

ENEMY MERCHANT VESSELS TORPEDOED

Although the other two aircraft of his flight were shot down in front of him, the Yorkshire pilot of a third Hampden torpedo-bomber pressed home his attack on enemy shipping through the heaviest screen of flak fire he had ever experienced and torpedoed his ship.

The attack took place off the coast of Norway yesterday afternoon, when three Coastal Command Hampdens sighted two medium-sized ships, escorted by two flak ships.

F./Sgt. John William King of Richmond, Yorkshire, the pilot of the Hampden, nursed his damaged aircraft home across 300 miles of sea to a safe landing at base.

"As we turned in to attack the ship," he said, "I saw 'R for Robert' on my port side shot down before it could attack. I had no time to watch further. 'M for Mother' had pulled in ahead of me and was heading straight for one of the ships. It was taking all the flak, and it was one of the heaviest concentrations I have ever seen. Suddenly right in front of me 'M' was hit and dived straight into the sea. We carried on, passing over the debris of the aircraft a few feet below and headed for the vessel which had been its target.

"I released my torpedo and pulled up and away. Almost at the same time we felt the aircraft shudder and afterwards found that the mainplane and boom and starboard engine had been hit."

As the aircraft climbed steeply for cloud cover, the wireless operator/air gunner shouted through the inter-com. that he had seen the torpedo hit the merchant ship plumb amidship. Debris was thrown into the air and black smoke poured from the vessel.

Several times on the homeward journey the starboard engine cut, and the pilot sent out an S.O.S. to give base his bearings in case he had to make a forced landing in the sea.

Two other German convoys were attacked off the Norwegian coast yesterday by other aircraft of Coastal Command.

A Hampden of an Australian squadron attacked a smaller merchant vessel in one of these convoys and then climbed for cloud cover. When in cloud, but approximately over the position of the ship, his aircraft was violently shaken upside-down.

"There was only slight machine-gun fire at the time," said the pilot, Sgt. A. Vincent, of Unley, S. Australia, "so I feel sure the explosion must have been our torpedo striking home. We were thrown over on our back but I managed to regain control all right."