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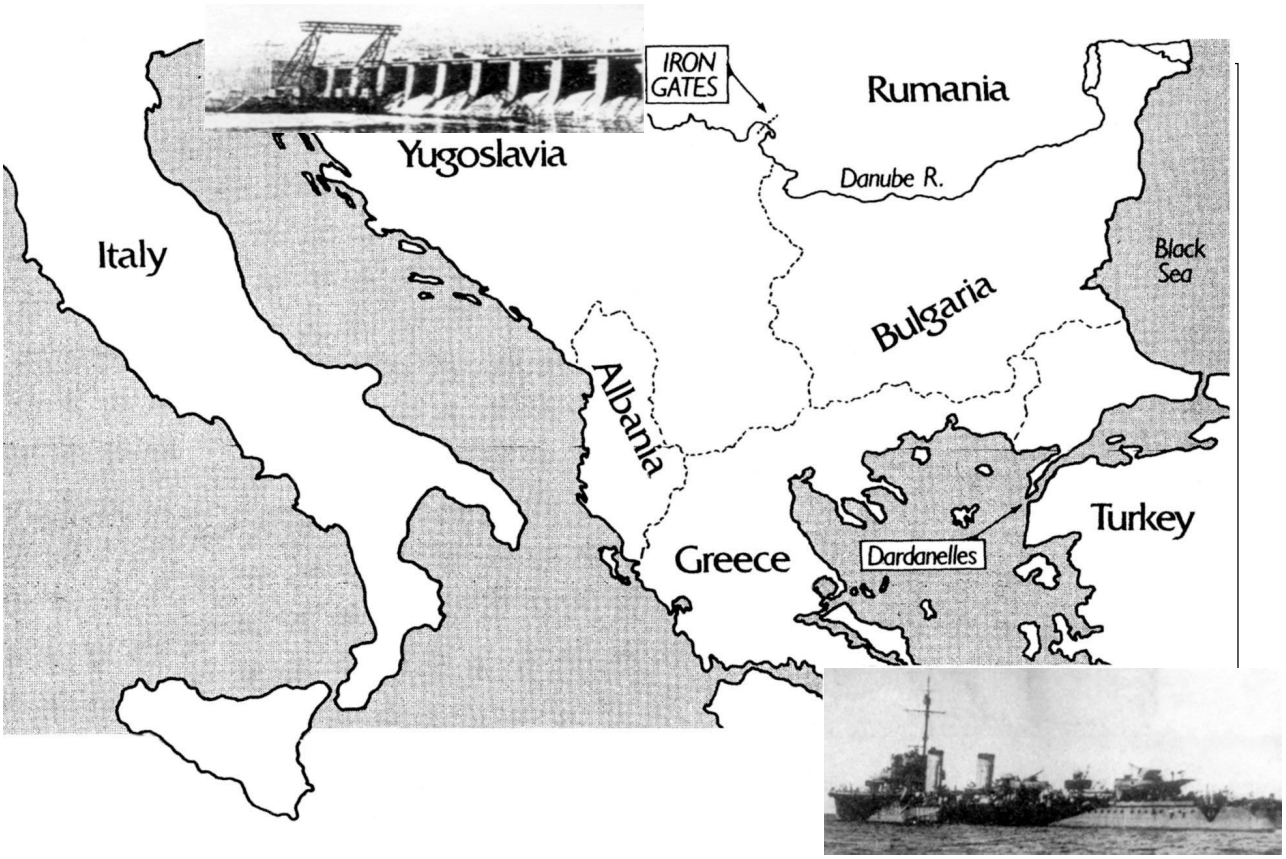
Operation "HUSH HUSH"



THE ATTEMPT TO BLOW UP

THE IRON GATES

ON THE DANUBE RIVER DURING WORLD WAR II

Vince Fazio

MONOGRAPH 169

Operation “Hush Hush”
Vince Fazio
Monograph No. 169

THE IRON GATES

(OPERATION "HUSH HUSH")

ONE OF WW 2 MOST SECRET OPERATIONS

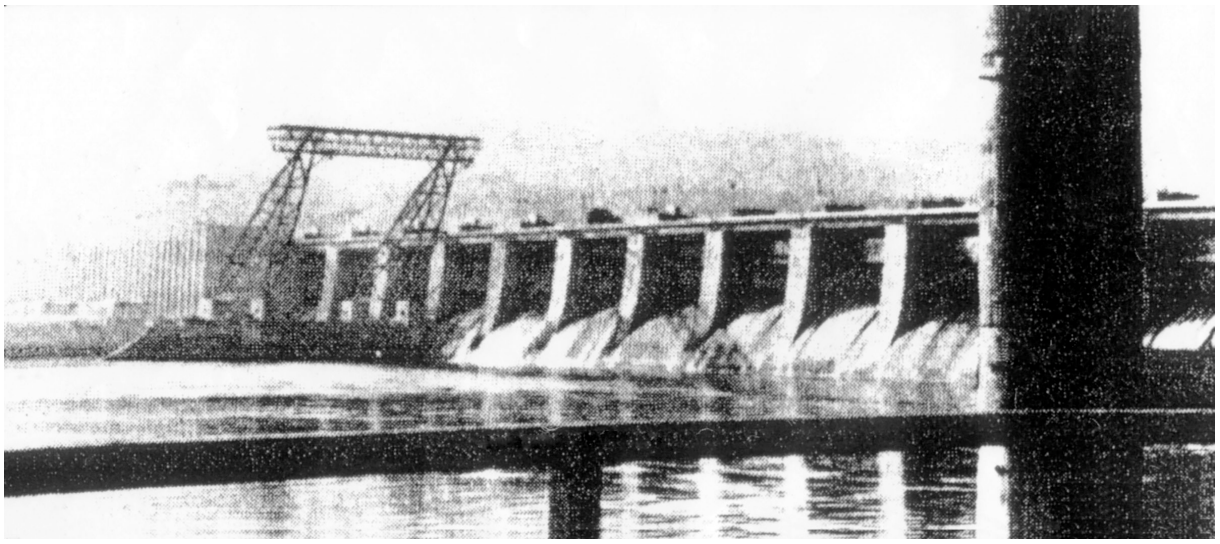
The "Iron Gates" would mean nothing or very little to the majority of people, and reasonably so, as the mission to destroy them was so secret, that no mention of it appears in the Official History of the RAN, by G Hermon Gill.

