

OFFICIAL ADMIRALTY AND AIR MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE

At about 11 a.m. yesterday, Thursday, R.A.F. aircraft reported that an enemy squadron consisting of the SCHARNHORST, GNEISENAU and PRINZ EUGEN, accompanied by destroyers, torpedo boats, E-boats and mine-sweepers, was approaching the Dover Straits from the westward. The enemy squadron was also heavily escorted by fighter aircraft.

The visibility at this time varied from 3 to 5 miles with low cloud, and the enemy ships were never visible from the English coast. On receipt of the report coastal craft of the Dover Naval Command were immediately sent out to the attack, together with Swordfish aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm, strongly escorted by R.A.F. fighters.

The attacks both by Swordfish and by the Coastal craft were pressed close home in the face of intense fire from all enemy surface vessels and opposition by enemy fighters. Reports indicate that the Swordfish scored at least one hit on one of the enemy heavy ships, and one of the Motor Torpedo boats also claims a possible hit, but owing to the intense barrage and a heavy smoke screen put up by the enemy, it was impossible to see the result of the attacks. Six Swordfish aircraft are missing but some of the crews have been saved. There were no casualties in the Coastal craft.

During this time the Dover defences opened fire at extreme range, which was replied to by the enemy shore batteries on the French coast.

The enemy force was repeatedly attacked by aircraft of the Royal Air Force strongly escorted by fighters. Results were difficult to see owing to low cloud, but according to preliminary reports, Coastal Command Beauforts claim three hits with torpedoes, and Bomber Command crews are confident that each of the main enemy units was hit by bombs.

The attacks were pressed home with the greatest determination in the face of heavy anti-aircraft fire and strong fighter opposition, which resulted in the loss of 20 of our bombers (including 5 aircraft of Coastal Command) and 16 fighters. 15 enemy fighters were destroyed by our fighter escort and at least 3 more by the bombers themselves.

Destroyers under the command of Captain O.T.M. Pizoy, R.N., in H.M.S. CAMPBELL also proceeded to intercept and attack the enemy.

At 1545 our destroyers sighted the enemy and went into the attack in the face of a very heavy bombing by enemy aircraft and also heavy gunfire from all the enemy's surface ships. Our destroyers took advantage of a rain squall to press their attack home.

Owing to the low visibility and the heavy fire to which the destroyers were subjected it was not possible to be certain of the result of the attack, but there is reason to believe that at least one torpedo hit was obtained.

Casualties in our destroyers were not heavy.

When last sighted the enemy, which had become separated, were making for their ports in the Heligoland Bight.

Further reports from our forces are awaited.

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ADMIRALTY, S.W.1.