003, so I wrote to the Air Historical Branch, outlining as I have done in the past with the rather vague information I had to hand. I wrote to Mr. G. Day with who I have dealt with in the past years. I received a reply and as was to be rather expected, he was unable to assist due to the lack of information I had on the possible dates, aircraft and any names to go by.

With so many involved searching on my behalf, I felt that sometime we must hit home with a lead. There was a humorous reply on the web by someone requesting that I put them out of their misery and tell them which aircraft it was! I think we are all getting a bit frustrated.

In the meantime, I received a very nice photograph of the *Weserland* from a fellow living in Austria, who signed himself Peter K. Peter and also sent me the information on the ultimate fate of the vessel which will be found in Appendix “D.”

We now come to Friday 30 May 2003 and I received an email from Ross McNeill as follows:

I've just picked up my copy of Unsung Heroes of the Royal Air Force; The Far East Prisoners of War, Les and Pam Stubbs.

"On being shot down in the Bay of Biscay, one man from No.202 Sqn (Alan D
Smith) was picked up by a German submarine which was on its way to Java,
where he was handed over to the Japanese in September 1942."

"Smith Alan Douglas - 575111 - 202 Sqn - Held Java"

May be a possible lead.

Happy hunting.
Regards
Ross

This information that Sgt. Alan D. Smith had been picked up by a German submarine was a surprise. I know that there were a few U-boats that travelled to the Far East, but somehow this didn’t ring “true” and for the moment I will treat the information as suspect.

Ross then followed this up with a further signal giving me the aircraft concerned: a Catalina of No. 202 Squadron and the serial being AJ162. Shot down 11 September 1942. He was then attempting to obtain a crew list.

As you can see, we are back to the suspect date of sailing of the *Weserland*, this being prior to the 19th.

Another signal from Ross:-

I've been able to expand the crew list a bit. We have 7 named killed and two un-named missing - presumed killed.

F/Sgt J W Pilling
P/O J G Pope
F/Sgt R S Rice RCAF
Sgt R Ainsworth
Sgt T Kirkham
Sgt W Law
Sgt J M Sloan

Looks like a hit with Smith and one other survivor (unknown for the moment).

Then another:

I checked the ORBs for No.202 Sqn. and AHQ Gibraltar at the PRO yesterday.

The aircraft was lost about 20:30 hrs on the 10th Sept 1942 shadowing a suspicious Merchant Vessel which had opened fire on them.

There is no crew list in the ORB apart from:

F/Sgt Pilling
P/O Pope
F/Sgt Rice

Earlier in the ORB (18/05/42) the crew listed as safe after Catalina AJ158 was shot down by French fighters off Oran included a Sgt Rice and Sgt Smith.

I'll try another tack for the full crew list but it may take some time.

1835 MTB1 VM GMRS 0530-235-10
1900 MTB2 VM previously reported has sighted a/c and opened fire
1915 MFB1 CPP Lat & Long (received by a/c)
1900 MFB2 Ask m/v to identify. If unsatisfactory attack with D/Cs (received
by a/c)
1932 MFB3 Your 1900 FKF (received by a/c)
2000 MFB4 After attack shadow to PLE Report change of course and speed.
2015 MFB5 My 1900 Reply at once

A/c last heard at 2040 when asking for repeat of 4th message. A/C has not
returned.

AIR27/1183 No.202 ORB

Catalina F/202 was airborne at 12:11 hrs on A/S patrol S.V.2. Aircraft
sighted and reported a suspicious M/V. The position given was thought to be 4205N 1530W but the signal was corrupt. Aircraft was ordered to attack and to afterwards shadow to prudent limit of endurance. Nothing has since been heard of F/202, the latest time being 20:40 hrs when the aircraft was in communication with base.

AIR24/715 AHQ Gibraltar ORB

Regarding the names mentioned in the 202 Squadron ORB of 18 May 1942 it is rather significant that there is a Sgt. Smith involved- our Sgt. A.D. Smith I wonder?

Now we come to the signal from Ross McNeill, which gave us the breakthrough which he has been striving for on my behalf for so long:

Hi Arthur,

Having exhausted all other avenue for the missing crew members of AJ162 I wrote to the RAFAHB and asked them to confirm if Smith was onboard and who the missing crew member was.

