

The E-Boats were difficult to see and their presence was not disclosed until they went ahead on their engines at high speed. Possibly they would have achieved more success and suffered less damage had they kept quiet during and after the firing of their torpedoes. The handicap of not having a flashless propellant for star-shell was again keenly felt.

*Torpedoing and Escorting of SYDNEY STAR.*

66. NESTOR, who at 0255 had observed one ship of the convoy dropping astern, proceeded to investigate, and on closing, it was seen that the ship, identified as S.S. SYDNEY STAR, was moving slowly through the water on an opposite course to that of the convoy. On closer approach, it was observed that the starboard boats were being lowered; the ship however appeared undamaged, with no list and at normal trim.

67. Some time elapsed before NESTOR could obtain a reply to repeated requests for information, but eventually SYDNEY STAR reported that she had been torpedoed in No. 3 hold, and that she had 30 feet of water in that hold and appeared to be sinking.

68. NESTOR therefore decided to embark the troops numbering 470, and proceeded alongside for this purpose. Planks were rigged from SYDNEY STAR's gunwale to NESTOR's forecastle, and Jacob's ladders employed aft. Transfer occupied 50 minutes, and was completed by 0405.

69. Throughout this operation both ships were lying stopped in a position 4 miles from Pantellaria. Three E-Boats were observed whilst the transfer of troops was proceeding, but no attacks developed. On completion of the transfer, personnel on board NESTOR numbered 774 (231 ship's company, 56 army passengers, 487 ex SYDNEY STAR).

70. Whilst alongside, NESTOR impressed on the Master of the SYDNEY STAR the absolute necessity of keeping his ship afloat and getting her under way again. At 0410 NESTOR cast off and SYDNEY STAR was able to follow her at 12 knots. It subsequently transpired that her No. 1 and No. 2 holds had also made water, and that the damage was caused by a projectile from one of the escort during the E-boat *mêlée*.

71. At 0615 two T/B aircraft were sighted by NESTOR on the port quarter. Barrage fire was opened and the aircraft crossed astern making off in the general direction of the convoy. At 0650 two more T/Bs were sighted, this time on the port bow. Barrage fire was again opened and the aircraft crossed ahead and made off towards the convoy. Thinking that SYDNEY STAR was about to be attacked, NESTOR made a "Help" signal, in consequence of which HERMIONE was detached by Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron at 0700 to join NESTOR and SYDNEY STAR.

*Approach to, and Arrival at Malta, 24th July (D.4).*

72. At 0705 when some 60 miles west of Gozo, a half-hearted attack was carried out by 3 T/B aircraft on the main convoy and

escort. Torpedoes were released at long range when the destroyer screen opened fire. Ships took avoiding action, but no tracks were seen.

73. In order to afford time for the cruisers and destroyers of Force X to discharge personnel and stores and refuel, it had been arranged that Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron should proceed ahead with the cruisers and Hunts at high speed at about 0700, provided the situation as regards enemy surface forces was considered satisfactory. At this time, although all enemy surface units had been reported in their respective harbours on the previous day, no morning reconnaissance report had been received from Vice-Admiral, Malta.

74. There appeared to be little likelihood of enemy surface forces making contact with the main convoy, a greater source of worry being the SYDNEY STAR. At 0730 the situation appeared easier, and realising that any further delay might jeopardise the arrangements for getting the convoy into Grand Harbour and for sailing Force X to rejoin Force H, Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron, with ARETHUSA and MANXMAN, parted company from the convoy and proceeded at 25 knots to Malta. At 0830 a reconnaissance report was received from Vice-Admiral, Malta, stating that no enemy surface forces were in the vicinity. This removed what little fears yet remained of an attack by surface forces.

75. At 1000, SYDNEY STAR, HERMIONE and NESTOR were attacked by 8 JU.87 dive bombers with German markings and 2 high level bombers. The attacks were well synchronised, and in the case of the dive bombing attack, well pressed home. One bomb fell 20 yards to port, and another 20 yards to starboard of NESTOR; others fell close to HERMIONE—but no ship was hit. One JU.87 was shot down by A.A. fire. One Beaufighter was in company but failed to make an interception.

76. EDINBURGH, ARETHUSA and MANXMAN entered Grand Harbour at 1130 with ships' companies fallen in and bands playing. A great reception was accorded them by the people of Malta.

77. HERMIONE, NESTOR and SYDNEY STAR, having taken the route north of Malta, arrived at 1400. The safe arrival of SYDNEY STAR reflects great credit on the Commanding Officer of NESTOR, Commander A. S. Rosenthal, R.A.N., who showed judgment, initiative and good seamanship in handling a delicate situation so close to the enemy's coast and in the presence of enemy E-Boats. It was appropriate that the Commanding Officer and most of his crew should be Australians.

78. The main convoy escorted by COSSACK, MAORI, SIKH, FOXHOUND and FARNDALE continued without further incident and, proceeding by the route south of Malta, entered harbour at 1530.

*Movements of Force H, 24th July (D.4).*

79. Meanwhile Force H had reached position 37° 35' N, 5° 15' E. at 0615, when two Swordfish were flown off to locate MANCHESTER