

## WW2 Merchant Seaman Executed for Treason

*I have read an awful lot about the British MN throughout my life but I never heard of this story until it came in today Nov. 4 2009 in one of my 'Google Alerts' from a website called- <http://www.executedtoday.com/> Being a bit doubtful about the report I went looking for it elsewhere to check the story and found that there is a full account of it (reprinted here) in Wikipedia.*

### **Duncan Alexander Croall Smith**



Scott-Ford was born in Plymouth with the name Duncan Alexander Croall Smith, the son of Duncan Scott Smith who worked as a sick bed orderly in the Royal Navy. His father died on March 23, 1933 after catching pneumonia from the effects of taking an overdose of morphine in a suicide attempt, and Scott-Ford changed his surname in an attempt to improve his social status. He was educated at The Royal Hospital School, Holbrook from 1933 to 1937, and then on turning 16, enlisted in the Royal Navy and joined HMS Impregnable in Devonport in December 1937.

#### **Royal Navy career**

In June 1939 Scott-Ford was serving on HMS Gloucester which had called at Dar-es-Salaam on a goodwill visit. He met and became infatuated by a German girl; the Security Service later came to believe that he may have told her secret naval codes. Later in 1940 his ship was stationed in Egypt and Scott-Ford became obsessed with a prostitute whom he often visited; he was discovered to have altered the book of his Post Office Savings account and sent to a court martial which convicted him. He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and dismissed from the service with ignominy but after a successful appeal by his mother, the sentence was remitted to six months' imprisonment and an honourable discharge.

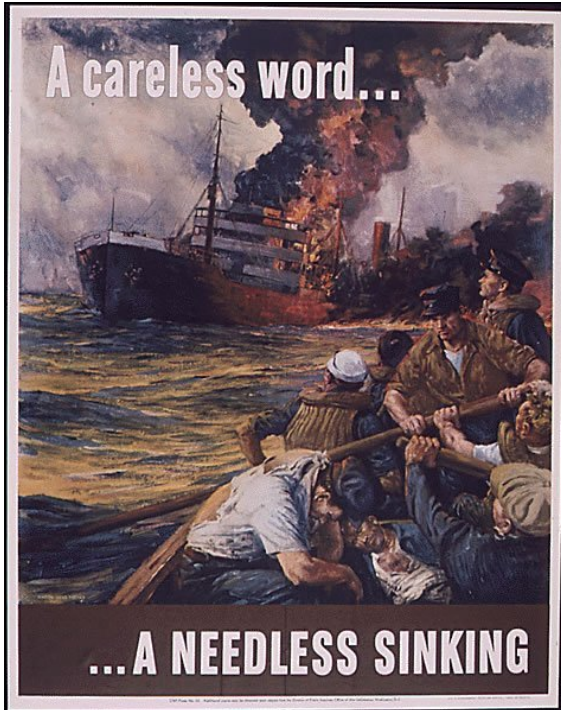
#### **Merchant Navy**

Repatriated to Britain to serve his sentence, Scott-Ford was released in July 1941 and stayed briefly with his mother. They had a blazing row over his mother's use of the allowance from his Royal Navy pay which he sent home, with Scott-Ford accusing his mother of using it to buy a fur coat. Shortly afterwards he joined the Merchant Navy. He was on board the SS Finland, which arrived in Lisbon on 10 May 1942, and a few days later he was met in a bar by a man who told him that his name was Rithman and that he could get a letter to the girl he had known in Dar-es-Salaam.

#### **Espionage**

Rithman offered Scott-Ford 1000 Portuguese escudos if he would confirm the rumour that all British ships had been ordered to be in the following day. Although unable to find confirmation, Scott-Ford met with Rithman and a man who called himself Captain Henley and appeared to be Rithman's superior. Confessing to not having supplied the information wanted, the group nevertheless discussed issues such as the state of morale in Britain, public opinion of Winston Churchill, and the extent of air raid damage.

