

181. I attribute the immunity from attack experienced by Force X and the convoy after passing Skerki Channel to using the route proposed by the Vice-Admiral, Malta. This well-judged move coupled with HERMIONE's bombardment appears to have deceived the enemy completely.

(Signed) J. F. SOMERVILLE,
Vice Admiral,
Flag Officer Commanding,
Force H.

OPERATION "HARPOON"

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 24th June, 1942 by Vice-Admiral Sir Alban T. B. Curteis, K.C.B., Senior Officer, Force T.

H.M.S. KENYA,
24th June, 1942.

REPORT ON OPERATION "HARPOON"

Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships the following report on Operation "Harpoon"—the passage of a convoy of six merchant ships through the Western Mediterranean to Malta.

Passage from Clyde as far as the Straits of Gibraltar. Thursday, 4th June to Friday, 12th June.

(Times Zone -2 (suffix B))

2. Having hoisted my flag in KENYA at 0900 on 4th June and having that afternoon held conferences with the Commanding Officers of H.M. Ships of Force T present in the Clyde and other officers concerned, Convoy W.S.19Z and escort sailed as required to comply with Admiralty messages, forming up a.m. Friday, 5th June as follows:—

Convoy W.S. 19Z—

TROILUS (Senior Liaison Officer acting as Commodore), BURDWAN, CHANT, ORARI, TANIMBAR.

Ocean Escort—

KENYA (Senior Officer, Force T), LIVERPOOL.

A/S Escort—

ONSLOW (Captain (D), 17th Destroyer Flotilla), BEDOUIN, ICARUS, MARNE, MATCHLESS, ESCAPADE, BLANKNEY, MIDDLETON, BADSWORTH, KUJAWIAK.

3. It early became clear that the merchant ships would not live up to the name of a 14-knot convoy, for BURDWAN claimed to be able to do only 13 knots and CHANT failed to produce much more, while TANIMBAR, a diesel ship, was unable to steam in the range of her critical revolutions, approximately 12.5 to 13.5 knots. However, favourable weather and a route selected short in anticipation of delay enabled the force to keep to timetable.

4. The passage was uneventful except for

(a) heavy oil consumption by KUJAWIAK necessitating detaching her at 0800/9 to refuel;

(b) identifying Portuguese VILLA FRANCA—Greenland to Lisbon with cod at 2100/8;

(c) several A/S contacts and attacks all of which were considered to be "non-sub."

5. To allow for refuelling, KENYA, BEDOUIN and KUJAWIAK approached Gibraltar without being visible on the night of the 10th June. KENYA only sailed to be clear of land by dawn 11th June.

Seven destroyers of the Gibraltar force sailed by day on the 11th June and the eight remaining destroyers from Home Waters reached Gibraltar after dark 11th June, though probably sighted from the African coast approaching Spartel. LIVERPOOL should have entered sufficiently late not to be sighted from the shore on the night of 11th June.

Passage from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Point of Separation of Forces W and X.

(Times Zone -3 (suffix C))

Friday, 12th June.

6. The convoy having passed through the Straits during darkness 11th/12th June was joined by the following units:—

Convoy—

S.S. KENTUCKY (Tanker).

Force T—

MALAYA, EAGLE, ARGUS, CAIRO, CHARYBDIS, Destroyers (who sailed 11th June) WISHART, WESTCOTT, WRESTLER, VIDETTE, ANTELOPE, ITHURIEL, PARTRIDGE.

Minesweepers—

HEBE, SPEEDY, RYE, HYTHE.

Motor Launches—

121, 134, 135, 168, 459, 462.

Temporarily Attached—

WELSHMAN.

Separately Routed—

Force Y—BROWN RANGER, GERANIUM, COLTSFOOT.

7. 1703.—The Spanish M.V. CABO PRIOR must have seen the convoy.

Saturday, 13th June.

8. Delay in starting the refuelling programme was caused by navigational errors. The same happened on Operation "Halberd" and it is recommended that if possible the refuelling force should be sailed with the remainder. Nevertheless, by using LIVERPOOL and continuing till well after dark CAIRO and 14 destroyers were refuelled.

9. In spite of maintaining a section of Hurricanes in the air from 0845 till dark, and an A/S patrol of Swordfish, the convoy was kept under observation by enemy aircraft and reported at 1045, 1151, 1405 and at 1202 by a U-Boat bearing 090°. Hurricanes made contact with one JU.88, probably killing the rear gunner, and destroyed one Cant Z.1007.

10. 2245.—Report of cruisers and destroyers leaving Cagliari was received.

Sunday, 14th June

11. 0242.—The convoy was probably reported by an Italian U-boat.

12. 0650.—Snoopers were again in company, reporting Force T at 0650 and 0750. Force Y was also reported at 1810.

13. 0730.—Paravanes were streamed.