

THE BEAUFORTS' ATTACK

The setting in which Coastal Command Beauforts delivered their torpedo attack on the enemy ships was described by Squadron Leader W.H. Cliff today.

"The formation went in just above the waves, skimming the crests," he said. "First we saw several destroyers. They put up an intense barrage, but we went straight through and the next thing we knew was that the big chaps were towering right above us. The 'flak' they put up was terrific. The whole sky seemed full of it. Then there were fighters - scores of them - around. They were screaming about the place, and fights were going on all over the sky. Every now and then an aeroplane fell in flames.

"We selected one of the big ships for attack, and got within torpedo range. She was throwing any amount of stuff at us. We released our torpedoes within ten seconds of each other.

"I don't see how the ship could have got out of the way. She seemed to slow down after the attack, and my rear-gunner said he saw a ship - probably the Prinz Eugen - smoking and listing as I threw the Beaufort all over the sky to get away.

"The Beaufort on my right, piloted by an Australian, ran into trouble. His aircraft caught fire. The rear-gunner and wireless-operator, fortunately, managed to put it out and the Beaufort made a safe landing."

Another pilot in the formation said that four Messerschmitts went for him as he dived to release a torpedo. "I kept straight on and dropped the torpedo," he said. "When it was last seen it was running strongly in the right direction - right at one of the big ships. But there was no time to see how it ended up. Two of the Messerschmitts - they were 109s - were keeping up the chase and making things rather unpleasant. They came at me from all angles and bullet holes began to appear all over the aircraft.

"My rear-gunner gave one of them a few good bursts, and I heard him shout through the inter-comm that he had shot it down. Another Me. came in but apparently got more than he bargained for, because, after a few bursts from my rear-gunner he sheered off and we didn't see him again."