

In search of warship gold



The cruiser Edinburgh : Torpedoed twice

BRITISH divers are on the trail of what must be the ultimate in sunken treasure: gold bullion worth £100 million which went down with one of Britain's warships.

The wreck of HMS Edinburgh, a 10,000-ton cruiser torpedoed by a U-boat while escorting a convoy from Russia to Britain in 1942, lies 1,000 ft down in the Barents Sea, in the Arctic Circle.

Two thirds of the gold belongs to Russia and one third to Britain, according to the Department of Trade yesterday.

The Edinburgh was torpedoed twice. The first blast wrecked her steering gear and tore away 30 or 40 feet of the stern.

With the help of two British and two Soviet destroyers, she struggled on for two more days.

Riddle

Then she was torpedoed again and had to be scuttled in icy waters north of Norway.

Why the gold was not transferred to other vessels in the convoy is a mystery—there is some suggestion that commanders on the spot had not been told it was aboard.

Now at least two salvage

Divers to seek £100m treasure

sunk in a British cruiser

REPORT BY NEVILLE HODGKINSON

operators are standing by, awaiting the go-ahead for what could become a tremendous race—against each other and against time before the weather makes a recovery attempt this year impossible.

About 50 of the crew were killed and the bodies of at least 30 are believed to be still in the wreckage.

'We want to ensure that the sanctity of the ship as a war grave is properly considered in any salvage operations,' said a spokesman for the Defence Ministry. 'We are usually against diving

operations in circumstances of this kind. But in the case of any wreck containing a valuable cargo, it is better to allow an operation while imposing strict safeguards.'

For the present the Navy has given two firms—Risdon-Beazley Marine, of Southampton, and Stolt-Nielson, of Norway—permission only to locate, sight and perhaps film the outside of the vessel on condition that no attempt is made to land her.

Risdon-Beazley's cargo recovery manager, Mr Fergus Hinds, said last night that the company had

considered attempting to recover the gold in 1953. But the company decided not to because at that time their divers had not gone so deep. It was also not known for certain whether the gold was still there. And there were political considerations.

'Now a number of changes have come about,' he said — 'we have since worked in this depth of water and that makes it worth another look.'

He refused to comment on whether or not the wreck had been located.

Risk

But a member of a third, Yorkshire, salvage company that is interested in the gold said the wreck had been seen.

Teams of men are on 24-hour stand-by, he says, awaiting confirmation that salvage terms have been agreed with Russia and that the recovery attempt can go ahead.

The gold originally belonged to a Russian trade delegation in Britain and was ultimately destined to go to the U.S. as a payment for arms.

Under a war risks insurance scheme, Britain paid out a third of its value and so still has a large stake in it.