

HMS ULSTER QUEEN (F118)

Anti Aircraft Vessel: Call Sign "PIGMY"

Commanding Officer: Captain C.K Adam

Dad served on her from 25th July 1941 until 8th January 1943

He joined as an Ordinary Seaman until being promoted to Leading Seaman on
17th September 1941.

He was further promoted, to Acting Petty Officer on
30th August 1942



"B" Gun Crew

(Dad in centre - standing)

either Christmas 1941 or 1942

Official number 161857. Built by Harland & Wolff Ltd. Belfast. Completed Feb 1930.

Displacement: 3,791 tons gross.

Dimensions: Length 314½ft (pp) / 329ft (oa). Beam: 46ft. Draught: 18ft to 13½ft.

Engines: Two shafts, Burmeister & Wain 10 cyl (bore 630mm x 980mm stroke) diesel engines developing 4,155 BHP to give 18kts. O.F 170 tons.

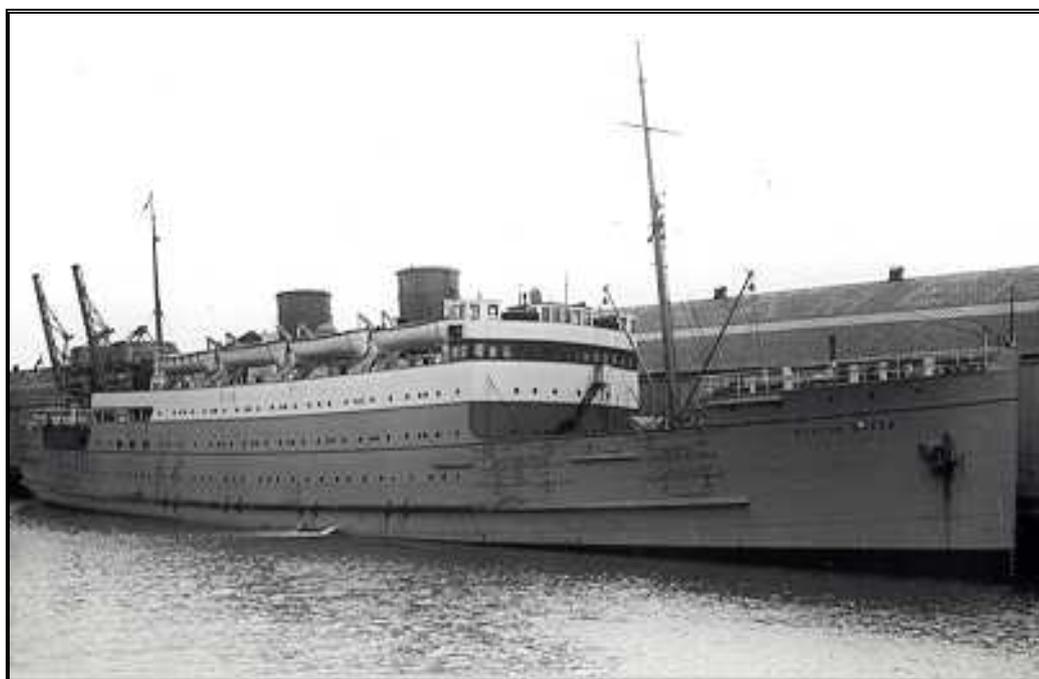
Armament: Six 4in AA (3x2), eight 2pdr AA (2x4), ten 20mm AA (10x1).

Ships History:

- Feb. 1930 Completed for the Belfast Steam Ship Co. and used on the Liverpool - Belfast run.
- 28/02/40 On passage to Northern Ireland. Ran ashore in a gale on Maughold Head, Isle of Man. The DUKE OF LANCASTER took off 88 passengers.
- 25/03/40 Refloated & anchored in Ramsey Bay. Arrived in Belfast under tow 29/3 for repairs.
- 15/08/40 Requisitioned by the Admiralty for use as an Auxiliary Anti Aircraft ship. Converted by Harland and Wolff, Belfast.
- 25/07/41 Dad joined the ship as an Ordinary Seaman.**
- 26/07/41 Commissioned as HMS ULSTER QUEEN (F118). Left Belfast 24/8 for trials on the Clyde.
- 17/09/41 Dad promoted to Leading Seaman.**
- 12/10/41 Arrived Milford Haven, assigned to the Irish Sea Escort Force.
- 14/04/42 Left Cardiff with HMS PC 74 escorted Convoy WS18. Arrived Belfast 23/4.
- 25/04/42 Left Belfast for Seydisfjord.
- 28/04/42 Left with Russian Convoy PQ15 during which 2 German aircraft were shot down.
- 21/05/42 Left Murmansk escorting Convoy QP12 until 29/5.
- 30/08/42 Dad promoted to Acting Petty Officer.**
- 07/09/42 Ship left Bangor to join PQ18.
- 25/09/42 Arrived Archangel.
- 17/11/42 Left Archangel with convoy QP15. Carrying 120 tons of Silver bullion.
- 30/11/42 Arrived Clyde damaged by severe weather.
- 08/01/43 Dad left the ship.**
- 14/02/43 Arrived Loch Ewe to escort Convoy JW53 but returned to Belfast for further weather damage repairs.
- 15/03/43 While under repair also converted to a Fighter Direction ship. CO Cdr M.H.J Bennet, RNR from 9/2/43.
- 28/06/43 Left Clyde for Algiers assigned to Mediterranean Fleet. Arrived 6/7/43.
- 10/07/43 Operation "Husky", landings in Sicily. Anti-aircraft ship & radar guard off beaches. Reserve HQ ship off Bark West.
- 29/08/43 En route to Algiers. Temporarily disabled by a German rocket bomb near miss.
- 10/09/43 Operation "Avalanche", Salerno landings. Operated off Southern Assault Area as anti-aircraft ship.
- 22/01/44 Operation "Shingle", Anzio landings. Fighter direction ship for a week.
- 02/03/44 F/D equipment modernised at Penarth until June 44.
- 15/07/44 Left Clyde for Malta thence Naples, arriving 3/8/44.
- 15/08/44 Operation "Dragoon", Allied landings in Southern France. Assigned as F/D ship to Alpha Attack Force.
- Sept. 44 Based at Alexandria. Operated North of Crete in Anti-aircraft role.
- 24/11/44 Refitted at Penarth for Far Eastern service. 2 x 4in guns removed.
- 31/03/45 Left Clyde for Alexandria.
- 08/05/45 Left Trincomalee for Rangoon. Flagship of C in C, East Indies.
- 01/09/45 Operation "Zipper", landings in Malaya. Left Madras to control air support from 9/9.
- 14/09/45 Returned to Ceylon. Left Colombo 6/10 to return to UK.
- 01/11/45 Arrived Plymouth for destoring. Reduced to Category B Reserve at Plymouth Feb.46, then Category C on 22/3/46.
- 28/03/46 Left Plymouth towed by HM tug TURMOIL, arrived Pembroke dock next day to be laid up.
- 01/04/46 Handed over to the General Steam Navigation Co. but did not return to service.

Short Sea : Long War - J de S Winsor

Unlike her two sisters, (ULSTER PRINCE & ULSTER MONARCH), ULSTER QUEEN continued in commercial service on the Belfast-Liverpool route and was on passage to Northern Ireland in a gale at 0250hrs on February 28th 1940 when she went ashore on Maughold Head on the Isle of Man. With her bow grounded in the sand, her 88 passengers were taken off and put aboard DUKE OF LANCASTER. A tug managed to release ULSTER QUEEN's bow but, in attempting to get her into deeper water, allowed the ship to swing broadside on and become impaled on a spur of rock, where the seas broke over her at high tide and she was dried out at low water. She was initially abandoned as hopeless but salvage work was started and by the 12th March half her cargo had been discharged and the rock was in the process of being removed. On March 25th she was refloated and anchored in Ramsey Bay, before being towed to Belfast for dry-docking four days later.

