



SUPPLEMENT

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SINKING OF THE GERMAN BATTLE-CRUISER SCHARNHORST

ON THE 26TH DECEMBER, 1943.

The accompanying Despatch was submitted on the 28th January, 1944, to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty by Admiral Sir BRUCE A. FRASER, K.C.B., K.B.E., Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet.

Be pleased to lay before The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty my despatch of the battle of 26th December, 1943, off the North Cape which culminated in the destruction of the German battlecruiser SCHARNHORST. All times are Zone minus one.

PRELIMINARY DISPOSITIONS.

2. After proceeding to Kola Inlet and providing battlefleet cover for J.W.55A* I returned with Force 2 (See paragraph 17) to Akureyri† to refuel preparatory to covering convoy J.W.55B.

3. With the safe arrival of J.W.55A I felt very strongly that the SCHARNHORST would come out and endeavour to attack J.W.55B.

4. Fortunately my small force had now been in company for nearly a fortnight, we knew each other and had practised night encounter tactics together.

5. Before sailing on 23rd December, I had a final meeting with Commanding Officers at which I stated my intentions and stressed on this occasion that every officer and man must be doubly sure that he knew his night action duty. Such a reminder would hardly seem

necessary except that within Home Fleet there are frequent changes of officers and men and, with constant escort requirements, adequate training is not easy to achieve.

6. Should the SCHARNHORST be encountered I had decided:—

(a) To close the enemy, opening fire with starshell at a range of about 12,000 yards.

(b) To form the four destroyers of my screen into sub-divisions and release them in time to take up positions for torpedo attack.

(c) To keep the JAMAICA in close support of DUKE OF YORK but with freedom of action to take drastic avoiding action and open the distance if engaged.

7. The endurance of my destroyers did not permit continuous cover to be given for the whole passage of the convoy and my intention was to reach the covering position at a speed of advance of 15 knots when the convoy was just east of Bear Island. This would allow me to spend some thirty hours in the area.

8. Force 2 sailed at 2300 on 23rd December, and in the early morning next day carried out a last practice attack using JAMAICA as target.

9. Meanwhile J.W.55B. had been located by enemy air the previous day and during the morning of 24th December, was being continuously shadowed.

10. Although German surface forces had never before made a sortie to the westward, the convoy which had reached the position 70° 40' N. 3° 10' E. at 1200 was entirely unsupported and I was uneasy lest a surface attack should be made.

* Admiralty footnote:—J.W. convoys were those bound for Russia, R.A. Convoys those returning from Russia.

† Admiralty footnote:—Akureyri—on N. Coast of Iceland.