



Official Communiqués from the British Admiralty Concerning the Chase of the Bismarck

Official Admiralty Communiqué, Saturday, May 24, 1941.

British Naval forces intercepted early this morning, off the coast of Greenland, German naval forces, including the battleship Bismarck.

The enemy were attacked, and during the ensuing action H.M.S. Hood (Captain R. Kerr, C.B.E., R.N.), wearing the flag of Vice-Admiral L. E. Holland, C.B., received an unlucky hit in a magazine and blew up.

The Bismarck has received damage, and the pursuit of the enemy continues.

It is feared there will be few survivors from H.M.S. Hood.

Official Admiralty Communiqué, Sunday, May 25, 1941.

After the engagement yesterday in the North Atlantic, the enemy forces made every effort to shake off the pursuit. Later in the evening an attack by naval aircraft resulted in at least one torpedo hit on the enemy.

Operations are still proceeding with the object of bringing the enemy forces to close action.

Official Admiralty Communiqué, Monday, May 26, 1941.

The chase of the Bismarck in the Atlantic has been hotly pursued. This evening torpedo bombers of the Fleet Air Arm have scored a hit with a torpedo on the Bismarck. The hunt continues.

Official Admiralty Communiqué (A), Tuesday, May 27, 1941.

The German battleship Bismarck has been sunk by our naval forces. Details of the operations will be announced as soon as possible.

Official Admiralty Communiqué (B), Tuesday, May 27, 1941.

Air reconnaissance by Coastal Command aircraft revealed that a German battleship and cruiser, which they had previously located in the Norwegian port of Bergen, had sailed.

Certain dispositions were therefore ordered, and as a result H.M.S. Norfolk (Captain A. J. L. Phillips, R.N.), wearing the flag of Rear Admiral W. F. Wake-Walker C.B., O.B.E., and H.M.S. Suffolk (Captain R. M. Ellis R.N.), were ordered to take up a position in the Denmark Strait.

On the evening of May 23 Admiral Wake-Walker reported sighting an enemy force of one battleship and one cruiser proceeding at high speed to the south westward.

Visibility in the Denmark Strait was bad and extremely variable. The range of the enemy was only six miles when he was at first sighted, and storms of snow and sleet and patches of

mist at times reduced the visibility to one mile. Despite the difficulties of visibility H.M.S. Norfolk and H.M.S. Suffolk shadowed the enemy successfully throughout the night.

Meanwhile other units of the Royal Navy were taking up dispositions at high speed with a view to intercepting the enemy and bringing him to action with our heavy forces.

Early in the morning of May 24 H.M.S. Hood (Captain R. Kerr, C.B.E., R.N.), wearing the flag of Vice-Admiral L. E. Holland, C.B., with the H.M.S. Prince of Wales (Captain J. C. Leach, M.V.O., R.N.) in company, made contact with the enemy. Action was immediately joined.

During the ensuing engagement Bismarck received damage and was at one time seen to be on fire. H.M.S. Hood, as has already been announced, received a hit in the magazine and blew up. H.M.S. Prince of Wales sustained slight damage.

The chase was continued on a south westerly course with H.M.S. Norfolk and H.M.S. Suffolk, shadowing the enemy and maintaining contact despite all his efforts to shake off the pursuit. It appeared at this time that the enemy's speed had been slightly reduced, and reconnaissance aircraft of the Coastal Command reported that she was leaving a wake of oil.

On the evening of May 24, H.M.S. Prince of Wales again made contact with the enemy and action was joined for a short time. The German ships at once turned away to the westward and then swung round on to a southerly course, with our forces still in pursuit.

Other of our naval forces were now approaching the enemy and during the night naval torpedo bombing aircraft from H.M.S. Victorious (Captain H. C. Bowell, R.N.) delivered a torpedo attack on the enemy from a considerable distance, and one torpedo was seen to hit the Bismarck.

H.M.S. Norfolk, H.M.S. Suffolk and H.M.S. Prince of Wales continued to shadow the enemy successfully until shortly after 3 a.m. on May 25. Touch with the enemy was now lost in low visibility. The enemy was then approximately 350 miles south-southeast of the southern point of Greenland. Searching dispositions were at once taken up by other units of the Royal Navy. The main body of the Home Fleet, under the command of Admiral J. C. Tovey, K.C.B., D.S.O., with his Flag in H.M.S. King George the Fifth (Captain W. R. Patterson, C.V.O., R.N.), was steaming at high speed in a south-westerly direction from northern waters.

Another force under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir James F. Somerville, K.C.B., D.S.O., with his Flag flying in H.M.S. Renown (Captain R. R. McGrigor, R.N.) was steaming north-westwards at high speed from Gibraltar. H.M.S. Rodney (Captain F. H. G. Dalrymple Hamilton, R.N.), H.M.S. Ramillies (Captain A. D. Read, R.N.), who were escorting convoys in the North Atlantic, proceeded to move in the direction of the enemy.

Extensive air searches were organised by Coastal Command and by the Royal Canadian Air Force stationed in Newfoundland.

It was not until about 10.30 a.m. on May 26 that the enemy was again located. At that time the Bismarck was sighted by a Catalina aircraft of Coastal Command in a position about 550 miles west of Land's End.

This aircraft was attacked and as a result lost touch with the enemy battleship half an hour later, but at 11.15 a.m. the Bismarck was sighted by naval aircraft operating from H.M.S. Ark Royal (Captain L. E. H. Maund, R.N.). Only the battleship Bismarck was seen, and she was then steering an easterly course.