The operation was planned to enable the "Iron Gates", a man made "Barrage" which controlled the height of water in the Danube River near the junction of the borders of Romania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria to be destroyed. This in turn would allow large volumes of water to disrupt the traffic from the oil fields in the area, denying the product to Nazi Germany and reducing her potential to wage war.

At the time, the Allied Air Forces (read RAF, RAAF and other Empire forces) did not have aircraft with the endurance to fly non stop and return from any aerodrome close enough to the target. Air raids did occur later in the war, but they have no bearing on this operation.

It would appear that nobody put their hand up to claim to have originated the proposal, but it would be a fair bet that our old friend W S Churchill would have been somewhat involved. The operation was in fact, planned by the Director of Naval Intelligence at the Admiralty, as a result of a voyage down the Danube, prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

Lt Commander M Minshall RNVR, had undertaken the voyage as an intelligence gathering mission and had suggested that an operation could be mounted. The co-ordinator of the plan was Lt Commander Ian Fleming RNVR, of "James Bond' fame. LCDR Fleming arranged the smuggling of 14 tonnes of explosive aboard the Orient Express for the operation. This particular train has achieved notoriety in both fiction and film for all manners of intrigue, as you are all aware.



The “Iron Gates” on the Danube, Post War
(The “Iron Gates” today, the site of a massive power plant)

Map of the "iron Gates" Operation area.
Much of the oil that fuelled the Nazi war-machine travelled to Germany from the oilfields of Rumania

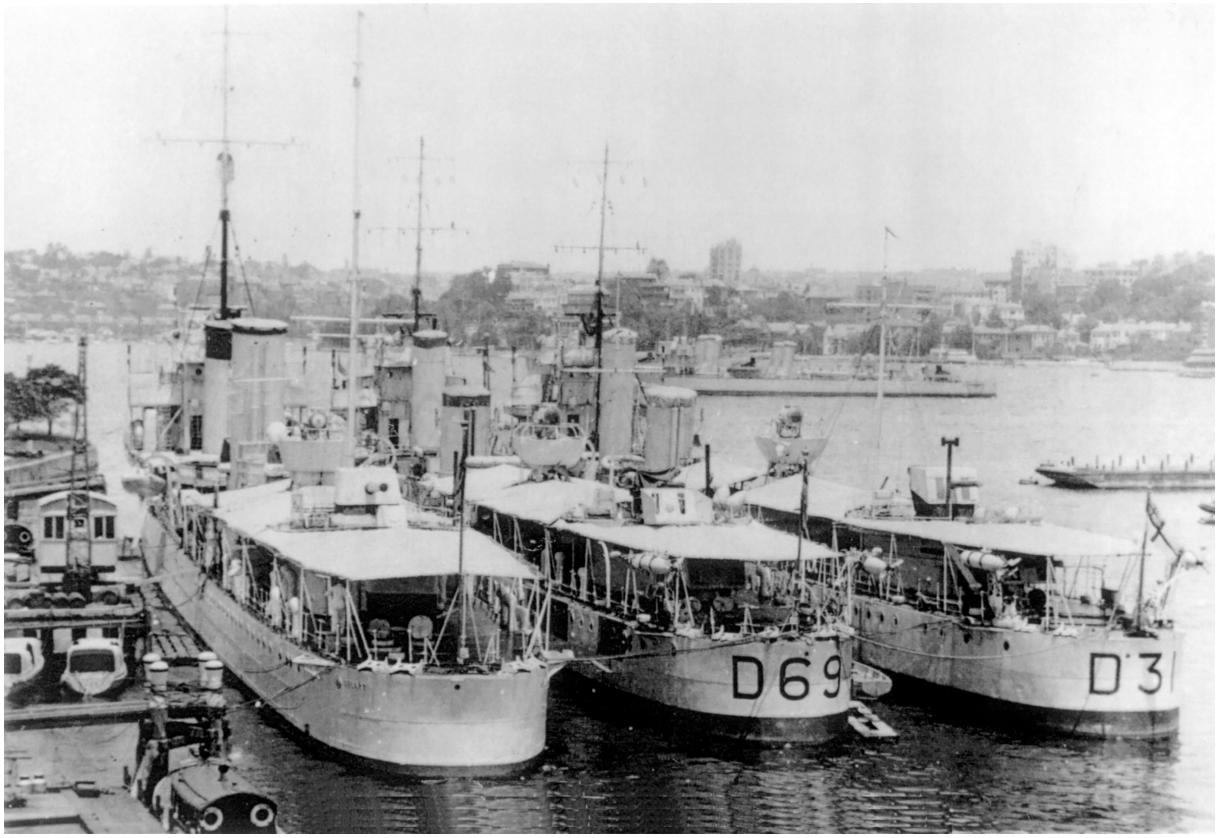
As a consequence, ships in the Mediterranean Fleet in January 1940, were directed to call for volunteers for a "highly secret and dangerous mission". Volunteers were warned that it may be only a one way trip, but this did not deter anybody.

The plan was to man an old freighter which looked "clapped out", with Royal Marines and sailors and officers from RAN and RN ships. Everybody concerned was issued with false identities and wore civilian clothing, a "one way" ticket indeed for any serviceman. Their uniforms were their protection if captured, but civilian clothing was an invitation to lunch with the Gestapo, or the SS or both.

Two Australian ships called for volunteers, HMAS STUART and HMAS VOYAGER. Reports from other sources also indicate that HMAS VAMPIRE was involved. Six men from each ship were selected, among them a young Stoker, Harry Albion Sutton, with whom I served in HMAS VENDETTA II in 1960, as Chief Stoker "Curley" Sutton, a rough diamond who had the respect of all who knew him. Although we were reasonably close and the Chief ERA, Stan Russell was a very close friend of his over many years, we had no idea or knowledge of his involvement.

The information of his participation was in an article in the Australasian Post magazine, dated November 19th 1987, some 26 years after "Curley" and I had parted company. I showed the article to Stan Russell, who expressed amazement at the contents. "Curley" had told nobody of his involvement, even some 47 years after the event. That's how "Hush Hush", to use the term of the time, that the operational classification was.

