

PROCEEDINGS  
(D.G.F. MAC)

Sir,

I have the honour to submit the following Report of Proceedings of the 5th. Escort Group under my command between the 18th. August and 30th. August, 1944. All times given are Zone -2.

2. The 5th. Escort Group, consisting of H.M.S. BICKERTON (Senior Officer), BLIGH, AYLMER, KEMPTHORNE and KEATS sailed from SCAPA at 1200, 18th. August. H.M.S. GRINDALL was unable to sail with the group due to getting a wire round her port propeller while going alongside the oiler "DANMARK" earlier in the day. The group formed the asdic screen for the C.V.E.'s TRUMPETER and NABOB, the whole forming Force 2 of the Home Fleet for operation "GOODWOOD".

3. The group continued to play this role without incident until at 1720 on 22nd. August, in position 71. 49.N, 20. 03.E., H.M.S. NABOB was torpedoed and shortly afterwards, H.M.S. BICKERTON suffered a similar fate while searching for the U-boat. A full account of this action is contained in Appendix I to this report.

4. At 2230, on the same day, BICKERTON having been sunk by our forces, and survivors embarked in KEMPTHORNE and AYLMER, together with 214 personnel from NABOB, the NABOB was able to get under way with AYLMER, BLIGH and KEMPTHORNE as escort. I and my Staff had transferred to AYLMER.

5. By midnight, NABOB was making  $8\frac{1}{2}$  knots on one engine and later increased this to  $9\frac{1}{2}$  knots. At 2000 on the following day, 23rd. August, the Force was joined by H.M.S. TRUMPETER, ALGONQUIN and KEATS and a further 212 ratings from NABOB were transferred to ALGONQUIN, after which the whole force continued in company en route for the FAEROES.

6. In spite of a moderate gale on 24th. August, NABOB continued to make good over 9 knots. The latitude of the FAEROES was reached at 0900, 26th. August and 5th. Escort Group and ALGONQUIN were relieved there by Captain (D) 27 and three destroyers. ALGONQUIN was detached to THORSHAVN to transfer NABOB's ratings to one of D.27's destroyers, but KEMPTHORNE who had no less than 530 people on board including some very severely injured continued to SCAPA with NABOB to disembark them.

7. AYLMER, BLIGH and KEATS proceeded to establish A/S patrols off the entrances to THORSHAVN ROADS while Home Fleet Units were fuelling. At 0530, 28th. August, after fuelling in SKAALKFIORD, AYLMER, BLIGH and KEATS accompanied by SERAPIS sailed for SCAPA as screen for FURIOUS. SCAPA was reached at 1930 the same day, and 5th. Escort Group then swept ahead of convoy EN 27 as far as LOCH EWE, AYLMER then proceeded to LIVERPOOL and BLIGH and KEATS to Belfast.

8. It is perhaps worthy of note here that the asdic conditions throughout the time we were in Northern Waters, north of the FAEROES, were quite hopeless. It appears that the asdic beam seeks the surface of the water and travels along close the surface. This was evident from the fact that echoes could be obtained at very long ranges from surface ships and wakes. Not a sign of an echo, however, was obtained from the U-boat although it is certain it was swept over by several ships. As a result, A/S escorts in Arctic Waters are useless for hunting U-boats and are at best able to form simply a physical obstruction when stationed as a close screen.

9. A further point of interest with regard to operations with the Fleet, is the unsuitability of Diesel-Electric frigates for such employment. The diesel frigates of the Group were a constant source of anxiety. At their best speed they had very little in hand for alterations of course or screening positions although only used to escort C.V.E.'s. When one of their frequent minor breakdowns occurred, they were unable to keep up on a straight course. It is suggested, therefore, that the present practice of having mixed groups of steam and diesel frigates should be done away with. Then, if a group is required to work with the Fleet, a group of steam frigates can be selected.

I have the honour to be,  
Sir,  
Your obedient servant,

The Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet.

APPENDIX I.

LOSS OF H.M.S. "BICKERTON".

All times Zone -2.

On the afternoon of the 22nd August, 1944, Force 2, consisting of H.M.S. KENT, (Senior Officer), TRUMPETER and NABOB in line abreast 5 cables apart and screened by the 5th Escort Group was proceeding at 16 knots and zig-zagging in accordance with zig-zag diagram No.20. The screen was formed in a modified screening diagram No.9, distances reduced 1,000 yards, and positions M, O, R, A and D being occupied by BICKERTON, BLIGH, AYLMER, KEMP THORNE and KEATS respectively. Thus AYLMER and BLIGH were to Starboard, BICKERTON ahead KEMP THORNE and KEATS to port.

2. At 1720, in position 71. 49.N. 20. 03.E. H.M.S. NABOB who was the starboard wing ship was torpedoed on the starboard side, right aft. The first Division of the 5th. Escort Group, (BICKERTON, BLIGH and AYLMER) were at once ordered to turn and form line abreast, one mile apart on the course 040 degrees. At the same time all ships of the screen were ordered to stream CATS.

3. I had appreciated at this time that NABOB had probably been hit by an acoustic torpedo and that it was probable that it had been fired from the starboard side of the squadron and that the starboard screen had passed the position of the U-boat. The course of 040 degrees was chosen therefore in order to sweep back over the U-boat if possible.

4. However, at 1725, while still in process of streaming the CAT which had just been heard beginning to function, BICKERTON was struck by a torpedo, presumably acoustic, right aft. The ship shuddered violently while a huge plume of water in which could be seen depth-charges and bodies rose to a great height over the stern, and the ship then came to a stand-still. The C.E.A. smoke apparatus evidently burst and choking fumes of chloro-sulphonic smoke were blown through the ship by the ventilating blowers aft making it impossible to remain anywhere except on the windward side of the upper deck without being gassed.

