

AMAZING EPISODE.

PLANE SINKS SHIP.

A Survivor Taken Prisoner.

(From Our Special Representative.)

SOMEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA, Feb 26.—An amazing episode, believed to be unique in the war, followed the sinking by an enemy plane of a small naval vessel, HMAS Patricia, near Wessell Island off the north-east tip of Arnhem Land. After sending the ship to the bottom with a direct hit and bombing and machine-gunning the survivors in the water, the enemy plane alighted on the sea and took prisoner one of the personnel of the ship. He was wearing only a pair of shorts and was moreover hard of hearing.

The Japanese pilot clambered out of the cockpit on to one of the floats and called to this man who was the nearest of the survivors to the plane. The man swam to the plane while the pilot covered him with a revolver. The other survivors could see them talking, but were too far away to hear what was being said. The conversation lasted about 3 minutes and ended with the pilot helping the prisoner into the middle of 3 cockpits, already occupied by a Japanese, possibly the navigator. The prisoner was given something to drink out of a flask by the pilot and the plane then took off and disappeared.

The ship, which was a wooden vessel and flat-bottomed, sank within 90 seconds of being hit. The plane dived on her out of the sun just after midday and the first bomb, striking amidships, penetrated the hatch and blew the bottom out. She was then 5 miles off the coast of Wessell Island.

Crew Bombed in Water.

While the crew was struggling in the water—most of them were suffering severely from the effects of the explosion—the plane dropped another bomb in among them, killing a rating and 2 native members of the crew. It then circled over the men for half an hour machine-gunning them, but by diving under the water all escaped serious injury. The brutality of the attacks removes the possibility that in taking a prisoner from the water the Japanese were acting from a humanitarian motive.

After the plane had made off the survivors put the more seriously wounded men on a damaged raft which had been blown off the ship and improvised other rafts from flotsam to which they clung from time to time. Wessell Island was visible, but after paddling and swimming for 4 hours the survivors found themselves no nearer to it. At nightfall however a strong current carried them southwards and in the early hours of the morning they landed on a small rocky island off the coast of Wessell Island. They had been in the water for nearly 15 hours. At daybreak they were found by natives who showed them where to find water and also edible roots which they cooked and ate.

The commander of the ship then set off in a canoe with natives to Wessell Island. On reaching the island he had to walk 35 miles in his bare feet. He accomplished the journey in 2 days. The following day an aeroplane dropped supplies to the survivors and 4 days later they were rescued and brought to an Australian port. While on the island a rating and a native died from the effects of the bombing in the water.

Most Desperate Battle
Of Russian Offensive
Today: All observers on the Russian front are now witnessing the most decisive along the 500-mile

THESE US sailors had to take what little protection their craft's bridge provided when they struck heavy weather while on the lookout for enemy submarines