

103. In order to make the best use of the relatively few aircraft available to patrol these areas, a new policy was introduced with the object of making G.R. forces as mobile as possible and to concentrate in areas where submarines were known or suspected to be. In addition, the generous allotment of air escort to convoys in areas where no threat existed was reduced to the minimum, and flying hours were thereby conserved for concentrated action where necessary.

104. C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet is in complete agreement with this policy and co-operates to the fullest extent.

105. The concentrations of aircraft needed to implement the policy and carry out intensive patrols when necessary demand considerable shuttling of aircraft between bases. These movements are used to good effect by routing the aircraft over shipping lanes so that they may carry out traffic patrols while in transit.

106. One of the first tasks carried out by "IOGROPS" was an investigation of the practical application of the system used in the Atlantic, by which air cover is given to shipping in accordance with the degree of risk and the value of the convoy. By the standards of this procedure—known as "Stipple"—the wastage in flying hours during May was assessed as follows:

|                        | Per cent. |
|------------------------|-----------|
| (a) Aden area ... ..   | 17        |
| (b) East Africa ... .. | 59        |
| (c) 225 Group ... ..   | 55        |
| (d) 222 Group ... ..   | 2½        |

107. Negotiations are now proceeding with C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet to introduce the procedure, modified to suit local conditions, in this Command.

108. Finally, all operations by Indian Ocean General Reconnaissance aircraft are in process of coming under the control of five Naval Air Operations Rooms at Bombay, Vizagapatam, Kilendini, Aden and Colombo. The resultant cohesion over the areas controlled, and closer liaison with the Navy of which these N.A.O.R.s will permit, promise well for future control of coastal aircraft in this theatre.

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#### Operations.

109. A decrease in enemy submarine activity in November permitted a reduction in air escorts and a subsequent saving in aircraft hours.

110. The lull was utilised to carry out a more intensive training programme as a necessary initiation for No. 203 Wellington Squadron, newly arrived at Santa Cruz; and as a refresher for the other squadrons already operational but in need of training to fit them for their more versatile work in the revised policy of mobility and aggression then being introduced. Otherwise, traffic patrols and shipping escorts were the main features of G.R. activity.

111. Survivors of a tanker torpedoed in the Seychelles area were located and rescued as a result of continuous sorties flown from the 28th January to 30th January. One Catalina crew flew for forty-two hours on the 29th-30th

and was particularly mentioned in the telegram of congratulation from C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet. The sinking of this tanker was the only one of the month in either 222 or 225 Group areas.

112. December opened with considerable activity and movement of G.R. aircraft in order to protect large shipping movements in the Bay of Bengal. To relieve the congestion on the Bengal communications system, Fourteenth Army were to be reinforced from east coast ports, and extensive patrols were provided to cover the entire eastern approaches to the Bay of Bengal. This involved a large-scale and rapid movement of forces over distances varying from 1,000 to 1,400 miles to concentrate suitable aircraft in strategic positions.

113. Round-the-clock patrols began at first light on the 6th and finished at midday on the 9th as the ships reached Chittagong. The re-deployment between Groups, and the conduct of the operation were notable for the high state of efficiency and serviceability maintained. During the operation there was only one sighting of a submarine, thought to be a Japanese of the "I" class. Unfortunately the Catalina was not positioned for an immediate attack and further searches failed to locate the enemy again. Two enemy aircraft were sighted over the Bay of Bengal but were not allowed to come within range of the surface vessels.

114. On the 23rd December the enemy torpedoed the s.s. Peshawar in convoy off the south-east coast of India. The attack was made in perfect weather at midday and while a Catalina was escorting. This was the first example of such an attack while escort was provided. Continuous day and night cover and a hunt to exhaustion was instituted, but apart from a report from the same convoy on the 25th, which caused an extension of the air cover, no other sightings were made.

115. On the 27th, H.M.I.S. BERAR (escort vessel) carried out a submarine attack near the south-west tip of India without any known result. A Catalina of 225 Group witnessed the attacks, and the detailed report and photographs taken by the aircraft's crew were of great value in assessing the results. Further south-west, on the same day, a merchant vessel was torpedoed, and to counter the threat to the many convoys in these waters, Catalinas were moved from Ceylon to Kelai, and Addu Atoll was reinforced.

116. Since commitments in 222 Group were heavy, especially in affording air cover to units of the growing Eastern Fleet, Beauforts were used to escort coastal convoys, and long-range aircraft reserved for the forward island bases and the Australia-Colombo convoys.

117. During this month No. 354 Liberator (B.24) Squadron took over the G.R. patrols previously flown by Wellington medium-bomber squadrons, and extended them to cover the N.E. Bay of Bengal, and the Arakan coastal areas. No sightings of enemy surface or underwater forces were made during these patrols, but this did not detract from their value as negative reconnaissance. Several small craft off the Arakan coast were attacked and sunk with bombs and gunfire.

118. The early part of January was conspicuous for the dearth of enemy activity in southern and eastern waters, in spite of the