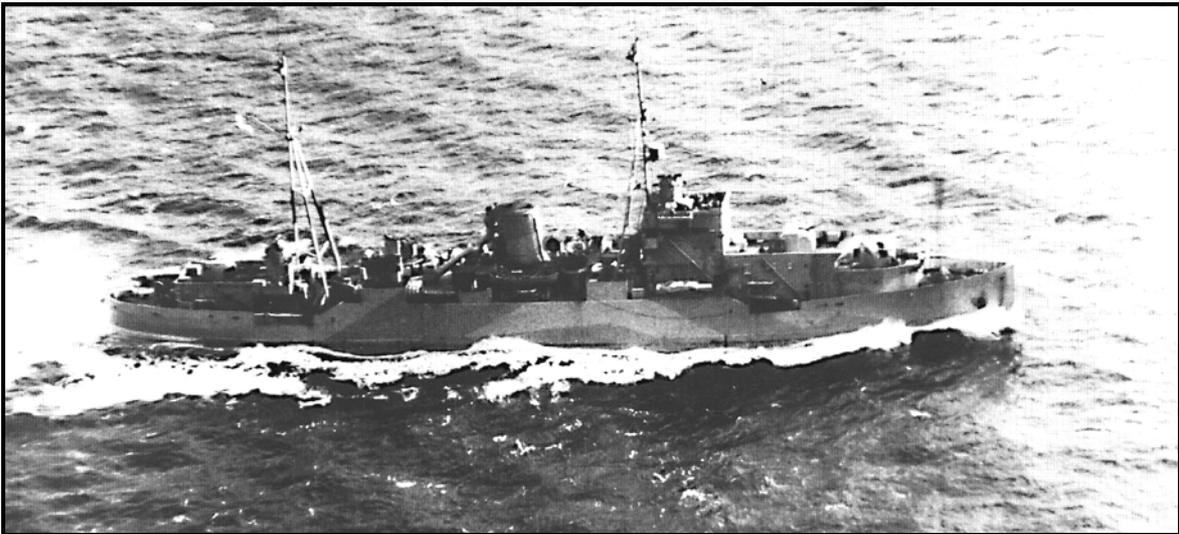


ANTI-AIRCRAFT SHIP

Whilst still under repair, the vessel was requisitioned on August 15th 1940 for service as an Auxiliary Anti-Aircraft Ship. The conversion necessitated amongst other things the removal of the whole of the structure and internal fittings above A Deck, including funnels, wheelhouse, navigating bridge, lifeboats, davits and masts, and the work lasted the best part of 16 months. On July 26th 1941 she was commissioned HMS ULSTER QUEEN and on August 24th she left Belfast. She was armed with six 4in guns, two 2pdr pom-poms, two ½in machine guns and two Oerlikons; she had a speed of 17½ knots and an endurance of 4,000 miles. She underwent trials on the Clyde, then on October 12th arrived at Milford Haven to join the Irish Sea Escort Force protecting convoys between there and Belfast. Soon afterwards she was in action against two aircraft, her six 4in guns firing three rapid salvos.

NORTH RUSSIAN CONVOYS

Two days after arriving at Belfast with an Irish Sea convoy, ULSTER QUEEN was on her way northwards on April 25th 1942, via Seydisfiord in eastern Iceland, to join North Russian Convoy PQ15 on April 28th. The convoy was shadowed by enemy aircraft throughout May 1st and attacked by six planes that night. They came under controlled 4in barrage from both HM cruiser NIGERIA and ULSTER QUEEN, with one aircraft being brought down by the latter's close range weapons. Later in the voyage, ULSTER QUEEN's radar failed to give warning of an aerial torpedo attack and the ship narrowly missed being hit: her guns did, however, shoot down one attacking aircraft and damage another.



February 1943

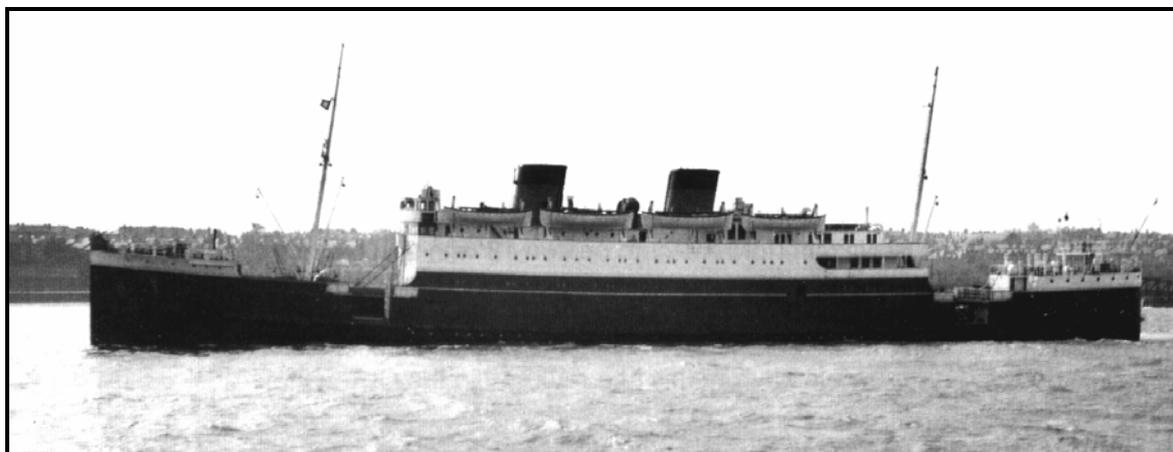
A further aircraft was brought down on May 3rd, two days before the convoy's arrival at Kola Inlet.

There, ULSTER QUEEN anchored for 15 days amidst the ships assembled off Murmansk and destroyed another German aircraft in one of the air raids, which occurred on average every other day. The return convoy, QP 12, left on May 21st and was uneventful. The ship then returned to her former duties until August 30th, when she left Bangor to join another North Russian convoy, PQ18 on September 7th 1942.

This convoy was off Archangel on September 21st and ULSTER QUEEN was detailed to remain to seaward of three American ships, which had gone aground in the Gulf. She finally arrived at Archangel on September 25th, **having been at defence stations continually for 18 days**. QP15, the return convoy, left on November 17th and met such heavy weather that ULSTER QUEEN sustained damage to her forecastle deck. She was providing not only air protection to the convoy but also stowage for 120 tons of silver bullion and on November 24th was obliged to leave the convoy to refuel at Seydisfjord, by which time her Asdic and radar had both been put out of action. She unloaded her bullion on the Clyde on November 30th and then moved to Belfast for repairs and preparation work for further Arctic service.

She was ordered to be at Loch Ewe on February 14th 1943, the day before North Russian convoy JW53 was due to leave. The ship duly arrived on the required day but was sent back to Belfast for repairs to the heavy weather damage sustained on the way. Leaks had occurred in her deck and ventilators and a damaged windlass made anchoring impossible.

Conversion for War - Dr R. Osborne



1938

In 1929 & 1930 the Belfast Steamship Co. took delivery of three new two-funnelled motor vessels for use on the Belfast-Liverpool run. One of these was the MV ULSTER QUEEN and for ten years she regularly ran across the Irish Sea until February 1940 when she ran aground in Ramsey Bay. After being refloated and refitted she was requisitioned by the Admiralty in August 1940 for conversion into an Auxiliary Anti Aircraft Ship.

