

*Movements of Forces on the Night 24th/25th September (D. - I/D I).*

5. NELSON with her screen proceeded to the westward until 2130, when course was reversed to 090°. After passing south of Tarifa at 1930, several small fishing vessels with bright lights were encountered.

6. BROWN RANGER, escorted by FLEUR DE LYS, sailed from Gibraltar to the eastward at 2030, so as to be in position for oiling destroyers on D.2.

7. RODNEY, ARK ROYAL, HERMIONE, DUNCAN (Captain (D), 13th Destroyer Flotilla), FORESIGHT, FORESTER, LIVELY, ZULU, GURKHA, LEGION and LANCE sailed from Gibraltar at 2300 to simulate a normal sortie of Force H and to rendezvous with the convoy at 0800 the following morning.

8. Force Z, consisting of QUEEN EMMA, PRINCESS BEATRIX, ULSTER MONARCH, ROYAL SCOTSMAN (whose ultimate destination was Freetown) and LEINSTER, escorted by JONQUIL, SPIREA and AZALEA, had been stationed astern of the main convoy at dusk and ordered to proceed into Gibraltar Bay. It was hoped that the presence of these ships in the Bay would allay suspicion, in the event of the convoy having been sighted and reported whilst passing through the Straits.

9. The remainder of Convoy W.S.11X and escort, organised in two groups one mile apart, and led by the Vice-Admiral, 2nd-in-Command, Home Fleet in PRINCE OF WALES, and the Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron in EDINBURGH respectively, passed south of Europa Point at 0130.

This disposition was adopted to reduce the frontage of the convoy during its passage through the Straits.

10. At 0730 RODNEY, ARK ROYAL and their screening destroyers were sighted from NELSON at about 10 miles, the limit of visibility at that time. Half an hour later the convoy and its escort were sighted, a few minutes after a Hudson aircraft which was carrying out an A/S patrol had reported them in sight to the westward.

11. NELSON shaped an easterly course while exchanges of destroyers took place in accordance with HAL (short title for Operation Orders), paragraph 21. These exchanges were designed so that destroyers required to accompany the heavy ships after parting company from the convoy on D.3 should be used to screen the convoy on D.1 and D.2 and thus economise fuel.

12. The forces then formed two groups, as follows:—

*Group I.*

NELSON (Flag Officer Commanding, Force H), ARK ROYAL, HERMIONE, COSSACK (Captain (D), 4th Destroyer Flotilla), ZULU, FORESIGHT, FORESTER, LAFOREY (Captain (D), 19th Destroyer Flotilla), and LIGHTNING.

*Group II.*

PRINCE OF WALES (Vice-Admiral, 2nd-in-Command, Home Fleet), RODNEY, KENYA

(Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron), EDINBURGH (Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron), SHEFFIELD, EURYALUS, DUNCAN (Captain (D), 13th Destroyer Flotilla), GURKHA, LEGION, LANCE, LIVELY, ORIBI, ISAAC SWEERS, PIORUN, GARLAND, FURY, FARNDALE and HEYTHROP, and the convoy, H.M.S. BRECONSHIRE, CLAN MACDONALD, CLAN FERGUSON, AJAX, IMPERIAL STAR, CITY OF LINCOLN, ROWALLAN CASTLE, DUNEDIN STAR and CITY OF CALCUTTA.

13. While in V/S touch, Vice-Admiral, 2nd-in-Command, Home Fleet reported that the convoy might have been sighted by a Portuguese merchant ship west of Cape Spartel, but that only fishing boats were seen in the Straits. SHEFFIELD reported that the convoy had not been sighted either by surface vessels or aircraft, whilst in company with her.

*Movements of Group I on 25th September (D.1).*

14. In order to give the impression to any shadowing aircraft approaching from the eastward that only the usual Force H was at sea, Group I parted company with Group II, and proceeded to the eastward at 18 knots, with the intention of keeping along the African coast.

15. Clocks were advanced 1 hour to Zone -2 at 1000A/25 and hereafter times are Zone -2.

16. ARK ROYAL maintained one A/S patrol aircraft in the air from 1105 until dusk. During the day 24 out of the 27 Fulmars carried were flown for exercise, two providing targets for a height-finding exercise. Six Fulmars flew round both groups for recognition purposes.

17. FLEUR DE LYS and BROWN RANGER were sighted at 1115. FLEUR DE LYS reported speed made good was 11 knots, and she was ordered to make good 12½ knots. It was ascertained after return to harbour that BROWN RANGER intended to convey she was unable to make good more than 11 knots, due apparently to a foul bottom. This was not appreciated at the time the signal was received.

18. At 1700, when in position 36° 36' N., 01° 58' W., DUNCAN, in position N in Screening Diagram No. 10, obtained a contact bearing 120°, 1,500 yards. She attacked with four charges, the starboard thrower failing to fire. GURKHA co-operated and attacked with a fourteen-charge pattern at 1716. At 1750 DUNCAN fired a second pattern. No further contacts were obtained, and both ships proceeded at 1758 to rejoin the screen. Both ships observed bubbles rising to the surface, possibly from a damaged U-Boat, after DUNCAN's first attack.

Two French merchant ships, MERS EL KEBIR and SIDI ORSA, were sighted about 1800. Several other unidentified ships were reported by aircraft, but did not come in sight of Group I.