

Friday, October 21st, 2016

Central London, England

HMS WESTMINSTER

The Royal Navy Type 23 frigate, *HMS WESTMINSTER*, was moored alongside the second world war light cruiser, *HMS BELFAST*.

The 4,900-tonne warship and her crew of 185 men and women were alongside for a visit to their capital city. Naturally, after an evening out on the town, they were very unhappy to be awoken soon after midnight by alarms sounding throughout the vessel. Very quickly, the crew dressed and reported to their stations. The operations room was manned, and magazines were opened to load the 30-millimetre remotely-operated guns on each beam. Within fifteen minutes, the Type 997 Artisan radar atop the main mast began to revolve, scanning the night sky for miles around, detecting, cataloguing and classifying everything it found. The thirty-two GWS-35 Sea Ceptor missiles in the vertical launch magazine at the bow were enabled and prepared for possible launch against incoming aircraft or missiles. Royal Marines ran across to the *BELFAST* and they set up a GPMG to guard the pier which led aboard the *BELFAST* and thence to the *WESTMINSTER*. An armed sea boat was put into the water to guard *WESTMINSTER* from the water.

The entire vessel was ready for anything which might come their way.

Within the Specialist Operations directorate of London's Metropolitan Police Service, or more specifically, Protection Command, there was total chaos.

Coming almost within minutes of each other, the reports of the two attacks had come in causing intense consternation. An attack was reported underway on Kensington Palace, although initial inquiries for more information had been blocked by inconsistent communications. The same for Chequers which was much more worrying. As far as they could tell, there was a very open attack underway on the British Government and Royalty. The biggest problem was where to target available resources. It did not help that potential operations were being hampered by interfering ministers and generally low morale.

Two groups were rapidly assembled - one group sped west, towards Chequers while another made their way towards Kensington Palace. The group headed west was led by Sergeant Joseph Beck and he was angry - he knew many of the men on the Prime Ministers protective detail, and by all accounts, there was a vicious firefight underway there with all access to the estate blocked by burning vehicles. It had been a difficult decision, but the Prime Minister had been deemed more important than those in residence at Kensington Palace. He headed a convoy of four red BMW X5 police 4x4s from Protection Command with eight motorcycle outriders from the Special Escort Group (SEG) providing escort. They headed up the A5, then the M1, and onto the A41, racing along at over ninety miles per hour.

As they crossed the M25, Beck received an important phone call from a very senior officer in Special Branch - a Commander Haig.

HMS WESTMINSTER & TWILIGHT

Scorpion expertly flew *TWILIGHT* at forty feet along the River Thames, slowing before she ran into Tower Bridge.

As the Agusta-Westland AW109LUH helicopter pivoted in the air, turning one-eighty degrees, the undercarriage dropped down. Smoothly, Scorpion translated sideways and gently deposited the three-wheeled undercarriage onto *WESTMINSTER'S* flight deck in exactly the right location. She waved forward the waiting flight deck crew and the medical staff. Two stretchers were laid out on the deck and both were quickly occupied by a struggling Electra and an unconscious Mary. As the loaded stretchers vanished into the cavernous aircraft hangar which was partially filled with a folded Merlin helicopter, Ginny, the Prince, and Sergeant Heynes followed on behind.

Scorpion increased the pitch of her rotor blades and *TWILIGHT* leapt into the air before heading northwest at high speed.

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Somewhere towards two that morning, an urgent pipe had been made, and the flight deck was prepared for a helicopter landing and the medical staff were ordered to prepare to receive wounded aboard.

The flight deck officer had been very surprised to find a 'black' helicopter landing on the flight deck and Royalty appearing from the back of the helicopter. The medical officer, Lieutenant Ed Harris immediately recognised the Prince, as well as his daughter. However, the Prince was uninjured, and a cursory inspection had shown the Princess to have nothing more than a flesh wound. His attentions were directed at the little girl with blood covering her torso while one of his female staff treated the Princess who was still unconscious. The young girl could not have been older than ten and she exhibited some nasty scars which became apparent once her blood-soaked pyjamas were removed, and the blood thinned.

