

98. While on passage, two formations of enemy fighters were sighted, but did not attack.

The Fulmar escort landed on at 1845, six Swordfish just after sunset, and six after dark; all were very short of petrol.

99. It was not until 1540 that the last of the fighters flown off at 1314 could be landed on; one ran out of petrol and force-landed at 1535.

The fighter situation became acute at 1520 when only three fighters, short of ammunition and fuel, were over the fleet. There were none from 1550 until four were flown off at 1605.

100. Two sections of fighters were vectored on to a Cante 506 shadower at 1630, which they shot down.

Between 1820 and 1920 a formation of 7 C.R.42s twice approached the fleet, but withdrew on the approach of the Fulmars and no combat took place.

101. During the day Fulmars destroyed five enemy aircraft, viz., 4 T/Bs and one Cant 506, without loss by enemy action. Two Fulmars were shot down by the fleet, and one force-landed short of fuel. Two crews were picked up.

*Night T/B Attack on Force X and Convoy, 27th September (D.3).*

102. After Force A (battleships, ARK ROYAL and 9 destroyers) had parted company at 1855, the convoy and escort were formed in Cruising Disposition No. 17.

103. Between 2000 and 2040, four T/B attacks were made from the port beam, two or three aircraft taking part in each attack.

The moon was bright and on the starboard quarter of the convoy.

SHEFFIELD reports that before and during the early stages of these attacks a considerable amount of signalling with unnecessarily bright lights was taking place in the convoy; this presumably refers to the signals mentioned in paragraph 107 below.

*(a) First Attack.*

104. At 1955, when the convoy was steering 114°, COSSACK, stationed on the port bow of the convoy, detected aircraft on R.D.F., and about five minutes later sighted an aircraft on the port side. COSSACK thereupon fired a white and green Very light, the signal for T/B attack.

105. The Rear-Admiral, 10th Cruiser Squadron ordered an emergency turn of 40° to port together by rapid manœuvring procedure. KENYA sounded two short blasts and turned, followed belatedly by the port column of the convoy.

This signal was incorrectly transmitted as 45° to starboard and EDINBURGH and the starboard column turned to starboard.

106. The port screen and the convoy opened fire to port, but only HERMIONE and COSSACK actually saw aircraft.

COSSACK observed the aircraft making white flashes before turning in to attack.

As far as is known, no torpedo tracks were observed.

107. As position V was reached at 2010, Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron made the executive signal by V/S to EDINBURGH for the pre-arranged white pendant turn to 071° and himself altered to the course. At this time the port column was formed on an approximate line of bearing 114°/294°; ships were not ordered to follow in the wake of their guide.

Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron first turned the starboard column to the original course (114°) and then led round to 071°.

*(b) Second Attack.*

108. Aircraft were reported bearing 090°, 3 miles at 2010 and others were detected on the starboard bow. Both these formations crossed from starboard to port, and attacked from the port beam. Two aircraft were seen by LAFOREY, flying from starboard to port about 2 miles ahead.

ZULU heard 4 separate aircraft distinctly, but only saw one, which passed so close that her guns could not train fast enough to get on.

Again, as far as is known, no torpedo attacks were observed.

*(c) Third Attack.*

109. Three T/Bs attacked from the port beam at 2022. HERMIONE saw a torpedo explode at the end of its run on the starboard quarter of the convoy. Aircraft were sighted and engaged by the port screen and convoy.

110. At about this time, ROWALLAN CASTLE and CITY OF CALCUTTA, the two rear ships of the port column, were in collision; no serious damage occurred, and both ships proceeded.

*(d) Fourth Attack.*

111. COSSACK sighted aircraft on the port side at 2027. A torpedo was dropped on SHEFFIELD's port bow at 2029, and five minutes later she had to turn to starboard under full rudder to avoid another dropped on her port beam.

112. At 2032 in position 37° 31' N., 10° 46' E., IMPERIAL STAR was struck port side aft by a torpedo. The subsequent proceedings of IMPERIAL STAR and the ships which proceeded to her assistance are included later in this report.

HEYTHROP, the rear destroyer of the port screen, sighted and engaged an aircraft at this time, possibly that which torpedoed IMPERIAL STAR.

113. ORIBI was attacked at 2036, a torpedo being dropped 800 yards just abaft her port beam, which she avoided by turning stern-on and increasing to full speed. This aircraft was shot down with pom-pom and Oerlikon guns by ORIBI.

114. No further attacks were made, but at 2312 and again at 2340 R.D.F. detected formations closing to within 10 miles, then subsequently retiring, having failed to find the convoy.

*Remarks on Night T/B Attacks.*

115. *Enemy tactics.*—All attacks appear to have been made from the port beam, although this was not directly up-moon, which was on the starboard quarter.