

Torpedoes were observed to be dropped from a greater height than that in most of the day attacks.

116. *Gunfire*.—On several occasions the cruisers leading the columns were prevented from firing a barrage by the destroyers adjacent to them.

Gun flashes probably showed the convoy up to aircraft manœuvring to attack. Flashless charges would be most useful for barrage fire at night.

ZULU sustained superficial damage from splinters, but no casualties.

Loss of M.V. IMPERIAL STAR.

117. When IMPERIAL STAR was torpedoed at 2032 it is probable that the explosion blew away both propellers and her rudder; in addition No. 6 hold and the after engine room were both flooded.

118. HEYTHROP, the rear ship of the port screen, proceeded alongside, but did not attempt to take IMPERIAL STAR in tow as she did not consider she was a suitable vessel to do so.

119. About 2045 EURALYUS ordered ORIBI to go to the assistance of IMPERIAL STAR. When ORIBI closed, HEYTHROP was already standing by, and while HEYTHROP took off IMPERIAL STAR's passengers, ORIBI proceeded close alongside to obtain reports from the Master and the N.L.O.†

They were first insistent that an attempt should be made to tow the vessel back to Gibraltar, but the Commanding Officer of ORIBI (Lieutenant-Commander J. E. H. McBeath, D.S.O., R.N.) realised that the only chance of saving the ship was to tow her the 220 miles to Malta, and prepared to do so.

120. HEYTHROP parted company at 2200 to rejoin the convoy. By 2235 ORIBI had IMPERIAL STAR in tow with 90 fathoms of special 5-inch wire hawser provided by IMPERIAL STAR.

121. For two hours the most determined attempts were made by ORIBI to tow IMPERIAL STAR towards Malta. Although a speed of 8 knots through the water was made nothing would prevent her steering in circles.

IMPERIAL STAR's normal displacement was 17,000 tons; in her damaged condition she was drawing 38 feet aft, and it is possible that her damaged stern was acting as a rudder.

122. Eventually, at 0120, ORIBI found herself being dragged stern first by her tow sheering off, and was forced to slip the tow.

ORIBI then went alongside to consult again with the Master and N.L.O. It was reluctantly decided that it was impracticable to tow the ship without tugs, which were not available at Malta, and that the remaining 141 persons aboard should be taken off by ORIBI and the ship scuttled.

Scuttling arrangements were not in place, and most of the flooding valves were jammed by the torpedo explosion; ORIBI therefore placed 3 depth charges lashed together just

below the waterline abreast a bulkhead, and these were fired by a safety fuse.

123. ORIBI cast off at 0340 and the charges fired 11 minutes later, starting a large fire aft. As this did not spread quickly, ORIBI shelled IMPERIAL STAR with 4.7-inch S.A.P. shell*, and left her at 0452, heavily on fire fore and aft and listing badly.

Aircraft from Malta sent to search for IMPERIAL STAR the next day failed to find any trace, and there can be no doubt that she sank or blew up.

124. ORIBI proceeded along the convoy route at 32 knots, and came up with them off Malta at 1215, having passed unmolested within 7 miles of the Sicilian coast in daylight.

Passage of Force X and Convoy through the Narrows.

125. Meanwhile Force X proceeded through the Narrows by the route previously arranged, i.e., along the south coast of Sicily. During the afternoon I had suggested to Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron the advisability of taking the Tunisian route owing to the presence of enemy forces in the vicinity. Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron replied that he preferred the Sicilian route, and in view of the enemy's hurried withdrawal to the north-east I agreed.

126. HERMIONE parted company from the convoy at 2030 to carry out a bombardment of Pantellaria harbour. A detailed account of this operation, which was very skilfully planned and executed by HERMIONE (Captain G. N. Oliver, R.N.) is contained in HERMIONE's report. Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron reports that the bombardment caused a most spectacular diversion which was clearly visible from the convoy and escort, then distant 50 miles.

127. No opposition was encountered by the convoy after the conclusion of the T/B attacks at 2040. The following lights on the Sicilian coast were seen to be exhibiting normal characteristics:—Admiralty List of Lights No. 1928 Cape San Marco, No. 1930 Cape Granitola, No. 1962 Cape Grosso.

128. At some time between 2000/27 and 0030/28, HERMIONE lost her port paravane. From the state of the end of the wire recovered there is little doubt that it was cut by an explosive cutter or other anti-sweep device. The route followed was identical with that taken by HERMIONE during Operation "Substance", on which occasion the starboard paravane towing wire when recovered at Malta was severely crippled and showed signs of having fouled a mine mooring. It therefore appears possible that a minefield exists on the Talbot Bank, the depth there being considerably less than 100 fathoms. This occurrence was reported in my message 0931 of 6th October.

129. HERMIONE rejoined at 0615/28. At daylight HEYTHROP and FARNDAL were detached to proceed ahead to fuel at Malta.

130. Although several formations of enemy aircraft were detected between dawn and the arrival of the convoy at Malta, the excellent protection given by shore-based fighters from Malta prevented any attack from developing.

Admiralty footnote

† N.L.O.—Naval Liaison Officer

Admiralty footnote

* S A P shell—an armour piercing shell