

Squadron, in the Denmark Strait, was ordered to rejoin the Rear-Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, after completing with fuel. In order to conserve fuel, this movement was deferred, SUFFOLK being sailed to arrive on patrol just before the earliest possible time of arrival of the enemy.

(d) ARETHUSA (Captain Alex C. Chapman), who was due at Reykjavik with the Vice-Admiral Commanding, Orkneys and Shetlands, on a visit of inspection to Iceland, was ordered to remain at Hvalfiord at the disposal of the Rear-Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron.

(e) KING GEORGE V (Captain Wilfrid R. Patterson, C.V.O.), flying the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, GALATEA (Captain Edward W. B. Sim), flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Alban T. B. Curteis, C.B., Rear-Admiral Commanding, Second Cruiser Squadron, AURORA (Captain William G. Agnew), KENYA (Captain Michael M. Denny, C.B.), NEPTUNE (Captain Rory C. O'Connor), and the remaining three Home Fleet destroyers ACTIVE (Lieutenant-Commander Michael W. Tomkinson), PUNJABI (Commander Stuart A. Buss, M.V.O.), and NESTOR (Commander Conrad B. Alers-Hankey, D.S.C.), were brought to short notice at Scapa. INGLEFIELD (Captain Percy Todd, D.S.O.; Captain (D), Third Destroyer Flotilla) and INTREPID (Commander Roderick C. Gordon, D.S.O.) arrived on 22nd May and joined this force, as did HERMIONE (Captain Geoffrey N. Oliver) on completing the repair of her fourth turret.

(f) The sailing of VICTORIOUS (Captain Henry C. Bovell) and REPULSE (Captain William G. Tennant, C.B., M.V.O.) in Convoy W.S. 8B was cancelled by the Admiralty and they were placed at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet. VICTORIOUS was already at Scapa and REPULSE was ordered to sail from the Clyde to join.

(g) The submarine MINERVE (Lieutenant de Vaisseau P. M. Sommeville) on patrol off South West Norway was moved to the vicinity of position 61° 53' N. 3° 15' E., and the P.31 (Lieutenant John B. de B. Kershaw) was sailed from Scapa to patrol west of Stadtlandet.

(h) A bombing attack by Royal Air Force aircraft was arranged for the dark hours and a reconnaissance of the coast from Trondheim to Kristiansand South for first light on 22nd May. Neither of these was able to establish definitely whether the enemy was still at Bergen, owing to the fog and low cloud over the Norwegian coast, but some of the bombers attacked ships in harbour.

(i) The Admiralty transferred 828 Squadron of Albacores to Sumburgh, to attack the enemy at Bergen. I had hoped to embark them in VICTORIOUS in place of her Fulmars, but when it became known that the enemy had sailed, it was too late to do so.

5. The lack of further news about the enemy's movements was disturbing; and the need was felt of an air patrol similar to "Sentinel" (since established) across the route between Norwegian waters and the Northern Straits to

report if the enemy left. Here, too, weather conditions were bad, with large stretches of fog, but it would have been possible with the aid of A.S.V.* to maintain some sort of watch.†

6. This state of uncertainty continued until the evening of 22nd May, when the Commanding Officer, R.N. Air Station, Hatston (Captain Henry L. St. J. Fancourt), on his own initiative, despatched an aircraft to try to break through the fog belt to the Norwegian coast. This aircraft carried Commander Geoffrey A. Rotherham, O.B.E., the executive officer of the station and a Naval observer with much experience, and was piloted by Lieutenant (A) Noel E. Goddard, R.N.V.R. Flying almost at surface level, they succeeded in penetrating to the fiords and carried out a search of the position where the enemy ships had been photographed. Finding nothing there, they examined Bergen harbour, under heavy fire, and reported that the ships had sailed. This skilful and determined reconnaissance is deserving of the highest praise, as is the initiative of Captain Fancourt in ordering it.

7. The report of the departure of the warships and convoy reached me at 2000 on 22nd May and, in view of the qualifications of the aircraft crew, I had no hesitation in accepting it. There seemed to be four possible explanations of the enemy's intentions:—

(a) The convoy might contain important military stores for Northern Norway and have gone on up the Leads. Movements of troops to Kirkenes had been reported for some weeks.

(b) The convoy might contain a raiding force bound for Iceland, possibly with a view to capturing an aerodrome for operations against Reykjavik and Hvalfiord.

(c) The battleship and cruiser might be trying to break out on to the trade routes. This theory had the support of Admiralty intelligence. If it were correct, the further question arose of which passage the enemy would select. Such information as was available suggested that on all previous occasions the Denmark Strait route had been taken, and this was therefore considered the most likely; but the passages between Iceland and Scotland could not be ruled out, especially in view of the enemy's stop at Bergen.

(d) The battleship and cruiser might have covered an important convoy over the dangerous sea passage as far as the Inner Leads, and might now be returning to the Baltic.

8. The third possible move carried the greater menace to our interests and dispositions were therefore made to meet it. These dispositions also gave a reasonable possibility of interfering, before it was too late, with any attempted landing in Iceland.

(a) SUFFOLK was sailed to join the Rear-Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, in the Denmark Strait.

Admiralty footnotes:—

* A.S.V.—radar equipment in aircraft.

† At the request of the Admiralty, Coastal Command carried out the more southerly air patrols at this time and there were insufficient A.S.V. aircraft left to fly any further patrols.