

HAMPDEN'S CARRY TORPEDOES

With the conversion of Hampden bombers to torpedo-carriers with the R.A.F. Coastal Command, the margin of safety for German supply shipping operating along the Norwegian coast has been considerably reduced.

When the German convoys reached Bergen on their way to the northern Garrisons with vital stores, they generally considered themselves safe from further attack from the air. Bergen was practically the limit of the effective range of Coastal Command's Beauforts and Hudsons; beyond that point the ships had to contend only with British submarines. But the Hampdens, with their greater powers of endurance, can range much further afield in search of their prey, and fiords and anchorages north of Bergen, which were once looked upon by German seamen as "reception areas", now come within the danger zone.

The majority of the Hampden squadrons, which are now filling the same role as that so effectively played in Coastal Command by Beauforts since the early days of the war, formerly operated with Bomber Command and have a distinguished list of battle honours - Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen, Cologne. At first, the crews were not enthusiastic about the change. They preferred bombing to "stooging" around over the sea looking for ships to attack. But one day as they were practising dropping their torpedoes at a target ship, the German cruiser Prinz Eugen steamed along the coast of Norway. Beaufort squadrons went off to attack the cruiser, and when they came back the Hampden crews listened enthralled to the story of that gallant sortie.

From that moment they agreed that after all there was "something in this torpedo business," and they set about mastering this skilled job, so that in a few months the A.O.C. was able to say to them - "You have done a fine job. You had to leave Bomber Command at a time when the work was becoming really interesting and you came to a Command which, I daresay, had no great attraction for you. But your practice work indicates that your reputation with us will be as high as it was when you were with Bomber Command."

And since their first "kill" the Hampden squadrons have become even more enthusiastic. One of the squadrons, which belongs to the Royal New Zealand Air Force, is a completely new squadron formed in Coastal Command. It was one of their aircraft which torpedoed and blew up a ship off the coast of Norway recently.

With the change over from bomb-carrying to torpedo-carrying, many technical problems arose. But these were solved with considerable ingenuity, principally by the members of a Royal Australian Air Force squadron. They suggested so many new gadgets for guns and torpedo release that they became known as "the invention squadron." Many of their suggestions were accepted and adopted as standard equipment for the Hampden squadrons.

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