For the reconstruction ULSTER QUEEN was sent back to her builders in Belfast, and work began on the 22nd August 1940. From the appearance standpoint, the alterations were dramatic. One of the after funnels was removed and the superstructure was completely raised. Both masts came out and the poop deck was levelled. The bulwark at the bows was cut off and all the portholes were plated over (apart from one escape port in each of the two main mess decks), the rubbing strakes were removed and all the lifeboats were landed. Internally the ship was gutted, only the engines and steering gear being left intact. Starting with a bare hull the shipyard built a squat cruiser style bridge and two gundecks forward. The exhaust pipe from the after diesel was led forward above upper deck in an ugly pipe, angled at 45°, to the rear of the remaining funnel. Another gundeck was added aft to support a twin 4in gun mounting and a Director Control Tower. Two bandstands, one to port and one to starboard were built between the funnel and after gundeck, to carry quadruple 2pdr guns. Two more bandstands were built alongside the bridge to house the multiple ½in machine guns. The tripod masts were stepped, the forward one resting partially on a platform at the rear of the bridge. The main DCT platforms was fitted on top of the bridge and signalling projectors were mounted on platforms at the rear of the funnel. The six heavy AA guns were installed on the 24th and 27th January 1941. Finally some hull stiffening was added on each side.

When ULSTER QUEEN emerged from the shipyard a year later, she looked every inch a warship and apart from a different sub-division and lower speed was almost comparable with a purpose built AA cruiser. Indeed her conversion was the most thorough of all the seven RN Auxiliary AA Ships.

In November 1941, "*Being in all respects ready for sea*", ULSTER QUEEN joined the Irish Sea escort Force based on Belfast, but the following month she was back in the

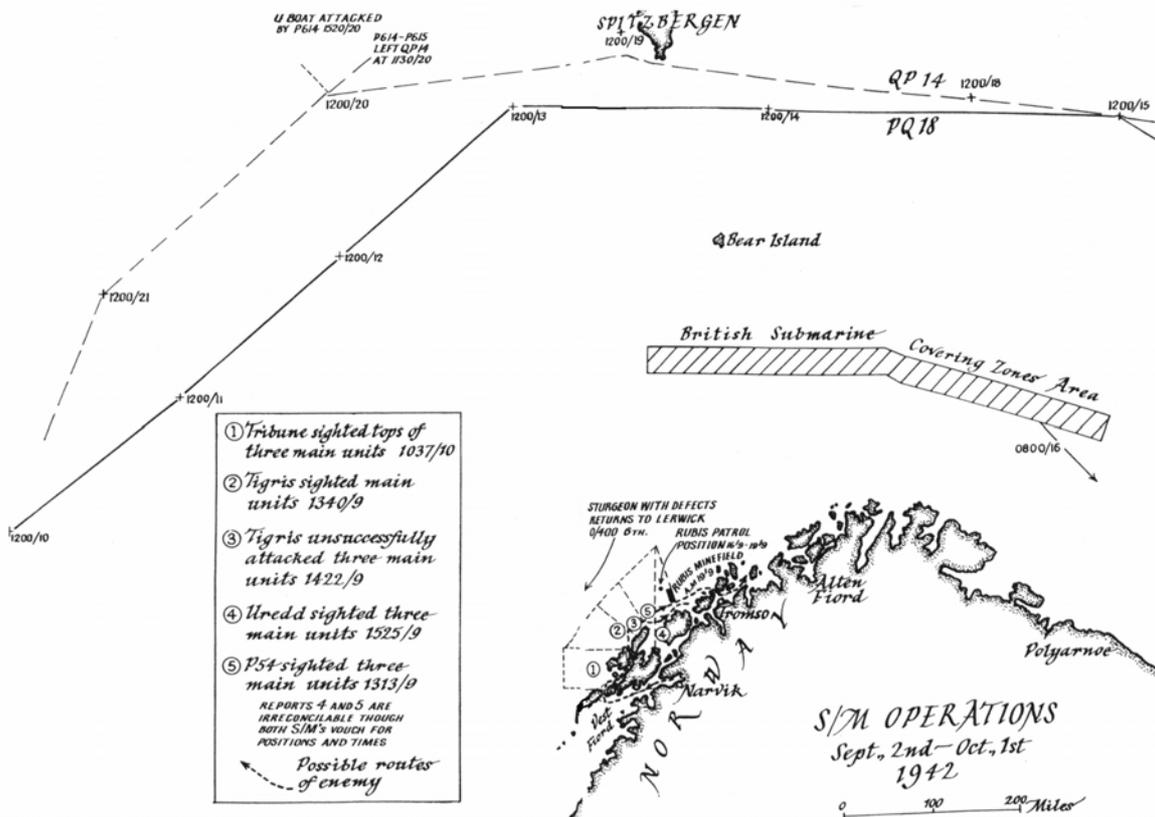
shipyard for repairs consequent upon sustaining storm damage while with a Western Approaches convoy. During April 1942 the ship proceeded to Iceland to join the ships gathering for a Russian Convoy, PQ15. This was the first such convoy to include an Auxiliary AA ship in its escort, and ULSTER QUEEN proved her worth in sustained air attacks which began on the 1st May and continued until the convoy ran into a snow storm on the 4th. After returning to the U.K. with QP12, the ship spent 3 months in the Irish Sea on escort work, then sent to Iceland for another of the Russian Convoys - PQ18. No previous convoys had endured such persistent air attacks amounting in all to over a hundred by torpedo bombers and slightly less than that by high-level dive-bombers. On arrival in Kola Inlet, ULSTER QUEEN became the AA guard ship and remained in that bleak and inhospitable place for two months, until the 7th November, when she sailed for home with QP15 and into a terrific storm which at least had the merit of keeping the U-boats away. The battered ships arrived home on the 23rd November 1942. After this ULSTER QUEEN began being converted into a Fighter Direction ship.



Tuesday 8th June 1943

Extracts from “Convoy” by Paul Kemp

PQ15 sailed from Reykjavik on the 26th April 1942. This was the first convoy to be afforded the protection of a CAM (Catapult Aircraft Merchant) ship, the EMPIRE MORN. The CAM ship was a standard merchant ship fitted with a catapult on which was mounted a Hurricane fighter. Its purpose was to provide some means of dealing with the ubiquitous BV138 and FW200 reconnaissance aircraft. It was, however, literally a one-shot weapon: once launched, the aircraft could not be recovered, and the pilot had to ditch alongside a friendly ship in the Arctic - not a particularly appealing prospect. Also included in the convoy were two icebreakers, the Soviet KRASSIN and MONTCALM.



Submarine Patrols and the route of German Forces

From the 26th April to the 5th May the trawlers, CAPE PALLISER, CHILTERN, NORTHERN PRIDE and VIZALMA escorted the convoy: the destroyer LEDBURY joined, escorting the oiler GREY RANGER, but detached to return to Lerwick where she arrived on the 8th May. The minesweepers BRAMBLE, LEDA and SEAGULL were present for the whole voyage. On the 28th April the convoy was joined by the destroyer escort, which consisted of BADSWORTH, BOADICEA, MATCHLESS, SOMALI, VENOMOUS and the Norwegian ST ALBANS together with the AA ship ULSTER QUEEN. The submarine HMS STURGEON accompanied the convoy from the 28th April until the 1st May before departing to carry out a patrol off the Norwegian coast. The cruiser HMS LONDON covered the convoy from the 30th April until the 1st May and was relieved by NIGERIA from the 28th April until the 2nd May.

The Home Fleet covering forces comprised the battleships KING GEORGE V (later relieved by HMS DUKE OF YORK), the aircraft carrier VICTORIOUS, the cruiser KENYA and the destroyers BELVOIR, ESCAPADE, FAULKNOR, HURSLEY, INGLEFIELD, LAMERTON, MAINE, MARTIN, MIDDLETON, ORIBI and PUNJABI. Since the strength of the Home Fleet had been depleted in order to find ships for the forthcoming invasion of Madagascar, for the first time the United States Navy provided elements of the covering force. This was appropriate, for fifteen of PQ15's merchant ships were American. The US Navy force, was under the command of Rear Admiral R.C Giffen USN. It consisted of the battleship WASHINGTON, the cruisers TUSCALOOSA and WICHITA and the destroyers MADISON, PLUNKETT, WAINWRIGHT and WILSON. Covering submarine patrols off the Norwegian coast were provided by STURGEON, TRUANT, UNISON, UREDD (Norwegian), MINERVE (Free French) and JASTRZAB (Polish).

