

48. Soon after 1000 three enemy aircraft shadowing from the starboard quarter at about 8½ miles had been picked up by radar and D/F. One was heard making enemy reports and was in radar contact for nearly three hours after which it was heard intermittently by D/F until about 1400; it then either lost touch or returned to base.

49. During the first two engagements by the cruisers the composition of the enemy force was not clear as the earlier radar reports from Force 1 had indicated that SCHARNHORST might be accompanied by destroyers. When C.S.10 had confirmed that only one heavy unit was present I decided to engage on similar courses with JAMAICA in support, opening fire at about 13,000 yards, detaching the destroyers of the screen to make a torpedo attack.

50. At 1400 I appreciated that if the enemy maintained his course and speed Force 2 would engage him about 1715. In the event he altered round to the south soon afterwards and was first picked up by DUKE OF YORK'S radar at 45,500 yards at 1617, bearing 020. A radar report was made including my position (my signal timed 1617).

At 1637 destroyers were ordered to take up the most advantageous position for torpedo attack, Force 2's screen having been formed into sub-divisions on either bow shortly after DUKE OF YORK first obtained radar contact.

51. The range closed rapidly and BELFAST was soon picked up astern of the target. DUKE OF YORK's Fire Control Radar found the target at 1632 at 29,700 yards when the enemy appeared to be zigzagging on a mean course of 160. At 1642 the enemy seemed to alter slightly to port. Two minutes later Force 2 altered to 080 to open A arcs* and at 1647 BELFAST opened fire with starshell, followed at 1648 by DUKE OF YORK. At 1650 DUKE OF YORK'S starshell illuminated the enemy, Force 2 opened fire with main armament and my first enemy report was made timed 1650.

FIRST ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ENEMY BY FORCE 2.

52. When DUKE OF YORK and JAMAICA opened fire at 12,000 yards there was every indication that SCHARNHORST was completely unaware of their presence. Although I assumed that reports of the aircraft which had shadowed Force 2 earlier in the afternoon would have been passed to her, SCHARNHORST was closed on a steady bearing and prisoners confirm that she made no radar contact. When first sighted her turrets were reported trained fore and aft, she did not immediately engage Force 2 and her opening salvos were erratic. Prisoners state they had been told they would not have to engage anything larger than a cruiser and were badly shaken when informed that a capital ship to the southward was engaging them.

53. The enemy altered round at once to the northward and DUKE OF YORK to 060 to follow and to avoid torpedoes which the enemy, had he been on the alert, might have fired.

* Admiralty footnote:—A arcs are the arcs on which all guns of the main armament will bear, thus allowing them to fire simultaneously at the enemy.

As SCHARNHORST turned to the northward BELFAST prepared to fire torpedoes and then with NORFOLK engaged her with main armament as she altered round on to an easterly course, probably to avoid Force 1 and to open her A arcs. By 1708 SCHARNHORST was steady on an easterly course and engaging DUKE OF YORK and JAMAICA with her main armament. Her tactics were to turn to the southward, fire a broadside and then turn end on away to the east until ready to fire the next, making DUKE OF YORK'S gunnery a difficult problem.

54. The situation as the chase to the eastward began showed DUKE OF YORK and JAMAICA to the southward of SCHARNHORST pursuing her and adopting similar tactics. Astern of SCHARNHORST, Force 2's screen, SAVAGE and SAUMAREZ on her port quarter, and SCORPION and STORD on her starboard quarter, crept slowly ahead to deliver their torpedo attacks, taking individual avoiding action from time to time when engaged by the enemy though this, for reasons given later, was not often, until they had closed in to 10,000 yards.

55. To the northward BELFAST and NORFOLK engaged the enemy turning away to the east until 1712, while she remained within range; SCHARNHORST replied to the cruisers' fire with two salvos. These two cruisers then followed the enemy to the eastward keeping to the northward of him. SHEFFIELD was still astern of Force 1 and dropping slowly back owing to her reduced speed.

56. The 36th Division to the north westward of the enemy altered round at 1700 to follow SCHARNHORST to the east and crept forward to the northward of her to deliver their torpedo attacks. MUSKETEER hoped to synchronise these attacks with those of Force 2's screen but owing to a technical failure in MUSKETEER'S W/T equipment she was never in W/T touch with SAVAGE and Force 2's screen delivered their attack nearly 40 minutes before the 36th Division reached the target area.

57. DUKE OF YORK probably obtained hits with her first and third salvos which prisoners state were low down forward (a hit which may have put "A" turret out of action as it did not fire again) and on the quarterdeck close to "C" turret. Little is known of other hits on the enemy during this first engagement but it seems certain that DUKE OF YORK obtained at least three, the last of which caused underwater damage and eventually reduced the enemy's speed. SCHARNHORST'S own gunfire was erratic to begin with but improved in speed and accuracy as the range increased until, between 17,000 yards and 20,000 yards, DUKE OF YORK was frequently straddled and there were many near misses.

58. JAMAICA, keeping six cables astern of and slightly to one or the other quarter of DUKE OF YORK, conformed to the flagship's movements. She opened fire at 1652 at a range of 13,000 yards and continued firing as opportunity offered until 1742 when the range had opened to 18,000 yards. At this range she considered her blind fire of doubtful value and liable to confuse DUKE OF YORK'S radar spotting. JAMAICA claimed one hit during this engagement.