

25. Owing to the evident inability of the Russians to provide air co-operation in the Barents Sea, I had asked for R.A.F. reconnaissance and long-range fighter aircraft to be stationed in North Russia. These would provide the convoys, during the worst part of their passage, with A/S patrols, fighter protection and reconnaissance against surface attack. But the number of aircraft in Coastal Command was insufficient to meet any of these requirements and the convoys had to continue this most hazardous passage virtually without air co-operation (see also paragraph 32).

P.Q.16 and Q.P.12

26. P.Q.16, which sailed on 20th May, contained 35 ships and, despite the fact that this was the most unfavourable time of the year, was the largest convoy which had so far been run. It was escorted by five destroyers, four corvettes, four trawlers, one minesweeper and one A.A. ship. It was located by enemy aircraft on 24th May and, though one shadower was shot down on 25th May by the Hurricane from the C.A.M. ship, was shadowed continuously for the next six days.

27. The first attack, 380 miles from the enemy aerodromes, was made on 25th May by eight torpedo aircraft and about twenty Ju.88s: one ship, the American s.s. CARLTON, had a steam pipe fractured and turned back for Iceland, in tow of the trawler NORTHERN SPRAY: one Ju.88 was shot down and four more were probably destroyed.

28. The main weight of air attack started on the afternoon of 26th May and continued almost without respite until 30th May. During this period no less than 34 torpedo aircraft and 210 bombers attacked the convoy, sinking five ships and damaging three others, as well as the Polish destroyer GARLAND: three aircraft were shot down and twelve more were probably destroyed. Numerous attempts were

made by U-boats to attack the convoy, but with one exception they were driven off, several U-boats being damaged: in the one successful attack, one ship was sunk, making a total loss of six ships out of 35. The smallness of the losses in comparison with the enemy effort was due to the skill and endurance of the escort, under the command of the Commanding Officer of the ASHANTI, and to the steadiness, good gunfire and excellent station keeping of the convoy. The German bombers pressed their attacks home on one day only, while their torpedo aircraft were cautious in the extreme and generally ineffective. Some Russian fighters were present on the last two days and claimed to have destroyed some of the enemy after their attacks.

29. Q.P.12, escorted by six destroyers, one A.A. ship, one minesweeper and four trawlers, left Kola Inlet on 31st May. They were sighted shortly after sailing; but the enemy concentrated all his force on the more important eastbound convoy and Q.P.12 reached Iceland without being attacked.

30. The cruiser covering force was in company with P.Q.16 for the first air attack, but their operations were otherwise without incident, as were those of the heavy covering force. The threat of surface attack by the two pocket battleships at Narvik did not materialise.

P.Q.17 and Q.P.13

31. The operation for the supply of Malta, early in June, left insufficient destroyers in the Home Fleet for the simultaneous running of Russian convoys. The next pair were therefore postponed until 27th June.

Summary of Results

32. The approximate scale of attack and the losses for the convoys run during the quarter were:—

Convoy	Ships sailed	Ships turned back	Ships lost	Attacked by	Reached destination
P.Q. 14	24	16	1	U-boats	7
Q.P. 10	16	1	2 2	U-boats 34 bombers	11
P.Q. 15	25	—	0 0 3	U-boats 6 bombers 6 torpedo aircraft	22
Q.P. 11	13	—	1 0 0	3 destroyers U-boats 4 torpedo aircraft	12
P.Q. 16	35	1	1 5 1	U-boats 208 bombers 34 torpedo aircraft	27
Q.P. 12	15	1	0	Nil	14

Note.—About 15 U-boats operated against each pair of convoys.

EXTRACT FROM DESPATCH COVERING THE PERIOD 1ST JULY TO 30TH SEPTEMBER, 1942

Home Fleet,

3rd January, 1943.

Threat of Heavy Surface Attack

Information received in June indicated that the enemy intended, at last to bring out his main units to attack the next eastbound convoy east of Bear Island. The strategical situation thus produced was wholly favourable to the

enemy. His heavy ships would be operating close to their own coast, with the support of powerful shore-based air reconnaissance and striking forces, and protected, if he so desired, by a screen of U-boats in the channels between Spitzbergen and Norway. Our covering forces, on the other hand, if they entered these waters, would be without shore-based air support, one thousand miles from their base, with their destroyers too short of fuel to escort a damaged ship to harbour.