PQ15 and QP11 were fortunate in their passages. Despite unfavourable ice conditions, air and surface attack and a heavy concentration of U-boats in the Barents Sea, only four of the 39 ships in both convoys were lost. The same cannot be said for the escort forces, which lost one cruiser, one destroyer, a submarine and had a further three destroyers damaged.

The Home Fleet was cruising to the south of the convoy routes when, on the 1st May, there was a collision in fog between the battleship KING GEORGE V (Capt W.R Patterson CB CVO) and the destroyer PUNJABI (Cdr The Hon J.M.G Waldegrave DSC). The day had been calm, but with frequent snow showers and patches of dense fog. The destroyer screen was stationed eight cables from the capital ships, but if the visibility worsened, the destroyers were permitted to close to four cables' distance, so as not to lose touch with the flagship. PUNJABI was the second ship in the starboard column, with MARTIN and MARNE astern of her. It was just before 1600hrs when the visibility suddenly worsened and the starboard leader closed in toward the battleships. PUNJABI's turned to follow the leader's fog buoy, lost it, but continued towards the line of advance of the fleet at an angle of 80 degrees. Suddenly KING GEORGE V, travelling at 25kts, loomed out of the fog and crashed into PUNJABI's port side, just aft of the engine room, slicing straight through her hull. PUNJABI's stern sank almost immediately and as it did so the ready-use depth charges on the stern went off, causing severe internal bruising to those of the ship's crew who were in the water. Both KING GEORGE V and WASHINGTON sustained shock damage as a result of the explosions. The two destroyers astern of PUNJABI - MARNE and MARTIN, had to go hurriedly astern and were nearly run down by VICTORIOUS and WICHITA.

PUNJABI's forward section sank more slowly, so that 169 officers and men, including Cdr Waldegrave, were rescued. Many men were picked out of the water unconscious due to the intense cold and could not be revived, but one survivor owed his life to the cold water. The rating in question had been thrown against a bulkhead by the force of the collision and was then severely scalded when a tea urn overturned on top of him. The pain and blisters were considerably reduced by his near-immediate immersion in the freezing water. Another rating, displaying considerable *sang froid* in adverse circumstances.

"...had time to change into his best suit, collect his valuables, put on an immersion suit and gently lower himself into the sea. He came on board HMS MARTIN, emptied out his shoes, took off the immersion suit, donned dry socks and, save for a damp patch on his collar, looked ready for Sunday Divisions in barracks".

HMS DUKE OF YORK (Capt C.H.J Harcourt CBE) was hastily summoned from Hvalfjord

to relieve KING GEORGE V, which proceeded to Scapa and then to Liverpool for permanent repairs.

The Germans found PQ15, 250 miles south-west of Bear Island shortly before midnight on the 30th April, but it was not until the 1st May that the first attacks occurred, when six Ju88s performed what Admiral Burrough, flying his flag in HMS NIGERIA, described as a “ragged and poorly executed attack”, losing one of their number in doing so.

By 1000hrs on the 2nd May the GREY RANGER, with her escort HMS LEDBURY, had left the convoy, together with the cruisers LONDON and NIGERIA, which had been ordered not to proceed into U-boat-infested waters east of Bear Island unless the convoy were definitely being threatened by German cruisers or larger vessels.

Capt J. Crombie RN in HMS BRAMBLE was now the Senior Officer of the escort. Shortly before midday on the 2nd May the westbound QP11 came in sight. Crombie detached the destroyer SOMALI to make contact, but she returned with the news that QP11 had endured air, submarine and destroyer attack and had to contend with the awkward position of the ice pack. When, half an hour later, the convoy was relocated by the *Luftwaffe*, the prospects looked very bleak. From then until it reached longitude 36°E, the convoy was under continuous surveillance from aircraft or U-boats.

At 2009hrs on the 2nd May the destroyer ST ALBANS and the minesweeper SEAGULL obtained an Asdic contact at 7°31'N 17°32'E. An attack with depth charges was carried out and the submarine was forced to the surface, where she was identified as the unfortunate JASTRZAB and found to be so badly damaged that she had to be sunk by gunfire after her crew had been taken off. A subsequent enquiry found that the submarine was nearly 100 miles out of position and in waters where U-boats were known to be operating. No blame, therefore, could be attributed to ST ALBANS or to SEAGULL.

Five hours later, at 0127hrs on the 3rd May, the convoy was attacked from the air. Six aircraft from *I/KG 26* came in low on the convoy's starboard bow and as a result were not picked up on radar. The half-light of the Arctic night, combined with haze, made the planes very difficult to spot. Although two of the attackers were shot down and a third later crashed, the remaining three all found targets. The merchant ships BOTAVON, CAPE CORSO and JUTLAND were hit and sunk, the derelict hulk of the last being dispatched by U251 (*Korvettenkapitan* Heinrich Timm) the next day.

A further air attack took place on the 3rd May when the trawler CAPE PALLISER was badly shaken by a near miss and one aircraft was shot down, but otherwise the escorts kept both the shadowers and the U-boats at bay.

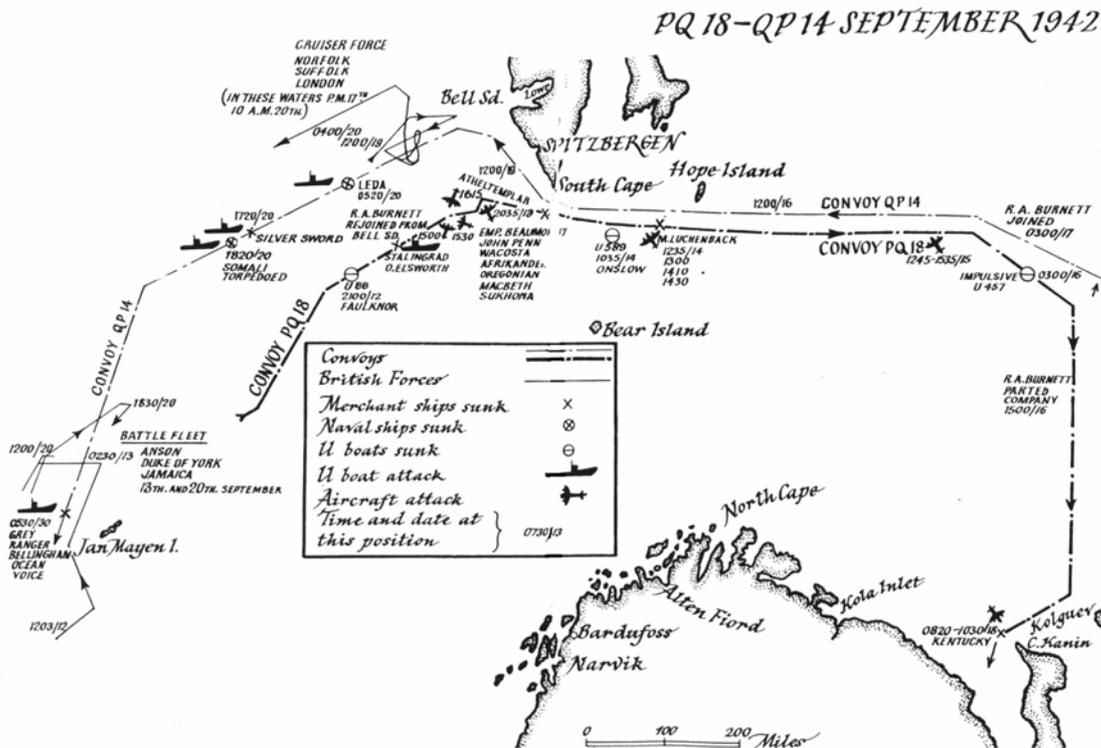
The ULSTER QUEEN had been particularly successful in driving off the air attacks, and eloquent testimony to the effectiveness of her gunnery was paid by the Negro steward of an American freighter visited by ULSTER QUEEN's officers while the ship was at Kola: ***“Gee! You come from that little white ship? Oh boy! Can she throw up the shit!”***

Visibility deteriorated from the evening of the 4th when a south easterly gale sprang up, accompanied by strong snow squalls. These effectively hid the convoy for the rest of the passage and the ships entered the Kola Inlet at 2100hrs on the 5th May 1942.