5. At the same time, the starboard steam siren, a particularly noisy fog horn type of siren of American pattern, jammed full on making it impossible for even the loudest shouts into the ear of a neighbour from being heard. This was particularly unfortunate as a number of the ship's company started to panic and carley floats were launched and some ratings followed them overboard. The whaler was also turned out and in spite of eloquent gestures by officers, which was all they could do in the appalling noise of the siren, this boat was lowered and filled dangerously full.

6. Eventually, however, the Engineer Officer was found wandering about the upper deck and he was sent to get steam turned off the siren. It is not certain whether or not it was due to any action on the part of the Engineer Officer or whether it was simply that steam pressure failed, but shortly after this the siren stopped. In the blessed silence that followed, it was possible to regain control of the situation. The would-be deserters were brought back on board, many of them covered with oil fuel and all wet through and shivering with cold, thus no doubt earning their just reward for allowing themselves to panic.

7. It was possible now also to receive reports on the extent of the damage. The setting in motion of the damage control organisation had devolved on Stoker Petty Officer Samuel Taylor, official number D/KX.81459, as the after repair party had been more or less wiped out by the explosion and it was now found that the Engineer Officer, Chief E.R.A. and Chief Stoker had abandoned ship without orders. Stoker Petty Officer Taylor, however, although it seemed likely at the time that the ship might not float for long, had without orders gone below and made an examination of the situation. He was thus able to report that the after engine room bulkhead was holding well and that, in fact, the machinery spaces were undamaged. He volunteered to take a party down to raise steam again and to get the pumps going and shore up the engine room bulkhead. Permission was granted, but shortly afterwards I ordered all hands on to the upper deck again as it was obvious that it would not be possible with the resources at hand to tow the ship to harbour and that she would have to be sunk to allow all ships to concentrate on the protection of NABOB, whose Commanding Officer had now reported that he hoped to get under way again shortly on one engine.

APPENDIX I (CONTINUED)

8. Meanwhile KEMPTHORNE had closed the two damaged ships and using the motor-boats and whalers from BICKERTON and KEMPTHORNE all surviving personnel from BICKERTON were taken to KEMPTHORNE starting with a number of severely wounded ratings. By 1915 all personnel except officers and a few ratings had been taken aboard KEMPTHORNE and I then abandoned ship with the last motor-boat load and proceeded to AYLMER where I embarked with this last boat load. The motor-boat was then sent away, with the 1st. Lieutenant of BICKERTON in charge to assist in transfer of spare personnel from NABOB to KEMPTHORNE.

9. During all this time, the remaining ships of the group, except KEATS who had remained with TRUMPETER as her escort, carried out operation "OBSERVANT" round the two wrecks, but without gaining any asdic contact. At 1945, however, BLIGH, who was at the time to the northward of NABOB and BICKERTON, reported sighting a conning-tower bearing 010 degrees, 2½ miles. BLIGH immediately proceeded to the attack and carried out step-aside procedure and dropped three "anti-gnat" single charges. No contact was gained however, although AYLMER joined BLIGH in carrying out "OBSERVANT" round the estimated diving position. Asdic conditions were evidently hopeless and it seemed as though the sound beam was travelling very close to the surface only, as echoes at long range could be obtained from wakes and surface ships, but nothing could be picked up from the submarine. The weather throughout was calm and clear with very little swell.

10. By 2115, 202 ratings and 12 officers from NABOB had been taken on board KEMPTHORNE. Meanwhile, at 1729, H.M.S. VIGILANT had joined to augment the escort. Orders having been received from the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, that BICKERTON was to be sunk, I ordered VIGILANT to carry out this and at 2055 she torpedoed and sank BICKERTON.

11. At 2230, NABOB reported all boats hoisted and making way at 6 knots. Screen was then formed on her, with escorts zig-zagging independently. At about this time, VIGILANT was ordered to join H.M.S. KENT, which left BLIGH, AYLMER and KEMPTHORNE to escort NABOB. Speed was gradually increased by NABOB till by night she was making 8½ knots, later increased to 9½ knots.

12. I would like to bring to the notice here the exemplary behaviour of Stoker Petty Officer S. Taylor, official number D/KX.81459, whose cool conduct and devotion to duty in spite of the poor example set him by some of his seniors in the Engine Room Department was in the best traditions of the Service.

13. Other ratings whose behaviour was particularly good were Acting Petty Officer Leonard Winter, official number P/JX.201253, Ordnance Mechanic F. Chapman, R.N.V.R., official number P/SDX.1648, Able Seaman D. Steele, official number P/JX.234798, who besides displaying coolness and courage throughout the emergency, formed the volunteer party to go below with Stoker Petty Officer Taylor to carry out the damage control.

14. Chief Petty Officer Telegraphist W. Brooks, official number P/J.29735, Leading Seaman (L.T.O.) R. Rendle, official number P/JX.167874, and Electrical Artificer F. Robinson, official number P/MX.67050, also showed coolness and courage in remaining at their duty until specifically ordered out of the ship, the first named having seen to the destruction of all secret books and publications in his possession, while the others attended on me and carried out smartly orders received without thought of their own safety. Their behaviour made a good example to others who were liable to panic. This can also be said of Stoker 1st. Class J. Ryres, official number P/KX.111826, who though wounded in the head remained cool and collected and refused to leave in earlier boat loads, giving up his place to others.

15. All officers behaved in the exemplary fashion expected of them, with the exception of the Engineer Officer, whose conduct in abandoning ship without orders has not yet been investigated or explained.

16. Report of Proceedings of BLIGH subsequent to the attack on NABOB is forwarded herewith. Her record seems to be at fault with regard to the formation and screening diagram in force at the time.