A Thrilling Discovery

The elegant form of the *Automedon*, which had enchanted those who saw her in days gone by, had been thoroughly transformed by the *Atlantis’s* merciless and accurate bombardment. The mangled *Automedon* was sunk by the explosives attached by the boarding party and a death-dealing torpedo at 15.07 on 11 November, about six hours after the attack. She slowly sank by the stern to the sea floor 325 metres (10,660 feet) below. According to the *Atlantis’s* war diary the exact spot was latitude 4.19 degrees north, longitude 89.24 degrees east. The name ‘*Automedon*’ was revived seven years later, when it was given to a Malayan Airways passenger plane.¹

In Walker’s recollection the time of sinking was 15.15, which roughly coincides with the *Atlantis’s* record, 15.07. According to one account the *Automedon* was sunk before noon, but Walker is certain that she was sunk after lunch. He even recalls that this lunch consisted of some delicious bean soup and that it was served at around 13.00. The *Automedon’s* crew was invited to watch her final moments from the wing of the bridge but all the officers and engineers – including Harper – refused. Being just sixteen years
old, Walker was rather indifferent to such principles and was curious to see anything out of the ordinary. With some crewmates, he watched the submergence of the ship that he had been aboard only that morning. As he witnessed her slow disappearance from beginning to end he felt an indescribable mixture of emotions.

The *Atlantis* then steamed at high speed to the meeting points where the *Teddy* and the *Ole Jacob* were waiting. Rogge and Mohr shut themselves away in the Captain’s lounge and began examining the contents of the official mailbags and the classified mailbag, literally a treasure that had been dug out of the debris of the *Automedon*’s chart room. The din of the *Atlantis*’s engine, which was powering the ship at her maximum speed of seventeen knots, barely reached the lounge. The room was steeped in the calm that comes in the wake of engagement. The rays of the southern sun streamed through the gap in the chintz curtains onto the highly polished surface of the table and the cut crystal which sparkled in the cabinets.

At first Rogge and Mohr were incredulous as one secret document after another emerged from the mailbags. There were Merchant Navy codes and sailing orders which were familiar to them as similar documents had been confiscated in previous raids. There was also much material of kinds they had not seen before: directives, letters, administrative communications, sensitive information, reports and data sent from the British War Cabinet, military and secret services to their outposts in Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tokyo. The jackpot, which delighted the two men above all, was contained in the long and narrow green mailbag marked: ‘Classified: Destroy in an Emergency’. This, of course, was the confidential consignment for the Commander-in-Chief of the Far East. Rogge opened it straight away and read the papers without concealing his great excitement.

The document was the British Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee’s Far East situation report dated 31 July that had been submitted to the War Cabinet on 8 August. It contained extremely detailed information on the Royal Navy’s and the RAF’s armaments and positions, the defence of Singapore and possible response measures to Japanese aggression, as well as an analysis of the roles of Australia and New Zealand. Rogge’s reaction was hardly surprising. The two men agreed that the Japanese military was bound to show an interest in these papers and that they should be used to elicit a much greater degree of cooperation from Japan. Germany was frustrated