

It was 19th
September 1965.

A light south-west-
erly breeze blew
over the calm Arabian
Ocean. Sun had disap-
peared down the west-
ern horizon. The purple
evening twilight was
yielding to darker
shades of night.

Against the horizon stood
out the silhouette of a ship —
a man-of-war. The scene pre-
sented an idyllic silence and
tranquillity. But it was no
more than a facet of the para-
dox of life. Inside the ship
thrilled the pulse of life all
excitement and expectation.
The beat was even faster
because it was life at its most
intense — it was wartime.

The Ship was a destroyer of
the Pakistan Navy guarding
the country's sea frontiers and
the vital sea lanes against an
enemy who was waging an
undeclared war against
Pakistan.

Deep concentration: It was
one of the units of the Pakistan
Navy Flotilla, which had been
patrolling the sea since the
outbreak of war. Patrolling is a
classic activity of sea warfare;
its object is that of achieving
seaward defence. Ships spread
out in the area where the
enemy is likely to transit. Then
they endlessly stream in the

A Glimpse of the war at sea

area under tactical plans. The
ships, throughout, maintain
the highest degree of pre-
paredness, ready to spring into
action in a matter of seconds.

There were more than 200
men in the destroyer. Each was
had a specific job. Each was
an essential link in the chain
of war organisation on board.

A burly helmsman stood
before the big, wooden steer-
ing wheel in the wheel house.
The wheel moved with rhyth-
mic, easy motion under his
firm hands. His eyes did not
stray from the compass in
front of him. He had to stand
at his station for the better
part of the twenty-four hours.
He had been conditioned and
trained to go on like this for
months.

In the compartment next
door another man bent over a
radar screen. He was looking
for suspicious 'contacts' which
would appear in the shape of
bright dots on the radar
screen. His deep concentra-
tion suggested the gravity of
his task. The outcome of a bat-
tle could very well depend on
the way this man performed
his job.

Down below in Ships boiler
room, where the steam was
raised to run the engine tur-
bines, temperature soared to
120 degree F. The mechanical
engineer on duty was soaked to
his skin with perspiration. His

hands continuously manipulat-
ed the fuel sprayers while his
eyes warily watched the pres-
sure gauges. He was oblivious
of what was happening above
in the ship. While he was on
duty nothing else mattered to
him except that the ship's bol-
ers should function well.

Men at other quarters, guns,
torpedoes, anti-submarine
sonar sets were just as con-
sciously engaged in their
duties.

The ship's navigating offi-
cer handed over the watch on
the Bridge and proceeded
below. Down on the next deck
he stopped for a moment to do
some bends and stretches then
slid down a ladder to step on
to the fore-castle. The navigator
carried heavy responsibilities.
It was not so much the actual
navigation of the ship but the
conduct of operations that he
constituted the bulk of his
task. Almost all types of oper-
ations needed his association
he peered out into the dark
around the ship and reflected.

More than ten days had
passed since the small but dar-
ing group of PN Ships had car-
ried out the devastating bom-
bardment of the Indian sea-
port of Dwarka. It was a dou-
ble affront to the Indian pa-
triot. Firstly, Pakistan had
wrested the initiative in the
naval warfare from the aggres-
sor in the war. Secondly,

Pakistan Navy had challenged
the Indian navy which was
four times its size. It should at
least have shaken them into
action, if nothing else. What
game were the Indians playing
at? Perhaps they were out at
sea now in full force waiting
for an opportune moment to
strike.

This led the navigator to
think of the maritime aspect
of the war. How important it
was to neutralise the enemy at
sea. The sea is the only route
for Pakistan's external trade.
Who knew how long will the
war go on? And the country so
much dependent on this trade
on imports, some of which
required a continuous flow!

He felt a surge of emotion
as he thought of the trust that
Pakistani masses had reposed
in some of their sea warriors -
he was engulfed with a sense
of utter loyalty to the home-
land and an unbounding
courage which it inspires.

The next morning, 20th
September, was uneventful.
The destroyer continued the
patrol. The men were engaged
in listening and looking, the
officers in planning and con-
ducting and the command in
assessing and appreciating.

Towards evening when the
pipe-call for meals was due,
there was a slight excitement
in the ship's operations room.
The radar operator had picked
up some new contacts. The
navigating officer, on being
informed, rushed out of the
wardroom and was in front of
the radar screen in a few
bounds. The contacts were
plotted immediately to assess
their movement and behav-

iour. Presently, the Captain
appeared on the scene.
Tension had built up in the
Operation Room. The contacts
were a formation of ships and
appeared to be heading
towards Karachi. Their dis-
tance from the destroyer was
about 60 miles. Battle
Stations.

Messages were passed to
other ships. Hands were called
to 'Battle Stations'. The ship
shuddered with a burst of
power as speed was increased
to maximum. The destroyer
proceeded to join the other PN
warships in the area.

By the time the Pakistan
Navy warships had formed up
and headed to intercept the
unidentified contacts, night
had settled on a choppy sea.
The radar contacts were 'paint-
ing' only intermittently now as
detection by radar is greatly
influenced by atmospheric
changes. The contacts had
altered to an easterly direc-
tion. If no other change took
place these would be within
the gun range of PN ships in
about two hours.

Apparently the same men
stood at same stations but
their business took on a new
intent. Their concentration
was absorbing. Their move-
ments were firm and brisk.

After a little while the radar
contacts increased speed and
altered directly away from the
PN ships. The rate of closing
became very slow. The PN ships
kept up the chase for another
two hours but then it became
futile because their distance
from Karachi was opening fast
while the suspicious contacts
gave no indication of slowing

down or turning about.

The chase was given up. The
ships returned to their patrol
stations. The men on board the
destroyer spent the next day
and a half in anticipation of
some action with the enemy.
Almost everyone was certain
that sooner or later an
encounter will take place. The
last incident was still fresh in
the minds of men. The atmos-
phere on board was charged
with the thrill of an impending
confrontation with the enemy.

On the 22nd of September
1965 as the sun was crossing
the mid-day meridian, the
radio operator in the wireless
room received a message on
the broadcast circuit. The mes-
sage was delivered to cypher
team. Almost in the beginning
were the words "Caselire"....
To take place with effect from
0300 on the 23rd September.
The news spread all over the
ship within moments.

A phase, an era, had come to
an end. A little too early per-
haps! There were no signs of
joy; rather a sense of unfulfil-
ment prevailed amongst the
men. It was not due to non-
achievement. In fact, the
Pakistan Navy had successfully
achieved more than its aim - it
had kept our Sea Lines of Trade
open, bombarded the enemies
coastal fortifications and it had
stopped the enemy from coming
anywhere near our coast line.

The men in the destroyer
felt that the round was not
complete. The enemy had
obtained a breather - to collect
and rebuild itself to strike
again. Coming events belied
the presumption; the enemy
never came out of its hiding.