

48. The enemy's courses west of south were being covered by SUFFOLK and, to a lesser extent, by NORFOLK and PRINCE OF WALES. KING GEORGE V worked across to the south-westward to cover a southerly course, allowing for an increase of speed by the enemy. Consideration was given to flying off the Walrus from KING GEORGE V to search the perimeter astern of the ship and so cover a south-easterly course of the enemy; but the swell was such that the sacrifice of the aircraft would almost certainly result, and I did not wish to expose KING GEORGE V to U-boat attack whilst picking up the crew. Subsequent analysis shows that such a search might possibly have located the BISMARCK.

49. The Rear-Admiral Commanding, Second Cruiser Squadron, was ordered by signal to organise an air and surface search, with VICTORIOUS and his four cruisers, north-west of the last known position of the enemy. When I issued these instructions, I estimated that the Rear-Admiral Commanding, Second Cruiser Squadron, and VICTORIOUS were well to the northward of this position; but in point of fact he had been steaming south at high speed and was now close to it. It is probable therefore that the air search carried out did not extend as far as the circle on which the enemy now was and would not have found them even if the aircraft had searched to the eastward, as the Rear-Admiral Commanding, Second Cruiser Squadron, and the Commanding Officer of VICTORIOUS had originally intended.

50. This completed the immediate search, leaving a sector between north and south-east unwatched. The search was backed up to a certain extent by the ships which had been detached by the Admiralty from various other duties and which were approaching the scene. RODNEY recovered her screen, which had earlier been forced by bad weather to drop astern, and took up an extremely well-chosen position on the route for the Bay of Biscay. RAMILLIES patrolled to the southward of KING GEORGE V and PRINCE OF WALES. EDINBURGH (flying the flag of Commodore Charles M. Blackman, D.S.O., Commodore Commanding, Eighteenth Cruiser Squadron), who had been patrolling off the Bay of Biscay and had been sent by the Admiralty to act as relief shadower, was near the track for Gibraltar. In addition, some degree of search was provided by REPULSE, whom I had been compelled to detach to Newfoundland for fuel, and by LONDON (Captain Reginald M. Servaes, C.B.E.), who had been instructed by the Admiralty to search for an enemy tanker believed to be in the area round 25° 30' N. 42° W. Force "H," some 1,300 miles to the south-eastward, had been instructed by the Admiralty to steer to intercept the BISMARCK from the southward.

51. The track of the BISMARCK as drawn on the attached strategical plot (see Plan 1) is probably reasonably accurate. It shows how narrowly she avoided contact with the various British forces during her run east. She started by crossing about 100 miles astern of KING GEORGE V at 0800 on 25th May and then passed about 50 miles from RODNEY and 45 miles from EDINBURGH. On the next day

she passed 85 miles under the stern of convoy W.S. 8B, and 25-30 miles ahead of the Captain (D), Fourth Destroyer Flotilla, who had parted company with this convoy. It is understood that the Captain (D), Fourth Destroyer Flotilla, had disposed the convoy escort to the westward of the convoy in the hope that the BISMARCK would be deflected if she appeared steaming towards it.

52. At 1030 on 25th May, a series of D/F bearings was received from the Admiralty which indicated that the enemy was breaking back across the Atlantic. The signals appeared to come from the same ship which had transmitted several signals soon after the T/B attack of the night before; they could therefore reasonably be attributed to the BISMARCK. These bearings, as plotted in KING GEORGE V, showed a position too far to the northward, which gave the misleading impression that the enemy was making for the North Sea. I broadcast this position of the enemy and instructed all Home Fleet forces to search accordingly. PRINCE OF WALES had not yet joined, but the course of KING GEORGE V was altered to 055°, 27 knots, to make for the Iceland-Faeroes gap.

53. A position of the enemy transmitted by the Admiralty made it clear that the enemy was making for a French port and had a lead of about 100 miles. The accuracy of the information which was issued by the Admiralty throughout this stage of the operation and the speed with which it was passed out were beyond praise. The situation could be clearly envisaged by all the forces concerned and I was able to preserve wireless silence.

54. KING GEORGE V, RODNEY, NORFOLK, EDINBURGH and Force "H" all proceeded at their best speed towards the Bay of Biscay; and a sweep was flown in the evening by Coastal Command flying boats as far as longitude 30° W. When this failed to locate the enemy, two cross-over patrols by flying boats were arranged to start at 1000 on 26th May, across his probable track. In addition to these forces, COSSACK (Captain (D), Fourth Destroyer Flotilla), with SIKH (Commander Graham H. Stokes), ZULU (Commander Harry R. Graham, D.S.O.), MAORI (Commander Harold T. Armstrong, D.S.C.), and the Polish Ship PIORUN (Commander E. Plawski) were detached by the Admiralty from convoy W.S. 8B early on 26th May and instructed to join and screen KING GEORGE V and RODNEY, to be joined by JUPITER (Lieutenant-Commander Norman V. J. T. Thew) from Londonderry; and DORSETSHIRE (Captain Benjamin C. S. Martin), on receipt of the first enemy report, reported that she intended to leave convoy S.L. 74, which she was escorting, and came up from the south-west to intercept and shadow.

Other Dispositions.

55. Meanwhile, those forces which could not reach the most probable track of the enemy were moving to cover alternative possible movements. MANCHESTER and BIRMINGHAM took up the Iceland-Faeroes patrol and ARETHUSA that of the Denmark Strait, with air patrols of all the northern passages to assist. The Rear-Admiral Commanding, Second