

remained in company as far as Cape Wrath, which was reached on 26th September without further loss.

54. They had been escorting the two convoys in succession in conditions of almost continual action for a period of 18 days. To their untiring vigilance is mainly due the fact that the losses were no heavier. These losses summarised were:—

P.Q.18. Ten merchant ships by air attack, three by U-boat. Arrived twenty-seven. Four fighters lost (three pilots safe).

Q.P.14. SOMALI, LEDA, GREY RANGER and three merchant ships by U-boat. Arrived sixteen.

German. At least three U-boats sunk and several more damaged. At least forty aircraft shot down and many more damaged. About two hundred and fifty aircraft torpedoes were expended.

Battlefleet

55. Vice Admiral Second in Command, Home Fleet, with the battlefleet, put to sea from Akureyri on 11th September, with the hope of inducing the enemy to believe that heavy cover as far as the Bear Island area was being provided as usual. In this he was probably successful, for he was sighted on 12th September, on a north-easterly course, and was not again located, though he returned to Akureyri two days later. A similar movement was made from 19th to 22nd September, but was not detected by the enemy.

Submarine Operations

56. All available submarines were employed providing cover and escort for these convoys. After the passage of *P.Q.18* and *Q.P.14*, the *TIGRIS* and *TRIBUNE* were diverted to patrol off the Lofotens for the German heavy ships returning to Narvik from Altenfiord; but nothing was seen of them. The *RUBIS* at the same time laid mines on their expected route. Shortly after parting company with *Q.P.14*, one of the escorting submarines, *P.614*, torpedoed and sank a U-boat.

Summary of Results

57. The approximate scale of attack and the losses for the convoys run during the quarter were:—

58. In attacks on convoys and escorts on this route, the German Air Force achieved the following results (figures for the previous quarter in brackets):—

| | <i>Bombers</i> | <i>Torpedo aircraft</i> |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Sorties | 126 (248) | 173 (44) |
| Sunk | 0 (7) | 13 (4) |
| Sorties per sinking | — (35) | 13 (11) |

EXTRACT FROM DESPATCH COVERING THE PERIOD 1ST OCTOBER TO 31ST DECEMBER, 1942

Home Fleet,
4th March, 1943.

Return of Hampden Crews

1. After the passages of *P.Q.18* and *Q.P.14*, the two squadrons of Hampden torpedo aircraft which had flown to Russia for this operation were presented to the Russians. The *ARGONAUT*, *INTREPID* and *OBDURATE* sailed on 13th October to bring home the crews of these aircraft. On the outward passage these ships carried the medical unit, which the Soviet Government had now consented to allow ashore, and food for the British forces in North Russia. The Norwegian expedition in Spitzbergen had also discovered some fresh needs for the winter; and the ships called at Barentsburg on the way.

2. The passage was made without incident, save for one sighting by enemy aircraft: the force reached Kola Inlet on 21st October, sailed the next day and arrived at Scapa on 28th October.

Independent Sailings

3. After considerable discussion with the Admiralty, it was decided at the end of October to sail about ten ships independently each way between Iceland and North Russia, taking advantage of the long nights and the passage north of Bear Island. The original plan was to sail the ships at 100-mile intervals in order of speed; but for political reasons it was necessary to sail British and American ships alternately, which led occasionally to one ship overtaking another on passage. Trawlers were spaced along the route for life-saving; and the Admiralty ordered two submarines as well to be used for this purpose.

4. The first eastbound ship left Reykjavik on 29th October and was followed by twelve others. The first indication to the enemy that

| Convoy | Ships sailed | Attacked by | Ships lost | Reached destination |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------|
| <i>P.Q. 17</i> | 38 (+ 2 rescue vessels joined later) | U-boats 6 bombers 33 torpedo aircraft ... | 0 } +21 0 } after 3 } scattering | 13 |
| <i>Q.P. 13</i> | 35 | No | 5 own minefield ... | 30 |
| <i>P.Q. 18</i> | 40 | U-boats 140 torpedo aircraft ... 120 bombers | 3 10 0 | 27 |
| <i>Q.P. 14</i> | 20 | U-boats | 4 | 16 |

Notes

(i) In *P.Q.17*, two of the ships turned back to their port of departure, whilst one went aground the day after sailing but was subsequently salvaged.

(ii) About 15 U-boats operated against each pair of convoys.

(iii) Fleet oilers and rescue vessels in company with the convoys are included in these numbers, but escorts are not.