



A Shipmaster's War Diary *by Nick Hambleton (63-66)*

The following has been taken from the diaries of the late Commodore Herbert Joseph (Gilo) Giles OBE RD RNR (1888-89), a Master Mariner who, in 1939, was nearing the end of a long career at sea but with the coming war, was to face his sternest test. Readers will recall that, in our last issue, we mentioned the tragic loss in April 1941, at Piraeus, of the Clan Fraser, with great loss of life including OCs Commanders Oswald Buckler and Francis Douglas-Watson. Commodore Giles was in command of Clan Fraser and in these poignant extracts from his diaries, he recounts at first hand the tragic events that spring Sunday during the fall of Greece. He writes in an unsentimental style which was so typical of those who served through the Battle of the Atlantic and elsewhere across the oceans of the world. Their stoicism and fortitude was remarkable, especially in light of the ever-present danger and also by the fact that mail often did not find them for months at a time.

Extracts from HJ Giles' Diaries Book 1 1939 to 1941

'The following rough notes from 3rd Sept 1939 to date of joining the *Llanstephan Castle* on 3rd May 1941 are written from memory as the diary kept by me since the outbreak of the war was destroyed with my vessel HMT *Clan Fraser* (right) in the Mediterranean on 6th April 1941.'



March 1941: 10th March Left Durban, SA sailing via Mozambique Channel for Aden.

March 24th: Sailed from Aden as guide of Convoy. (Commander Graham, RN Commodore)

March 27th: Convoy dispersed. Proceeded independently full speed.

March 29th: Arrived Suez. Went ashore to report to SNO. Met Dent. Received cable 'House Bombed but family safe'.

March 30th: 6am. Left Suez and entered Canal. Three vessels sunk in Canal by mines, one in a very difficult position. At 7pm arrived Port Said.

April 1st: Tuesday - noon - sailed in company with *Northern Prince* to connect with Alexandria convoy.

April 2nd: 10am. Rendezvous with Alex. convoy and proceeded N of Gavhods Is. and West of Crete.

April 3rd: 9am. Passed BI Steamer, *SS Holmsfield*, bombed and abandoned off Crete. Escort sunk her by gunfire. p.m. Convoy attacked by bomber planes. *SS Devis* hit - 8 killed but ship proceeded. Later, convoy again attacked - aerial torpedoes and bombs dropped over us but missed. HMT *Northern Prince* struck by bombs and immediately went on fire. Vessel had to be abandoned and later blew up. She was laden with valuable cargo of military stores and equipment. We had a near shave.

April 4th: 9am. Arrived off Piraeus. Some delay entering harbour. All fast at noon. *Clan Cumming* in port for repairs after being torpedoed nearly completed. Dined with Mr and Mrs Knox and Captain Matthews. Had a very pleasant evening and drive into Athens and visited the British Club.

April 5th: Visited the Agent (Crostore). Met Buckler (ex Conway) now STO at Athens. (He was killed following night).