The first bullet had entered her abdomen from the rear an inch or two above the left hip. With some swift surgery, the bullet was removed having been found embedded up near her left lung. It was a miracle that the bullet had not clipped anything important - still, the girl would find walking very sore for a little while as her hip muscle was nicked. As for the second bullet, that one had entered slightly above the first and passed straight through, exiting to the front above her left hip and adjacent to a vicious-looking scar which ran across the girl's front down to her left thigh. Electra Haig was made comfortable in one of the two beds in the sickbay while the Princess resided in the other. Both girls were unconscious and would be for a few hours yet thanks to the painkillers.

Meanwhile, up in the Captain's day cabin, the Prince had met with the *WESTMINSTER'S* captain, Commander Hugh Drake. Considering that he was busy, he had allocated his day cabin for the Prince's use and there was a Royal Marines Commando posted outside for privacy.

"Your daughter is sleeping, Your Highness; the wound needing nothing more than a clean and a bandage. However, I am certain that it will be painful when she wakes up. As for the other girl. . ."

"Electra," Ginny prompted.

"Electra - she has had a bullet removed and the wound from another cleaned and dressed. She, too, has a painful time ahead of her."

"Electra saved my daughter - put herself between her and the bullets," the Prince explained.

"Would I be pushing my luck to suggest that Electra was a part of *Vengeance*?" the commander asked. "My medical officer explained that the girl had significant scarring from existing injuries, not to mention a knife in a

scabbard on her left ankle. I am also aware that you were dropped off by a *Vengeance* helicopter."

"I can neither confirm nor deny that suggestion, Commander," the Prince replied with a grin. "However, should you assume the positive, then I would not dissuade you from that assumption."

"Have no fear, Your Highness, this ship is behind you and *Vengeance*. Whatever is happening in this country, we back the Government."

"Thank you, Commander, that is a comforting thought."

Chequers

SABRE and *SCIMITAR* headed east but they were forced to turn south as a pair of Nissan Navara 4x4s headed in their direction, flanking the armoured SUVs, spewing out lead from a mounted machine-gun in the load bay.

SCOURGE swept in and Raptor opened fire on the two approaching vehicles with his mini-guns. Bullets struck the lead vehicle, shredding the bodywork and ripping through the passenger compartment. The second vehicle had veered away from its twin but also away from *Vengeance*. However, the vehicle soon stopped a distance from its destroyed twin and a man jumped out of the cab and he raised a long weapon, shaped like a tube. Before *SCOURGE* could come around, he fired off an anti-armour rocket which powered towards *SABRE*, but Crimson jinked at the last second allowing the round to streak past and impact a large tree before exploding violently. Crimson triggered off two pairs of the smoke mortars, surrounding the vehicle in thick smoke which under darkness made the vehicle all but invisible. Behind them, *SCIMITAR* followed suit with its own mortars, adding to the expanding smoke cloud.

The two luxury armoured 4x4s accelerated over the wet grass, skidding momentarily in the mud before the four-wheel-drive system took control and kept the vehicle pointing in the desired direction as it made for safety. Random gunfire erupted out of the trees, the bullets slamming into *SCIMITAR* but causing no damage to the heavily armoured vehicle which ignored the bullets like an elephant versus dozens of mosquitos. The smoke prevented accurate targeting but eventually, the smoke began to dissipate in the rain revealing the racing 4x4s as they reached the eastern exit. *SCOURGE* engaged the burning police Transit van and blew it mostly out of the way, making an escape from the compound possible.

With *SABRE* leading, they smashed through the wreckage, closely followed by *SCIMITAR*.

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They immediately took a right onto Dunsmore Lane and they powered down the narrow road, heading east.

Above them, *SCOURGE* followed, providing escort. After a mile, they took a right onto the A413 London Road. They kept up a high speed - relatively easy at such an early hour as the roads were all but empty. Three miles to the south, Crimson was surprised to find a sea of blue lights ahead of them and they found a pair of roundabouts blocked off by SEG motorcycle riders, all armed with machine guns as opposed to the usual pistols. Red BMW X5 4x4s interceded themselves into the convoy providing a blue light escort with the motorcycles riding on ahead, clearing junctions as they sped the forty miles to London. They did not stop for anything, taking junctions irrelevant of the red or green state of the traffic lights. *Vengeance* and the Prime Minister breathed a sigh of relief as they realised that they were mostly safe.

