

Movements of Group II on 25th September (D.1).

19. Group II continued along the track ordered without incident. This track lay to the south of the Balearics through an area which experience suggested was reasonably clear of merchant ships and civil aircraft.

Movements of Group I on 26th September (D.2).

20. One A/S patrol aircraft and 3 or 4 fighters were maintained in the air from daylight until dusk. Speed was reduced to 17 knots at 0920.

21. At 0932 air look-outs in NELSON sighted a shadowing aircraft (probably Cant 506), bearing 150°, 10 miles, and flying very low. This machine was not detected by R.D.F.

Owing to a complete failure of R/T in the fighter leader's aircraft delay occurred in vectoring the fighters, and no interception took place.

22. A Swiss merchant ship, S.S. TUNISIAN, was sighted at 1048.

23. Group I reversed course at 1300, in order to close the distance on Group II. HERMIONE was stationed astern for R.D.F. purposes, and to give A.A. protection to ARK ROYAL.

24. At 1537 two aircraft were sighted low down to the eastward by ZULU, NELSON and HERMIONE. ZULU reported them as probably S.79s, but they appeared to be showing I.F.F.* and were thought to be Hudsons by the other two sighting ships and fighters were not vectored. This was an error on my part since there was no information of Hudsons being on passage from Malta to Gibraltar, and the slight I.F.F. reported might well have been due to the proximity of aircraft to one another.

25. To avoid altering course to the eastward before dark, Group I turned to 225° at 1745, paravanes were streamed at 1835, and at dusk a further turn was made to 090°. HERMIONE rejoined the screen for the night.

26. R.D.F. reports at 2030 indicated an aircraft passed 5 miles to starboard of Group I.

A ship burning navigation lights was sighted at 2135, steering 140°. Course was altered to port to avoid.

27. After dark, T.S.R.† aircraft in ARK ROYAL were drained down in order to reduce fire risks during the anticipated enemy air attacks on D.3.

Movements of Group II on 26th September (D.2).

28. Group II proceeded to the north-east until 0700, then to the eastward, and altered course to 107° on passing through 38° 31' N., 02° 32' E. at noon.

29. The first two destroyers were detached to oil at 0650. Delay occurred owing to BROWN RANGER being 22 miles west of the position ordered and on the quarter of the convoy instead of on the bow. This was due to the unexpected reduction in BROWN RANGER's speed referred to in paragraph 17.

* Admiralty footnotes

* I F F—a recognition device to identify own craft

† T S R—Torpedo/Spotter/Reconnaissance

30. During the afternoon an aircraft with Spanish colours and the letters FARM along the fuselage appeared out of the clouds over the destroyer screen and then disappeared in clouds. No other aircraft was sighted or detected. There is reason to believe that this aircraft, or its passengers, reported the presence of the convoy. A merchant ship wearing French colours was passed at 1830.

31. Oiling of the 12 destroyers in company was not completed until dusk. FURY and HEYTHROP rejoined after dark; ORIBI failed to find Group II in the dark and joined up with Group I screen until daylight.

Convoy M.G.2—Departure of First Ship from Malta.*

32. A signal was received from the Vice-Admiral, Malta at 1141, stating that a few Army and R.A.F. personnel with their wives had been embarked in the three ships of M.G.2 at their own risk, and at the request of H.E. the Governor of Malta. I feel that I should have been consulted about this, since a moral obligation arose to give these ships some degree of close protection. It was my intention, however, not to depart substantially from the priorities laid down by the Admiralty for Operation "Substance", viz., that the safe return of the escorting forces was of more importance than the safe arrival of empty shipping.

33. S.S. MELBOURNE STAR sailed from Malta at noon on 26th September.

Movements, a.m. 27th September (D.3).

34. Group I, which had been steering east during the night, reversed course to 290° at 0710, sighting Group II right ahead ten minutes later. ARK ROYAL with EURYALUS ahead and HERMIONE astern as close escort operated as requisite for flying off and on inside the screen.

35. The Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron took charge of the convoy proper and the whole force continued on an easterly course.

36. Four Fulmars were flown off at 0800. This number was increased to ten at 1000, to twelve at 1100 and again to sixteen at noon, when air attack was expected to follow reports made by enemy shadowers.

37. Indications by R.D.F. suggested that enemy reconnaissance aircraft were in the vicinity of the fleet from 0720, but the first report made by enemy aircraft was not intercepted until 0810. A second report was intercepted at 1056.

A few minutes earlier fighters had been vectored to the southward on an R.D.F. report, but there was some delay due to atmospheric interference with R/T and no contact was made.

38. R.D.F. detected a single aircraft bearing 210°, distant 14 miles at 1158 and two minutes later it was reported by LEGION as a B.R.20. Fighters made contact, but the enemy escaped in cloud. An enemy report was subsequently intercepted, which had probably been made by this aircraft.

Admiralty footnote

* Convoy M G 2—a Malta to Gibraltar convoy