

At 0205 H.M.S. MACKAY in the vicinity of Z23 broke off the engagement and returned to patrol 4.

*Loss of H.M.T. WILLIAM STEPHEN.*

15. This trawler did not maintain her station in the convoy though she should have had sufficient speed and had dropped some five miles astern. As soon as the E-boat activity developed it was seen that this unfortunate trawler had E-boats both ahead and astern of her and she ran into the group at 56B buoy, being sunk by torpedo a few minutes before 0100. I regret now that I did order her to steer inshore, but at the time the E-boat situation was not so clear as it became subsequently. The explosion was felt by Unit V to the northward. A German broadcast on the following day mentioned the picking up of survivors.

*Coastal Force Engagements.*

16. Unit S—M.L. 250 and R.M.L. 517 (position Z22) sighted H.M.S. MACKAY's first action but was not able to intercept the E-boats, the speed of the unit being reduced to 12 knots due to engine failure in M.L. 250. At 0156 a momentary action was fought with the two E-boats driven off by H.M.S. MACKAY in her second action.

17. Unit V—M.G.B.s 315 and 327 (position Z55) started to fleet 300°, 20 miles at 2345. The first actions of H.M. Ships WORCESTER and MACKAY were seen in the distance to the southward. An underwater explosion was felt about 0100 which confirms the time of the torpedoing of trawler WILLIAM STEPHEN. H.M.S. WORCESTER's second action (paragraph 14) was also seen and at 0120 radar contact was made with these E-boats. Three boats were heavily engaged from 0138 until 0144, hits being observed on two of them. The last boat in the line may have been considerably damaged. At 0230 three more E-boats were sighted on a north-easterly course at high speed about six miles north of 55B buoy. Owing to their large turning circle Unit V was unable to turn quickly enough to engage the fast moving enemy.

18. Unit R—M.G.B.s 609 and 610 (position Z56) started to fleet 300°, 20 miles at 2341. Two unidentified plots were signalled to the unit at 0035 and 0040 some ten miles E.N.E. of Sheringham buoy but Unit R had already investigated radar contacts in this area by the time the signals were received.

19. At 0100 Commander-in-Chief signalled position of Unit R and an enemy plot—Unit R had already obtained hydrophone contact and at 0102 obtained contact by radar. From this time until 0141 Unit R stalked the enemy, keeping between him and the convoy. As soon as the enemy showed signs of closing the convoy, Unit R attacked, twice forcing him to withdraw to the eastward, the second time for good. The second boat in the line on which Unit R concentrated their fire was undoubtedly hit hard and forced to leave the line.

20. This group of E-boats was the only one to operate north of 57F buoy.

21. Unit Y—M.G.B.s 607 and 603 (position Z16) together with Unit L (position Z18) was fleeted 020°, 20 miles at 2340 as mentioned in paragraph 4. H.M.S. WORCESTER's first

engagement at 0027 and those of H.M.S. MACKAY were observed to the westward. H.M.S. MACKAY's track chart and that of Unit Y indicate that the E-boats engaged by H.M.S. MACKAY at 0148 could not be the same as those engaged by Unit Y as suggested by Senior Officer of Unit Y. From statements by prisoners of war and other sources it is considered that Unit Y's group were proceeding back to their base possibly escorting one E-boat that had been damaged by H.M.S. PYTCHLEY at 2318. The fact that they reached Unit Y approximately at the end of H.M.S. MACKAY's action appears to have been pure coincidence.

22. At 0206 Unit Y engaged a group of E-boats steering an easterly course about 22 miles north-east of Smiths Knoll buoy. The unit pressed home its attack with great vigour and set two E-boats on fire. These E-boats were seen to blow up. M.G.B. 607 (Lieutenant R. M. Marshall, R.N.V.R.) also rammed and sank a third E-boat.

23. At 0400 M.G.B. 603 with 607 in tow obtained radar contact to the northward. Tow was slipped and at 0418 M.G.B. 603 went into action with six E-boats at a range of under 800 yards. As the result of being the first to open fire M.G.B. 603 obtained many hits on one boat and probably damaged it severely. After a running fight the enemy made off at high speed at about 0445. M.G.B. 603 then rejoined M.G.B. 607.

24. Unit J—M.T.B.s 442 and 439. Units E and J which had been ordered out from Lowestoft to positions Z10 and Z12 when E-boat activity started, were ordered to the northern end of Brown Ridge (position RB27 and ten miles north of position RB27 respectively) where they arrived at 0300. At 0406 unit went into action with three E-boats and a high speed running fight ensued in which both M.T.B.s scored a number of hits. They also suffered damage and casualties, a hit on the bridge of 442 killing the First Lieutenant. At 0415 M.T.B. 439 lost contact with 442 owing to the failure of the rudder to turn the boat, although hard over—439 continued to engage the enemy, however, until 0445 when it became necessary to attend to action damage and to wounded. At 0450 M.T.B. 442 also disengaged due to action damage and stoppage of 2-pdr. It is considered probable that considerable damage was inflicted on the enemy in these engagements.

25. At 0545 in position 52° 50' N. 3° 04' E., M.T.B. 439 sighted four E-boats steering E.S.E. As by this time 439 was in no fit state for action, avoiding action was taken. The presence of 439 appears to have confused the enemy sufficiently to induce them to open fire on one of their own boats which was straggling from the line.

26. At 0605, some 12 miles further west, 439 sighted another group of eastbound E-boats who opened fire. This group was also avoided. I consider this avoiding action was justified.

27. Most unfortunately fog at the aerodromes prevented any aircraft of Fighter or Coastal Commands taking advantage of this unique opportunity of attacking E-boats in daylight. A number of these did not reach their base before noon.