At this time H.M.S. King George the Fifth and H.M.S. Rodney were approaching the area, but were not yet sufficiently close to bring the enemy to action.

As soon as Bismarck was sighted by Ark Royal's aircraft Admiral Sir James Somerville detached the cruiser H.M.S. Sheffield (Captain C. A. A. Larcom, R.N.) to make contact with and shadow the Bismarck. During the afternoon a striking force of naval aircraft was dispatched from H.M.S. Ark Royal to attack with torpedoes, but this proved unsuccessful.

Shortly after 5.30 p.m. H.M.S. Sheffield made contact with the Bismarck and proceeded to shadow her. Within 20 minutes another striking force of naval aircraft was flown off by H.M.S. Ark Royal. This force attacked successfully, and one torpedo was seen to hit the Bismarck amidships. A second hit was obtained by a torpedo on the starboard quarter of the German battleship. It was subsequently reported that on being hit during this attack, the Bismarck made two complete circles, and that her speed was again reduced.

During the evening some of our destroyers of the Tribal class, under the command of Captain P. L. Vian, D.S.O., R.N., in H.M.S. Cossack, made contact soon after 11 p.m.

Between 1.20 a.m. and 1.15 a.m. on May 27 the Bismarck was attacked by torpedoes by H.M.S. Zulu (Commander H. R. Graham D.S.O., R.N.), H.M.S. Maori (Commander H. D. Armstrong, D.S.C., R.N.), and H.M.S. Cossack. H.M.S. Cossack and H.M.S. Maori each hit with one torpedo. After H.M.S. Maori's attack it was reported that there was a fire on the forecastle of the German battleship.

One hour after these attacks by our destroyers it was reported that the Bismarck appeared to be stopped. She was then about 400 miles due west of Brest, and had been pursued by our forces for more than 1,750 miles. It was subsequently reported that the Bismarck was again under way, and had made good about eight miles in one hour, and that she was still capable of heavy and accurate gunfire.

At daylight on May 27 another striking force of naval aircraft was dispatched from H.M.S. Ark Royal, but this had to be cancelled owing to low visibility.

Shortly after daylight the Bismarck engaged our destroyers by gunfire. H.M.S. Norfolk was in action with the Bismarck almost immediately afterwards and very soon the Bismarck was being engaged by our heavy ships.

Details of this phase of the action have not yet been received. It is known, however, that H.M.S. Dorsetshire, Capt. B. C. S. Martin, R.N., was ordered to sink the Bismarck with torpedoes. Bismarck sank at 11.01 this morning.

So far as is known at present the only damage sustained by H.M. ships other than H.M.S. Hood is the slight damage to H.M.S. Prince of Wales already referred to.

Official Admiralty Communiqué, Thursday, May 29, 1941.

It is now possible to give some details of the final phase of the destruction of the German battleship Bismarck.

The torpedo attacks by naval aircraft and the destroyer attack during the night of May 26-27, in which H.M.S. Sikh (Commander G. H. Stokes, R.N.) took part, in addition to the ships already announced, resulted in the speed of the Bismarck being greatly reduced and her steering gear being put out of action. Both her main and secondary armament, however, remained effective.

The Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, intended to close the Bismarck at dawn and sink her by gunfire from H.M.S. King George V and H.M.S. Rodney. This intention, however, was abandoned owing to the uncertain and variable visibility, which made it necessary to await full daylight before closing the enemy.

Shortly before 9 a.m. H.M.S. King George V and H.M.S. Rodney engaged the enemy with their main armament. The gunfire of these two battleships silenced the enemy. The Commander-in-Chief then ordered the H.M.S. Dorsetshire to sink the Bismarck with torpedoes.

As already mentioned, the Bismarck sank at 11.0 a.m. on May 27.

More than one hundred officers and men from the Bismarck were picked up by our forces and are prisoner of war.

On the day after the sinking of the Bismarck some of our naval forces which had taken part in the operations leading up to the destruction of the German battleship were heavily attacked by German aircraft. During these attacks H.M.S. Mashona, a destroyer of the Tribal class (Commander W. H. Selby, R.N.), was hit. The Board of Admiralty regrets to announce that she subsequently sank and that one officer and 45 ratings are missing.

The next of kin of casualties are being informed as soon as possible.

Official Admiralty Communiqué, June 6, 1941.

After the recent operations against the Bismarck, our forces encountered and sank three enemy supply ships and an armed trawler. These ships were, no doubt, intended to supply the Bismarck and other vessels operating against our trade.

Official Admiralty Communiqué, June 10, 1941.

As soon as it was known that the Bismarck and Prinz Eugen were endeavouring to break out into the Atlantic it was assumed that their object was an attack upon our trade. Such an attack could not be maintained for any considerable time unless replenishments of fuel were available by supply ships. Consequently an ocean-wide search by all available cruisers and aircraft carriers was organized to cover those areas in which these ships were likely to operate. These operations have been successful. In addition to the three supply ships and an armed trawler announced on June 6 as having been sunk, two more enemy supply ships have been intercepted and sunk. The operation of rounding up supply ship is continuing.

Official Admiralty Communiqué, June 14, 1941.

The operation of rounding up enemy supply ships which put to sea in order to be available for the Bismarck and Prinz Eugen continues successfully. Another enemy supply ship has been intercepted and sunk. Thus six enemy supply ships and one armed trawler have been intercepted and sunk by our ships during these recent operations.