

3° 35' E. steering 300° at about 1940. The inference was made that if these were in fact E-boats they were using a route direct from Ijmuiden north of the Ower Bank thence to the convoy route either in the Humber or Cromer area. It was also considered probable that they would use the same route for their retirement. When the action started coastal forces were redispensed accordingly.

3. At about 2318 H.M.S. PYTCHLEY who was guarding the seaward flank of the F.N. convoy\* obtained a radar contact of E-boats. The E-boat warning was at once sent out. At 2318 H.M.S. PYTCHLEY went into action with 5 or 6 E-boats 4 miles north of 56B buoy† and drove them off to the north-east, severely damaging one. This timely and well fought action undoubtedly saved the convoy from being accurately located. It appears probable that the E-boats intercepted by Unit Y at 0206 (see paragraph 22) were some of this group escorting the damaged boat back to its base.

4. On receipt of H.M.S. PYTCHLEY's enemy report at 2318 coastal force units were redispensed as follows:—

(a) Units R and V (positions Z56 and Z55‡) were fleeteds§ 300°, 20 miles.

(b) Units L and Y (positions Z18 and Z16) were fleeteds 020°, 20 miles, to cover the inferred line of retirement to Ijmuiden.

(c) Units C, O and P (positions Z14, Z12 and Z10) were fleeteds 015°, 18 miles to close the gap left by (b).

(d) Two fast units of M.T.B.s (E and J) were ordered out from Lowestoft to positions Z10 and Z12. These were later ordered to the northern end of Brown Ridge, again covering the inferred line of retirement to Ijmuiden.

It is most creditable that all these signals were correctly received and acted upon with promptitude.

5. The shore radar stations now began to get unidentified plots in dangerous proximity to the F.N. convoy—H.M.S. EGLINTON on patrol 3 was therefore ordered to remain with the convoy until further orders, H.M. Ships WORCESTER, MACKAY and CAMPBELL (patrols 4, 5 and 6) being fleeteds north to 3, 4 and 5 respectively at 0002.

6. It soon became clear that the E-boats had split into numerous groups which were approaching the outer war channel at a number of points east of 57F buoy. It was remarkably fortunate that all these groups came in astern of the convoy which was in fact never sighted. This convoy happened to be 2 hours ahead of timetable. In addition to the convoy the trawler WILLIAM STEPHEN was a source of anxiety as she had straggled some miles astern of the convoy.

7. The situation at 0002 on 25th October on the convoy route was as follows:—

The rear of the F.N. convoy approximately

*Admiralty footnotes:*

\* F.N. convoys were northbound coastal convoys.

† For positions of numbered buoys, see Appendix A.

‡ For numbered positions Z56 etc., see Appendix A.

§ "Fleet" was a code-word used in signals when re-disposing units on patrol; in this context, "fleeteds" means merely "moved".

at 57C buoy—H.M.S. WORCESTER on patrol 4 had by that time reached the eastern end of her patrol, 57 buoy. There was thus temporarily a stretch of 25 miles that was completely open to attack since H.M.S. EGLINTON (patrol 3) had been ordered to remain with the convoy. Radar stations showed unidentified plots close north of 55B buoy and approaching 56B. Another track appeared about 3 miles north-east of 57C moving slowly towards 57F. Shortly after this time yet another track appeared a mile or so north of 56 buoy. At 0002 H.M.T. WILLIAM STEPHEN was near 56 buoy.

8. Between 0015 and 0115 there were groups of E-boats at 56, 56B and at 57F buoy after the convoy had passed. Positions of these groups obtained by shore radar were signalled by Commander-in-Chief, The Nore, although no immediate action could be taken to deal with them. These groups were in addition to those engaged by H.M.S. PYTCHLEY at 2318, H.M.S. WORCESTER at 0027, H.M.S. MACKAY at 0045 and 0136, and Unit R at 0140.

*Destroyer Actions.*

9. H.M.S. PYTCHLEY (with F.N. 60).—Already described in paragraph 3.

10. H.M.S. WORCESTER (patrol 4).—At 0027 when 3 miles east of 55B buoy, H.M.S. WORCESTER engaged 4 E-boats, scoring Oerlikon hits on second boat in the line. The E-boats retired on a course of 030°. A cast round after contact had been lost did not locate the possibly damaged boat.

11. H.M.S. WORCESTER passed 56 buoy about 0100, at which time shore radar placed the group that had been near that buoy about 3 miles north of it. By now the large number of plots made identification and following of units extremely difficult and a clear picture of the situation in this area could not be obtained.

12. At 0117 H.M.S. WORCESTER engaged 3 E-boats 1½ miles north of 56B buoy. One E-boat was hit by a 4.7-inch shell and close range weapons and was seen to blow up, burning wreckage being passed during the chase to the northward. At 0151 on return to the channel, H.M.S. WORCESTER sighted and engaged 3 E-boats on the scene of the action at 0117. These were stopped when sighted. They were engaged and driven off.

13. H.M.S. MACKAY (patrol 5).—At 0005 when "fleet north" signal was received H.M.S. MACKAY was at southern end of patrol 5. At 0036 when at 57 buoy radar detected 3 targets 4 miles to the northward. At 0040 5 E-boats were engaged at 1,700 yards range. These retired to north-eastward, making smoke and dropping delayed action depth charges which were easily avoided. M.G.B. Unit L fleeteds 020°, 20 miles from Z18 obtained H.E. from this group at 0137 but could not intercept. At 0107 H.M.S. MACKAY, then some 14 miles north-east of 57 buoy, shaped course for 54D buoy.

14. At 0136 when 6 miles north of 57 buoy, H.M.S. MACKAY obtained suspicious radar contact 4 miles to the west. At 0148 at least 2 E-boats were engaged and straddled with the twin 6-pdr. The E-boats retired to the north-eastward, dropping depth charges as they went.