Just got the answer today.

575111 Sgt A D Smith, PoW
961286 LAC H W Long, PoW

The RAFAHB also added the info:

"Shot down by gunfire from the enemy ship and crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off Coruna, Spain. The two airmen who survived were rescued by the crew of the Weserland, whose ship had left Bordeaux, France on the 8th September 1942 for it's destination of Yokohama. On reaching Java, the two prisoners disembarked and were handed over to the Japanese."

In "Unsung Heroes" the details for Long are:

Long Harry William - 961286 - Unit not known - Held Java, Singapore, Kyushu
(Fukuoka 1)

So without prompting, the RAFAHB Casualty Cards contained confirmation of the *Weserland.* I suspect that this information came from their post debrief.

Regards
Ross

In the signal received today, Ross McNeill informs me that Alan Smith had left a message on his answering machine. Ross said he would be speaking to him that evening.

The next communication, Ross had spoken to Alan Smith and Alan would be expecting a call from me Alan Smith, the aircraft Wireless Operator, was the one who lost a leg and Long had suffered the burns. Alan says the fire started in the flight engineers area and after the first wireless message, he failed to send anymore as he was chucking out ammo from the fire.

The *Weserland* treated him well and even attempted a blood transfusion from a German sailor by means of a syringe.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Catalina AJ162/P of 202 Squadron was airborne at 1211 hours from its base at Gibraltar 10 September 1942. It sighted and reported a suspicious Merchant Vessel (MV) while on an A/S Patrol S.V.2. The aircraft was ordered to attack and afterwards shadow to prudent limit of endurance (PLE).

The Operations Record Book (ORB) records the following transmissions were sent to Catalina AJ162 202 Squadron from its base in Gibraltar and aircraft to base.

1835; MTBI VM GMRS 0530-235-10

1900; MTB2 VM Vessel previously reported has sighted aircraft and opened fire.

1915; MFBI CPP Latitude and Longitude (Received by aircraft)

1900?: MFB2 Ask M.V. To identify itself, if unsatisfactory attack with DC's (received by aircraft).

1932; MFB3 Your 1900 FKF (received by aircraft).

2000; MFB4 After attack shadow to PLE. Report change of course and speed.

2015 MFB5 My 1900 Reply at once.

A/c last heard at 2040 when asking for repeat of 4th message. A/C. has not returned.

AIR27/1183 No.202 ORB

Catalina F/202 was airborne at 12,11 hrs on A/S patrol S.V.2 aircraft sighted and reported suspicious M/V. The position given of the suspicious M.V. was thought to be 4205N, 1530W, but the signal was corrupt. Aircraft was ordered to attack and afterwards shadow to prudent limit of endurance. Nothing has been heard of F/202 , the latest time being 20.40 hrs. when the aircraft was in communication with base.

AIR24/715 AHQ Qibrahar ORB.

The following are a few extra items of information on the crew members who were killed.

Alan Smith's conversation with Ross McNeill reveals that a fire started in the Flight Engineers area and after the first wireless message was sent out he failed to send any more as he was throwing out ammunition from the fire. The aircraft crashed off Conuia, Spain and the following crew members who were killed and have no known graves and are now Commemorated on the Malta Memorial. Extra information has been obtained from the CWGC website:

F/Sgt. PILLINOJ.W. (James Walter) 1283040 RAF(VR)

P/O. POPEJ.G. (John Gordon) 118944 RAF(VR) Late of St. Leonards, Sussex. M. A. (Cantab).

F/Sgt. RICE.R.S.(Ruskin Service) R/76534 RCAF Late of Edmonton Alberta. Canada

Sgt. AINSWORTH.R. (Rowland). 1117848 RAF(VR) Late of Bacap, Lancashire

Sgt. KIRKHAM.T. (Thomas) 975695 RAF(VR)

Sgt. LAW.W.(William) 1020850 RAF(VR) Late of New Brancepeth, Co. Durham

Sgt. SLOAK.J.M. (Joseph Macnay) 1055236 RAF(VR) Late of Airth, Stirlingshire. Scotland

Survivors;

Sgt. Alan Douglas Smith, received injuries to his leg and it was amputated on board the *Weseriand*. Alan went on to tell Ross McNeill, that he was treated well aboard the Weserland and they even attempted a blood transfusion from a German sailor by means of a syringe.

