

(d) *Work of the submarines.*—Information has not yet been received of the results obtained by the submarine patrols co-operating in this operation. There is good ground to believe that the marked inactivity of the Italian surface forces may have been due to the marked activity of our submarines.

(e) *Tactical and fighting efficiency.*—Although a great number of the ships taking part had not operated in company previously and some were newly commissioned, it was satisfactory to note the good standard of efficiency displayed. Nevertheless it must be appreciated that the highest standard cannot be achieved unless ships have opportunity to work together in company and to exercise the movements and action required to deal with the situations which arise during operations of this nature.

(f) *Behaviour of M.T. ships.*—The Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron reports "that the operation was successfully carried out is due in no small measure to the behaviour of the merchant ships in convoy. Their manœuvring and general conduct was excellent and caused me no anxiety whatever. I had complete confidence that orders given to them by me would be understood and promptly carried out. Their steadfast and resolute behaviour during air and E-Boat attacks was most impressive and encouraging to us all. Particular credit is due to S.S. MELBOURNE STAR, Commodore of the convoy,* who set a high standard and never failed to appreciate directly what he should do. S.S. DURHAM experienced piston trouble in her port engine and it was evident that her engines required careful nursing. Nevertheless, she was able to maintain a speed of 14 knots throughout the critical period on D.3 and D.4, which was only 1 knot less than her accredited maximum speed."

109. The Air Officer Commanding, Mediterranean and Officer Commanding, 200 Group, R.A.F. afforded most valuable air co-operation which contributed in no mean measure to the success of the operation.

110. It was with considerable surprise that I learned on arrival at Gibraltar that a number of women and children had been embarked in the ships of Convoy M.G.I. Had I known this earlier, I should certainly have sent a destroyer to escort each group.

(Signed) J. F. SOMERVILLE,
Vice-Admiral,
Flag Officer Commanding,
Force H.

OPERATION "HALBERD"

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 9th October, 1941 by Vice-Admiral Sir James F. Somerville, K.C.B., D.S.O., Flag Officer Commanding, Force H

H.M.S. RODNEY.

9th October, 1941.

REPORT ON OPERATION "HALBERD"

Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships the following report on Operation "Halberd".

Admiralty footnote.

* Commodore of Convoy "Substance" was the Master of S.S. MELBOURNE STAR, Captain D. R. MacFarlane

The preliminary discussions, arrangements and movements in connection with the operation, which was designed to secure the passage of H.M.S. BRECONSHIRE* and 8 M.T. ships to Malta, have been dealt with in previous reports of proceedings. This report deals with the period from 1800A on 24th September (D.-1) until the completion of the operation.

Situation at 1800A on 24th September (D.-1).

2. The situation at 1800 on 24th September was as follows:—

(a) Convoy W.S.IIX, consisting of H.M. Ships BRECONSHIRE (Commodore), QUEEN EMMA, PRINCESS BEATRIX, ULSTER MONARCH, ROYAL SCOTSMAN, and S.S. IMPERIAL STAR (Vice-Commodore), ROWALLAN CASTLE (Rear-Commodore), CLAN MACDONALD, CLAN FERGUSON, AJAX, LEINSTER, CITY OF LINCOLN, DUNEDIN STAR and CITY OF CALCUTTA, with PRINCE OF WALES (Vice-Admiral, 2nd-in-Command, Home Fleet), EDINBURGH (Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron), KENYA (Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron),† EURYALUS, SHEFFIELD, and the destroyers LAFOREY (Captain (D), 19th Destroyer Flotilla), LIGHTNING, ORIBI, COSSACK (Captain (D), 4th Destroyer Flotilla), FURY, FARNDALE and HEYTHROP in company, were to the westward of the Straits of Gibraltar, steering east, to pass south of Europa Point at 0130A on 25th September.

(b) At Gibraltar:—NELSON, RODNEY, ARK ROYAL, HERMIONE, the destroyers ISAAC SWEERS, PIORUN, GARLAND, DUNCAN (Captain (D), 13th Destroyer Flotilla), FORESIGHT, FORESTER, LIVELY, LEGION and the oiler BROWN RANGER with her escort FLEUR DE LYS.

(c) Approaching Gibraltar Bay from the westward:—ZULU, GURKHA and LANCE.

3. NELSON, screened by ISAAC SWEERS, PIORUN and GARLAND, sailed to the westward at 1815. The Flag of the Flag Officer Commanding, Force H, had been hoisted in RODNEY as a ruse to give the impression that NELSON, on relief by RODNEY, was sailing to the westward for the United Kingdom. Farewell messages were passed between NELSON and RODNEY to assist the deception. This ruse appears to have created the desired impression.

4. After NELSON had cleared the entrance, GURKHA, ZULU and LANCE, who had been detached by the Vice-Admiral, 2nd-in-Command, Home Fleet to proceed ahead of the convoy to fuel at Gibraltar, entered harbour.

Admiralty footnotes

* H.M.S. BRECONSHIRE—Ammunition and Store Carrier

† Commodore of Convoy—Captain C. A. G. Hutchinson, R.N. (Retd.), Vice-Commodore of Convoy—R. Miller (Master), Rear-Commodore of Convoy—C. Harvey (Master), Vice-Admiral, 2nd-in-Command, Home Fleet—Vice-Admiral A. T. B. Curteis, C.B.; Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron—Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret, Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron—Rear-Admiral H. M. Burrough, C.B.