

PART II—REMARKS.

28. This was probably the most difficult night yet experienced from the radar point of view. The E-boats split up into many small groups thus making identification most difficult.

29. As late as 0540 there were indications that some E-boats were still not far from the coast, almost certainly north of Ower Bank since the area south of it was covered by Coastal Forces. From previous experience it can be inferred that they were looking for missing boats. It is always a sign that our counter-measures have achieved some success. Analysis of the action reports points to the E-boats having come in north of the Ower Bank and then fanned out to the southward in probably three main groups (A, B and C) which in turn split up into smaller groups.

30. Group A operated between 57F buoy and 56B buoy and appears to have been a very large group. Units of it were engaged by H.M. Ships PYTOHLEY and WORCESTER (second action). Group A also provided the unit which remained at 57F buoy between 0050 and 0212. Another unit of this group went north of 57F buoy in search of the convoy and was only prevented from finding it by the well judged action of Unit R. It was probably some of group A that sank H.M.T. WILLIAM STEPHEN.

31. Group C was the most easterly of the three. Units of it were engaged by H.M.S. WORCESTER at 0027 and H.M.S. MACKAY at 0045 and 0148.

32. Group B appears to have been between 56B and 55B buoys. Shore radar showed E-boats near 56 buoy and Unit V's second sighting was probably boats of this group. It appears to have merged with group A at times and may have had a hand in the sinking of H.M.T. WILLIAM STEPHEN and therefore in H.M.S. WORCESTER's second action.

33. From the number of callsigns heard (30) and the number of boats accounted for by radar plots and ships' action reports (see paragraph 8) it is considered that at least 30 E-boats were present on this occasion, a strength of attack that has to be expected with the large number of E-boats known to be based on Dutch ports.

Shore Radar.

34. Shore radar stations did much good work in detecting E-boat units in or near the swept channel. It was their first experience of action conditions and it is considered that great credit is due to them in view of the very large number of both enemy and friendly vessels involved.

Remarks on Ships' Actions and Reports.

35. H.M.S. PYTOHLEY (Lieutenant-Commander R. H. Hodgkinson, R.N.).—This timely and well fought action had considerable bearing on the general success of the night's operations in that it prevented the enemy accurately locating the convoy. Throughout the Commanding Officer acted with sound judgment.

36. H.M.S. WORCESTER (Lieutenant J. A. H. Hamer, R.N.).—The Commanding Officer's decision at 0130 to break off the chase of E-boats when five miles north of the swept channel and return to his patrol was correct,

especially as the range was such that hits could scarcely be expected. The definite destruction of an E-boat is a most satisfactory indication of the efficiency of the ship. The Commanding Officer handled his ship with determination and sound judgment.

37. H.M.S. MACKAY (Lieutenant-Commander J. H. Eaden, D.S.C., R.N.).—Although it is undesirable to lay down any hard and fast rule as to how far from his patrol a destroyer should chase E-boats, in this case H.M.S. MACKAY's patrol was left completely open for a very long time. The object of these patrols is the prevention of minelaying in the channel and on this occasion the enemy would have been able to lay mines at his leisure during a period of two hours.

38. Unit V (M.G.B.s 315 and 327) (Senior Officer, Lieutenant J. A. Caulfield, R.N.V.R.).—The shore control had great difficulty in identifying Unit V among the many radar plots that appeared in the area concerned, consequently it was not possible to give this unit much help. It is most satisfactory that the unit was able to get into action with good effect so soon after H.M.S. WORCESTER's engagement and probably with the same boats. The continual harrying of the E-boats is bound to have a discouraging effect. The results obtained by the new type of hydrophone are most satisfactory but the standard of radar performance in M.G.B. 315 leaves something to be desired. Had the second enemy unit been picked up by radar the unit might have been able to turn to a similar course to that of the enemy before sighting and thus have got into action.

39. Unit R (M.G.B.s 609 and 610).—The Senior Officer of this unit, Lieutenant P. Edge, R.N.V.R., showed a quick and sound appreciation of the Commander-in-Chief's object in fleeing the unit, i.e., the defence of the north-bound convoy, and throughout handled his unit with tactical ability of a high order. Skilful use of radar gave him an exact picture of the enemy's movements and enabled him to go into action at a moment of his own choosing. The moment he chose was entirely correct and there is no doubt that this well fought action saved the convoy from being located and attacked. The unit was unfortunate in not obtaining a kill especially as a probable one had to be sacrificed in achieving the object.

40. It is not possible to lay down any hard and fast rule as to how far destroyers should be from the convoy route and it is inevitable that they should illuminate any craft approaching them that they cannot identify as friendly. The onus of establishing identity must remain with the coastal forces.

41. Unit Y (M.G.B.s 607 and 603).—Lieutenants Marshall and Lightoller showed admirable judgment and a magnificent fighting spirit in this, the most successful action of the night. It is considered that the claim to have destroyed 3 E-boats is substantiated. Once again the value of 2-pdr. starshell both as illuminants and as incendiary ammunition was demonstrated.

42. This action also shows the devastating effect of the gunpower of the D class M.G.B.s in an attack which is pressed well