L/Ac. Harry William Long suffered burns and in my conversation with Alan Smith he thought not too serious.

Tuesday 8 July 2003 I had a very pleasant phone conversation with Alan Smith and promised to send him the photograph of the *Weseriand* and also its history (Appendix C). As we were finishing, Alan added that he had been transferred to the *Uckermark* another of the German blockade runners, but he didn't say where this took place, so I have written off to his home address to ask Alan for information about the transfer from one ship to the other.

The quandary I have is about the sailing dates of the two vessels from Bordeaux as they may or may not be correct as in appendix D. The sailing dates I have are that the *Uckermark* sailed 9 September 1942 and the Catalina (AJ162) was shot down on the evening of the 10th. The *Weserland* is given as sailing on the 19th September. Still quite a puzzle.

 Both Jochen Brenneke ('Schwartz Schiffe - Weite See') and the Air Historical Branch, state that the two airmen were picked up by the *Weserland*, so the transfer must have come later in the voyage. I await the reply from Alan Smith in the hope we can clear this up.

We now arrive at March 2004 and with information received from a new contact from Hamburg, Rolf Schulenburg, I am becoming more convinced that it was the *Uckermark* that Alan Smith was transferred to from the *Weserland* at some point of the journey. I have also been suspicious of the address I sent my letter to Alan, so I looked up his name on the internet White Pages and found I had made an error. Perhaps this is why I had not received a reply from him, so I sent another off. It wasn’t long before he replied as follows:

Thank you for your letter,

I must apologise for the delay in replying to your previous letters. I seem to have mislaid my ‘log book’ and other papers. After reading all the details enclosed with your previous letter I am beginning to get confused myself.

Firstly, I am sure the boat that shot us down was the *Weserland* although I did not know these vessels at the time, I am definite that I was transferred to the *Uckermark* in Tandjongpaiok (Batavia) by the line between the vessels. (Alan was transferred ship to ship by a line slung across and must have spotted the names - compiler). I understood that the *Uckermark* (like the infamous *Altmark*) was a prison ship and carried Merchant seamen from vessels sunk in the South Atlantic, although I never saw any.

To get down to details of the action off Coruna in the Bay of Biscay.

I flew as a WO/AG on Catalina AJ162 from Gibraltar (202 Sqn). We took off at 12:45 hours on 110th September 1942 for an anti-shipping patrol in the Atlantic off Spain and the Bay. After the usual sightings of Spanish fishing vessels, a larger ‘blip’ was seen on our ASV. When we descended through cloud, the vessel fired on us. The time was around 18:35.

After reporting the sighting, I was on the wireless at the time the reply from base was "Ask the ship to identify itself!" As if 3 inch shells were not sufficient identification! We attacked the ship with bombs, but in the action we were on fire in the engineer’s compartment (Harry Long was on duty). This fire made my position untenable, so I got up to get the fire extinguisher.

My last recognition was falling down between the two pilots. Next thing I remember was waking up in the water with two broken legs. Far enough from the aircraft to be safe when it blew up.

Luckily I had spent a lot of time as a schoolboy mucking about in the local swimming pool and had learnt to move through the water with little movement of the legs. I was picked up by the German ship by hanging on to the rope ladder with my arms looped on a rung.

I found out afterwards that Harry Long had been rescued, but severely burnt in the legs. I was treated well in the sick bay on board the ship and when I developed gangrene my right leg had to be amputated below the knee. The doctor saved my knee joint by cutting off the leg without a flap of skin over the cut. I had to grow new skin to cover the wound.

During the operation I received a blood transfusion from a German sailor by use of a syringe. I was treated well and had many visitors from the crew until I started asking questions about our destination. When we docked, I still did not know where we were, although I guessed by the weather that it was in a warm climate.

After a few days I was transferred to the other vessel (the *Uckermark* - compiler) and then taken ashore. I then realised that we were in the Far East. I was taken to a hospital camp in Batavia. It had been a a girls school. (the toilet seats were made for children). Later on, I was transferred to a prison camp (Kampong, Macassar?), where I stayed until released. I never saw Harry Long after the aircraft was shot down.