In the book "Leader of the Crocks" the story of HMAS STUART, by L E Clifford, is a chapter dealing the operation. I can do no better than to quote directly from the source:



STUART, VENDETTA and VOYAGER, Sydney 1934

"It was now early March and Italian neutrality was apparently developing into passive hostility towards the Allies. The Mediterranean Fleet was beginning to receive reinforcements from the Home Fleet and the East Indies.

Our short refit being completed, we proceeded to sea one evening, and shortly after leaving harbour, the Bosuns Mate piped "The ship is proceeding on patrol". It was promulgated later that our mission was that of seeking a certain ship and Commander Waller offered a reward of One Pound to the first man who sighted her. Many ships were sighted and challenged, until during the early hours of the morning a couple of days later, the object of our search was discovered. It was only natural that the Signalman of the Watch "Brigham" Young, should be the first to sight our quarry, and he duly received the reward.

Shortly after sighting the vessel, Commander Waller embarked in STUARTs motor boat and boarded the ship. On his return, we proceeded at high speed to Malta, where on our arrival, several lighters assembled alongside. Men were soon busy hoisting mysterious cases of 'Agricultural Machinery' inboard from the lighters, a task lasting several hours, at the conclusion of which, some fifty officers and men (including a few soldiers) were embarked.

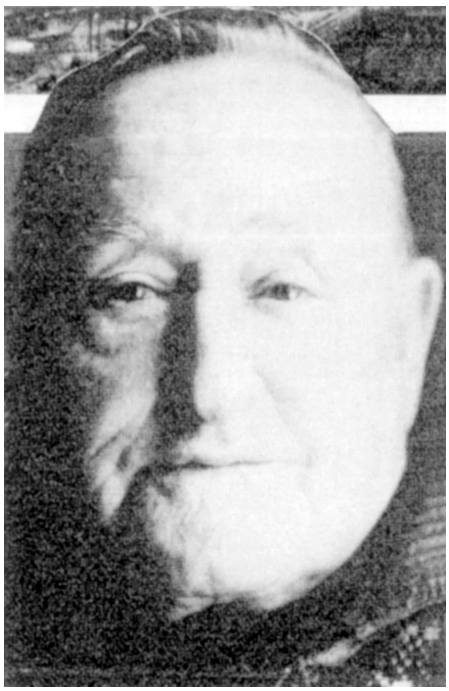
When darkness fell, STUART proceeded at high speed to rendezvous with the mysterious vessel. During the early hours of the following morning, we again sighted the ship and shortly afterwards STUART secured alongside.

Within a couple of hours of arriving alongside the mystery ship, all stores and personnel, the latter now clothed in civilian attire, were disembarked and STUART returned to Malta. During the return passage, Commander Waller "Cleared Lower Deck" and in an address to the ships company, stressed the point that no mention of the ships latest venture must be made ashore, or reach the ears of anyone outside the ship, as it would not only endanger the lives of the men we had disembarked, but would be disastrous to the Allied cause. Mainly for this reason, we did not enter Grand Harbour on our return, but anchored elsewhere. No shore leave was given that night.

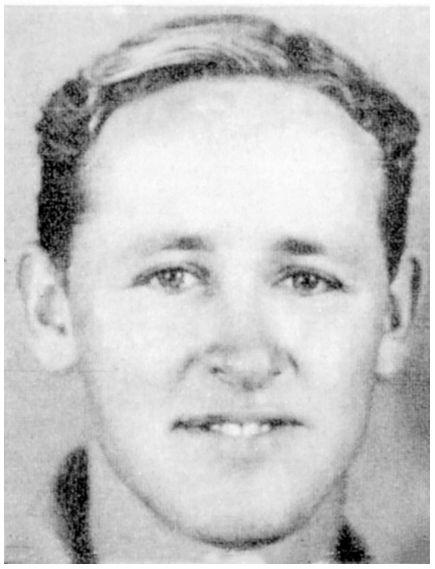
The following morning we weighed anchor and joined the destroyer HMS WESTCOTT (who we had last seen in Singapore) and proceeded to carry out exercises with the Aircraft Carrier HMS GLORIOUS, remaining at sea that night and continuing exercises throughout the following day.

In a letter addressed to Commander Waller, Admiral Sir A B Cunningham, the Commander in Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, stated: 'On the conclusion of the important operation which was entrusted to HMAS STUART, I wish to convey my appreciation of the way in which this duty was carried out. The interception of the ship concerned and the subsequent embarkation of the personnel and stores and their final disposal, was carried out in a manner which reflects great credit on all hands'. It was only natural that we should feel proud of our efforts after receiving such a tribute from the Admiral.

So ended STUARTs role in the 'Hush Hush' mission. It is now common knowledge, that the 'Agricultural Machinery' consisted of guns and ammunition and the personnel were Special Service men, some of whom were members of STUARTs ships company." (end quote).



Terry Van Prooyen as he is today - still puzzled.



The young Terry when he was an RAN Able Seaman

Leading Seaman T J Van Prooyen had an outstanding war record of his own.

He signed on in 1938 for 12 years in the RAN and saw service on HMAS VOYAGER, spending two years in the Mediterranean. VOYAGER was part of the the "scrap-iron flotilla" which helped ferry supplies to the Rats of Tobruk.

He was an anti-aircraft gunner, and after Japan entered the war was transferred to HMAS AUSTRALIA and spent four years in the Pacific.

The AUSTRALIA took part in major naval battles like the Coral Sea, the Solomons invasion and the Philippines campaign, and Terry Van Pooyen was blazing away strapped to his Oerlikon gun when the ship was hit by kamikazes off the Philippines in 1944. Some of Terry's mates were among the 74 crewmen who died.

In the six years of war, Terry spent only about four months away from the action, yet he escaped without a scratch.

Able Seaman Dominic Owens, one of Terry's mates.

Stoker "Curly" Sutton was also on the mission.

