

11. At 1400 on 24th December, I therefore broke W/T silence and reversed the course of the convoy for three hours increasing the speed of Force 2 to 19 knots. If the enemy surface forces had searched to the westward this step would have had little effect in bringing the convoy closer, but it would have prevented the convoy being located by them before dark.

12. There was no further development that day and the original intentions for the covering force were resumed.

13. The J.W. convoy was not, however, making its scheduled speed and it appeared that the R.A. convoy was passing Bear Island without being contacted by the enemy. Shadowing of the J.W. convoy together with this fact implied that U-boats if present, might be concentrating on the J.W.

14. I therefore requested Rear Admiral, Destroyers, Home Fleet to take the following action if he thought it desirable:—

(a) To divert the R.A. convoy to the northward clear of the area.

(b) To detach four Fleet destroyers from R.A.55A to J.W.55B. This was successfully carried out.

15. I now felt confident that if the 'SCHARNHORST' attacked the convoy, Force 1 and the escort destroyers would either drive her off or inflict damage which would give me time to close.

16. During the night of 25/26th December, the Battlefleet steamed to the eastward at 17 knots. There was an unpleasant sea and conditions in DUKE OF YORK were most uncomfortable, few people obtaining any sleep.

17. At 0339 Admiralty message timed 0319 was received in which Admiralty appreciated that SCHARNHORST was at sea. The stage was well set except that if SCHARNHORST attacked at daylight and immediately retired, I was not yet sufficiently close to cut her off. At 0400 the dispositions of Forces in the Bear Island area were as follows:

(a) *J.W.55B and Through Escorts.*

In position 73° 31' N. 18° 54' E. steering 070 at 8 knots. 19 merchant ships escorted by ONSLOW (Captain J. A. McCoy, D.S.O., R.N.), ONSLAUGHT (Commander W. H. Selby, D.S.C., R.N.), HAIDA (Commander H. G. de Wolf, R.C.N.), IROQUOIS (Commander J. C. Hibberd, D.S.C., R.C.N.), ORWELL (Lieutenant-Commander J. A. Hodges, D.S.O., R.N.), HURON (Lieutenant-Commander H. S. Rayner, D.S.C., R.C.N.), SCOURGE (Lieutenant-Commander G. L. M. Balfour, R.N.), IMPULSIVE (Lieutenant-Commander P. Bekenn, R.N.), and GLEANOR (Lieutenant-Commander F. J. S. Hewitt, D.S.C., R.N.), and the following ships belonging to the Western Approaches Command—WHITEHALL, WRESTLER, HONEYSUCKLE and OXLIP. This escort had also been recently reinforced by the following four destroyers detached from R.A.55A—MUSKETEER (Commander R. L. Fisher, D.S.O., O.B.E., R.N.), OPPORTUNE (Commander J. Le Barber, D.S.O., R.N.), VIRAGO (Lieutenant-Commander A. J. R. White, R.N.), and MATCHLESS (Lieutenant W. D. Shaw, R.N.).

(b) *R.A.55A and Through Escorts.*

In approximate position 74° 42' N. 5° 27' E. steering 267 at 8 knots. 22 merchant ships escorted by MILNE (Captain I. M. R. Campbell, D.S.O., R.N.), METEOR (Lieutenant-Commander D. J. P. Jewitt, R.N.), ASHANTI (Lieutenant-Commander J. R. Barnes, R.N.), ATHABASKAN (Lieutenant-Commander J. H. Stubbs, D.S.O. R.C.N.), and SEAGULL (Lieutenant-Commander R. W. Ellis, D.S.C., R.N.R.), and the following ships from the Western Approaches Command—BEAGLE, WESTCOTT, DIANELLA, POPPY and ACANTHUS.

(c) *Force 1.*

In approximate position 73° 52' N. 27° 12' E. steering 235 at 18 knots. BELFAST (Captain F. R. Parham, R.N. wearing the flag of Vice Admiral R. L. Burnett, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., Commanding Tenth Cruiser Squadron), NORFOLK (Captain D. K. Bain, R.N.), and SHEFFIELD (Captain C. T. Addis, R.N.).

(d) *Force 2.*

In position 71° 7' N. 10° 48' E. steering 080 at 24 knots. DUKE OF YORK (Captain the Honourable G. H. E. Russell, C.B.E., R.N., wearing the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet), JAMAICA (Captain J. Hughes-Hallett, D.S.O., R.N.), SAVAGE (Commander M. D. G. Meyrick, R.N.), SCORPION (Lieutenant-Commander W. S. Clouston, R.N.), SAUMAREZ (Lieutenant-Commander E. W. Walmsley, D.S.C., R.N.), and STORD (Lieutenant-Commander S. Storeheill, R.Nor.N.).

18. As J.W.55B. had been consistently shadowed and reported by U-boats and aircraft throughout its passage, and R.A.55A was apparently undetected, I appreciated that SCHARNHORST would make for the former convoy.

19. While breaking W/T silence would give away the fact that covering forces were in the vicinity I decided that the safety of the convoy must be the primary object.

20. The following action was therefore taken:—

(a) The convoy was diverted to the north in the hope that the change of course would make it more difficult for the SCHARNHORST to find it.

(b) C.S. 10* was ordered to report his position and D.17* that of the convoy.

(c) My position, course and speed was indicated.

21. On the course and speed of Force 2 and in the following sea my destroyers had much difficulty in avoiding broaching to and the DUKE OF YORK'S bows were constantly under water.

22. At 0628 I altered the course of the convoy to 045 and, having received C.S.10's signal timed 0540 giving his course as 235, I ordered Force 1 to close the convoy for mutual

* Admiralty footnote:—C.S. 10—Vice Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron. D.17—Captain (D), 17th Destroyer Flotilla.