When I arrived in the hospital camp (Mata Dolorosa? - compiler) they took more bandages off me than they possessed.

I am very pleased with the result of all the work done by so many people who have taken the time to assist. There are so many, that I will give a general thank you to all of them.

One last question I would like answered - Is Harry Long still alive and if so, where is he now?

How pleasing it would be if the pair could, after all these years, be reunited.

**APPENDIX “A”**

(Crew Lists for Sunderland's W3985/T & DP177 RB-F)

DP177 RB-F (lost Bay of Biscay 11 August 1943): The 10 Squadron RAAF all- Australian crew were: (Via 'Alan2')

Flt Lt Norman Clive Gerrard (Captain) age 25
Fg Off Ian William Bowen (Pilot) age 29
Fg Off Keith Dermer Smith (Pilot) age 21
Plt Off James Inman Rowland (Navigator) age 33
Plt Off Roydon James Adams (Gunnery Officer) age 30
WO Frank Howard Jones (WOAG) age 27
WO James George Hudson Webster (WAG) age 25
Sgt Douglas Edward Bennington (Fitter 2E) age 21
Sgt James Edward Challinor (ACH) age 23
Sgt John Gordon Dwyer (Air Gunner) age 26
Sgt William Ernest George Mathews (Fitter 2A/AG) age 27
Sgt John Reviere Dallas (Armourer) age 22

3 days earlier they had escaped an attack by 6 Ju88s.

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Sunderland II - 10 (RAAF) Sqn - W3985/T - lost over Biscay Bay 18 August 1943. (Via Ross McNeill)

F/O Victor Denis William COLLINS - 409027 - Pilot
F/Lt Hickson William SKINNER - 407977 - Pilot
F/O Ronald Ross SWINSON - 414966 - Pilot
F/O William Noel HILL -401820 - Nav
F/Sgt Hugh Edward BURBIDGE - 414990 - Ag
F/Sgt Ronald Arthur GIBBS - 402704 - WOp/Ag
F/Sgt Kenneth Morwick MELDRUM - 404754 - WOp/Ag
Sgt Alfred Ramsay ALDRIDGE - 5226 - Fitter 2A
Sgt Walter Paul GREATZ - 19707 - Fitter 2E
Sgt Norman Henry ORFORD - 51797 - Armourer
Sgt Walter SLATER - 19194 - Flt Engineer
F/Sgt Donald Stanyon CROXFORD - 655726 - RAF(VR) -passenger.
Except CROXFORD all crew RAAF.

The following extract is relevant for the position of the SOS from T and the claim by KG40.

Took off for a Musketry 10-2 Patrol with F/Sgt Cosford as a passenger but failed to return from over the Bay of Biscay. At 18:45 hrs St.Eval D/F station received a garbled SOS from T/10 on a bearing of 222 degrees True. Believed shot down by Hptm Horst Grahl of 5/KG40.

**APPENDIX “B”**

(Crew List & Fate of Whitley Z9365 YG-A of 502 Squadron 15 September 1942)

The following information is taken from Errol Martyn’s ‘For Your Tomorrow’ Vol 1.Page 249 and from the e mail from Ross McNeill.

The Whitley was operating on a Anti Submarine patrol ‘BP13’ having taken off from St. Eval, Cornwall at 1305 the Whitley was forced to ditch after an encounter with several German aircraft of 13/KG40. The name of the pilot credited with the Whitley has been given as Fw. Henny Passier and the position PLQ14W/9855 at 1847 hours. The coded position was 150 miles W of Brest, France.

During the encounter the captain of the Whitley, a New Zealander, was wounded. On impact Whitley Z9365 broke in two and its large dinghy sank with the tail half. The 2nd pilot and a RCAF member of the crew drifted away from the wreckage and were not seen again. The other four clambered into a small dinghy, but the captain died on the 16th, another from injuries received in the crash, and a third from exposure. An RAF Sgt ( T.J.Edwards) was the sole survivor, being picked up by a French fishing boat, only to be captured by the Germans on the 30th. His five comrades are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial.

The crew were as follows:-

P/O.A.E.(Alan Edward) Coates.mid NZ40643 RNZAF. Age 30 Captain

Sgt. A.B.(Alexander Bridges) Coburn.NZ414594 RNZAF Age 27 2nd Pilot

Sgt. H.A. Roberts 1164473 RAF(VR?)