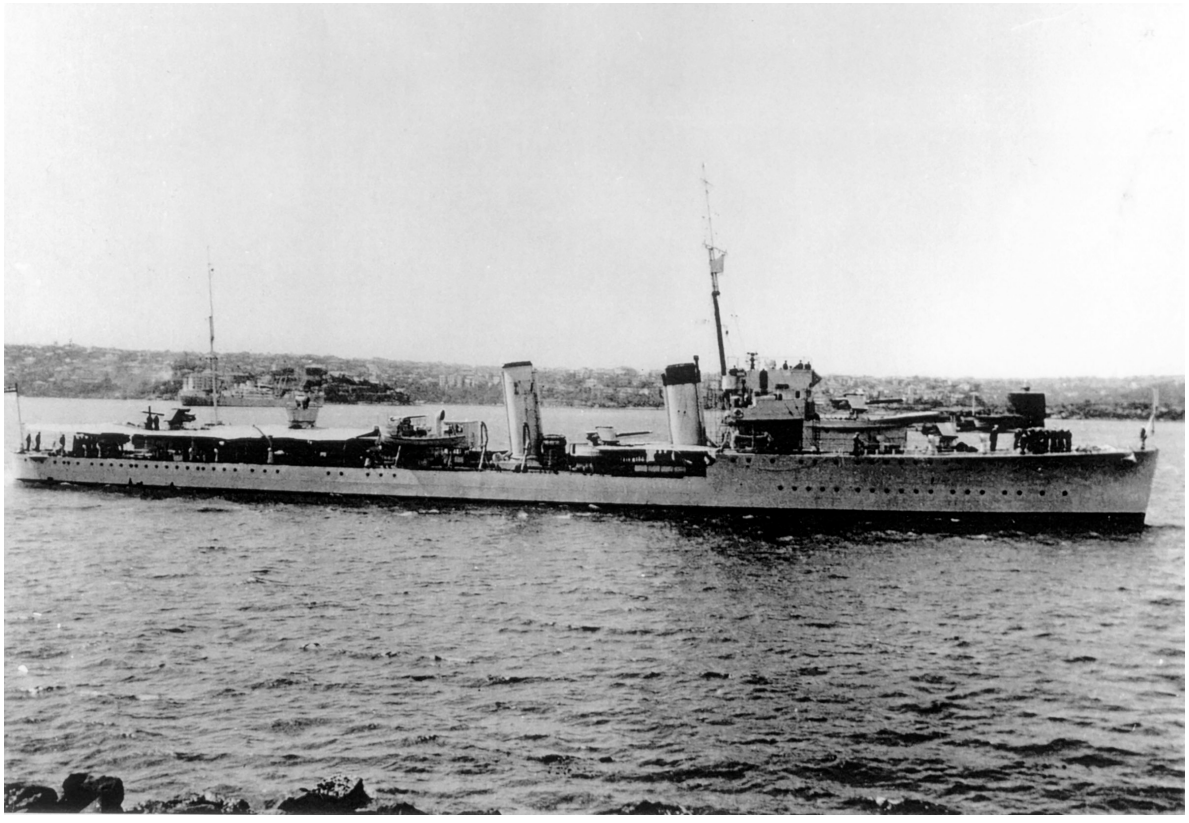
"Scrap Iron Destroyers" by Lew Lind and Alan Payne devotes some space to the story of the operation, and again I quote:

"On March 7th, Commander Waller called for six volunteers for a hazardous operation and the whole crew stepped forward. The six volunteers were given a quick course and STUART sailed on March 20th for a three day patrol along the North African coast. She was cruising off Tunis at 1145 on the 22nd and lookouts were warned to keep a sharp watch for a freighter. The vessel, a rust scarred old tramp SS ALTERIA, was sighted several hours later and STUART went alongside her. Commander Waller boarded the freighter and spoke to her officers.

The ships parted company and STUART returned to Malta. Immediately on entering port, the ship oiled and took on provisions. Soon after dark, a party of 60 Special Service men (the crew called them the Suicide Squad), arrived alongside with cases of gear. The cases marked 'Agricultural Machinery', were quickly taken aboard and lashed to the deck. At 2000 she was under way for another mysterious rendezvous.

Next morning, the 24th, the Captain 'Cleared Lower Deck' and addressed the ships company. He said the ship was on a top secret mission and no word of what happened on the voyage could be comunicated to any other person. He added that some of the ships company were in the Special Service Squad and their lives could be forfieted by a security leak. Commander Waller finished his address, by promising a reward of One Pound for the first man to sight the ship they were to rendezvous with.

For the next 24 hours, all eyes searched the sea for the sight of smoke. A number of ships were sighted, but they did not bring the promised reward. At 1000 on the 24th the quarry came in sight. She was the same vessel they had met off Tunis on the 22nd, the British



HMAS STUART in Sydney, mid 1930s

tramp SS ALTERIA. The vessels steamed in company for several hours, then STUART went alongside her and began transferring the Special Service Squad and their cases of 'Agricultural Machinery'. When the transfer was complete, ALTERIA turned north and STUART waited until she was out of view, before proceeding herself.

STUART did not return immediately to Malta. At 2000 on the 24th, she arrived at Kalafrana Bay and anchored offshore for the night. Early next morning, she weighed and rendezvoused with the submarine HMSM OSWALD and carried out torpedo and anti submarine exercises. The submarine returned to harbour in the early afternoon and STUART joined the Aircraft Carrier GLORIOUS for screening duties, with the destroyer WESTCOTT.

STUART was to become involved in another drama before she returned to Malta, which had no connection with the Special mission. As would be expected, the ships company were not hoodwinked by the 'Agricultural Machinery' labels on the cases they had transferred to ALTERIA. They contained rifles, machine guns, grenades, ammunition and explosives, bound for occupied Europe.

(The letter from C in C, Mediterranean is then recounted, as shown in full on page 3).

This was STUARTs first 'cloak and dagger' operation. She was to be involved in similar operations in other seas later in the war.

The full glory of 'Operation Hush Hush' was not solely STUARTs as a clipping from the Adelaide 'Advertiser' of July 25th 1941 testifies:

'VAMPIREs men in Danube Exploit. Thrilling Stories by Men on Leave'.

A dangerous eight months journey along the Danube, before which members of the expedition were told that if their job was not done properly, many might not escape alive, was among heroic adventures described by seven South Australian seamen from HMAS VAMPIRE who reached Adelaide yesterday.

Able Seaman J Dox of Port Lincoln told of the call for 100 volunteers for a party which was to proced up the Danube, with the object of blasting away at its cliff banks, at a spot known as the Iron Gates, thus immobiising all German river traffic. Starting from Malta, the sailors made their way through the Dardanelles and started up the Danube in flat bottomed oil lighters, laden with 100 tons of explosives.

Romanian River Pilots however, recognised them 150 miles from the German border, only 50 miles from their objective, and reported them to the German Consulate. Their equipment was seized, but they managed to escape down river". (end quote).

