

(b) ARETHUSA was sailed to join MANCHESTER and BIRMINGHAM in the Iceland-Faeroes passage. These ships were disposed by MANCHESTER in equal areas between 61° N. 10° 30' W., and 64° N. 15° W. Five trawlers were on their normal patrol west of these areas.

(c) The Vice-Admiral Commanding, Battle Cruiser Squadron, with his force then on passage to Hvalfiord, was instructed to cover the patrols in the Denmark Strait and the Iceland-Faeroes passage, operating north of 62° N.

(d) KING GEORGE V, VICTORIOUS, GALATEA, AURORA, KENYA, HERMIONE and seven destroyers sailed from Scapa at 2245 to cover the passages, operating south of 62° N. LANCE (Lieutenant-Commander Ralph W. F. Northcott) was compelled to return to Scapa with boiler trouble, but REPULSE and three destroyers of the Western Approaches Command joined north-west of the Butt of Lewis on the forenoon of 23rd May. I had intended to detach two cruisers to patrol the Faeroes-Shetlands passage, but I finally decided to keep all four in company with me.

(e) Air reconnaissance of all the passages between Greenland and the Orkneys and of the Norwegian coast was asked for, as well as reconnaissance of forces approaching Iceland. An additional air patrol line about 260 miles west of the Iceland-Faeroes passage was also established by the Admiral Commanding Western Approaches.

9. It was desirable that the cruiser patrols in the passages, and the heavy ships as well, should be as nearly complete with fuel as possible when the BISMARCK was located. The problem involved in ensuring this, during the long period between her location at Bergen and the report of her departure, was not an easy one. If the BISMARCK had chosen the Iceland-Faeroes passage, the cruisers which were sent to refuel at Skaalefjord would only just have been in time to intercept her when they resumed their patrol. The force in company with me was likewise sailed at the latest possible moment, for it was obvious that fuel would become a vital factor before the operation was completed.

10. The battlefleet proceeded to the north-westward until reaching latitude 60° N., far enough north to be in a position to deal with an attack on Iceland or a possible break back, and then steered west. There had been an interval of 29 hours between the time the enemy was last seen at Bergen and the time they were found to have left, so no accurate estimation of their "furthest on" position could be made; but the time of their first sighting by SUFFOLK showed later that they must have sailed on the evening of 21st May, soon after they had been photographed at Bergen and long before their departure was discovered.

First Sighting.

11. The air patrols arranged for 23rd May were seriously depleted by weather conditions. Two sorties were carried out in the Iceland-Faeroes gap, the more westerly one backing it up was maintained only from 1300 to 1700, while the Denmark Strait patrol did not fly at all, though I did not learn of this until later.

12. The Rear-Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, had issued the following signalled instructions to NORFOLK and SUFFOLK:—

"SUFFOLK is to patrol within R.D.F.* distance of the ice-edge on line running north-east and south-west. Southern end of 3 hour beat to be on line 310° from Staalbiorg Huk. The time at southern end to be at 2200 and every 6 hours thereafter. When clear inshore NORFOLK will patrol about 15 miles abeam of you. When thick inshore NORFOLK will patrol to cover inshore passage. NORFOLK will make contact with you at 1300B/24th May in position 66° 45' N. 26° W. to check position. Investigate ice up to minefield on parting company to-day Friday."

13. On the afternoon of 23rd May the atmospheric conditions in the Denmark Strait were unusual, being clear over and close to the ice, and misty between the ice and the land. SUFFOLK took advantage of this to move further to the eastward across the top of the minefield than would otherwise have been prudent and kept close to the edge of the mist so as to have cover handy if the BISMARCK were sighted at close range. NORFOLK patrolled 15 miles on the beam of SUFFOLK's patrol.

14. Shortly after turning back to the south-westward on completing her investigation of the ice-edge, SUFFOLK at 1922 sighted the BISMARCK, followed by the PRINZ EUGEN, 7 miles on the starboard quarter, steaming the same course as herself. SUFFOLK made an enemy report, increased to full speed and altered to 150° to take cover in the mist and to make for the gap in the minefield if unable to round its northern edge. She was able, however, to keep under cover and to follow the BISMARCK round the minefield, maintaining touch by R.D.F. Her alert look-out and the intelligent use made of the peculiar weather conditions enabled SUFFOLK, after this short range sighting, to avoid being engaged. At 2028 she sighted the enemy again, reported them and once more retired into the mist. At the same time, NORFOLK, who had meanwhile been closing, also made contact, this time at a range of 6 miles. The BISMARCK opened fire, but NORFOLK retired safely under a smoke screen, though some salvos fell close enough to throw splinters on board.

15. This report from NORFOLK (2032/23rd May) was the first intimation that I received of the enemy being sighted, as none of SUFFOLK's reports up to date had been received in the battlefleet. The two cruisers proceeded to shadow with great skill in very difficult conditions. There were rain storms, snow storms, ice floes and mirage effects, which occasionally deceived SUFFOLK into thinking that the enemy had closed to very short range. SUFFOLK took up a position on the starboard quarter of the enemy within R.D.F. range of the edge of the ice, to ensure that the enemy could not turn back unseen between her and the ice; NORFOLK on the port quarter covered any possible turn to the southward. The Rear-Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, reports that a third, smaller, ship was thought

Admiralty footnote:—

* R.D.F.—radar.