Henley gave him a 1000 Escudo note and arranged another meeting a few days later. At this meeting, Scott-Ford was driven around in a car to disorient him and then taken to a room where he was asked to obtain more information about the location of British minefields, the arrival of American servicemen in Britain, and up-to-date copies of Jane's Fighting Ships and Jane's All the World's Aircraft. Henley asked Scott-Ford to sign a receipt for the 1000 Escudos, which Scott-Ford did, using his real name. His ship sailed the next day; all the crew were interrogated on arrival at Liverpool to ask if they had been approached by German agents. Scott-Ford stated that he had been approached but had not cooperated.



### **Blackmailed**

The Finland sailed for Lisbon again in July, arriving on July 26. Scott-Ford again met up with the Germans, receiving another 500 Escudos for expenses (again signing a receipt) although he had been unable to get the books which they had requested. The Germans threatened to give the receipts to the British consulate. Scott-Ford did give details of the convoy he had sailed in and its protection, the location of an aircraft factory, and the training of troops for an invasion of Europe. At the end of the meeting he was told to keep a record of the movement and speed of the convoy and given another 100 Escudos. Another meeting was arranged but Scott-Ford was unable to keep it as the Finland sailed for Manchester.

### **Confession**

On arriving at Salford Docks on August 18, Scott-Ford was again routinely asked about approach attempts from German intelligence, and this time described a man who had asked him about communism in Britain. The authorities had already had word from Lisbon that an agent codenamed 'RUTHERFORD' by the Germans had been talking and therefore arranged to see him again the next day. Scott-Ford admitted that he had received 1600 Escudos (about £18 in 1942) for information, and was taken into custody and sent to the 'London Reception Centre' where refugees were routinely screened for German agents. The notes which Scott-Ford had made about the convoy were found in a search of his quarters on the Finland.

### **Trial**

In order to allow Scott-Ford to be kept in custody, an order was made under Defence Regulation 18B for him to be detained. He was sent to Camp 020, an interrogation centre based at Latchmere House on Ham Common in south west London where he complied with the authorities, although becoming increasingly alarmed at the reality of the situation he was in. Professor Brian Simpson, a historian of detention without trial, has speculated that Scott-Ford was offered his life in return for more information on the Germans' intelligence system, but had no more information to give. Scott-Ford was charged under the Treachery Act 1940, and after an in camera trial before Mr Justice Birkett was convicted and sentenced to death on October 16.



### Hanging

Camp 020 were asked for their recommendation on whether Scott-Ford should be reprieved. The commandant wrote that there were no reasons for a reprieve: "Indeed, there may well be many who will agree that death by hanging is almost too good for a sailor who will encompass the death of thousands of his shipmates without qualm." The sentence of death on Scott-Ford was executed by Albert Pierrepoint at 9 AM on November 3, 1942 at Wandsworth prison.

The details of his trial had been kept secret until Scott-Ford was dead. The next day's papers reported that Scott-Ford had betrayed his country for £18, and lost his life in consequence, as a warning to other Merchant Navy sailors who might have been approached.

### References

Duncan Scott-Ford from Stephen Stratford (accessed September 3, 2005)

'Camp 020: MI5 and the Nazi spies' by Oliver Hoare (Public Record Office, London, 2000) ISBN 1-903365-08-2

'In the Highest Degree Odious: Detention without Trial in Wartime Britain' by Professor A.W.B. Simpson (Oxford University Press, 1992) ISBN 0-19-825775-9



Quite a story, the Royal navy charge sounds a bit 'sus' to me, where would a RN boy seaman on a shilling a week get the money to court and fall for the girl in Dar-es-Salaam and why would she select him, the lowest of the lowest from all on the ship. And to visit prostitute regularly costs more than a shilling a week and how would he a lowly boy seaman get hold of the Radio Codes. That the RN reduced his sentence makes that case all sound fishy to me.

In a war there are many different ways to lose one's life.

As a teenager and home on leave I sometimes drank at a pub in Failsworth, a Manchester suburb that was owned by Albert Pierrepoint the hangman, it was called of all things

"Help the poor Struggler"