PQ18

The convoy sailed from Loch Ewe on the 2nd September 1942 and from there until the ships had reached the Iceland meeting point they would be escorted by ships from Western Approaches Command. The escort consisted of the destroyers CAMPBELL, ESKDALE, FARNDALE, MONTROSE, WALPOLE and MALCOLM and the trawlers ARAB, DUNCTON, HUGH WALPOLE, KING SOL and PAYNTER. At the Iceland meeting point, which was reached on the 7th September, the Western Approaches ships were relieved by the Close Escort, consisting of the AA ships ALYNBANK and ULSTER

QUEEN, the destroyers ACHATES and MALCOLM, the corvettes BERGAMOT, BLUEBELL, BRYONY and CAMELLIA, the minesweepers HARRIER, GLEANER and SHARPSHOOTER, the submarines P614 and P615 and the trawlers CAPE ARGONA, CAPE MARIATO, DANERNAN and ST KENAN.



Route of Convoy and initial U-boat dispositions

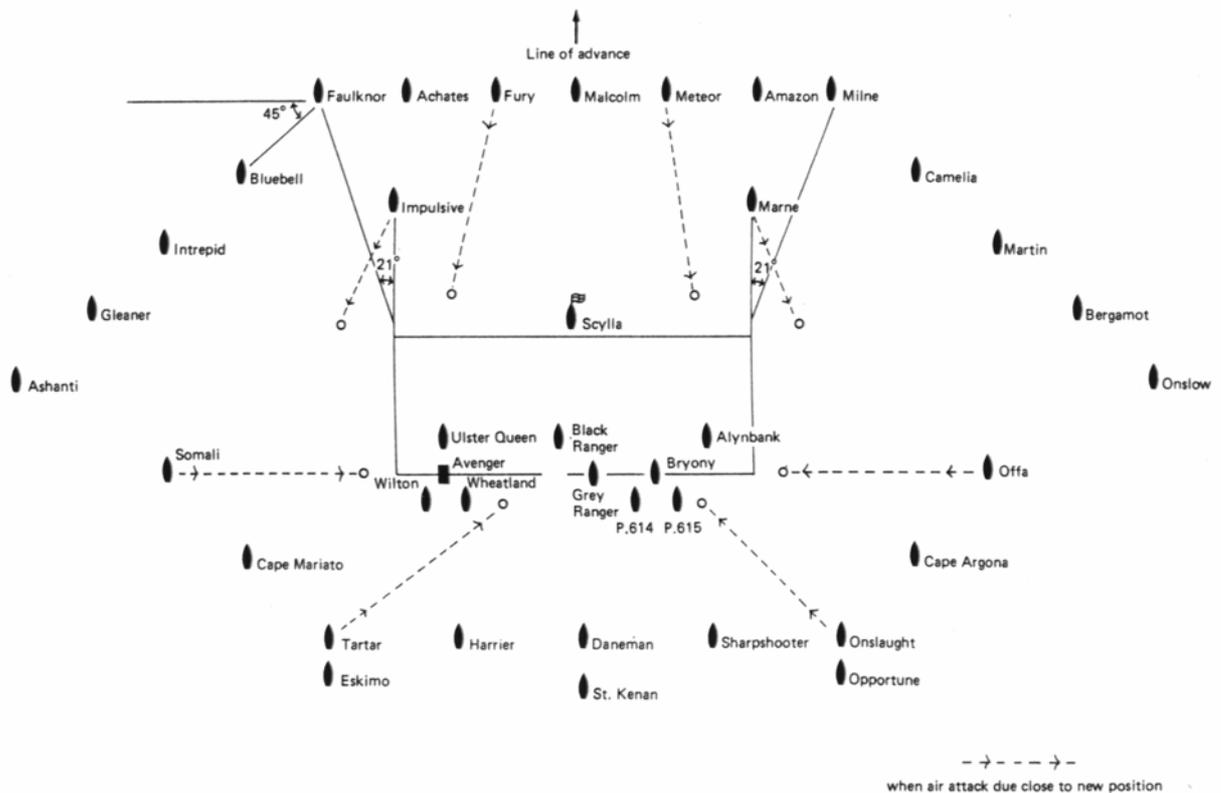
Even more comforting to the merchantmen was the sight of the light cruiser HMS SCYLLA (Capt I.A.P Macintyre RN) and the sixteen destroyers, ASHANTI, ESKIMO, FAULKNOR, FURY, IMPULSIVE, INTREPID, MAINE, MARTIN, METEOR, MILNE, OFFA, ONSLAUGHT, ONSLOW, OPPORTUNE, SOMALI and TARTAR of the Fighting Destroyer Escort which joined two days later. Almost immediately the destroyers began proceeding in groups to Lowe Sound in Spitzbergen to fuel, and all ships were complete with fuel by the 13th September.

On the 8th September PQ18 was located north of Iceland and between the 10th and the 11th three U-boats were deployed along longitude 3°W between 76°30'N and 74°70'N. Four more boats were ordered to concentrate between Bear Island and Spitzbergen and another five were instructed to close the area. At the same time, in a repeat of operation "Rosselsprung", a surface task group consisting of SCHEER, HIPPER, KOLN and several destroyers left Narvik and proceeded to Altenijord in anticipation of the executive order to operate against the convoy from the *Fuhrer's Hauptquartier*. At 1037hrs the German ships were sighted by TRIBUNE (Lt-Cdr N.J Coe DFC RNR) but the range, ten miles, was too great for her to do anything other than report. At 1340hrs TIGRIS (Lt-Cdr G.R Colvin RN) sighted the distinctive foretop of a heavy German warship at a range of about nine miles. The weather could not have been worse for an attack: visibility was clear, with a low swell

accompanying a glassy calm. Colvin's difficulties were increased by the attentions of an He115 seaplane, which was wave hopping ahead of the formation and caused him to be extremely cautious in the use of his periscope.

In spite of these difficulties, Colvin brought TIGRIS into an almost perfect firing position - 1500 yds from KOLN and 4,000 yds from SCHEER (which he erroneously identified as TIRPITZ):

“At 1404hrs, with still a few degrees to go to my firing course, there were still two screening destroyers yet to pass me. The nearest was close, but although they were weaving constantly, I thought I was just inside the screen. The submarine had just steadied on her firing course when the Asdic operator reported very loud hydrophone effects on the starboard quarter. This was the first of the two destroyers about five cables distant and winging towards me. I kept her under observation using an inch or two of the periscope at a time. When the destroyer had cleared my bow, I found that I had missed my Director Angle by between five and ten degrees”