It is now quite apparent that the Operation did not achieve its aim and the Iron Gates remained intact.

Perhaps G Hermon Gill should have subscribed to that newspaper at the time, as it appeared to be the only time that the Operation received any publicity in Australia during the War. (This is the only occasion in which VAMPIRE is mentioned in this regard).

A more detailed account is given in the book, "HMAS VOYAGER I" by Ralph Dymond, which was related by Able Seaman Terry Van Prooyn in the Australasian Post article. As before, I quote direct from the article:

"Just prior to VOYAGERs visit to Alexandria, a rather cryptic notice was posted on Notice

Boards throughout the ship. One of the sailors mentions the notice in his diary- 'they have put a notice on the board asking for volunteers for the 'Suicide Club'. Some have volunteered and some haven't. I have not".

Although our diarist showed little interest in volunteering, six or so of VOYAGERs crew added their names to the notice. One of VOYAGERs volunteers, Terry (Dutchie) Van Prooyn in an interview with the Australasian Post (19.11.87), spoke of the Suicide Club mission:

"I was serving in HMAS VOYAGER in 1940 when volunteers were called for a special operation. Being only 20 and a bit adventurous, or a bit stupid, or both, I volunteered and was chosen along with 11 or 12 other sailors from the Australian Destroyer Flotilla to train with a special service brigade in Malta. For about two weeks we lived in the St Angelo Depot, diving, training, and at one stage we assembled and were addressed by a high ranking Royal Navy officer. His speech ran something like this:- 'You are going on a mission of great danger. If it goes wrong we will deny all knowledge of your existence. Anyone wishing to fall out now may do so and won't be thought any the less of. Best of luck to you all'.

It was typical British stiff upper lip stuff - but no one fell out. We were then placed under very tight security. We had our photos taken in civvies, to attach to fake Merchant Seamans tickets. I was listed as a Stoker/Greaser. And we all had fake passports. Our uniforms were stowed away and late at night, we boarded HMAS STUART and loaded a cargo of arms, ammunition and demolition equipment in crates marked 'Fragile - Handle with Care'. I think it was the next night that we met up with a British Merchant ship and transferred to her. There must have been a lot of 'behind the scenes' activities, because Turkey was neutral and we passed through the Dardanelles without any problems.

At this stage, we had no idea what our mission was or where we were bound. Ultimately we were told that we were to take over small lighters on the Danube and sail up the river to blow up the Iron Gates to stop the oil traffic to Germany from the Ploesti oil fields. How the hell we could ever expect to get out of Romania afterwards, I'll never know. It looked like a one way trip for sure.

We thought it would be a firing squad for all of us and it damn near was. We eventually pulled into a little town and were raided by the Romanian Secret Police. I don't know what

HMAS Vampire, taken in 1932

happened to many of the others. We had been away for over five months. In fact my family back home had contacted the Navy asking why they had not heard from me. They were told that I was on a special mission".

The remainder of the story is quoted directly from the Australasian Post article, as I consider that a first hand account is more interesting than a "doctored" version:-

"Romania was neutral at this stage, but it seemed full of Germans and every second ship tied up along the river bank seemed to carry a Swastika. But up the river we went, tailed by a Romanian gunboat. We tied up at one stage with a Nazi ship on either side of us.

We eventually pulled into a little town and were raided by the Romanian Secret Police. We heard on the radio that British sabotage agents had been captured on the Danube. We managed to ditch our gear overboard, but we were still put under arrest, with armed guards patrolling the wharf for a couple of weeks. One thing I do remember very clearly, is that it was bitterly cold. The Danube was flowing fast, with ice everywhere.

Eventually we were allowed ashore for about two hours a day, but still kept under curfew. But we drank ashore with the Jerries! It really was a strange affair, I still don't know what happened to many of the others - but the whole thing was a complete cock up. This is the closest point to the Iron Gates on the Danube, that any of the parties were able to reach. Then one night, we were untied from the wharf and took off. There was obviously a lot more 'behind the scenes' intrigue involved, for we were able to sail straight back down the Danube and through to Bacos in Turkey, which is near Istanbul. It was reported that during the withdrawal down river, one barge loaded with explosives, was detonated beneath a railway viaduct, presumably causing some considerable damage.

I had my 21st birthday in Turkey and finished up in hospital, but that's another story. If we thought however, it was all completely over, we were wrong. The Italians were waiting for

VOYAGER in RN service, prior to RAN service

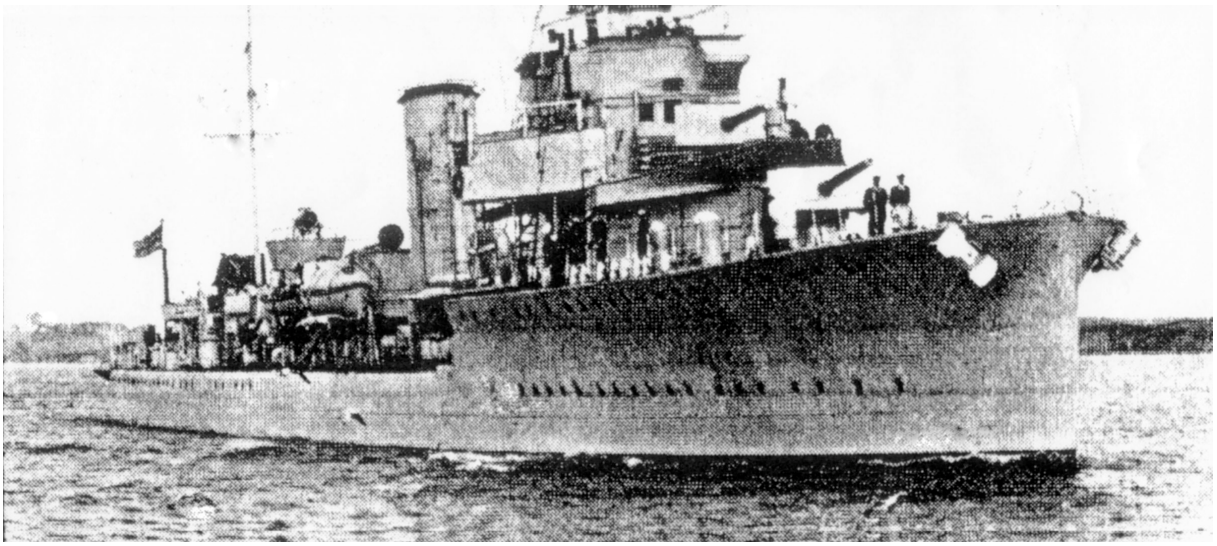
us outside the Dardanelles and although we were flying the Panamanian flag and dodged them at first, we were spotted by a reconnaissance flying boat and then bombed off Crete by Savoia Maschetti bombers. It would appear that enemy Intelligence were right onto us. Lots of near misses, but then a British destroyer escorted us back to Alexandria and the 'Grand Fiasco' was over.

