

number of heavy destroyers and about twenty torpedo boats available in the Baltic. It is probable that he realised our combined sea and air defences made the Southern North Sea and the English Channel a very unpleasant area for operations by the German Navy. In any case, it is certain that, despite the few positive results of our night attacks, the enemy was so harassed by them that he was unable seriously to interfere with our "Overlord" shipping.

29. This success meant that, from the end of June, my anti-shipping aircraft were able to devote more of their time to the second of their two tasks—the interruption of German coastal shipping. In June, I directed the greater part of my effort to the naval targets in the Channel, and only a few attacks were made on convoys. These, however, included some very successful engagements, the most important of which occurred on 15th June north of the Dutch island of Schiermonnikoog, when Beaufighters sank a merchantman of 8,000 tons, a naval auxiliary of 4,000 tons and a minesweeper, besides damaging four more of the escort vessels.

30. In July I kept up the Channel protection, but diverted all but one of the Beaufighter Squadrons to convoy strikes off the coasts of Southern Norway and the Low Countries. There is no doubt that these strikes proved most harassing to the enemy, and he was obliged to divert to this purely defensive task numbers of minesweepers and naval escort craft which he urgently required elsewhere.

31. The beginning of August saw a new phase open in the shipping war. As our tanks swept through North-Western France, enemy coastal craft broke for the comparative safety of the North Sea ports; one night alone saw 70 of them attacked from the air. Moreover, the enemy in the Brest Peninsula was cut off by land. He was therefore obliged to squeeze yet more work from his seaborne supply services. Every available ship in Western France from Brest to Bordeaux was pressed into service to keep the beleaguered garrisons supplied. Coastal Command made the best of this opportunity. Mosquitoes based in Cornwall, Halifaxes, previously operating in an Anti-U-Boat role, and a Wing of Beaufighters which I transferred from the East Coast convoy routes, operated all along the Biscay coast. Merchant ships, sperrbrechers, minesweepers and coasters of all kinds were sunk, and a fitting climax was reached on 24th August when the last of the larger German warships in this area, a Seetier and an Elbing class destroyer, were sunk in the Gironde by the rockets of the Beaufighter Wing.

32. At the beginning of September, the area of anti-shipping activity had moved eastward in the wake of the Allied armies. There were no more attacks in the Bay of Biscay or in the

Channel. As the enemy-occupied ports fell into our hands, the night patrols of the Beaufighters, Avengers and Wellingtons moved eastwards along the coast. This happened so quickly that there were no attacks off the Belgian Coast after 7th September, and our attention was turned completely to the intensification of the offensive against the enemy's shipping operating off the Dutch and Norwegian coasts.

33. Thus concluded three months of intensive operations in which the German naval units and merchant shipping in Western Europe had been hammered unmercifully.

#### CONCLUSION.

34. I wish to end this despatch by paying tribute to all personnel in Coastal Command who by their tireless endeavour and concerted efforts helped to bring about the victory over the enemy sea opposition to the liberation of Europe. In addition to the operations of my Anti-U-Boat and Anti-Shipping aircraft, whose activities have been recounted, the photographic reconnaissance squadrons, the meteorological squadrons and the air/sea rescue air and surface craft all carried out their arduous tasks with skill and resolution.

35. I would like to mention particularly the Fleet Air Arm Squadrons which were incorporated in my Command for operation "Overlord". They performed their varied duties with outstanding keenness and precision.

36. A tribute must also be paid to the Liberator Squadrons of the U.S. Navy, under Commodore Hamilton, U.S.N., which, working under the operational control of 19 Group, did invaluable work, particularly during the "cork in the bottle" operations.

37. Two Norwegian Squadrons, a Czech and a Polish Squadron were also distinguished for their gallantry and enthusiasm in the combined team.

38. Finally, it will not be forgotten that the successes of our operations could not have come about but for the skill in planning and organisation of the Command and Group Staffs who—with the invaluable and enthusiastic co-operation of the Staffs of the Naval Commands—worked long and hard to perfect our preparations; and but for the ceaseless energies of the ground personnel at Stations who provided our aircrews with the means to reap their victories.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

SHOLTO DOUGLAS,

Air Chief Marshal,

Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief,  
*Coastal Command, Royal Air Force.*

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