

Two Fulmars arrived over the convoy at 0615, followed at 0700 by 6 Beaufighters, and subsequently Hurricanes. Fighter direction was carried out by EDINBURGH and the co-operation of the fighters left nothing to be desired.

131. At 0800 a report that no enemy surface forces were to northward or southward of the convoy's track was received from the Vice-Admiral, Malta. The Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron consequently detached KENYA, SHEFFIELD, EURALYUS and HERMIONE to proceed ahead to Malta to fuel. The four cruisers were sighted from Gozo at 0845 and entered Grand Harbour at 1130 with guards and bands paraded. They were accorded a great welcome by the people of Malta.

132. The whole convoy, with the exception of IMPERIAL STAR, entered harbour undamaged early in the afternoon of 28th September (D.4).

*Movements of Force A from Dusk 27th September (D.3) to p.m. 28th September (D.4).*

133. After landing on all aircraft (*vide* paragraph 86), Force A proceeded to the westward at 14 knots, this being NELSON's best speed at the time. LEGION reported an A/S contact at 0010/28 (D.4), but this was not confirmed.

134. In view of the low speed of NELSON I did not consider that action to afford close support of the ships of M.G.2 was justified, since this would have involved an unacceptable reduction in the destroyer screen then available. I wished also to convey the impression that a general withdrawal of forces to the westward was in progress and would be continued.

135. ARK ROYAL flew off 1 A/S patrol and 3 fighters at 0725. The latter carried out a search to a depth of 40 miles astern, but nothing was sighted. At 0812 an enemy shadower was sighted, but escaped into cloud.

136. An enemy report made by an R.A.F. aircraft received at 0958 indicated that 2 enemy battleships, 5 cruisers and 13 destroyers were 70 miles, 105° from Cagliari at 0940, steering 195°. These ships, which were not in a position to menace the convoy, manoeuvred in this area throughout the day.

137. NELSON sighted a Cant 506 very low down at 1025, and fighters were vectored. After a chase to the south-east he was shot down 55 miles from the fleet and only 200 yards from the Algerian shore, near Cape de Fer. This was a fine example of fighter control and relentless pursuit which reflects the greatest credit on those concerned. Although there were no survivors from the Cant, the occurrence may have been witnessed by occupants of the lighthouse at Cape de Fer, a small house in the vicinity and from a small vessel also in the vicinity.

138. Shadows were again reported at 1640, and yet again an hour later, but due to a failure of ARK ROYAL's R/T transmitter, it was not possible to vector fighters in time to intercept. An enemy report made by Italian aircraft was intercepted at 1720.

139. DUNCAN in position M in Screening Diagram No. 7 reported a contact on the port bow at 1942, in position 37° 30' N., 3° 45' E. She reported "definitely submarine" and carried out two attacks with no apparent result. LEGION closed to co-operate but did not gain contact. Both ships left the area at 2012 to rejoin the screen.

140. Speed was reduced to 12 knots at 2010 to reduce the strain on bulkheads and decks in the wake of flooded compartments in NELSON. At this time NELSON was approximately 8 feet down by the bows, and it was estimated that 3,500 tons of water had entered the ship.

141. At 2100, Group 2 of Force A, consisting of PRINCE OF WALES (Vice-Admiral, 2nd-in-Command, Home Fleet), RODNEY, ARK ROYAL and 6 destroyers were detached to proceed to the eastward and rendezvous with Force X a.m. on D.5. Group 1, consisting of NELSON and 3 destroyers, continued towards Gibraltar.

142. By keeping the battleships concentrated until dark, I hoped to have concealed damage to NELSON, and that consequently enemy surface vessels would keep clear while Force X made the passage westward from Malta.

*Submarine Attacks on Force A, a.m. 29th September (D.5).*

143. At 0555, in position 37° 30' N., 06° 25' E., PRINCE OF WALES obtained an R.D.F. surface echo ahead, and an emergency turn of 40° to port together to 050° was carried out at 0609. Three minutes after the turn, GURKHA (in position A, Screening Diagram No. 6) sighted a torpedo track approaching from an approximate bearing of 330°, and at a speed estimated at 40 knots. It was too late to alter course to avoid, and a second track followed a few seconds later; both appeared to pass under the ship.

GURKHA turned to port in the direction from which the torpedoes had approached, and ISAAC SWEERS joined in hunting for the submarine. No A/S contact was obtained and no depth charges were dropped.

At 0622, ten minutes after the tracks had been sighted, a double explosion was heard and felt.

GURKHA and ISAAC SWEERS rejoined the screen at 0700. Owing to the absence of these ships from Gibraltar it has not yet been possible to ascertain why no depth charges were dropped, but this will be investigated on their return.

144. GURKHA obtained an A/S contact, classified as a submarine, bearing 102°, in position 37° 26' N., 07° 14' E. at 0810, two hours after the previous attack. The contact was nearly ahead and a deliberate attack with a 14-charge pattern was carried out at 0815. Six minutes later a heavy underwater explosion was heard and felt—this was similar to that felt after the successful attack on a U-Boat next day.

GURKHA was ordered by the Vice-Admiral to rejoin the screen at 0841, and the hunt was abandoned. No torpedo tracks were seen.