Sgt. T.J. Edwards. RAF(VR)?

Sgt W. Harvey. R/92554 RCAF

Sgt. J.R.Ellam.112387 RAF(VR?)

Note; Sgt Coburn’s true family name was Cockburn, although enlisted and served as Coburn.

All a very sad story indeed, apart from Sgt. Edwards, which is a pleasure to record that he was a survivor and was still alive in the 1990’s.

**APPENDIX “C”**

(A list of sailings via German website [www.feldgrau.com](http://www.feldgrau.com) kindly sent by F Almeida of Portugal)

**1941 - 1943
unter Leitung des Marinesonderdienstes auf der Route zwischen Japan und Europa**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Ermland(später: Weserland) | Kobe | 29.12.40 | Bordeaux | 04.04.41 | Versorgung ORION, ADMIRAL SCHEER  |
| 2 | Ole Jacob (später: Benno) | Kobe | 12.40 | Bordeaux | 19.07.41 |   |
| 3 | Elbe | Dairen | 20.04.41 | . | .  | + 6.6.41 Azoren von Flugzeugen der HMS EAGLE bei Suchaktion nach BISMARCK. |
| 4 | Regensburg | Dairen | 05.05.41 | Bordeaux | 27.06.41 |   |
| 5 | Ramses | Dairen | 12.05.41 |   |   | *re* wegen Verlustes der ELBE |
| 6 | AnnelieseEssberger | Dairen | 20.06.41 | Bordeaux | 10.09.41 |   |
| 7 | Odenwald | Yokohama | 21.08.41 | . | . | p..6.11.41 von USS OMAHA in panamerik. Neutral' zone. |
| 8 | Benno (ex Ole Jacob) | Bordeaux | 30.08.41 | Kobe | 10.41 |   |
| 9 | Rio Grande | Bordeaux | 21.09.41 | Osaka | 06.12.41 |   |
| 10 | Burgenland | Kobe  | 21.09.41 | Bordeaux | 10.12.41 |   |
| 11 | Kota Pinang | Bordeaux | 27.09.41 | . | . | (+) 3.10.41 Azoren vor HMS KENIA |
| 12 | Benno | Kobe | 10.41 | Bordeaux | 12.41 |   |
| 13 | Elsa Essberger | Sasebo | 14.10.41 | El Ferrol | 15.01.42 |   |
| 14 | Spreewald | Dairen | 21.10.41 |   |   | + 31.1.42 irrtümlich von U 333 |
| 15 | Portland | Bordeaux | 22.10.41 | Osaka | 01.01.42 | Versorgung KORMORAN |
| 16 | Pietro Orseolo | Kobe | 02.12.41 | Bordeaux | 24.02.42 |   |
| 17 | Cortelazzo | Dairen | 15.11.41 | Bordeaux | 28.01.42 |   |
| 18 | Benno (ex Ole Jacob) | Bordeaux | 22.12.41 | . | . | + 24.12.41 Portugal durch Flugzeuge |
| 19 | Osorno | Kobe | 24.12.41 | Bordeaux | 19.02.42 |   |
| **1942.** |
| 20 | Doggerbank | Bordeaux | 25.01.42 | Kobe | **.. .. ..** |   |
| 21 | Rio Grande | Kobe | 31.01.42 | Bordeaux | 16.04.42 |   |
| 22 | Fusijama | Kobe | 07.02.42 | Bordeaux | 26.04.42 |   |
| 23 | Münsterland | Yokohama | 18.02.42 | Bordeaux | 17.05.42 |   |
| 24 | Portland | Yokohama | 26.02.42 | Bordeaux | 10.05.42 |   |
| 25 | Tannenfels | Bordeaux | 02.03.42 | Yokohama | 12.05.42 | Versorgung THOR, MICHEL, STIER |
| 26 | Dresden | Bordeaux | 15.04.42 | Yokohama | 06.42 | Versorgung DOGGERBANK |
| 27 | Regensburg | Bordeaux | 02.05.42 | Yokohama | 07.07.42 | Versorgung THOR |
| *.Schiffe Nr.1 bis 16 wurden um Kap Hoorn geleitet ; Schiffe Nr. 17-37 wurden um das Kap der Guten Hoffnung geleitet..*  |
| 28 | Tannenfels | Yokohama | 08.08.42 | Bordeaux | 02.11.42 |   |
