

16 Group.

(i) To hunt and destroy E-Boats and destroyers in the Southern North Sea.

(ii) To provide anti-E-Boat and destroyer reconnaissance in conjunction with Naval Surface Forces operating in the Southern North Sea.

Form of Operations.

11. It was correctly appreciated that anti-ship operations would take place mostly at night and at dawn and dusk, and these were to take the following forms:—

At night.

(i) Operation of Albacore and Swordfish under G.C.I. control of 10 and 11 Groups.

(ii) Reconnaissance by Wellington flare-dropping A.S.V. aircraft operating under 16 and 19 Groups, and the subsequent direction of Naval Surface Craft and/or Coastal Command Beaufighters to the target.

At dusk and dawn.

Beaufighter sweeps with the object of destroying enemy Light Surface Craft when leaving harbour at dusk or returning from patrol at dawn.

12. As in the case of anti-U-Boat measures, I was prepared to implement these plans as a result of enemy reaction to exercises such as "Fabius", or to any other event which might have led him to believe that the assault was imminent.

Main Battle Zone.

13. In agreement with the Admiralty and the Air Commander-in-Chief, A.E.A.F., I demarcated an area between the lines Portland to Jersey on the West and North Foreland to Calais on the East, as the main battle zone. Coastal Command aircraft were to operate primarily on the flanks of this area and only to a limited extent within it. This was an important point. I expected such a concentration of shipping of all sorts in this zone that even by day I considered it would be difficult to distinguish friend from foe, and at night almost impossible. As it turned out, however, it became possible, by special briefing at Area Combined Headquarters, for my anti-shipping aircraft to operate within the Battle Zone outside the central area containing the cross-channel shipping lanes.

Order of Battle.

14. The Order of Battle, as it stood on 6th June, 1944, shows that, in order to make the flooded area in the S.W. Approaches effective, I deployed no less than 21 of my A/U squadrons together with 4 Fleet Air Arm squadrons in this area. My anti-shipping striking force consisted of seven Beaufighter squadrons, of which I allotted initially five to the east of the main battle zone where the threat of E-Boats was considered greater, and two to the west.

CONDUCT AND RESULTS OF OPERATIONS.**U-Boat Operations in the North.**

15. Intensive operations for Coastal Command began in mid-May, although only the Anti-U-Boat squadrons in the North were involved. At this time the enemy decided hurriedly to reinforce his U-Boat flotillas in the Bay of Biscay by moving a number of his Norwegian-based boats into the Atlantic and

thence southwards to the Channel and French West Coast ports. The U-Boats were presumably in too much of a hurry to proceed submerged, and their Commanding Officers were apparently confident in the efficiency of their anti-aircraft defences, for they remained on the surface and shot it out with the aircraft to their own detriment. Every opportunity was taken to bring to bear on the enemy the fullest weight of attack without reducing the forces preparing for the vital struggle which was shortly to take place in the S.W. Approaches, and I therefore moved detachments of squadrons from Iceland and Northern Ireland to airfields and flying boat bases in northern Scotland and the Shetlands, to supplement the aircraft at the disposal of the A.O.C. 18 Group. All through June and July these Northern operations went on, and towards the end of July they had extended into Arctic waters, where the enemy seemed to be trying to work round into the Atlantic out of aircraft range. This meant that operations were being conducted at no less than 850 miles from the aircraft's bases. At the end of June, however, I had moved the whole of the VLR* Liberator squadron from Iceland to Tain, and this squadron bore the brunt of the operations conducted in these very far Northern regions.

16. During June perhaps three or four boats in all got through to the Bay of Biscay. The rest were either destroyed or damaged and forced to put back to Norway. In those Northern latitudes at that time of year there was no darkness, and, at the beginning of the battle at any rate, few of the Northern U-Boats had been fitted with "schnorkel". These two factors were largely responsible for the opportunities for so many attacks.

17. During the period mid-May to the end of July, we sighted seventy-five U-Boats in Northern Waters and attacked fifty-one. Of these sixteen were sunk or probably sunk and twelve damaged. These successes were not achieved without cost. 162 Canadian Squadron sank four U-Boats and lost three Catalinas in June alone. Two Victoria Crosses were awarded to officers taking part in these operations, one posthumously to the Captain of a Catalina of the afore-mentioned 162 (R.C.A.F.) Squadron, and a second to the Captain of a Catalina of 210 Squadron.

U-Boat Operations in the South.

18. Despite the importance of these far away operations, it was inevitable that the main attention should be concentrated on the beaches of Normandy and the English Channel. The preparations for the assault and the large scale exercises during the last few days of May and the beginning of June did not produce any reactions from the enemy, and on 6th June the majority of the enemy's operational U-Boats were still assembled in the Biscay ports. They were not offensively deployed on that date, so there can be no doubt that the enemy had been unable to discover the date of our landing. On D-Day however, he reacted swiftly. It soon became clear that the U-Boats were making for the assault area with the utmost speed—that is, on the surface whenever possible. The air patrols which had been planned to counter this move were already being flown and successes soon materialised. Off the Brest Peninsula and in the mouth of the

* Very Long Range.