At least until one of the escorting BMW X5 4x4s blew up forty yards ahead of *SABRE*.

Kidlington, Oxfordshire

Thames Valley Police Control Room

The man from the Home Office was making his presence felt.

Despite the presence of a very angry Chief Constable, the man was insisting that the Firearms Response Team Unit be on hand to apprehend *Vengeance* with the assistance of the Roads Policing Unit.

The Chief Constable was very unhappy about it, but he had his orders, and they came direct from the Home Office.

M40 Motorway

Junction 2

The rocket had come out of nowhere and destroyed the leading BMW X5 4x4.

The vehicle was burning steadily, and nobody had escaped the explosion or inferno. Immediately behind, another X5 had narrowly avoided a collision and was now stopped on the central reservation at the edge of the roundabout which formed the junction over the motorway. Behind that X5, *SABRE* took cover on the grass verge to the left with another X5 and *SCIMITAR* following suit while the remaining X5 took up position to cover *SABRE* and the Prime Minister. The eight motorcycles of the Special Escort Group were scattered. Three were in the rear and they provided a rear perimeter on the A355, northbound. Two riders were immediately engaged in a firefight on the eastbound M40 slip road where the burning wreck of two cars blocked access onto the motorway. Another rider had been blown off his machine by the exploding X5 and his machine was shredded with shrapnel. Of the remaining pair, one was taking cover behind the X5 on the central reservation while the other took cover amongst the trees on the inside of the roundabout.

There appeared to be at least seven groups of enemies - as figured out by the incoming gunfire and the FLIR aboard *SCOURGE* which was warily circling the ambush site. Another pair of burning vehicles blocked the southern flyover, preventing escape in that direction. It was obvious that the open routes were a death trap. They had to get onto the motorway, that was the *only* way to escape the carnage and get the Prime Minister to safety. *SCOURGE* made a vain attempt to attack the team with the rockets, as yet another was fired at the besieged Protection Command officers and *Vengeance*. As the small attack helicopter took up position to 'hose down' the copse of trees, it came under attack from a stream of machine-gun tracers erupting from a point beside the exit slip road from the eastbound carriageway of the M40 motorway. Then, the night was rent by a large explosion as a streak of light terminated at the rocket team and the copse of trees was blown apart.

TWILIGHT streaked across the junction at over one-hundred knots before coming around tightly to target a second rocket where possible.

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For those members of the law-abiding public who were out on the M40, that morning, in the early hours, Junction 2 was a maelstrom of sound and light.

Blue strobe lights, white headlights, orange flames, gunfire, shouting, explosions - it was a veritable party with some assuming somebody was setting off fireworks a few weeks too early. Unfortunately for some of those law-abiding citizens, they had been caught up in the ambush by being in the proverbial wrong place at the wrong time. Crimson and Stripe were engaging the enemy with their submachine guns. Ammunition was not a huge problem as the two Range Rovers carried copious amounts, so the pair sent short bursts at anything which moved outside of the safe zone around the Prime Minister. Not that the fire was one way; the incoming fire was both accurate and heavy. The forward BMW X5 was peppered with bullet holes and to be brutally honest, was probably never driving away from its current location under its own power without major work.

They could not remain there for long as enemy reinforcements were undoubtedly on their way. *SCOURGE* and *TWILIGHT* both engaged the enemy forces with gunfire, using their FLIR systems to pick them out amidst the trees and undergrowth. The local fire brigade had arrived in response to the burning cars, closely followed by ambulances and paramedics. They were mostly stopped by the SEG officers before they could become embroiled in the action. Unfortunately, at least one ambulance came under attack and was forced to flee the scene at speed. *SCOURGE* had identified the enemy vehicles and Raptor took perverse joy in shredding six vehicles parked around the junction.

"We need to move," Drift shouted. "I have an idea - nobody beats a Range Rover off-road!"