| 29 | Dresden | Yokohama | 20.08.42 | Bordeaux | 03.11.42 |   |
| 30 | Kulmerland | Dairen | 26.08.42 | Bordeaux | 07.11.42 |   |
| 31 | Uckermarck | Bordeaux | 09.09.42 | Yokohama | 24.11.42 |   |
| 32 | Regensburg | Kobe | 14.09.42 |   |   | = Sundastraße, in Singapore repariert |
| 33 | Weserland (ex Ermland) | Bordeaux | 19.09.42 | Yokohama | 01.12.42 |   |
| 34 | Rhakotis | Yokohama | 27.09.42 |   |   | (+) 1.1.43 vor HMS SCYLLA |
| 35 | Rio Grande | Bordeaux | 28.09.42 |   |   | (+) 8.1.43 vor USS OMAHA |
| 36 | Pietro Orseolo | Bordeaux | 01.10.42 | Kobe | 02.12.42 |   |
| 37 | Burgenland | Bordeaux | 09.10.42 | Kobe | 12.01.43 |   |
| 38 | Irene | Bordeaux | 11.10.42 | Kobe | 12.42 |   |
| 39 | Ramses | Kobe | 23.10.42 | . | . | (+) 10.12.42 Indischer Ozean vor HMAS ADELAIDE |
| 40 | Anneliese Essberger | Bordeaux | 05.11.42 | . | . | (+) 21.11.42 St. Pauls vor USS Milwaukee |
| 41 | Karin | Bordeaux | 06.11.42 | Shonan | 01.43 |   |
| 42 | Hohenfriedberg | Yokohama | 11.11.42 | . | . | (+) 26.2.43 Kap Finisterre vor HMS SUSSEX |
| 43 | Rossbach | Kobe | 12.11.42 | . | . | *re* nach Batavia |
| 44 | Cortellazzo | Bordeaux | 29.11.42 | . | . | + 30.11.42 Biscaya von HMS REDOUBT |
| 45 | Doggerbank | Kobe | 17.12.42 |   |   | + 3.3.43 irrtümlich von U 43 |
| **1943.**  |
| 46 | Weserland (ex Ermland) | Yokohama | 05.01.43 |   |   | *re* nach Batavia |
| 47 | Pietro Orseolo | Kobe | 25.01.43 | Bordeaux | 02.04.43 | = 1.4.43 Biscaya von USS SKAD |
| 48 | Rio Grande | Yokohama | 28.01.43 |   |   | *re* Yokohama |
| 49 | Irene | Singapore | 04.02.43 |   |   | (+) 10.3.43 Kap Finisterre vor HMS ADVENTURE |
| 50 | Karin  | Singapore | 04.02.43 |   |   | (+) 10.4.43 Natal-Freetown-Enge vor USS SAVANNAH |
| 51 | Regensburg | Batavia | 06.02.43 |   |   | + 30.3.43 Dänemarkstraße von HMS GLASGOW |
|  52 | Burgenland | Kobe | 07.02.43 |   |   | *re* von Batavia nach Kobe |
| 53 | Portland | Bordeaux | 02.43 |   |   | (+) 13.4.43 vor FFS GEORGES LEYGUES |
| ---- |
| 54 | Rio Grande | Yokohama | 04.10.43 |   |   | (+) 8.1.44 Natal-Freetown-Enge vor USS OMAHA |
| 55  |  Weserland |  Yokohma |  26.10.43 |   |   |  (+) 2.1.44 Südatlantik vor USS SOMERS |
| 56 | Burgenland | Yokohama | 29.10.43 |   |   | (+) 5.1.44 Natal-Freetown-Enge vor USS OMAHA |
| 57 | Osorno ("Bernau") | Kobe | 02.10.43 | Gironde | 26.12.43 | In der Gironde auf Wrack gelaufen, sinkendes Schiff auf Strand gesetzt und Ladung geborgen |
| 58 | Alsterufer ("Trave") | Kobe | 04.10.43 |   |   | + 27.12.43 Nordatlantik durch Flugzeugbomben. |
| **.1944.** |

Von 1944 an musste wegen der lückenlosen Feindüberwachung die Zufuhr kriegswichtiger Rohstoffe von und nach Ostasien durch große deutsche und japanische U-Boote durchgeführt werden. Von ihnen haben drei japanische (I-8, I-29 und I-30) und drei deutsche U-Boote (U178, U188 und U843) im deutschen Machtbereich liegende Häfen erreicht.
.

