

Air Ministry News ServiceAir Ministry Bulletin No.10016ATTACK ON ENEMY CONVOY

One medium sized merchant vessel was torpedoed and other ships were hit when a large enemy convoy was attacked by aircraft of Coastal Command off the Dutch coast this afternoon.

Beaufighters carrying torpedoes were escorted by Spitfires of Fighter Command, and Mustangs of Army Co-operation Command.

The convoy consisted of approximately 15 vessels. One, a medium sized merchant vessel, was hit by two torpedoes and left on fire and listing.

"We came in on the port side of the convoy" said one of the pilots "and attacked the leading escort vessel. I dropped my bombs which missed only by a matter of feet. I then saw my squadron commander hit the ship he attacked and afterwards had a go at the next."

One of the pilots said debris was flying almost 100 feet into the air.

"We arrived just in time to see one ship with bits and pieces falling from it. I am sure it was blown 20 feet into the air."

"The air was thick with aircraft. Flak had become fairly accurate now. I bombed an escort ship and saw a big column of smoke pouring from it. Our fighters sat round us beautifully and there was no enemy fighter opposition.

"After the attack started a Ju.88 came along but he soon took to his heels pursued by four of our fighters."

Wing Commander H.P. Blatchford, D.F.C., who led the Spitfire wing escorting the Beaufighters, described it as "a terrific show".

"It was just like having a ringside seat at a world championship fight", he said. (The Wing Commander might be forgiven the metaphor for boxing was his favourite sport before he left Canada to join the R.A.F.)

"While our Spitfires sailed aloft on the look out for enemy fighters," added Wing Commander Blatchford, "the leading aircraft tore down in a thrilling dive on the convoy.

"After the ships had been raked with gunfire from the Beaufighters other Beaufighters came in low to crash torpedoes into the heart of the convoy.

"I myself saw eight of those 'tin fish' hit the water leaving white tracks as they swished towards the ships. They all looked as though they could not miss.

"I saw the biggest ship hit by a torpedo slap amidships. A shower of water and junk shot up into the air. In no time, the ship had listed to port. It seemed a certainty to sink. It was a great thrill and one I shan't forget for a long time."

All the Spitfire pilots were enthusiastic in their praise of the Beaufighters. They circled round in their aerial grandstand as the Beaufighters went down in succession to the attack.

The whole operation was carried out at great speed.

The Spitfires, although enemy fighters were spotted in the distance, were not engaged. They stayed until the end and then escorted their charges safely back to base without loss.