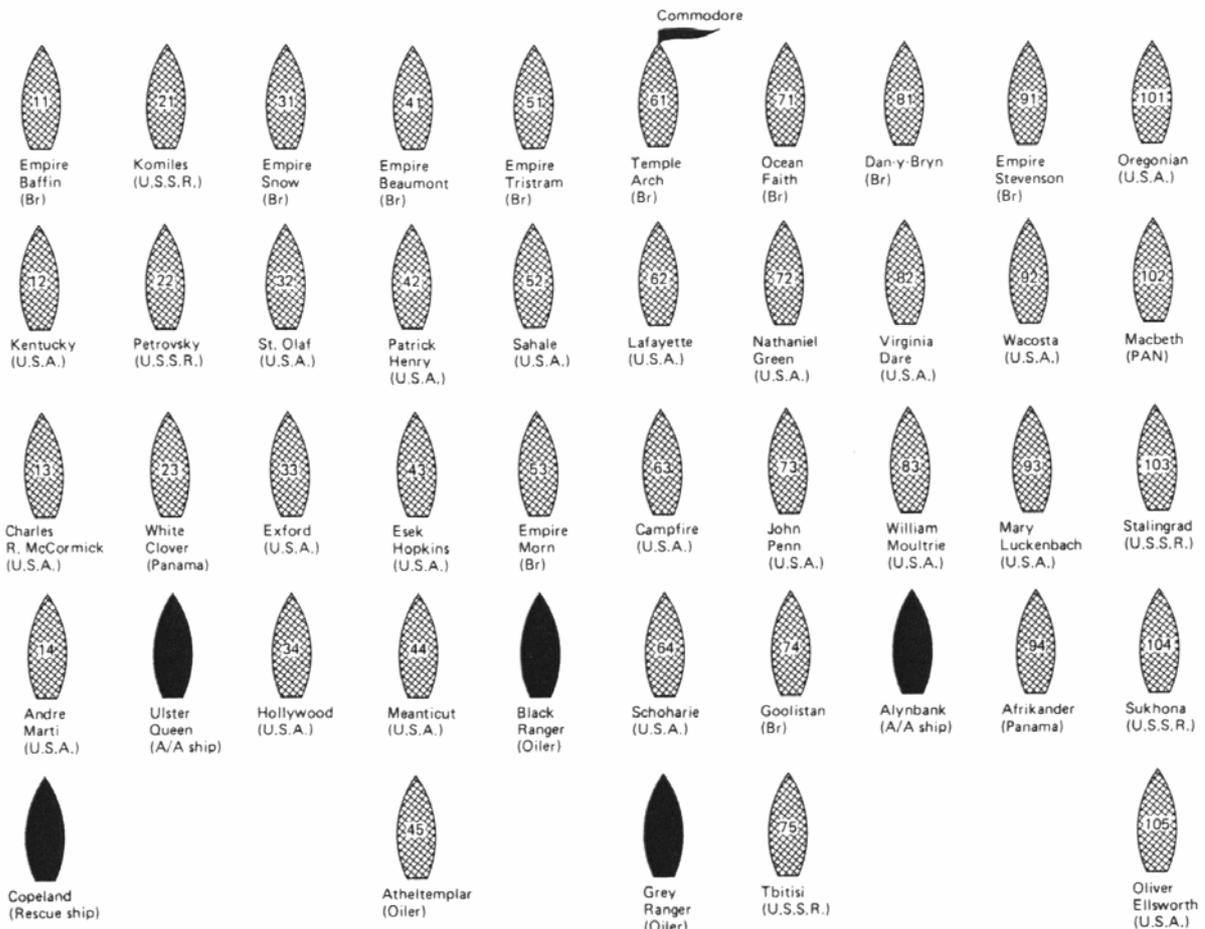


PQ18 Screening Plan for Full strength Escort

Attempts were made to “chase” the Director Angle and at 1414hrs a salvo of five individually aimed torpedoes was fired. All the torpedoes missed astern and exploded at the end of their runs, leading the Germans to believe that they were being bombed by high-flying aircraft. It was not until the *B-Dienst* teams in SCHEER intercepted TIGRIS's sighting report that they realised that a submarine was responsible. UNSHAKEN and UREDD also sighted the German ships but were unable to attack. This was the last occasion during the Second World War when Allied submarines would encounter German warships at sea.

The surface threat remained latent. Hitler's obsession with the prospect of an invasion of Norway and the consequent need to preserve the Fleet proved more important than the necessity of destroying supplies bound for the Soviet Union. PQ18 was to be left to the *Luftwaffe* and the U-boats.

The U-boats had already been making their presence felt in the shape of dubious Asdic contacts or by being forced to dive while some distance from the convoy after being sighted by AVENGER's aircraft. At midday on the 10th, HARRIER and SHARPSHOOTER depth-charged a contact astern of the convoy, and in the evening of the 12th, MALCOLM and IMPULSIVE attacked a contact reported by aircraft. Both attacks were inconclusive, but a more substantial attack was carried out by FAULKNOR ahead of the convoy, which resulted in U88 (*Kapitanleutnant* Heino Bohmann) being sunk. But the U-boats were persistent and from aircraft sightings and HF/DF bearings it was estimated that eight of them were in contact with the convoy. AVENGER's aircraft were proving their worth by making a thorough nuisance of themselves as far as the U-boats were concerned: although none of the latter was sunk by aircraft during this phase, the role of the aircraft in putting them down at a safe distance from the convoy and in harassing them while they were trying to recharge their batteries was crucial.



PQ18 Layout of Merchant Ships

Each column 4 cables apart. Distance between ships in each column 2 cables apart. Normal cruising speed 8 knots.

The weather, which was foggy with frequent snow and rainsqualls, aided the U-boats, and in the morning of the 13th September they scored their first success. At 0855hrs two ships in the starboard column, the STALINGRAD and OLIVER ELLSWORTH, were torpedoed. U405 (*Korvettenkapitan* Rolf-Heinrich Hopmann), U589 (*Kapitanleutnant* Hans Joachim Horrer) and U408 (*Kapitanleutnant* Reinhard von Hymmen) were all in contact with the convoy at the time, and the three boats fired at roughly the same time. Both ships were probably hit by the same boat, though there is no way of determining which of three was successful. U589 reported one 7,000-ton ship sunk and two explosions 3 minutes 35 seconds following the firing of two torpedoes against AVENGER. U408 observed one hit on a merchant ship after a running time of 5 minutes 27 seconds and a hit on another ship beyond.

The *Luftwaffe* regained contact on the 12th and again on the 13th, and thereafter the convoy was continually shadowed by aircraft. The shadowers were the ubiquitous BV138 or long-range Ju88 and proved very difficult to deal with. They often worked in groups - nine were in contact on the 12th - and their heavy defensive armament made them a tough proposition for the lightly armed Sea Hurricanes (equipped with four .303in machine guns) to deal with. They extended their activities to protecting U-boats on the surface from attack by AVENGER's Swordfish.

The first air attack came at 1500hrs on the 13th as the screen was re-forming after the return of SCYLLA and the five destroyers which had fuelled at Spitzbergen. A force of Ju88 bombers from *KG 30* made an unsuccessful high-altitude attack, and directly after this, the main force of the *Luftwaffe* - forty He111 and Ju88 torpedo bombers - was detected coming in on the starboard bow. The Commodore, Rear-Admiral E.K Boddam-Whetham ordered a 45-degree turn to starboard towards the enemy but the starboard columns failed to comply. The aircraft approached in line abreast, 100 to 150yds apart and maintaining their positions in the face of the intense barrage put up by the escorts, and dropped their torpedoes within 2,000yds. Surgeon Lt-Cdr J.L.S Coulter RN, HMS SCYLLA's medical officer, watched the attack from the back of the ship's bridge:

“They approached the convoy in line ahead from the starboard horizon. When level with the convoy they all turned towards it and attacked in line abreast. Each aircraft flew low over the water, and as the torpedoes were launched, each flew down the whole length of the convoy, firing its armament, There is no doubt that the attack was carried out with magnificent courage and precision, and in the face of tremendous gunfire from the whole convoy and its escort. The tanker in the next line abreast of us was hit early on by a torpedo, which finished its run-in just above the tanker's funnel. At that second, the whole tanker and aircraft were enveloped in a crimson wall of flame which seemed to roll over and over up into the sky until it dissolved in a vast cloud of black smoke. When I looked down at the sea again, apart from a small occasional flicker of flame on the water, there was no sign of either the tanker or the aircraft and I realised that they had both blown up”

The attack had been extremely successful and had decimated the starboard side of the convoy, sinking six of the seven remaining ships and two from the middle of the convoy - EMPIRE BEAUMONT, JOHN PENN, EMPIRE STEVENSON, WACOSTA, AFRICANDER, OREGONIAN, MACBETH and SUKHONA. There were two more attacks on the 13th, the first by a group of He111s at 1615hrs and the second by some He111s at 2035hrs. Both were unsuccessful and were driven off by the escort.