**=** *beschädigt* ; **+** *versenkt* ; **(+)** *selbst versenkt* ; **p** *als Prise aufgebracht* **; re** *zurückgerufen*

**APPENDIX “D”**

Text from Peter K of Austria posted, together with the sources on the Feld Grau website Saturday 18 January 2003.

 Hi ARTHUR!

I had collected the following data for you:

WESERLAND, ex ERMLAND

The HAPAG-motorship ERMLAND (building year 1922, 6528 BRT) reached Manila on August 26, 1939, coming from Houston. It sailed again immediately and entered the harbour of Takao, Formosa, on August 31, 1939.
The ship sailed to Kobe, Japan, from July 28 until August 5, 1940

Without any cargo the ship sailed again on December 28, 1940, to take prisoners from German auxiliary cruisers.
ERMLAND reached successfully Bordeaux on April 4, 1941. After that the ERMLAND was renamed into WESERLAND. Between August 17 and August 20, 1942, the ship tried to sail to Japan, but failed.
Between September 18 and December 1, 1942, the WESERLAND sailed from Bordeaux to Yokohama.
The ship was leaving Yokohama on January 5, 1943 for France, but had to return. Finally WESERLAND sailed again on October 26, 1943, but was sunk by the US destroyer SOMERS in the Southern Atlantic on January 2, 1944.

Source: Cai Boie/Bernd Oesterle, Die deutsche Handelsschiffahrt bei Kriegsausbruch 1939

The motorship ERMLAND (6528 BRT) reached Takao on August 31, 1939, coming from Manila. She had 706 t of fuel left, with an daily use of 13,2 t.
On August 5, 1940, the ship entered the harbour of Kobe. ERMLAND (Kpt.F. Krage) sailed to Bordeaux from December 28, 1940, until April 4, 1941, taking 350 prisoners from the auxiliary cruiser ORION (Schiff 36) in the vicinity of the Marshall-islands and later 56 additional prisoners from the cruiser ADMIRAL SCHEER.
Renamed as WESERLAND, she reached Yokohama again on December 1, 1942. She was lost on January 3, 1944, at about 17°S/21°W by gun fire of the US destroyer SOMERS.

Source: Hans Jürgen Witthöft, Die deutsche Handelsflotte 1939-1945, 2. Band
picture available

ERMLAND (Kpt. Krage) met the auxiliary cruiser ORION, from which she takes 330 prisoners, and the prize tanker OLE JACOB on January 5, 1941, at the Lamutrek-atoll. Under the prisoners were a French, called Paul Vois, who wrote a book about his journey on board of ORION and ERMLAND, called "Tausend Inseln und keine für uns."

On January 9, 1941, ERMLAND was leaving the two other ships and continued her journey home. On February 23, 1942, ERMLAND met a British troop transport or auxiliary cruiser, but without any consequences.
Later the ship met first the NORDMARK (Kpt. Grau) at point "Andalusien", and later the cruiser ADMIRAL SCHEER, from which 56 more prisoners were taken. On board of the ERMLAND, Lt. Georg was responsible with 9 other men for watching all the prisoners! ERMLAND reached Bordeaux on April 3, 1941.

After renaming the ship into WESERLAND, she was loaded with a machinery cargo for Japan and armed with 1x10,5 cm and 4x2 cm guns. She started a new journey to Japan, but at Kap Ortegal 3 enemy aircraft were attacking. One or two were shoot down, the third escaped. After watching an other air attack at the nearby tanker UCKERMARK, WESERLAND entered the Spanish harbour Finisterre, but only to return to Bordeaux shortly after!

In the middle of September 1942 she tried again. Far away from the Spanish coast a Sunderland was attacking, but failed and was shoot down. Two survivors were rescued by Kpt. Krage – one was heavily burnt, the other had a leg amputated, but both survived! WESERLAND successfully reached Japan, sighting 6 ships on this journey!

