

Did You Hear That?

INTRODUCING ITHURIEL

THE COMMANDER of H.M. destroyer *Ithuriel* told of one of the exploits of his ship in a talk to Home and Forces listeners. 'Let me begin by introducing Ithuriel to you', he said. 'He is an archangel, though I regret to say a fallen one, and is to be found in the pages of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. He goes about with a magic spear and, as the Devil himself found to his cost, a stab with this spear causes evil to show itself in its true colours. No disguise is proof against it. The ship I have the honour to command is named after this archangel, and in her short life she has done her best to live up to her celestial god-fatherhood. She is a destroyer of about 1,500 tons and one of the most handsome of her type in the Royal Navy. Before she was very old *Ithuriel* had been in action several times against enemy air and surface forces, giving more than she got in the process, I am glad to say. And so we had our tails well up when we set off in August as one of the large destroyer escort of the Malta convoy. In the midst of the general excitement of this operation we had the good fortune to ram and destroy an Italian U-boat. You might like to hear something about it.

'Here you are up on the bridge. It's a small space some thirty feet above the water, with no roof, packed with instruments and gadgets, and just enough room to walk a few paces up and down. I am seated in a nice wooden chair, taking the weight off the feet, as we say, and standing by are the two action officers of the watch. Both are sub-lieutenants. My yeoman of signals, who has two pairs of eyes, is reading a signal with one pair, and looking out for aircraft with the other. At the rear of the bridge are the submarine and aircraft look-outs, glasses to their eyes. Only yesterday we saw the *Eagle* go. There are continual air attacks on the convoy, and a number of U-boats are in the vicinity. We are at action stations and all on the top line for anything that may happen. Frequently we open fire at enemy aircraft. One Ju. 88 falls in flames ahead of us and three Jerries bale out with parachutes.

'Suddenly from the able seaman up on the rangefinder comes the report "Periscope green 70". Sure enough, broad on the starboard bow a slight feather can be seen in the water, halfway between us and the aircraft carrier. I immediately give the following orders: "Hard a-starboard, 24 knots; make the alarm signal; depth charges ready; press the U-boat alarm". We warn the aircraft-carrier and other neighbouring ships by signal. The alarm bells ring loudly throughout the ship. Depth charges are reported ready. The guns are ready to open fire. The boats are got ready in case required. Everything is ready. We're off. The periscope dips from sight, but we are heading towards him. Even if we don't kill, we should give him something to think about. The asdic has picked up the U-boat. That's fine; now we're all set; let's hope we get him.

"Stand-by depth charges"; "Depth charges fire"; the able seaman standing by the firing levers pulls them, and, after a few seconds, the ship shudders as they explode violently astern of us. "Quite a good attack, I think, sir", says the R.N.V.R. sub-lieutenant, and everybody looks astern, hoping for some signs of wreckage to appear. I decide to carry out a second depth charge attack, and the ship is just turning, when a roar goes up "There she is". It was a successful attack, and the U-boat has come to the surface, but the job is not yet finished. Perhaps she will crash-dive and try to

escape. We can take no chances. So—"Full ahead both engines: prepare to ram". The guns need no orders. They have already opened fire and the U-boat is getting seven bells knocked out of her. Some of the Italians start shouting out and jumping overboard. I give the order: "Full speed astern" to take some speed off the ship and avoid damaging ourselves unnecessarily. After all, you don't need to use a hammer on a boiled egg, so to speak. We hit her abaft the conning tower and heel her right over. It is a delightful crunch.

'Most of the Italians are by now on deck or swimming for dear life. Soon our boats are busy collecting the survivors. The first lieutenant sorts them out amidships by the torpedo tube. Our engineer officer comes up to the bridge and reports that our damage is slight and that he has shored up the necessary bulkheads. The boats have now been hoisted, so we go ahead again and get on to our course to rejoin the convoy'.



One of the tree-houses of New Guinea which 'may well be useful to our forces for spying out Japanese positions'

E.N.A.

NEW GUINEA VILLAGES

New Guinea villages are very different from villages as we know them. 'I doubt if they're like villages anywhere else in the world', said JACK MCLAREN. 'The houses are made of grass and palm-thatch laid on a framework of rough timber. They often stand on ridges or peaks that command a view of the surrounding country. Sometimes there is a house in a tree to give a still wider view. The people built these tree-houses in order to spy out possible war-like approach by other tribes, for those primitive mountains have seen a lot of inter-tribal attacks. On prospecting expeditions I have camped with these people and it was an alarming experience, what with the way the tree-house swayed in the wind and creaked. I remember one tree-house that stood on the edge of a shuddersome precipice, and I was unable to sleep for fear that the incessant rain would wash away the tree's roots and the whole swaying affair go plunging over into the depths. But the houses are really quite strong, and may

well be useful to our forces for spying out Japanese positions.

'Many of these mountain villages are surrounded by strong wooden stockades. Usually there is no gateway in the ordinary sense; apparently the people don't want an opening that could be charged by an enemy. The people let me in by pulling aside one of the great slabs of the stockade. In those astonishingly jumbled mountains the scarcity of flat and unbroken ground has driven some of the people to build their villages across chasms. The houses on opposite sides of these deep fissures are often connected by a bridge that's only a rough and slippery log. For me, in boots, it was a nerve-racking business to cross those logs, but the barefooted people, even women with children on their backs, walked across them quite easily. The houses are windowless and dark, and there's always a heavy smell of rank tobacco, and the thick smoke of a cooking fire which is made on a layer of earth in the middle of the slab floor. Yams, taro, sweet potatoes, bananas, sugar-canes, and other foods from the village gardens down the slopes, lie about. In the jungle near the stockade you might hear the rounded whistling note of the red bird of paradise. It was at a village on a peak westward of the Kokoda track that one morning I saw what was surely one of the most thrilling sights. I was right in the centre of New Guinea. Very far away, across the jungle, I saw the gleam of water. It was the Pacific Ocean. I was looking across one of the greatest islands in the world'.—Home Service

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