We had been away for over five months. In fact my family back home had contacted the Navy asking why they had bad no mail from me. They were told I was on a special mission. Well, it certainly was, but it didn't achieve much.

You know, I often think today, sailors in civvies, flying the wrong flag, servicemen as saboteurs ... we didn't think the British did that sort of thing, did we? (He had a lot to learn, didn't he!) I'd like to see some recognition for the part Australians played and to hear what happened to the others on the mission. The Australians I can remember being part of my group were my two special mates, Dominic Owens and Arthur Collins, plus Curley Sutton, Zach Lardner and a chap named Dix - I think his name was Joe - (This would have been J Dox, mentioned in connection with the seven South Australians from VAMPIRE, which would lend credibility to their story of VAMPIREs involvement. (VF)), plus an officer from VOYAGER, Sub Lt Milne. I wish I could remember the names of the others". (end quote).

At a later stage of the Second World War, aircraft such as the B 24 Liberator became available. They had the range and capacity to reach Ploesti and carried out raids, obtaining a measure of success denied to the Royal Naval operation. That is all that could be found on this event. As stated at the beginning of this talk, so little is known of this episode, that of necessity, the various accounts have overlapped in places and details are sketchy. This is unavoidable in presenting the whole picture. No doubt a full account exists somewhere, but not in Australia, or G Hermon Gill would have had access to it and used it in his Official History of the RAN in the Second World War.

The sum total of the adventure, is that desperate times called for desperate measures and who knows, with luck, it may have come off.



HMAS Stuart in the Mediterranean - 1940

You will note that Lt Commander Ian Fleming RNVR, creator of the fictitious James Bond, had a hand in the organisation of the sortie. A book called "Room 40" describes some of the Admiralty "weird ideas" operations and Ian Fleming was involved in a lot of them. These ideas were more than likely, the basis of his James Bond adventures. Seems a reasonable assumption under the circumstances.

ADDENDUM TO THE MAIN NARRATIVE

On the 27th of March 1940, whilst exercising with the Aircraft Carrier GLORIOUS, a signal was received in STUART directing her to proceed to the assistance of the tanker TROCUS which had broken down some miles away from her position. STUART was required to stand by and render assistance until the arrival of salvage tugs from Malta, to tow TROCUS to port for repairs.

As the weather began to worsen, the seas roughened and visibility was far from favourable. The ship approached the given position of the tanker and she was sighted in the early hours of the following morning, showing the two "Not under Control" lights. The tanker was unable to anchor due to the depth of water and was in danger of drifting inshore and running aground. Commander Waller advised the tanker that he would try to get a line across to her at daybreak.

When dawn broke, STUART closed the tanker and got a line across, but due to the heavy seas, the line carried away before the towing hawser could be sent over. Further attempts wre to no avail and it was decided to lower the whaler and row the line to the ship, which had suffered a broken propeller shaft. Eventually, the line and hawser were secured, but the strain proved too much and the hawser snapped. An attempt to run another line was thwarted due to the closing in of a heavy fog, which obscured the tanker from view.

Commander Waller did not give up easily, as was the character of the man, and by easing STUART through the fog, he closed TROCUS, maintaining communications with the aid of a megaphone. As TROCUS appeared, both ships passed a line simultaneously and hawsers were quickly secured. This time the tow was successful and a speed of two knots was obtained, although still in fog. Not long after, the tugs from Malta arrived and were warned of the tow. The tugs stood clear until the fog lifted and took over the tow with an amount of difficulty, owing to the weather. Eventually, the tug RESPOND accepted the tow and headed to Malta, with STUART taking station some distance astern.

The tow was successful and STUART arrived at Malta, having passed the tug and tanker en route. It was reported that leave was granted for the first time since the beginning of "Operation Hush Hush" that night.

Some months later, STUART was patrolling in an area near the islands of Skyros, Euripo and Skiathos when two specks appeared on the horizon. As they drew nearer, they were noted as being two barges. STUART had hauled down her ensign to conceal her identity from enemy forces just prior to sighting the barges, when the leading barge called her up by lamp, using the correct call sign.

Captain Waller (he had been promoted) was curious as to how the barge had identified his ship. It transpired that the officer in charge of the barge was the former Navigating Officer of STUART, Sub Lieutenant Scott, who was a member of the of the "Hush Hush" team. He had been promoted to Lieutenant and mutual congratulation signals passed between him and Captain Waller on their respective promotions. The next day, two more barges containing Special Services volunteers were sighted, returning from the Iron Gates mission.

Subsequent to the presentation of the talk on this subject, the following information was obtained from the book by Lew Lind, "Battle of the Wine Dark Sea". In Chapter 3 of the book, Lew describes the events leading up to "Operation Hush Hush" and I quote at length:

"The eastern Mediterranean has long lent itself to intrigue and special operations. Small groups of men have appeared from the desert or the sea, or even fallen from the skies and vanished just as covertly. Their origins and destinations were known only to a few. The purpose of their strange perambulations were rarely reported in official records and their names found no place in official histories, not even when their activities influenced the outcome of battles or the future of nations.

Operation Iron Gates was planned and refined by Commander Ian Fleming RNVR. In October 1939 he was an aide to Admiral Roger Bellairs, co-ordinator of Secret Intelligence. At one of the first meetings of the War Cabinet, he proposed an operation to block the Danube river at Kazan Gorge in Rumania, where the river narrows to pass betwen great granite cliffs known as the Iron Gates. Through this gorge passed Germany's main oil supplies and a variety of other war materials for her war industries.

