

The former was escorted by five destroyers, four corvettes, two minesweepers and four A/S trawlers, with the EDINBURGH, NORFOLK and two destroyers providing close cover: the westbound convoy had the LIVERPOOL, five destroyers, one minesweeper and two trawlers. The KING GEORGE V, DUKE OF YORK, VICTORIOUS, KENT, NIGERIA and eight destroyers provided heavy cover.

4. P.Q.14 ran into ice south-west of Jan Mayen Island and was delayed and scattered: two-thirds of the convoy lost touch and returned to Iceland, with several of the escort who had been damaged by ice. The remaining nine ships, with most of the escort, continued their passage. The delay had probably disorganised to some extent the German arrangements for attack, but the convoy was sighted by enemy aircraft on 13th April and attacked by U-boats east of Bear Island on 16th April, one ship being sunk.

5. Q.P.10 was subjected to air and U-boat attacks for three days, while on passage between the Kola Inlet and Bear Island, and four ships were sunk. One other returned to Kola, the remaining eleven arriving safely in Iceland.

P.Q.15 and Q.P.11

6. Before the next pair of convoys was due to sail, I suggested once more that these convoys, if they could not be postponed until the ice moved north, should be limited in size. This proposal was not accepted: convoys P.Q.15 and Q.P.11, which sailed on 26th and 28th April respectively, contained 25 and 17 ships.

7. The eastbound convoy was escorted by four destroyers, one A.A. ship and three minesweepers, and included a C.A.M. ship*; the NIGERIA and two destroyers provided close cover. The westbound convoy was escorted by five destroyers, five corvettes and two trawlers, with the EDINBURGH as close cover. Distant cover for both convoys was given by the KING GEORGE V, U.S. battleship WASHINGTON, VICTORIOUS, U.S. cruisers WICHITA and TUSCALOOSA, KENYA and ten destroyers (of which four were American). This was the first occasion on which United States ships operated as part of the Home Fleet.

8. Four submarines were disposed off the the Norwegian coast, moving north-eastwards with the convoy, to provide cover against the surface forces at Trondheim; being joined later by the TRIDENT, which accompanied P.Q.15 as far as longitude 5° East.

H.M.S. EDINBURGH Torpedoed

9. Q.P.11 left the Kola Inlet on 28th April and was sighted and reported by aircraft and U-boats the next day. On 30th April the EDINBURGH, about fifteen miles ahead of the convoy, was struck by two torpedoes from a U-boat. Her stern was blown off and she was unable to steer, but she proceeded at very slow speed towards Murmansk, escorted and towed by the FORESIGHT and FORESTER, who were detached from the convoy escort. Minesweepers, tugs and Russian destroyers were sent from Murmansk to assist.

Admiralty footnote:—

* C.A.M. ship—a merchant ship fitted with a catapult for flying off an aircraft.

10. The protection of these Russian convoys against surface attack must always involve grave risk of ships of the covering force being torpedoed by U-boats. The convoys come under early air reconnaissance and for a great part of the voyage have up to eight U-boats within striking distance. The number of escorts and the necessity for strict economy of fuel do not permit of prolonged A/S hunts; the speed of the convoys is 8 knots or less; so U-boats put down by the escorts have little difficulty in regaining contact. The risk from U-boats has always been appreciated by the Flag and Commanding Officers of the covering cruisers; but it is obvious that effective protection against surface forces in the varying visibility usually experienced can only be provided if the covering cruiser is in the vicinity of the convoy.

Q.P.11

11. The convoy drove off an attack by four torpedo aircraft and, on 1st May, was five times attacked east of Bear Island by three large German destroyers. The escorting destroyers, though greatly inferior in gunpower, met these attacks with gallantry and skill and by their aggressive tactics succeeded in driving off their powerful opponents. One merchant ship was sunk and the AMAZON was damaged, though able to proceed. No further losses were suffered by this convoy.

12. The three German destroyers then transferred their attentions to the EDINBURGH, who was now in tow of a Russian tug and escorted by the FORESIGHT and FORESTER, one small Russian destroyer and the minesweepers HARRIER, HUSSAR, GOS-SAMER and NIGER. The German destroyers located her on the morning of 2nd May, in low visibility and extreme cold. The tow was immediately slipped and the EDINBURGH, who was unable to steer, circled slowly at about eight knots.

13. A series of most gallant actions followed, the enemy being engaged in turn by the FORESIGHT and FORESTER, the remaining guns of the EDINBURGH, and the minesweepers. One enemy destroyer was sunk and the other two damaged; but the EDINBURGH was struck by another torpedo and had to be abandoned, being sunk later by a torpedo from the FORESIGHT; two officers and 56 ratings were lost. The FORESIGHT and FORESTER were seriously damaged, both being brought to a standstill during the course of the action, but each in turn covered the other while she effected the repairs necessary to enable her to proceed. The minesweepers were not damaged, though more than once they had engaged enemy destroyers single-handed and driven them off.

14. P.Q.15, which had sailed from Hvalfjord on 26th April, was reported by enemy aircraft two days later, in spite of a spirited attack on the sighting aircraft by the Norwegian seaplane providing A/S escort. A U-boat made contact the following day. On 1st May the convoy was bombed without success by six Ju.88s, one of which was shot down. As all the enemy destroyers in the Far North had been sunk or damaged in the final action of the EDINBURGH, I instructed the NIGERIA and LONDON to leave convoy P.Q.15 west of Bear Island and not to proceed into the U-boat waters further east unless the convoy was threatened by enemy cruisers or larger vessels.