

33. At about noon I found myself in a difficult position on account of the destroyers' fuel situation. I had either to turn back or go on to Kola Inlet*, and if the enemy had turned for home by this time there was obviously no chance of my catching him.

34. The convoy remained on a course of 045 but at 1122 I ordered D.17 to use his discretion regarding its course and at 1155 he altered round to 125 to keep Force 1 between the convoy and the enemy.

35. Force 1 was still zig-zagging ahead of the convoy. NORFOLK had reported a radar contact at 27,000 yards at 1137 but had lost it a few minutes later and by 1200, when the convoy was turning to 125, Force 1 was in 74° 11' N. 22° 18' E. steering 045 at 18 knots. Then, at 1205 with the convoy about 9 miles on the port quarter of Force 1, BELFAST made contact with the enemy by radar at 30,500 yards, bearing 075 and I knew now that there was every chance of catching the enemy.

36. C.S.10 concentrated the 36th Division on his starboard bow and at 1219 altered course to 100; the enemy course and speed was estimated at 240, 20 knots. A minute later the SCHARNHORST appeared to alter slightly to the westward, at 1221 SHEFFIELD reported enemy in sight and Force 1 was ordered to open fire at a range of 11,000 yards.

37. At the same time the 36th Division was ordered to attack with torpedoes. Unfortunately weather conditions, which reduced the destroyers' speed, and also the enemy's hurried retreat, prevented them from getting within range. MUSKETEER opened fire on the enemy at a range of 7,000 yards at 1222 and continued firing until 1236. During this time the range was never less than 4,100 yards and SCHARNHORST retiring at high speed was not considered to be a possible torpedo target.

38. This second action, fought by the cruisers at ranges from 4½ to 8 miles, lasted about 20 minutes and for the second time SCHARNHORST was most effectively driven off the convoy by Force 1's determined attack. The enemy quickly withdrew; his course altered round from west to south-east and the range began to open as his speed increased from 18 to 28 knots. Several hits were claimed by the cruisers during the opening salvos. Only one, which struck the port side aft and did not apparently explode, has been confirmed by prisoners but MUSKETEER from a distance of 4,500 yards considers there were others. Prisoners were agreed that the cruisers' fire was unpleasantly accurate and filled the air with fragments.

39. At 1233 NORFOLK received one hit through the barrette of "X" turret, which put the turret out of action and the magazine was flooded as a precaution; a second shell hit amidships. All radar became unserviceable except Type 284 and one officer and six ratings were killed and five ratings seriously wounded. At the same time an eleven inch salvo straddled SHEFFIELD and several pieces of shell described by C.S.10 as "up to football size" came inboard; fragments also penetrated the ship at various points.

* Admiralty footnote:—Kola Inlet = the entrance to Murmansk.

40. By 1241 the enemy was on a course of 110 at 28 knots and the range had opened to 12,400 yards. C.S.10 decided to check fire and shadow with the whole of Force 1 until SCHARNHORST could be engaged by Force 2. Force 1 therefore increased speed to 28 knots and at 1250 the enemy range and bearing were steady at 13,400 yards, 138°.

The 36th Division to the westward of the cruisers continued to pursue the enemy in line ahead, their range opening to 20,000 yards and then remaining steady.

SHADOWING OF THE ENEMY BY FORCE 1.

41. For the next three hours SCHARNHORST'S course was to the south-east and southward. Prisoners state that by this time she had given up all idea of attacking the convoy. Force 1 shadowed and reported SCHARNHORST from a range of 7½ miles and slightly to the eastward of the enemy. As he was retiring on such an advantageous course for interception by Force 2 the cruisers remained in close company and did not attempt to engage, shadowing instead by radar from just outside visibility range.

42. The 36th Division to the westward of SCHARNHORST and rather further astern closed the range slightly but owing to the heavy sea were unable to close to attack and were later stationed to the westward (in accordance with my signal time 1559) to guard against SCHARNHORST turning in that direction and breaking back to the convoy or to Altenfjord. Had this happened neither DUKE OF YORK nor my destroyers could have kept up against the head sea.

43. Despite her damage NORFOLK kept up with Force 1. At 1603 she was obliged to reduce speed to fight a fire in a wing compartment but she rejoined the Force at 1700.

44. At 1610 SHEFFIELD dropped back and reported that her port inner shaft was out of action and her speed reduced to 10 knots for half an hour, but by 1621 she was catching up again at 23 knots. However, the delay, and her reduction in speed, prevented her from rejoining Force 1 until 2100 and for the rest of the action she remained some 10 miles astern conforming to the general movement of the battle.

45. At 1640 Force 1 made radar contact with Force 2 at 40,000 yards on a bearing of 176 and C.S.10 received my order to open fire on the enemy with starshell at the same time. The range of SCHARNHORST from BELFAST was then 19,300 yards. BELFAST opened fire at 1647 with starshell and four minutes later Force 1 observed Force 2 engaging the enemy.

MOVEMENTS OF FORCE 2.

46. Acting on the enemy reports of Force 1, Force 2 had been steering throughout the day to intercept.

47. The exemplary fashion in which C.S.10 with Force 1 shadowed the enemy until Force 2 made contact had given me all the information I required. At one time I feared that our respective positions might be in error but D/F bearings indicated that the approach was being made on a steady bearing.