Both Winston Churchill and Admiral Cunningham were involved in or were aware of the plans, but neither wrote of it in their memoirs. The man who made the plan possible was Britain's leading Grand Prix driver and amateur spy, Merlin Minshall, who had journeyed from the North Sea to the Black Sea via the Danube in 1933. He had been under surveillance by the German Secret Police who bad warned him that he risked potential danger should he persist with the voyage. This did not deter Minshall, although several attempts were made to sink his Dutch river barge early in the trip and attempts were made on his life in Rumania. Despite all this, he continued on his merry way. The Rumanian police tried to forestall him by placing a writ on his vessel, claiming that he had no licence to sail in Rumanian waters. Minshall had anticipated this ploy, by having obtained an international licence for ships undertaking scientific research, forcing the writ to be withdrawn.

On arrival at Kazan Gorge, the reason for the German concern became obvious. A large fleet of tankers and bulk carriers, most of which were in excess of 5,000 tons were passing through the gorge, which was marked on the charts as "navigable for vessels of less than 1,000 tons displacement". The German secret was a great lock in the gorge, built into the granite walls of the Iron Gates, to allow large vessels to bypass the rapids. A railway had been built on the Rumanian side, along which giant locomotives towed the ships against the current, allowing large ships to navigate the "impassable" section of the river. On his return to England, Minshall reported his discoveries to the Admiralty.

A plan to block the Danube, should war break out was prepared by Naval Intelligence in

1938, but was rejected by the Admiralty as impractical. It was revived however, when Churchill was First Lord, who gave it instant approval. (It was one of those derring do schemes which appealed to him and for which he had achieved a form of notoriety, mainly for the spectacular failure of most of them. VF). Ian Fleming was appointed as project leader.

In February 1940, the British Ambassador in Turkey sought approval from the Turkish Government for a Company of Royal Engineers to be stationed at the Black Sea entrance of the Danube, ostensibly to study river siltation. The request was approved and the troops set up a base, but objections from Germany forced the Turks to withdraw approval, and the Royal Engineers left the area. As a result, Commander Fleming asked Churchill to obtain 50 volunteers from the Mediterranean Fleet. Admiral Cunningham then asked Captain Waller to arrange for the volunteers to be drawn from the RAN destroyers under his control.

The story of how the volunteers were selected is told elsewhere in this narrative and it is not necessary to recount it again. Following the withdrawal of the army, Fleming revamped his plans. Merlin Minshall (What a name!) who was now a Lieutenant RNVR, was to command the operation. He was already in Bucharest on the staff of the Ambassador as a vice consul and the appointment provided him with excellent cover and the freedom to make all arrangements for the operation.

Fleming's plan was two pronged. He had found six large river vessels which were British owned, at the nearby port of Braila, six hours steaming from the Iron Gates. The German skippers were paid off with a handsome bonus and six British officers took their place. In mid February, twelve regular service Engine Room Petty Officers arrived at Braila, disguised as distressed Russian seamen and were smuggled aboard the ships. Their responsibility was to maintain the ships' engines and guard the vessels. The second prong of the plan was provided by six river steamers at the Black Sea end of the river. These vessels, when the Special Service crews arrived, were to sail up the Danube to the Iron Gates and be scuttled on river bars at the downriver end of the Kazan Gorge.

When Minshall's activities in Bucharest attracted the attention of the Rumanian Secret Police, he soon realised that they could be bribed with British gold sovereigns. What he did not know however, was that a member of the British Ambassador's staff was an enemy agent.

Minshall's duties required him to travel on the Orient Express to carry diplomatic mail from France. Included in each consignment were a number of bags which contained cartons labelled "Mackintosh Toffee". Each carton contained twelve slabs of Torpex explosive cast in the factory moulds and identical in appearance to the genuine slabs of toffee. These were the scuttling charges for the ships at Braila. On one of these courier runs, Minshall returned to his sleeping compartment and surprised a man slitting open the toffee cartons. He quickly overpowered and killed the intruder, stripped him of all clothing and identity and dumped the body out of the toilet window. The Rumanian Secret Police turned a blind eye for a payment of 5,000 gold sovereigns.

By the last wek in March, the preparations were almost complete. The Australians were on their way and the ships at Braila had their scuttling charges in place and the crews were all

set up as previously described. Minshall had acquired a fast motor launch through the Embassy and he used it to maintain contact with the ships. He intended to use the launch to carry him into the gorge on the night of the operation. By the 29th of March, the Australians were some 40 miles downstream and Minshall decided to carry out the operation on the 30th.

Things went wrong on the day. At 1000, a confidential phone call informed him that the six barges coming up river had been seized by the Rumanian Secret Police. There was nothing that Minshall could do without compromising the other prong of the operation, so he waited until darkness, then sped down river to Braila and the other six ships.

An inspection showed everything to be normal on board and nothing aroused any suspicions with Minshall. He checked the scuttling charges which were still in place and told the senior officer in each ship that he would return at 2330, prior to moving into the gorge. As he went over the side, the senior Petty Officer thanked him for allowing overnight leave to all hands on the previous evening. Minshall was immediately alarmed, as he had done no such thing.

A quick check of the ship's hold revealed that all the detonators had been removed and he knew at once that the Germans had been warned of the operation. He was not to be beaten however, and thirty minutes later he had all six ships ready to sail. They were to follow him in the launch and run aground at the river bar below the lock, as planned. He reasoned that the current would swing the ships as they sunk and block the channel.

The first ship eased out and after a run of two hundred yards, she stopped. The Germans had drained all the fuel from all six ships. Nothing daunted, Minshall returned to his launch and set off upstream at full speed. In his duffel bag was the last package of Torpex and he planned to use it on the secondary target, the towing locomotive on the lock side.

As he turned into the main stream, two large Rumanian patrol boats came at him on an interception course. Minshall's launch was some 10 knots faster, which allowed him to avoid the trap and run clear of his pursuers. Two hours later, he was at the target position and he was forced to crash his boat into the rocks, and leap ashore.

His target towered above him. This locomotive was claimed to be the largest of its kind in the world, comprising two powerful diesel traction engines on one great chassis, with drivers cabs at each end. The destruction of this engine would close the Iron Gates for many months. Minshall observed that the crew was still on board and climbing the rough track, he reached his objective without encountering any sentries or other people. After recovering his breath, he climbed into the locomotive and encountered the crew of three, who were totally unaware that he was behind them. He drew his pistol and shot all three dead.

