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Appolonia

Three weeks after the attack on Jervis Bay a Shell vessel of the N.I.T. Company fell victim to surface marauders off the south west coast of England. This was 'Appolonia' command Captain P.Scholl which was intercepted by two German destroyers between Lizard and Wolf Rock at midnight 25 November 1940. The tanker in ballast was illuminated at night by search-light from one warship and immediately came under heavy gunfire from the other. The attack lasted for over an hour, and two torpedoes that struck amidships on the port side settled the ships fate. Great gallantry was displayed by all crew members who helped to handle a lifeboat and rescue survivors. **Appolonia** heeled over and sank amid a blaze of burning oil on the sea, having been shelled again at point blank range before the German destroyers steamed away. Casualties were heavy, thirteen of the Chinese crew were killed in action or drowned, several others seriously wounded.

Casualties of tankers and other merchant ships increased during the grim 'Battle of the Atlantic', the lengthy period when supplies were needed urgently at Malta and North Africa, and at the time of the loss of Malaya and the Dutch East Indies to Japanese forces. Tanker casualties in 1941 involved many outstanding episodes of the Shell group of tankers.

From the outbreak of war to the end of December 1939, (5 months) 118 ships of the Merchant Navy were sunk by enemy action, ships from passenger liners to fishing trawlers, 2,000 British ocean going vessels were at sea on any one given day, hundreds of ships in their home and allied ports were within striking distance of the German Luftwaffe Bombers and Stukas. These were early days in the 'Battle of Britain' Unrestricted use of mines around British home ports, and in Australia, and New Zealand caused many disasters, Shell, Eagle Oil, suffered serious losses from this one victim was San Delfino.