

An Litir Bheag

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 517 (which corresponds to Litir 821). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclea@bbc.co.uk.

Three people from the wee Isle of Scalpay [Harris] – and eight people from Lewis – were killed when a German vessel was sunk in the Second [World] War. Aye, a German vessel. They were prisoners of the Germans on board a vessel called the 'Penguin'. The Penguin was a commerce-raider. That's a warship that was pretending to be a merchant ship.

Although the Penguin looked like a cargo vessel, she was brimming with armaments. She carried big guns, torpedo tubes, two small planes and hundreds of mines. But all of the armaments were out of sight. The big guns were covered with sheets of iron on the vessel's sides.

They also pretended that the Penguin belonged to another country. She raised a German flag only when she was ready to attack.

She was working in the Atlantic, the Indian Ocean and around the coast of Australia. She was very successful in sinking British shipping.

Chaidh trìuir à Eilean beag Sgalpaigh – agus ochdnar à Leòdhas – a mharbhadh nuair a chaidh soitheach Gearmailteach a chur fodha anns an Dàrna Cogadh. Seadh, soitheach Gearmailteach. Bha iad nam prìosanaich aig na Gearmailtich air bòrd soitheach air an robh 'Penguin' mar ainm. Bha am Penguin na shoitheach-cealgach. 'S e sin long-cogaidh a bha a' toirt a' chreidsinn gur e soitheach-carago a bha innte.

Ged a bha am Penguin a' coimhead coltach ri soitheach-carago, bha i làn armachd. Bha gunnaichean mòra oirre, tiùbaichean airson toirpeadan, dà itealan bheag agus na ceudan de mhèinnean-mara. Ach bha an armachd gu lèir a-mach à sealladh. Bha na gunnaichean mòra air an còmhdachadh le siotaichean iarainn air cliathaich an t-soithich.

Bha iad cuideachd a' toirt a' chreidsinn gun do bhuin am Penguin do dhùthaich eile. Bha i a' cur suas bratach Ghearmailteach dìreach nuair a bha i deiseil gus ionnsaigh a thoirt.

Bha i ag obair anns a' Chuan Siar, sa Chuan Innseanach agus timcheall costa Astràilia. Bha i gu math soirbheachail ann a bhith a' cur luingeas Breatannach fodha.

Occasionally she didn't [even] have to mount an attack. In December 1940 she captured the Norwegian whaling fleet off South Georgia. She didn't fire any shell.

Because the Pinguin was so successful, at times there were hundreds of prisoners-of-war on board. If she were sunk, British sailors would die. But there was no choice. She was doing so much damage. She had to be sunk.

The end came in May 1941. HMS Cornwall was in pursuit of her. The Pinguin was pretending to be a Norwegian merchant vessel. Finally, she raised a German flag. She fired on the Cornwall.

A shell from the Cornwall hit the Pinguin's armaments' store. She exploded. Within a few seconds, she'd gone down. More than three hundred Germans lost their lives, and more than two hundred prisoners-of-war. Among them were eleven from Lewis and Scalpay.

Corra uair cha robh aice ri ionnsaigh a thoirt. Anns an Dùbhlachd naoi ceud deug is ceathrad (1940), ghabh i thairis an cabhlach Nirribheach a bha an sàs ann an sealg nam mucan-mara far South Georgia. Cha do loisg i slige sam bith.

Leis gun robh am Pinguin cho soirbheachail, aig amannan bha na ceudan de phrìosanaich-cogaidh air bòrd oirre. Nam biodh i air a cur fodha, gheibheadh seòladairean Breatannach bàs. Ach cha robh roghainn ann. Bha i a' dèanamh uiread de sgrios. B' fheudar a cur fodha.

Thàinig an deireadh anns a' Chèitean, naoi ceud deug, ceathrad 's a h-aon (1941). Bha HMS Cornwall an tòir oirre. Bha am Pinguin a' toirt a' chreidsinn gur e soitheach-carago Nirribheach a bha innte. Mu dheireadh, thog i bratach Ghearmailteach. Loisg i air a' Chornwall.

Bhuail slige bhon Chornwall ann an stòras armachd a' Phinguin. Spreadh i. Taobh a-staigh beagan diogan bha i air a dhol fodha. Chaill còrr is trì cheud Gearmailteach am beatha, agus còrr is dà cheud prìosanach-cogaidh. Nam measg bha aon duine deug à Leòdhas agus Sgalpaigh.