SABRE and *SCIMITAR* led the way at speed with the two surviving BMW X5 4x4s following along behind. With the eastbound slip road blocked, *SABRE* sped down the slip road but took a hard right into the bushes and the heavy four-wheel-drive vehicle used its bulk to push through and down the slope towards the motorway. *SCIMITAR* dived after its twin followed by the X5s which struggled with the terrain, but they made it. At the bottom, they slid onto the tarmac and the four vehicles accelerated away from the ambush, heading east for London. Four of the SEG motorcycles had been able to follow the off-road vehicles with care and they were soon accelerating after the 4x4s.

The two helicopters took up position to protect the convoy.

CALEDONIA

For Jessica it was with intense relief that she laid eyes on her step-brother.

The boy stood on the after deck like nothing was happening.

"Hey, motherfuckers!" he called out and Jessica figured that the boy had gone mad.

The two gunmen who had been keeping an eye on them ran at the boy, only for them both to die. Jessica was shocked to see each writhing for a few seconds, each with a commando knife hilt-deep in their throats. Christopher ran forward, and he began to sever the plastic bindings and release everybody.

"Stay down until we've cleared the vessel," one of the newcomers growled.

Their weapons were lying on a table and everybody quickly rearmed. Olivia was conscious but in a lot of pain. She forced a smile for Christopher.

"Well done," she said.

"They're SBS - Special Boat Service - from a submarine," Christopher explained excitedly. "I think there're six aboard."

Gunfire erupted from forward but only for a second before there was silence and a few minutes later, one of the men, clad in a black wetsuit, appeared.

"Caledonia is all yours, ma'am," he said to Sarah. "We've removed the explosives from the bilge where the boy found them."

"Thank you, err . . ."

"We were never here," the obvious leader said with a grin. "We just happened to be passing."

"The men?" Sarah asked as she looked at the empty deck where two men had died.

"Feeding the fucking fishes."

Kidlington, Oxfordshire

Thames Valley Police Control Room

The Chief Constable had had enough.

His men were being directed to intercept the convoy of 4x4s which sped down the M40. On the cameras which covered the motorway network he could see evidence of what could only be another ambush waiting to happen. He had seen the Prime Minister's face on one of the cameras at the earlier ambush site. His marked BMW 530d estates were converging on the convoy with the aim of stopping it. He turned to the control room and he began to issue orders, grabbing hold of a radio.

"All Thames Valley units - this is Tango Victor. Assist Vengeance, repeat, assist Vengeance - detain anybody interfering with Vengeance in the course of their activities."

"You can't do that!" the man supposedly from the Home Office roared. "Stop that convoy!"

"Start with him," the Chief Constable ordered.

The 'Home Office' man made an attempt to go for a pistol. He was rapidly subdued by half-a-dozen uniformed officers and he found himself handcuffed within seconds. As the disgruntled man watched, the eight marked police vehicles formed an impenetrable barrier between the ambush and the convoy until they were safely past - the Firearms Response Team Unit attacking the ambush site.

The M40 soon became the A40 as the convoy entered the outskirts of London.

SABRE

For Crimson, it had been a major worry when she had seen the approaching police cars.

It seemed that they were finally receiving assistance in their fight to protect the Prime Minister. They were met by other police units as they entered London amid reports of suspect vehicles approaching the convoy and it was proving difficult to know who to trust as the convoy found itself being chased by various vehicles which tried to force the convoy off the road. Two of the Special Escort Group motorcycles had crashed, leaving just the one survivor.

One of the attacking vehicles was a Metropolitan Police Range Rover – only the occupants were not in uniform. *SABRE* took a beating, as did *SCIMITAR* before the errant Range Rover crashed after Crimson forced it off the road and into a parked truck – the Range Rover stopped dead. Later, as a police BMW overtook, the young vigilante thought that it was all over – but only for a moment as instead, the BMW raced ahead and stopped the traffic at the next junction, allowing them to blast through the red light at speed while another police officer waved them through the junction with a broad grin on his face before the BMW moved to block the pursuing vehicles.

“Go for it, *Vengeance*!” the police sergeant driving the BMW muttered as he climbed out of his car to face the angry mercenaries who were *not* happy.

Central London

Whitehall

SCIMITAR

It was most definitely a first for Drift as he drove *SCIMITAR* into London.