The Germans had lost eight aircraft - one per ship - which had all been shot down by the AA

fire of the escort. What of the AVENGER and her air group? The carrier had deployed her Hurricanes against the shadows and the Ju88s involved in the first bombing attack, so that when the torpedo bombers arrived there were no British aircraft available AVENGER's Commanding Officer, Cdr A.P Colthurst, realised that a change in his operating method was required:

“With the small number of obsolete fighters at our disposal and with their slow operation in an auxiliary carrier, we must use them only to break up large attacking formations rather than destroy individuals”

Colthurst also emphasised the need for AVENGER's radar operators to be able to differentiate between a reconnaissance in force and an attack in order that the small number of fighters available be properly deployed.

Before this change could be effected, the U-boats struck again. U457 (*Korvettenkapitan* Karl Brandenburg) torpedoed the oilier ATHEL TEMPLAR at 0330hrs. It was an extremely lucky shot, for while it was manoeuvring, the U-boat was detected by HMS IMPULSIVE passing up the port side of the convoy. Brandenburg was guilty of the sin of exaggeration, for in his patrol report he also claimed to have hit another merchant ship and to have scored two hits on a "J" class destroyer. However, the hit on ATHEL TEMPLAR was bad enough, for although the tanker was still afloat, there was no question of her proceeding to the Kola Inlet. Since there were still at least five U-boats in contact, there could be no possibility of detaching escorts to tow her to Spitzbergen, and the decision was taken to sink her.

Revenge came seven hours later with the sighting of a U-boat by one of AVENGER's Swordfish. The Swordfish was driven off by a BV138, but Burnett dispatched HMS ONSLOW to the area. The U-boat, now known to be U589 (*Kapitanleutnant* Hans-Joachim Horror) was sighted on the surface at 1020hrs and ONSLOW went into the attack with depth charges. The destroyer continued her efforts for the next three hours, after which a quantity of oil fuel together with green vegetables and pieces of the U-boat's casing came to the surface.

The air attacks began at 1235hrs when twenty or more torpedo bombers came in low on the starboard bow - so low that they evaded radar detection. They divided into two groups. One, the larger, went after the AVENGER, while the remainder concentrated on the other escorts. Evidently the barrage put up the previous day by the escorts had caused the *Luftwaffe* to revise its tactics. However, the new measures implemented by Cdr Colthurst also proved effective. AVENGER left her station at the rear of the convoy and, with her two attendant destroyers, WHEATLAND and WILTON, pressed ahead of the convoy to find room to manoeuvre while flying off six fighters:

“It was a fine sight to see AVENGER peeling off Hurricanes, whilst streaking across the front of the convoy from starboard to port inside the screen with her destroyer escort blazing away with any gun that would bear and then being chased by torpedo bombers as she steamed down on the opposite course to the convoy to make cover”

The AA ship ULSTER QUEEN (Capt C.K Adam RN) also left her position in the centre of the convoy to manoeuvre freely and use her six 4in HA guns to “put up some shit!” and break up the attacking formation. The tactics worked: AVENGER's fighters drove off the attackers at long range while the gunfire forced others to drop their torpedoes early. Eleven aircraft were shot down with no loss to the convoy - “Altogether a most gratifying action” wrote Burnett.

Shortly after this, about twelve Ju88s made a high-level bombing attack without success,

although AVENGER and some of the escorts suffered near misses. One aircraft was lost to AA fire. The torpedo bombers returned shortly afterwards and attacked from ahead: their target was AVENGER, now on the convoy's starboard quarter. The carrier had ten of her Hurricanes airborne, and they accounted for eight of the 25 attackers, a ninth falling victim to the gunfire of MMS (Motor Minesweeper) No 212. However, one of the attackers managed to torpedo the freighter MARY LUCKENBACH on the starboard wing column. The freighter was carrying ammunition and she disintegrated in an awesome explosion, captured on film by the official Admiralty photographer accompanying the convoy on board AVENGER. The last attack of the day came at 1430hrs and was made by a force of twenty Ju88s which bombed from high level although a few made shallow bombing runs. This attack was also unsuccessful, and one of the attackers was shot down.

September 14th had seen an all-out effort by the *Luftwaffe* to inflict maximum damage on the convoy. Four attacks had been launched by *I/KG 26* and *III/KG 26*, involving about seventy aircraft. The attacks had cost the *Luftwaffe* dear: *I/KG 26* lost twelve aircraft and seven crews while *III/KG 26* lost eight aircraft and seven crews, in return for the loss of the MARY LUCKENBACH and three Hurricanes - all of which last had been victims of the intense AA barrage put up by escorts and merchant ships. It was hardly a successful performance by the Germans, and the loss of fourteen highly trained crews was particularly significant. The tactics adopted by AVENGER and the AA ships, combined with the intense AA fire, were successful: the attacking formations were being broken up before they could come within launching range.

The next day the bombers returned a force of about fifty attacking the convoy in two's and three's between 1235hrs and 1535hrs. They met a vigorous response. When the aircraft came below the cloud they were met by a heavy AA barrage, while above the cloud they were harassed by AVENGER's fighters who made 21 sorties during the attack. Three of the German aircraft were shot down, all by AA fire. Towards the end of the attack the Germans seemed content to remain above the cloud, waiting for the ships to pass from under it before bombing. Burnett was considering ordering the convoy to remain within cloud when the "Headache" team embarked in SCYLLA reported that the aircraft were being ordered to jettison their remaining bombs and return to base. (The "Headache" team was a small group of German-speaking officers and ratings embarked in HMS SCYLLA for the purpose of intercepting the enemy's tactical communications, some of which would be *en clair* - as in the chatter between aircraft - and some in code. The work of these "Headache" teams was invaluable in providing Burnett with real-time intelligence about the enemy's immediate intentions).

Although the convoy's defences had been successful against the *Luftwaffe*, the strain of these attacks on the officers and men of the warships and merchant ships was intense. Surgeon Lt-Cdr Coulter in SCYLLA wrote in his journal for the 15th September:

"Afraid that I could not possibly set down the detailed events of today with any accuracy, as the noise and activity have been so extreme most of the time, that it has been rather a 'blur'. There were certainly some heavy air attacks but I am not sure whether some of them did not take place yesterday instead of today.

...the general noise and confusion were unbelievable. At the height of the attack, the ship was near missed, and at the same time the safety valve lifted on one of the smoke stacks and for about five minutes there was also the noise of steam escaping under pressure, which was itself deafening"

Coulter's normally extensive duties as medical officer of a cruiser at war were complicated by the presence on board of nearly 400 survivors from sunken ships, mostly those lost on the 12th September: "They are all over the place asleep, and it is hard to avoid tripping over them". One of the survivors had a lucky escape:

"Something hit him in the chest, with such force that he was knocked over and received multiple contusions. He is badly bruised all over the front of his chest ... In a pocket of his jumper, he was carrying a gunmetal cigarette case full of cigarettes, which had worked itself into a position immediately in front of his cardiac area. There were several perforations in his clothing and in the front of the cigarette case. The back of the cigarette case was intact. On opening the case. I found a number of bomb splinters inside it and the cigarettes all fragmented. There is no doubt that the cigarette case may well have saved his life"

The large number of survivors present was a result of a deliberate policy decision to concentrate them on SCYLLA which had better facilities for their care and which would be returning direct to Britain so that they would not become a charge on the Royal Navy's slim resources at Murmansk.

