

support, as I wished C.S.10 to have destroyers with him. C.S.10 altered course to 270 at 0712, in order to approach the convoy from the southward and avoid, in the event of action, steaming into the strong south westerly wind and heavy seas. At 0815 after receiving the position, course and speed of the convoy from D.17, the course of Force 1 was adjusted to 305 and speed increased to 24 knots.

#### FIRST CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY BY FORCE 1.

23. At 0840 BELFAST'S radar picked up the enemy at 35,000 yards, bearing 295, when in an estimated position  $73^{\circ} 35' \text{ N. } 23^{\circ} 21' \text{ E.}$ ; at this time C.S.10 expected the convoy to bear 287, 48 miles. At the same time D.17 estimated that the enemy's position was about 36 miles bearing 125 from the convoy.

24. In BELFAST the range of the main echo shortened rapidly and at 0900 a second echo was obtained bearing 299 at 24,500 yards. This second echo remained on a steady bearing and was held until 0930 when, from its estimated speed of 8-10 knots, C.S.10 considered that it was probably a merchant ship from the convoy and disregarded it. It may well, however, have been one of the enemy destroyers, detached to shadow the convoy, which are mentioned in paragraph 30 below.

25. At 0915, by which time Force 1 was formed on a line of bearing 180 the main echo bore 250 at 13,000 yards, speed approximately 18 knots. Force 1 altered to a line of bearing 160 and at 0921 SHEFFIELD reported enemy in sight bearing 222, range 13,000 yards.

26. At 0924 BELFAST opened fire with starshell and five minutes later Force 1 was ordered to engage with main armament. At 0930 Force 1 altered to 265 and NORFOLK opened fire at a range of 9,800 yards but had to drop back to clear BELFAST'S range. At 0938 Force 1 altered to 105 and at 0946 to 170 by which time the range had opened to 24,000 yards and the enemy had altered course to 150 steaming at about 30 knots.

27. NORFOLK alone of Force 1 continued firing until about 0940. She claimed one hit with her second or third salvo and this has since been confirmed by prisoners as a hit either in the crow's nest or the bridge port director which caused several casualties. Other observers consider that she scored a further hit on the forecastle without doing very much damage but prisoners have not yet confirmed this. The 6-inch cruisers did not open fire during this phase of the action and the enemy may at this time have been deceived as to the number of cruisers in Force 1 and thus made a second attempt to attack the convoy. From prisoners' statements, however, it seems that SCHARNHORST had been expecting to engage two or three cruisers.

28. After NORFOLK ceased firing Force 1 pursued the enemy to the southward but the range continued to open with the enemy's speed at 30 knots. At 0955 the enemy altered course to the north east and C.S.10 at once appreciated that he was trying to work round to the northward of the convoy and attack again. Possibly this was the result of an exhortation from Admiral Doenitz which appears to

have been received and read to the ship's company at about this time. In the prevailing weather conditions, with wind force 7-8 from the south west, Force 1's maximum speed was 24 knots and as that of the enemy was estimated at 28 to 30 knots C.S.10 decided that Force 1 must get between SCHARNHORST and the convoy. Force 1 therefore altered course to 305 at 1000 and to 325 at 1014. Six minutes later contact with the enemy was lost when he was bearing 078 at 36,000 yards and steering to the north east at about 28 knots.

29. During this engagement the convoy was turned to the northward by D.17 on my instructions at 0930; it remained on that course until 1030 when, realising that C.S.10 had lost touch with the enemy and was closing the convoy, I ordered D.17 to turn it back to 045. C.S.10 had previously asked for six destroyers to be detached to Force 1 but D.17 received my signal timed 0937 (ordering only four to join Force 1) before they were detached and so MUSKETEER, MATCHLESS, OPPORTUNE and VIRAGO (36th Division) left the convoy to join C.S.10 at 0951.

\*30. Throughout this first engagement I had appreciated that enemy destroyers might be in company with SCHARNHORST. In fact no visual contact with them was reported by any of our forces throughout the whole operation, though many unidentified destroyer radar echoes persisted during the day. From prisoners' reports, however, there seems little doubt that SCHARNHORST had three destroyers in company with her and that before Force 1 first made contact these destroyers had been sent ahead to shadow, report and if possible attack J.W.55B. Prisoners also state that the destroyers did make contact with the convoy and signalled that they had done so by Very lights before Force 1 engaged. If this is so neither the destroyers nor the Very lights were seen by the convoy escorts who reported nothing unusual until they sighted BELFAST'S starshell at 0925. It may well be that when SCHARNHORST was engaged these destroyers withdrew from the convoy either to assist her or to make good their escape.

#### SECOND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ENEMY BY FORCE 1.

31. Force 1 closed the convoy and was joined at 1024 by the 36th Division. At 1045 Force 1 passed through position  $73^{\circ} 49' \text{ N. } 21^{\circ} 58' \text{ E.}$  and five minutes later made radar contact with the convoy bearing 324 at 28,000 yards. The cruisers commenced zig-zagging 10 miles ahead of it with the 36th Division disposed ahead of Force 1 as a screen.

32. At this time I appreciated that Force 2 would have little chance of finding the enemy unless some unit regained touch with him and shadowed. I informed C.S.10 of this at 1058 but as weather conditions gave the enemy an advantage of 4-6 knots in speed he rightly considered it undesirable to split his force by detaching one or more ships to search, feeling confident that the enemy would return to the convoy from the north or north east.

\* Admiralty footnote.—It is known that the three destroyers at sea with SCHARNHORST were detached early on the day of the action to seek and attack the J.W. Convoy and that thereafter they did not rejoin her.