Ahead of them, they had six Special Escort Group motorcycles, with four more plus a Protection Command Range Rover close behind and they were all redefining the term: ‘close escort’. The extra protection had joined the convoy at the Bayswater Road as they passed Hyde Park. The convoy was moving at a significant speed through the streets, the DPG motorcycles racing on ahead at high speed to clear a route through the traffic. They never stopped as they drove deeper into London. They raced through Hyde Park Corner with the early morning traffic beginning to build. Constitution Hill was taken at speed as they swept past Buckingham Palace and drive down The Mall towards Whitehall. Their route had been carefully planned and they cut through St James’ Park at Marlborough Road, exiting the park and belting across Horse Guard’s Parade before making a right turn onto Whitehall towards the Cenotaph.

They had arrived.

For the support teams, it was a relief to hear that they had been successful – despite the mission having changed totally, midway through the night.

Each team left the area and they made their way in a stealthy manner back towards the sea, avoiding drawing unwanted attention to themselves, fully aware that the enemy was still at large and very angry. Reports had come in concerning the attack on *CALEDONIA*, not to mention the injured members from Kensington Palace. All through the long drive back to London, the Prime Minister had listened to everything that had happened to *Vengeance* and everything that they had gone through. She was amazed that they had not thrown in the towel weeks before, but she was very pleased that they had not, or she would be dead, and the country would be in the hands of some uncompromising zealot. She herself had been stunned to hear of the attack on the Royal family but grateful again for *Vengeance*’s intervention. Those who believed in *Vengeance* and who had uncovered the despicable plan had obviously suffered much as they stuck to their beliefs without a moment’s fluctuation.

She had some orders to issue, the moment that she reached safety.

SABRE

The gated entrance to Downing Street was cordoned off by four red BMW X5 police 4x4s but two of them moved smartly to allow *SABRE* and *SCIMITAR* to sweep through the gates with just the Protection Command Range Rover following for escort.

Crimson braked hard and she stopped *SABRE* directly outside the famous black door to Number 10. Nemesis dived out of *SCIMITAR* and she ran around to the rear door of the other armoured vehicle while Drift stepped out and he covered the vehicles while Nemesis opened the rear door and she helped the Prime Minister out.

The security detail from Protection Command quickly whisked the Prime Minister through the black door which had opened smartly and was closed just as smartly.

BBC NEWS

'History is being made here today, in Whitehall, as the Prime Minister returns to Downing Street under the protection of Vengeance, a shadowy paramilitary organisation with links to the American vigilante organisation known as Fusion and headed by the notorious purple vigilante, Hit Girl. How the Prime Minister became involved with the organisation is unknown at this point in time. Over the past few hours, there have been rumours of running battles in the Home Counties involving unknown forces. As far as the BBC was concerned, the Prime Minister was resting at her country retreat of Chequers in the Buckinghamshire countryside. Out of the blue, she has made a very noticeable return to Downing Street in battle-scarred vehicles belonging to a vigilante organisation that most would never expect to be seen associating with the British Government and definitely not with the Prime Minister. Whether this has anything to do with the activity at Kensington Palace, earlier this evening, is unknown. However, black helicopters have been reported over London, including one bearing Vengeance markings landing on HMS Westminster, a Royal Navy warship, currently moored alongside HMS Belfast in the Pool of London beside Tower Bridge. All requests for information from the relevant authorities have, so far, been met with silence to this point.'

Downing Street

It was something of an anti-climax as they loitered outside the British seat of government.

After twenty minutes, *SABRE* and *SCIMITAR* were moved further along Downing Street and turned around for a speedy exit. Crimson, Drift, Stripe, and Nemesis remained outside Downing Street, their SIG Sauer MPX PSB submachine guns held at the ready. Beside them stood two uniformed police officers, each armed with Heckler & Koch G-36C submachine guns. If they disliked sharing the doorstep of Number 10 with the masked vigilantes, they did not show it. The injured head of the Prime Minister's security detail had been whisked off for medical attention and he was somewhere within Number 10. Then, ten minutes later, the black door opened, and the Prime Minister emerged looking much refreshed and she stepped into the street, beckoning the four vigilantes to walk with her.

