

increased number of convoy sailings and movements of naval forces. One U-boat was known to be in the Maldives area, and on the 16th another made an attack off Pondicherry, sinking one vessel. A Catalina assisted in the rescue work, but the offensive anti-submarine search which was immediately instituted proved fruitless. What was probably the same submarine was sighted and attacked by a Catalina of No. 240 Squadron returning from a convoy escort on the 22nd. Probable damage was done in spite of the difficult conditions of light and angle of attack, and a hunt to exhaustion was immediately initiated using Catalinas of both 225 and 222 Groups. The enemy was not destroyed, although depth-charges were dropped on a possible sighting, and no further attacks were made on convoys in the area.

119. 225 Group aircraft continued to search for the submarine until after dawn on the 25th, but the 222 Group detachment returned to Ceylon to provide cover for units of Eastern Fleet. Beauforts carried out anti-submarine sweeps in front of Trincomalee harbour, while the Catalinas escorted the arriving ships to port.

120. In spite of defensive air patrols, one independently routed merchant vessel was sunk in the Maldives area, but aircraft again located survivors and guided a cruiser to the spot.

121. Considering the great amount of shipping activity, the month witnessed comparatively few attacks. It is probable, however, that enemy submarines were being employed on reconnaissance, particularly of the growing concentration of naval forces. There is no doubt that the provision of patrols and escorts of the greatest density possible with the forces available was responsible for denying to these enemy reconnaissance submarines much useful information.

122. In February the number of enemy submarines estimated to be in the Indian Ocean rose to ten, and patrol activity was intensified to meet the threat. It became necessary to augment air cover for the threatened areas around Ceylon with Catalinas and Wellingtons from 225 Group. Sinkings were heavy during the month, but one submarine was destroyed by escort vessels with the co-operation of the covering aircraft, and another, after it had sunk H.M.T. KHEDIVE ISMAIL, by H.M. destroyers who were guarding the troopship in such a strength that no air escort was deemed necessary.

123. The sinkings necessitated many rescue operations by aircraft, and the survivors of three ships were located and covered while surface craft were guided to them. The outstanding rescue was that of survivors of a ship torpedoed fourteen days earlier 800 miles from the mainland.

124. The other major operation of the month, which absorbed a considerable number of aircraft hours, was the cover given to a slow-moving floating dock from Bombay to Trincomalee—cover which would probably not have been afforded had the "Stipple" procedure been in force.

125. Towards the end of February there arose a potential threat to the east coast of India from the move of a considerable portion

of the Japanese Fleet to Singapore. Plans were laid for the assembly and despatch of air striking forces including all heavy bomber squadrons should the occasion arise. Bases in Southern India and Ceylon were prepared and stocked for the possible advent of large forces from Bengal, and No. 200 (Liberator G.R.) Squadron from West Africa and No. 47 (Torpedo) Beaufighter Squadron from the Mediterranean arrived as reinforcements. No. 27 (Coastal Fighter) Beaufighter Squadron was detached from Bengal to work with No. 47 Squadron at Madras. The threat did not materialise but the organisation built up has been retained in skeleton form.

126. March witnessed a peak of activity which began on the first of the month with a hunt to exhaustion following the sinking of a merchant vessel twenty-five miles south-west of Galle. In the forty-fourth hour of the search a Catalina sighted and attacked a surfaced submarine by moonlight. The enemy U-boat was not seen after the attack, and although it was probably damaged the search was continued for two more days.

127. Further enemy attacks resulted in two sinkings in the Arabian Sea, four in more southerly waters, and one of a troopship in the northern Bay of Bengal, an area hitherto almost completely immune from submarine attacks. There were regrettable delays in reporting the sinking, and thus the assembling of forces to search for the submarine, but the limited number of aircraft available to 173 Wing which controlled the area, eked out by Beaufighters from 224 Group, carried out a modified search until the arrival of reinforcements. The flying effort and quick turn round of the few aircraft available, however, was particularly creditable, one Liberator of No. 354 Squadron being airborne again forty-seven minutes after landing.

128. No. 230 (Sunderland) Squadron arrived in the Command during March, but it did not begin to operate fully until later, since lack of spares kept its serviceability low.

129. In April the number of submarines operating in the Indian Ocean fell to an estimated two. One was believed to be in the Maldives area and the other to be operating on the trade routes between Freemantle and Colombo, out of range of aircraft operating from the Maldives. Beaufort aircraft were thus employed on coastal convoy escort, and long-range aircraft were held at Ceylon in readiness for a threat further afield. No ships were sunk in the waters around India during the month, and the gradual change-over from the defensive to the offensive was symbolised in this month by the successful escort provided to Eastern Fleet in their strike with carrier-borne aircraft against Sabang in North-West Sumatra.

130. In May, Eastern Fleet was again covered during its journey to and from Sourabaya. During the month, it became possible to discontinue the Arakan coast patrols. No sightings of any importance had been made in the six months that the patrols had been carried out, and the continued absence of a threat in this area now allowed of a diversion of these aircraft to more positive work.

131. The loss of Liberators (B.24) engaged on photographic reconnaissance of the Andamans, Nicobars and North Sumatra led