

than attempt his destruction, and on this policy I acted.

Their Lordships' signal had enquired my "intentions" as regards re-engaging with PRINCE OF WALES. I was careful in my reply to state my "opinions" and not my intentions, and I was grateful that They left the matter to my judgment."

24. After full consideration of the facts, I am of the opinion that this decision was justified and correct. Some of the factors affecting it require emphasis. The PRINCE OF WALES, with many of the contractor's workmen still on board, had joined the Fleet on 25th March. It was not till 27th April that the last of her turrets could be accepted from the contractors and that practice drills with the whole main armament could be started. Captain Leach had been able to report on 17th May, shortly before the Fleet sailed for this operation, that he considered his ship fit to operate; but neither he nor I interpreted that report as implying that she was fully worked up. Her turrets, of a new and untried model, were known to be liable to teething troubles and could already be seen to be suffering them. The effects of all this on her gunnery had been witnessed by the Rear-Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, and he knew, in addition, that her bridge was seriously damaged, that she had taken in 400 tons of water aft and could not exceed 27 knots. The BISMARCK and PRINZ EUGEN, on the other hand, after working up for many months under ideal conditions in the Baltic, had given evidence of a very high degree of efficiency: the BISMARCK had been hit, but the Rear-Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, could see no sign of damage.

25. In these circumstances, the senior officer on the spot was clearly justified in his conclusion that he was more likely to achieve his object of ensuring the enemy's destruction by keeping touch until the approaching reinforcements should arrive. If these powerful reinforcements had not been in the vicinity, the problem would, of course, have been a different one.

26. At 1445 the Admiralty asked the Rear-Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, to report on the percentage fighting efficiency of the BISMARCK and requested his intentions as regards PRINCE OF WALES re-engaging. The Rear-Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, replied that the BISMARCK's efficiency was uncertain but high, and that he considered that PRINCE OF WALES "should not re-engage until other heavy ships are in contact unless interception fails. Doubtful if she has speed to force action." From his reply I assumed that the Rear-Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, would not force action unless the situation changed materially, or instructions were received either from the Admiralty or myself. I had complete confidence in Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker's judgment, nor did I wish the enemy to be forced away to the westward.

Shadowing during Daylight on 24th May.

27. After the action had been broken off, the three ships continued to shadow. The enemy proceeded on a south-westerly course, with minor alterations, until 1240. They tried hard, by frequent alterations of course and

speed, to throw off the shadowers; and the rapid variations of visibility, between two and seventeen miles, were of great assistance to them; but their efforts were without success. SUFFOLK, using her R.D.F. in a masterly manner to overcome the difficulties of varying visibility, shadowed from the starboard quarter to cover any attempt to break back along the ice; NORFOLK, with PRINCE OF WALES in company, kept out on the port quarter to ensure the detection of any alteration to the southward. About 1240 the enemy seem to have abandoned hope of evasion by daylight, for they turned south, presumably to gain sea-room for another attempt by night, and reduced to 24 knots.

Movements of the Battlefleet.

28. At the time the first report of the sighting of the enemy was received by me, KING GEORGE V, with REPULSE, VICTORIOUS, GALATEA, AURORA, KENYA, HERMIONE and nine destroyers in company, was in approximate position 60° 20' N. 13° W. I had always thought the enemy, when breaking out, might have long distance aircraft reconnoitring ahead of them, to give warning of any of our forces in a position to intercept; if either or both of our capital ship forces were reported, the enemy might turn back through the Denmark Strait or shape course and speed to avoid contact. I therefore altered course to 280° and increased to 27 knots with the idea of reaching a position from which I could intercept the enemy to the eastward of the Denmark Strait, and at the same time be able to reinforce HOOD and PRINCE OF WALES if they were able to bring him to action and reduce his speed, or force him in my direction. As more information was received, it became clear that the enemy intended to continue his attempt to break out; though there was still the chance that he would turn back when he encountered HOOD and PRINCE OF WALES or, if HOOD and PRINCE OF WALES were to the westward of him when contact was made, he might endeavour to break to the south or south-eastward.

29. The sinking of the HOOD and the damage to PRINCE OF WALES made it unlikely that the enemy would be forced to turn back, and the best hope lay in interception by my force, though this would not become possible unless he reduced his speed. Course was altered accordingly to 260°, and later to 240°. Reports suggested that the enemy was keeping a few miles off the edge of the ice, possibly in the hope of finding thick weather. From my point of view the greatest danger lay in his hugging the coast of Greenland, and then making his way to the westward, where I suspected he might have an oiler: for, if he could refuel, he would be able to use higher speeds than KING GEORGE V could maintain and so get away.

30. The enemy's alteration to the southward and his reduction of speed were a great relief, although there seemed a good chance that he was leading our forces into a concentration of U-boats. It suggested that he did not know of my force and it made interception possible.

31. There was still a grave risk of his getting away by sheer speed, and though I knew the lack of experience of the crews of the aircraft in VICTORIOUS and of VICTORIOUS's own