"I have given orders for *HMS Westminster* to depart London and make for open waters. She will make contact with *Caledonia* and act as guardship. I have been informed that *Westminster's* transit of the River Thames will take about seven to eight hours. I am truly sorry about what you have all been forced to endure these past weeks - if only I had known the truth."

"Yes, ma'am," Nemesis replied.

"Steps are being taken, I assure you," the Prime Minister went on. "This is not the end, but only the beginning. The tide is turning against those responsible for this outrage and a tsunami is building. Please - you are safe from all those loyal to the government. Go and rest for the first time in weeks. Your Government thanks you for your actions. Lay low and await the Reckoning which will most surely come. I have work to do and the day has only just begun."

With that, *Vengeance* returned to their vehicles and they left Downing Street.

It was very early morning, so the scattered members of *Vengeance* all drove west to the Isle of Grain from where they would take a boat out to the *CALEDONIA*.

The relief that it was almost over was palpable and there was a lot of grinning. They knew that they were still in danger, but at least they were no longer alone. Everybody was very pleased to hear that *CALEDONIA* would soon have company, sometime early that afternoon, to protect her. There was worry about their brethren who were wounded and aboard the *WESTMINSTER*, but they would be together very soon.

While the *Predators* viewed things differently, the adults were very grateful that things were coming to an end.

CALEDONIA

The same relief had worked its way through the mega-yacht.

Their rescuers had vanished just as they had arrived. There was a lot of chatter between the kids as they discussed what had happened. They were all worse than exhausted and desperate for sleep. Lynn spent some time seeing to Olivia's face and the vicious bruise. The others were unharmed and glad to be safe. Though they were tired, nobody wanted to go to bed. They knew that their friends were due back on board in just a few hours and they wanted to be awake for that. It was dawn, so the daylight assisted security and *CALEDONIA* now had no need to hide from the majority of the British Government.

In the end, the kids all laid down on sofas and fell straight to sleep, leaving Lynn and Sarah to survive on caffeine.

HMS TRIUMPH

It had been a rough few hours.

However, all had prevailed and the crew had performed well. The *CALEDONIA* was safe and the SBS troopers were back aboard and enjoying a fried breakfast. The Commander took the time to nap for forty minutes before returning to his control room and moving onto the sonar room to check on what was in the surrounding area. There were the usual shipping movements where dozens of vessels criss-crossed the area as they emerged from every point of the compass. The bigger vessels were constrained to the shipping lanes by their draught and they would pass *TRIUMPH* with miles of sea room and not affecting the submarine as it drifted along at four knots. However, something had been missed - or rather it had been marked as 'irrelevant' on the computer system.

Due to *TRIUMPH*'s focus on *CALEDONIA* and the distinctly unfeasible chances of *TRIUMPH* herself coming under attack, nobody was paying close attention to the merchant vessels as they ploughed through the North Sea, except to ensure that none came close to the submarine. Almost to the minute, as the clock on the bulkhead marked 06:00, the rating manning part of the Sonar 2076 system almost jumped out of his seat and hit the overhead. For a moment he just stared at the waterfall display, unable to comprehend what he was seeing before galvanising himself into action.

"T . . . Torpedo! Torpedo! Torpedo! Torpedo bearing red one-one-two! True bearing one-six-zero! Speed thirty knots!"

A few feet away, Commander Adams leapt into action.

"Helm! Steer zero-two-zero, revolutions for twenty-five knots. Cavitate! Sonar, report!"

"Hands to Action Stations!" the Executive Officer bellowed as the nuclear-reactor increased power and the 5,000-tonne hunter-killer submarine surged forwards like a thoroughbred.

"Torpedo closing - range 12,200 yards. Torpedo! Torpedo! Torpedo! Second torpedo in the water - third . . . fourth. Four torpedoes in the water. Sonar indicates Mark 46, sir!" the sonar officer reported.

"They selling the damn things at Tesco, now?" Commander Adams fumed.

"Starboard twenty - steer zero-four-four."

The usual options of diving deep and cranking on full power were not feasible in the tight confines of the North Sea. Instead, the Commander would have to dig deep and use every trick he knew. It would not do to lose one of Her Majesty's submarines. He was not being very stealthy, and he knew that on the surface, a great hump of water would be following him as he bored enormous holes in the water at a shallow depth. The torpedoes searching for him - none had acquired the submarine - were American Mark 46 anti-submarine torpedoes, most probably air-dropped from a helicopter. The eight and a half feet long weapons were loaded with 45-kilogrammes of high explosive which would ruin the day for most submarines and their crews.