He then opened the "Toffee" cartons and set the charges behind the control panel, under the diesel engines and the fuel tank. He then started the engines, opened the throttle to its maximum, released the brakes and leapt clear.

By now, the locomotive was gaining speed towards a slight bend in the track where the waterway changed direction. It would normally approach this point at walking pace, hauling a 5,000 ton ship, but now there was no impediment to its ultimate destruction.

One minute it was airborne, then it plunged headlong into the river and spectacularly exploded.

Eventually, Lieutenant Minshall, wearing the uniform of a Rumanian Customs Officer (he was fluent in the language), left the country in a first class compartment of the Orient Express, reporting to Commander Fleming some ten days later at the Admiralty in London, to report on the operation. (This incident would explain the comment on page 7 made by one of the Special Service Squad about hearing that a barge was exploded under a railway viaduct.)

It transpired that the Iron Gates were unusable for a period of some months and all cargoes of oil and other vital materials had to transhipped by road around the blockage. The effect of the delays on Germany's plans for the assaults on Holland and France was considerable, so in this context, it could be considered that the operation was to some extent, successful".

That is the extent of Lew Lind's narrative on the operation and complements the material in the first eight pages of this monograph. The overall story now has a better meaning for the readers of this saga.

Would it be reasonable to assume that Merlin Minshall was the role model for the fictitious James Bond, created by Ian Fleming?

NAMES OF SOME PARTICIPANTS

Subsequent to the addition of the information contained in the Addendum, Tom Martin of Rose Bay, Sydney, provided a lsit of names of some of the Australian sailors who took part in the Operation;

Lt Scott (RANR)	S/Lt Milne (RANVR) Asdic Officer
AB Terry Van Prooyen	AB A Collins
AB Pankhurst	AB J Dix
AB Dominic Owens	Stoker R (Zac) Lardner
Stoker F Lead (or Peal)	Stoker H A (Curley) Sutton

The following are not shown by rank; Mahoney, Scanlon and Baumgarten. (One of them was an Officers Steward.)

The Officer in Charge was Commander Gibson RN, who was appointed as Commanding Officer of HMS HOSTILE an "H" Class destroyer, after returning from the Danube. He was killed when HOSTILE struck a mine at 0317 on the 23rd of August 1940 some 18 miles south east of Cap Bon, Tunisia. HOSTILE was a total loss and was sunk by HMS HERO.

Tom Martin believes that 17 Australians were involved, but could only trace the names shown above.

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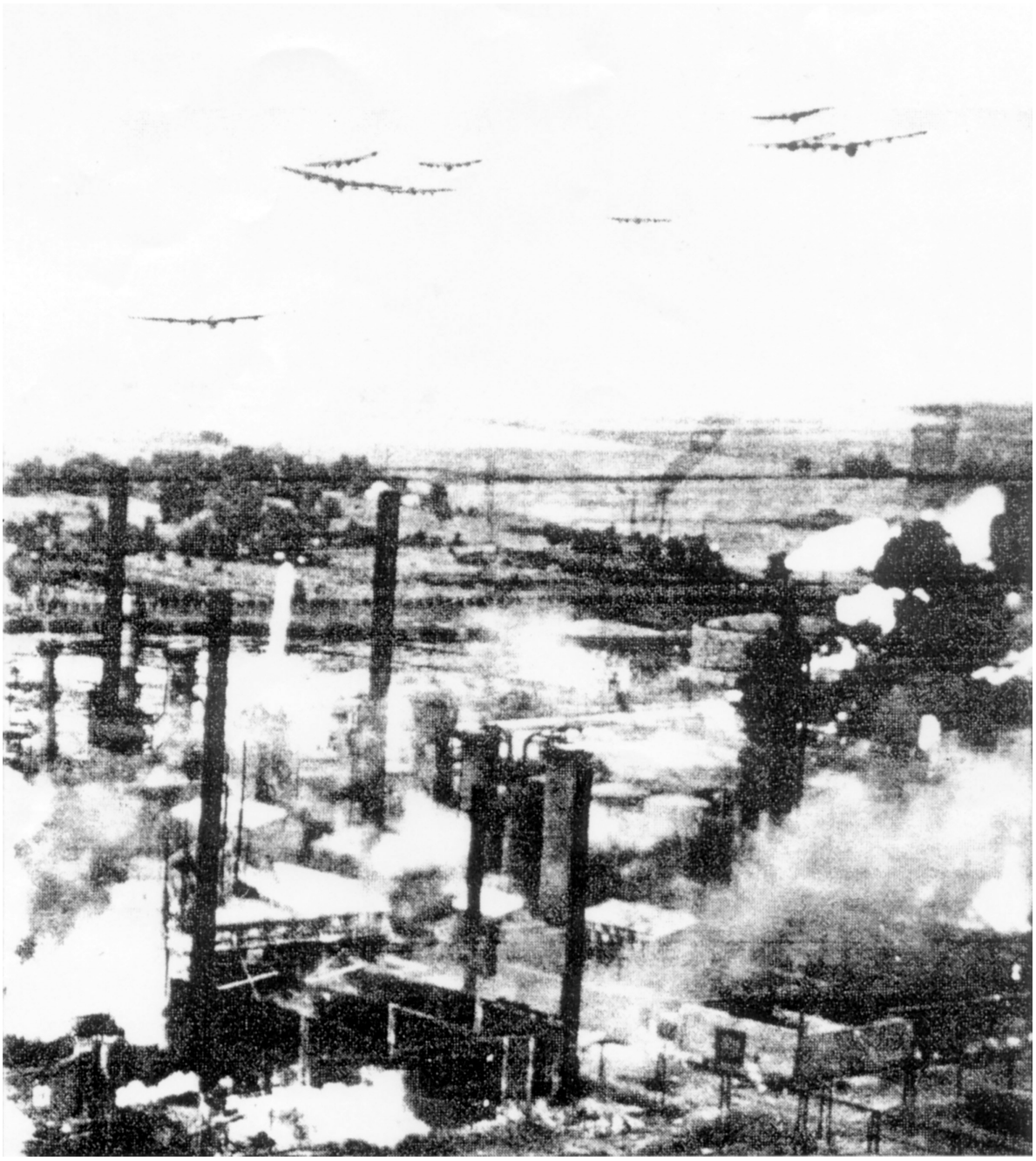

USAAF Bombers attacking Ploesti - 1944

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