After taken 35 Italian uboat-drivers in Singapore, WESERLAND was sighted by an aircraft on January 1, 1944, which was shot down. But on the next day 4 more aircraft shadowed the ship and at 22.00 o’clock the ship was gunned by the US destroyer SOMERS. It sunk at about 23.00 by scuttling charges. 5 men were killed, all others were rescued on the next day´s morning by the destroyer.

source: Jochen Brennecke, Schwarze Schiffe – Weite

On December 28, 1940, ERMLAND (6528 BRT, Kpt. Krage) sailed from Kobe for the Lamutrek-atoll to meet the auxiliary cruiser ORION and her tanker OLE JACOB. This took place on January 5, 1941, but after only a few hours the ship sailed again. Later all three ship met again and travelled together until January 9, 1941.
On January 1, 1944, the US Bombron 107 consists of 11 PB4Y-1 Liberators with 15 crews, stationed at Natal and Ascension (airfield Widewake). Normally they flew a triangular search of 700, 400 resp. 1000 nm at a maximum range of 2290nm. Moreover there were an Army Airforce unit of B25 with a range of 1275 nm stationed at Ascension.

On January 1, 1944, 07.20, the first PB4Y started with Lt. Krug, but sighted nothing at her 7,5 hours flight.
At 07.40 the "Baker 9" of Lt. Taylor started and at 14.00 she saw a ship at ENE-course with 10 knots speed at 9°35N23°45W. It was identified as GLENBANK, which had leaved Capetown on December 24, 1943, for Montevideo, but of course it was WESERLAND. After firing a few 12,7 mm rounds, the WESERLAND fired back and wounded one crew member (MacGregor). Despite that, the aircraft safely returned at 18.45.
In the meantime at 14.14, the "Baker 5" reported another ship, 200 nm away at position 7°52N21°40W, which seem to be the SEAPOOL.

The cruiser MARLBEHEAD and destroyer WINSLOW were detached to control the ship of "Baker 5", the destroyer SOMERS to look for the ship of "Baker 9". At 20.35 "Baker 12" sighted the GLENBANK of "Baker 9" again, at a position 70 nm SE from the last reported. This aircraft landed at January 2, 1944, 03.30.
At 22.00 MARBLEHEAD and WINSLOW reached the SEAPOOL and identified her positively.
In the meantime two more ship were sighted, the FORT WELLINGTON and the WASCANA PARK.
On January 2, 1944, 09.30, the "Baker 12" with Lt. R.T. Johnson started again. SOMERS (Cdr. E.C. Hughes) was controlling the WASCANA PARK, when "Baker 12" sighted another ship 60 nm away. Lt. Johnson called for assistance, but at 17.25 the ship – of course the WESERLAND – opened accurate AA-fire and damaged the aircraft. Nevertheless until 18.30 three more aircrafts were in place and "Baker 12" started her 600 nm-flight for Ascension. "Baker 2" escorted her and at 21.30 "Baker 12" lost height down to 430 m, and at 21.45 to only 180 m. At 21.47 she went finally down.
At 22.00 SOMERS sighted the WESERLAND 12 nm away, illuminated by aircrafts. At 23.00 SOMERS opened fire at a distance of only 4 nm and the ship sunk at 00.30 on January 3, 1944. there were 5 deaths, but SOMERS rescued 134 survivors, like she reported at 04.00.

Source: Martin Brice, Blockadebrecher

Building yard: Blohm & Voss, Hamburg
Building number: 414
6528 BRT, about 11150 t, 136,87 x 17,77 x 7,65 m, height 9,00 m, 3500 PSe for 11 kn,
2 x B&V 6zyl. 4takt diesel engines, 33020 nm / 11 kn / 1853 t oil, crew 42-58, 9850 tdw,
armed since October 1941 with 4x2cm, 4xMG launched on 18.02.22, commissioned on 29.08.22 as ERMLAND
lost on 03.01.44 at 17°S21°W by scuttling in sight of US destroyer SOMERS

Source: Erich Gröner, Die deutschen Kriegsschiffe 1815-1945, Band 4 sketch available

I hope, there is something of some help!

Greetings from Austria,
Peter K.

**APPENDIX “D”**



**Coruna, Spain**