

Narrative of X.10

73. X.10 (Lieutenant K. R. Hudspeth, R.A.N.V.R.) was slipped from H.M.S. SCEPTRE from the slipping position—70° 40' N. 21° 07' E.—at 2000Z on 20th September, and after a trim dive proceeded on the surface at full speed across the declared mined area in the direction of Stjærnsund. The entrance to Stjærnsund was identified at 2300Z from a distance of 20 miles, and at daylight (0205Z) on 21st September, X.10 was in a position 5 miles from the west point of Stjernoy Island, when she dived.

74. Difficulty was experienced in trimming, and the defect to the periscope motor which was present on taking over from the passage crew had become worse. Further electrical defects also developed and the gyro compass failed. Lieutenant Hudspeth therefore decided to proceed into Smalfjord on the north coast of Stjernoy to remedy these defects. The choice of Smalfjord was made as it was considered there was less risk of detection there than in one of the small fiords in Stjærnsund in which it had been the original intention to bottom during daylight on 21st September.

75. X.10 arrived in Smalfjord at 0700Z on 21st September, bottomed at the head of the fjord on a sandy bottom and spent the day making good defects. By 1750Z the defects had been sufficiently overcome to warrant proceeding—though they were by no means cured—and X.10 proceeded out of Smalfjord and at 2035Z entered and proceeded up Stjærnsund, keeping close to the north shore. The only sign of activity was a small ship of fishing craft type which was sighted with navigation lights burning at 2135Z. She appeared to enter Storelokker Fjord.

76. Alten Fjord was reached by 2320Z on 21st September, and intending to press on so as to be close to the entrance of Kaafjord by daylight on 22nd September, course was shaped to the southward, keeping to the eastern side of the fjord.

77. At 0110Z on 22nd September it was realised that the gyro compass was wandering. At 0135Z, the steaming lights of a vessel were sighted ahead, approaching X.10; and at 0140Z, X.10 dived to avoid being sighted. On diving it was found that the damping bottles of the gyro compass were not working, and on raising the magnetic compass the light refused to function. As this light can only be replaced by taking off the top cover from outside, the result of these two defects was to leave X.10 with no compass whatsoever. At 0150Z X.10 came to periscope depth; but on attempting to raise the periscope a brisk fire developed from the periscope hoisting motor, filling the craft with smoke, and Lieutenant Hudspeth was forced to come to the surface to ventilate and clear the craft of fumes. Dawn was then breaking and X.10 was almost within sight of the entrance to Kaafjord.

78. Lieutenant Hudspeth then decided that, with the craft in its then condition, with no compass and no means of raising or lowering the periscope, he was in no state to carry out his attack. He therefore decided to bottom before daylight set in, in the only possible position within reach at the time. At 0215Z on 22nd September he bottomed in 195 feet

half a cable S.E. of Tommerholm Island, 4½ miles from the entrance to Kaafjord, and took immediate steps to make good defects.

79. At 0830Z—the exact time at which an explosion of charges might have been expected from the other craft attacking—two very heavy explosions were heard at a few seconds interval. Five minutes later—at 0835Z—nine further heavy explosions were heard at short and irregular intervals. These were followed between 0900 and 1000Z by a burst of about twelve lighter explosions, which were repeated, but this time louder and closer, at about 1100Z.

80. The two heavy explosions at 0830Z would appear undoubtedly to have been one or more of the X-craft charges detonating, while the lighter explosions between 0900 and 1000 and at 1100 would seem probably to have been depth charges. It is difficult to understand the nine heavy explosions at 0835Z. They might have been some form of controlled mine, either in the nets or in the entrance, or depth charges: though it does not seem probable that craft carrying depth charges could have been got under way in so short a time. The possibility of their having been other X-craft charges should not be discounted, echoes and a possible miscounting of the number of explosions heard being responsible for the figures given.

81. After spending the whole of daylight on 22nd September on the bottom, the defects in X.10 had still not been overcome; and Lieutenant Hudspeth reluctantly decided to abandon any idea of attacking and to withdraw. His decision was influenced by the explosions he had heard during the day, which convinced him that other craft had carried out their attack. At this time he still thought that all five of the other X-craft had been able to attack: he had no knowledge of the sinking of X.8 or the loss of X.9.

82. I consider Lieutenant Hudspeth's decision to abandon the attack was in every way correct. To have made the attempt without a compass, and with a periscope which could not be operated and must remain in the fully raised position, would have made any chance of success remote indeed. With the attack already compromised it would have been doomed to failure from the outset and would merely have been an unnecessary loss of valuable lives.*

83. X.10 surfaced at 1800Z on 22nd September and made for deep water. At 1825Z both charges were jettisoned in 135 fathoms, set to "safe". X.10 then proceeded on main engines out of Alten Fjord. A darkened vessel was sighted at about 2100Z off the entrance to Langfjord but was lost to sight in a snow squall. The western end of Stjærnsund was reached by 2350Z. As it was impossible to cross the declared mined area before daylight, X.10 proceeded into Smalfjord, where she arrived at 0215Z on 23rd September. As the fjord was completely deserted and snow

Admiralty footnote —

* It is now known that on the morning of 22nd September, SCHARNHORST was returning to her anchorage in Kaafjord, after carrying out gunnery exercises in Alten Fjord, when she received a signal stating that TIRPITZ had been torpedoed. She thereupon put about and proceeded to Langfjord, so it is clear that in any case X.10 would not have found her quarry.