

tows but with X.7 still in tow with her operational crew on board, was closing the land to make her landfall. SEANYMPH, having sunk X 8, was on patrol some 60 miles to the westward of Alten Fiord.

63. At 0300Z, SYRTIS sighted a submarine on the surface bearing 030° and five minutes later this was identified as a U-boat: position 71° 00' N. 22° 10' E., course 235°, proceeding at about 9 knots at a range from SYRTIS of about 3,500 yards. In order not to compromise the operation in any way submarines had been forbidden to attack anything below capital ships while on passage out to or in their patrol areas off Alten, and the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. SYRTIS had no option but to let this tempting target pass by, at 1,500 yards range and a sitting shot. The U-boat, which had originally appeared to be making for the entrance to Soroy Sound, altered to 105° at 0315Z and disappeared in the direction of Tarhalsen Point, presumably entering the Leads round the eastern end of Soroy Island and possibly being bound for Hammerfest.

This may have been the same U-boat previously sighted by SYRTIS on the evening of the previous day. It reflects credit on the lookout kept by our submarines that, with six of them in the vicinity and four of them with X-craft in tow, none were sighted. A single sighting might have compromised the operation, or at least led to A/S activity in the area.

64. At 0105Z STUBBORN was in position 70° 45' N. 21° 03' E. when she sighted a floating mine. The mine itself passed clear of STUBBORN but the mooring wire caught in the tow astern and slid down the tow until it became impaled on the bows of X.7. This brought the Commanding Officer of X.7 (Lieutenant B. C. G. Place, D.S.C., R.N.) on to the casing, where by deft foot-work he was able to clear this unpleasant obstruction, remarking as he did so that this was the first time he had kicked a mine away by its horns.

After this interlude STUBBORN proceeded to make her landfall off Soroy and set course for her slipping position.

65. The weather had by now improved considerably, the wind had dropped to a southeasterly breeze, the sea had gone right down and visibility was good, enabling all submarines to fix their positions accurately. All was now staged to slip for the attack, and between 1830 and 2000Z the four X-craft—X.5, X.6, X.7 and X.10—were slipped from THRASHER, TRUCULENT, STUBBORN and SCEPTRE respectively from their slipping positions and proceeded independently into Soroy Sound. The submarines then withdrew to seaward within their patrol sectors.

66. That four out of the six X-craft which set forth from Port HHZ should have made these passages, varying between 1,000 and 1,500 miles, in tow of submarines, without major incident, to be slipped from their exact positions at the time ordered ten days later, was more than I had ever anticipated.

67. The Commanding Officer, H.M.S. STUBBORN (Lieutenant A. A. Duff, R.N.), deserves special mention for his determination in the way he battled against the difficulties of parted tows and brought his X-craft to the right position at the right time in spite of everything.

68. The passage crews of the X-craft deserve great credit for the way they stuck the long and weary passage and for the efficient state of the craft when they were turned over to the operational crews. The passage crews played a big part in the subsequent success of the operation.

69. I consider this passage a fine example of seamanship and determination by all concerned.

#### *The Attack*

70. The crews of all four X-craft were reported to be in great spirits and full of confidence when they parted company with their towing submarines. The Commanding Officers all reported that their craft were in an efficient state when they took over from their passage crews except that X.10 had a defect in her periscope hoist motor and in the motor of her "wet and dry" pump, and a slight gland leak; however, these defects were accepted by the operational crew, who were confident that they could remedy them.

71. As X.5, X.6 and X.7 have not returned from the operation, it is impossible to trace their movements in their approach to and subsequent attacks. The target was TIRPITZ in each case. The intentions of the Commanding Officers were, after passing across the declared mined area to the westward of Soroy on the surface during the night 20th/21st September, to proceed dived up Stjærnsund during daylight on the 21st September in order to reach Alten Fiord by dusk: then to proceed southward to charge batteries in the vicinity of the Brattholm group of islands, about four miles from the entrance to Kaafiord. All three had intended to be at the entrance to Kaafiord shortly after daylight on 22nd September. To give all X-craft ample time to reach their objective, and to guard against loss of surprise through one X-craft attacking before the remainder, X-craft were forbidden by their orders to attack before 0100Z, 22nd September, but were free to do so at any time after that, setting their charges in accordance with the firing rules table given in the operation orders. As all X-craft Commanding Officers had agreed between themselves not to set their charges to fire in the 0400-0500 firing period, it was expected that they would carry out their attacks somewhere between 0500 and 0800Z, laying their charges set to fire about 0830Z on 22nd September, by which time it was hoped that they would have been able to withdraw from the area.

72. That these three very gallant Commanding Officers succeeded in carrying out their intentions and pressing home their attacks to the full, I have no doubt; but what difficulties and hazards they were called on to negotiate in the execution of the attack are not known; nor is it known how some of them (if the German wireless broadcast is to be believed) came to be taken prisoner. It is certain that outstanding devotion to duty and courage of the highest order were displayed. The full story of this gallant attack must remain untold for the time being.\*

#### *Admiralty footnote —*

\*For further information on the attacks by X.5, X.6 and X.7 see Admiral (Submarines) supplementary despatch dated 2nd February, 1944, compiled from information received from German prisoners subsequently taken and other sources.