Whomsoever had dropped the torpedoes had obviously had no real idea where the Trafalgar class submarine was, or *TRIUMPH* would already have been sunk. Instead, they only had to keep clear of the circling torpedoes for six to eight minutes before they ran out of fuel and sank. The torpedoes would circle in a clockwise direction searching for a target. They were of no significant threat to the surface ships as the torpedo never went above twenty feet. Even if a torpedo did strike a larger vessel, it would be like pin prick to a giant. The minutes dragged by excruciatingly. The torpedoes had no chance of sinking the submarine. The waters around that part of the North Sea were so congested with shipping and biologics that the torpedoes would not have been able to hear a thing, let alone the powerplant of one of the quietest submarines in the world.

"Control, sonar. Lost contact on first torpedo."

"Thank you, sonar."

Two minutes later, the last of the torpedoes sank to the sea floor. Each location was marked for future recovery of the potent weapons.

"Christ!" Commander Adams breathed. "Where's the bloody *Caledonia*?"

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Once *TRIUMPH* was heading south again towards *CALEDONIA*, a radar mast was raised along with the main search periscope and a couple of other masts.

"Control, radar - we have *CALEDONIA* at green zero-one-five. Speed eight knots on a course of one-three-two. Range sixteen thousand yards."

"Thank you, radar."

It would take them about forty minutes to intercept at their current speed of twelve knots. Then, just as Commander Adams could not consider things getting any worse, an alarm sounded.

"Control, radar!"

"Go ahead, radar."

"We have a large contact heading directly for Caledonia!"

"Somebody broke a damn mirror, this morning!"

"Looks like a container ship, sir," the OOW said from the periscope.

"Call, Caledonia."

Two minutes later, there was still no response from Caledonia. However, they had detected some local radar and radio jamming, centred on the container ship. Commander Adams weighed up the options, his orders, and his rules of engagement. He kept coming to the same conclusion. He studied the chart - they would never make it in time. Only one thing would.

"*Watch stand to!*" Commander Adams ordered. "WEO, all tubes to the action state! Spearfish torpedoes."

The five torpedo tubes in the bow were loaded but not armed and ready to fire. That was quickly changed as the potent dual-purpose weapons were prepared for launch. The container ship was large and the only way to stop her almost dead in the water would be to rip out her bottom and break her back.

"Open bow caps!" the Weapons Engineering Officer ordered.

"WEO, target Sierra Eight Four - three Spearfish. Fire tubes one, three, and five."

There were three thuds, one after another, as the three weapons were shoved out of their tubes into the cold North Sea. Each seven-metre, 533-millimetre diameter weapon accelerated to seventy knots, their gas-turbine-driven pump-jets powering the 1.8-tonne weapons through the water. Each weapon towed a fibre-optic cable behind it allowing *TRIUMPH* to control each weapon. The distance was a little over four miles and the weapons covered that at over a mile a minute. As each weapon passed directly under *CALEDONIA* and then dove under the giant container ship, each 300-kilogramme warhead was detonated, and the container ship was lifted out of the water by almost a tonne of aluminised PBX explosive. The vessel's keel snapped amidships under the immeasurable strain of supporting the entire vessel and the bottom itself was torn to shreds.

Each million-pound torpedo performed flawlessly.

CALEDONIA

"Holy shit!"

Olivia was just sitting up on the sofa when she heard a weird sound coming from beneath *CALEDONIA*. The sound faded but then she caught sight of an enormous container ship, off to starboard and then the whole world appeared to explode. The container ship leapt out of the water and then crashed back down again

before snapping in half. The two halves tore apart, rolling over and tipping hundreds of containers into the North Sea. One deck above, Sarah was stunned – she had been studying a chart, relying on the automated radar systems to warn her of any potential collisions. She had sensed something and then turned to find thousands of tonnes of container ship bearing down on *CALEDONIA*.

She had no time to reach for the throttles, nor the wheel before the world was torn apart.