

second salvo of four torpedoes at a range of 2,500 yards and claimed a further unobserved hit. VIRAGO followed OPPORTUNE in and at 1934 fired seven torpedoes at a range of 2,800 yards and observed two hits. The Sub-Division then retired to the westward, VIRAGO opening fire on the enemy while still visible.

75. The hits scored by the 36th Division are again difficult to assess as some were not observed and as the cruisers were attacking at about the same time; five hits in all is considered the most probable assessment. Little information is available from prisoners, most of whom were engaged in abandoning ship, but SCHARNHORST seems to have taken a list to starboard and they therefore consider that most of the hits were on her starboard side. One prisoner has confirmed three hits from the same destroyer, possibly MUSKETEER or SAVAGE.

#### SINKING OF THE SCHARNHORST.

76. Three cruisers and eight destroyers were now in the target area and DUKE OF YORK steered to the northward to avoid the mêlée. All that could be seen of the SCHARNHORST was a dull glow through a dense cloud of smoke, which the starshell and searchlights of the surrounding ships could not penetrate. No ship therefore saw the enemy sink but it seems fairly certain that she sank after a heavy underwater explosion which was heard and felt in several ships at about 1945. JAMAICA, MATCHLESS and VIRAGO were the last ships to sight her at about 1938; at 1948 when BELFAST closed to deliver a second torpedo attack she had definitely sunk in approximate position 72° 16' N. 28° 41' E.

77. JAMAICA rejoined DUKE OF YORK to the northward whilst BELFAST, NORFOLK and most of the destroyers searched the area until 2040, during which time SCORPION picked up 30 survivors and MATCHLESS six. SCORPION reported subsequently that the Captain and the Commander of SCHARNHORST were seen in the water seriously wounded; the Captain was dead before he could be reached, the Commander grasped a life-line but succumbed before he could be hauled in. Soon after 2100 SHEFFIELD rejoined Force 1 and I ordered all forces in the area to proceed independently to Kola Inlet where they arrived without incident throughout 27th December.

78. The 36 prisoners picked up by the destroyers were transferred to DUKE OF YORK at Kola Inlet and were provisionally interrogated on board during the ship's return to Scapa. No officers survived, the most senior of the prisoners being of the equivalent rating of Acting Petty Officer.

#### CONDUCT OF OFFICERS AND MEN.

79. The conduct of all officers and men throughout the action was in accordance with the highest traditions of the Service.

80. Earlier in the day, the resolute attack by Force 1 to drive off the enemy undoubtedly saved the convoy and their subsequent shadowing was invaluable to me in my approach.

81. DUKE OF YORK fought hard and well having drawn, for over an hour and a half, the whole of the enemy's fire. She was frequently straddled with near misses, ahead, astern and on the beam. Both masts were shot through by 11 inch shell which fortunately did not explode.

82. That she was not hit was probably due to masterly handling aided by accurate advice from the plot. There is no doubt that the DUKE OF YORK was the principal factor in the battle. She fought the SCHARNHORST at night and she won.

83. This in no way detracts from the achievements of the "S" class destroyers who with great gallantry and dash pressed in unsupported, to the closest ranges, to deliver their attacks, being subjected the while to the whole fire power of the enemy. Their resolution and skill shortened the battle and ensured the sinking of the ship.

84. In general the speed of wireless communication and the exceptional performance of radar reflects the greatest credit on the personnel concerned and in this night battle contributed in great measure to its success.

85. Plotting arrangements in the Fleet Flagship worked well and were of great assistance both to me and to the ship. I myself alternated between the plot and the Admiral's bridge, the Chief of Staff remaining in the plot. I feel very strongly that the officers in the plot must always be in the closest contact with the Admiral who should obviously be on the bridge.

86. Although failings in material and personnel were few during this action it should of course be remembered that the enemy inflicted very little damage on our ships and they were not therefore extensively tested under adverse conditions.

87. I should also like to record that the accurate and concise information supplied by the Admiralty in the early stages of this operation was of great assistance.

88. I have forwarded separately my recommendations for honours and awards as a result of this action.

(Signed) BRUCE FRASER,  
Admiral.