The air attack on the 15th was the last that PQ18 faced while AVENGER and the Fighting Destroyer Escort were in company. Submarines, however, were still a menace. As many as twelve were in the area, and three were in contact, although resolute and aggressive measures by the escort prevented them from breaking through. At 1340hrs on the 15th smoke was sighted some ten miles from the convoy. The destroyer OPPORTUNE was sent out to investigate and, to Burnett's relief (for he was continually aware of the surface threat), the smoke turned out to be the diesel exhaust from two U-boats condensing in the cold air.

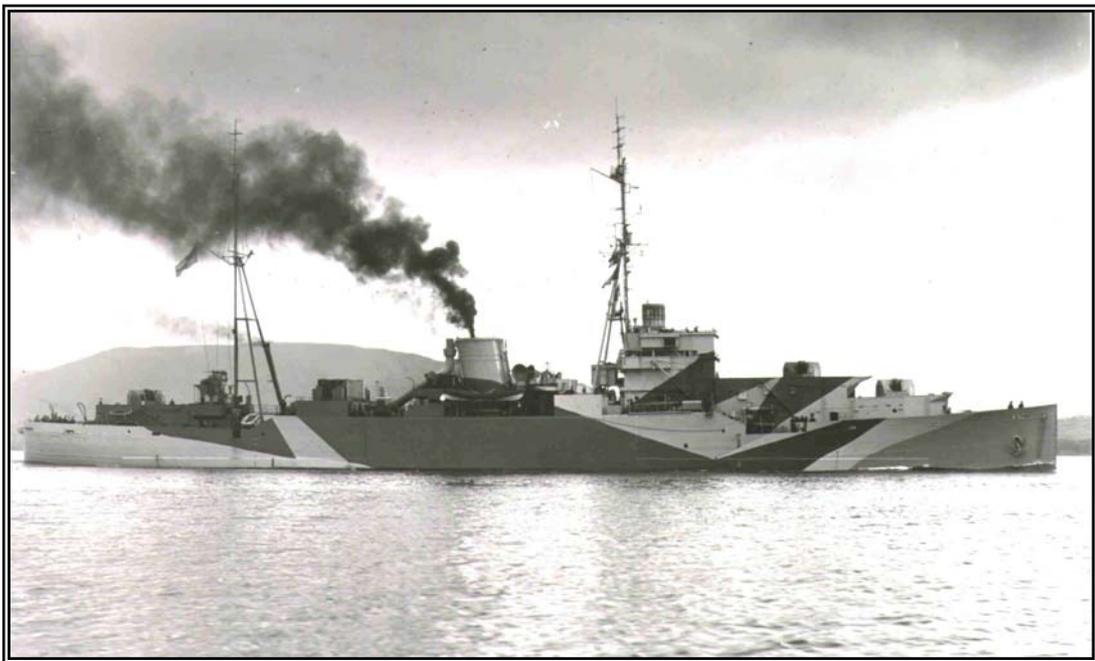
At 0300hrs on the 16th *Korvettenkapitan* Karl Brandeniburg judged the moment right to take U457, currently on the convoys' port bow, through the screen and dived. As he did so he was spotted by HMS IMPULSIVE. The destroyer immediately obtained Asdic contact and held it down to 50yds before dropping a pattern of depth charges set to 50ft and a calcium flare to mark the spot. When IMPULSIVE returned to the spot she found oil and wreckage, including a black leather glove, some wooden debris and pieces of paper. Before rejoining the convoy she dropped a further depth charge set to 500ft (the depth of water being 120 fathoms) over the point from where the oil was coming and that was the end of U457.

During the afternoon of the 16th Burnett parted company with PQ18 to join the homeward-bound QP14. Besides SCYLLA and the destroyers he took AVENGER, the two submarines and the oilers GREY RANGER and BLUE RANGER, the ships departing in three groups to confuse the constant shadowers. Their place was taken on the 17th by the Soviet destroyers GREMYASHCHI, SOKRUSHITELNY, URITSKIY and KUBYSHEV. The first two ships each possessed a good AA armament of four 5in guns and were excellently handled. Also augmenting the escort from this date were Catalina aircraft of No 210 Squadron RAF based in northern Russia. Their arrival was timely, for, as the convoy rounded Cape Kanin on 18th September; twelve He111s attacked from the starboard quarter. Fortunately, they were detected on ULSTER QUEEN's radar, so the escorts were ready for them. The aircraft attacked from astern and dropped their torpedoes at a distance of 3-4,000yds. The ships manoeuvred vigorously, but the KENTUCKY, the second ship in the port wing column, was hit. An hour later the aircraft were back, this time attacking from both sides of the convoy. On this occasion the bombers managed to synchronise their attacks with the torpedo carriers, and as the first wave of torpedo bombers began their run-in, the bombers began bombing through the cloud at a height of 2,500ft. Four of the aircraft

were shot down, three by AA fire and one by the EMPIRE MORN's Hurricane fighters though not before one of the bombers had succeeded in finishing off the KENTUCKY which had to be beached. Though the ship was beyond repair, the Russians managed to salvage some of her cargo. Once again the ULSTER QUEEN was particularly effective in dealing with the attackers, her gunfire accounting for two of the aircraft shot down.

The convoy reached the Dvina Bar at the entrance to the White Sea in the evening of 19th September. Even so, the *Luftwaffe* maintained the pressure for a dozen Ju88s attacked the following afternoon as the ships were struggling to find shelter from a gale during which three merchant ships went aground. They remained, guarded by the ULSTER QUEEN, and were attacked again on the 22nd, by which time the rest of the convoy had reached Archangel.

PQ18 had lost thirteen ships out of forty, ten of them to aircraft and three to the U-boats: QP14 had lost three out of fifteen together with SOMALI, LEDA and GREY RANGER - all sunk by U-boats. The *Luftwaffe* was disappointed with these results and cited the presence of AVENGER and her air group as the prime factor. Efforts to sink the escort carrier were frustrated



Tuesday 8th June 1943

Convoy OGM 77: Report dated 8th December 1941 at Milford Haven

Two air attacks:

17th Nov 1828hrs.

Two aircraft attacked convoy. ULSTER QUEEN fired barrages at 1907; 1913; 1915; 1919.
No damage

24th Nov 1552hrs & 1840hrs.

Attack by He111's in position 51°42'N 05° 22'W. No damage.

**COPIES OF "SECRET" END OF VOYAGE REPORTS SUBMITTED BY CAPTAIN
ADAM AND HELD AT THE PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICE**

Convoy PQ15 / QP12 (ADM 199 / 721)

From: - Commanding Officer, HMS ULSTER QUEEN
Date: - 5th June 1942
To: - The Flag Officer in Charge, Belfast.

Subject: - Experiences with North Russian Convoys

In accordance with verbal instructions received from The Flag Officer in Charge, Belfast, the following remarks are submitted.

NARRATIVE

1. HMS ULSTER QUEEN with LEDBURY, submarine STURGEON and a fleet tanker having left Seydisfjordur, Iceland at dawn on the 28th April 1942, rendezvous with Convoy PQ15 North of Iceland in the afternoon of the 28th April.
Convoy was formed in five columns, each of five ships, Senior Officer of escort M.S.6 in HMS BRAMBLE.
Although visibility was low this day, convoy was sighted and reported by a Fokker-Wolfe aircraft PM when hardly clear of Iceland.
In spite of my representations, ULSTER QUEEN had been stationed as leader of the Port Wing Column of Convoy by C.S.10 at escort conference in Seidisfjord.
2. C.S.10 in HMS NIGERIA joined convoy 30th April and took station between nos. 3 and 4 columns, ordering ULSTER QUEEN to take station ahead of him, also between nos. 3 and 4 columns. Weather cleared that night and about midnight enemy-shadowing aircraft appeared. Convoy was shadowed by enemy aircraft all the 1st May and that night the first attack, made by six Junker 88 arrived.
The approaches of these aircraft were spotted in plenty of time by NIGERIA's RDF type 281 and all ships were therefore in 1st degree of readiness.
As soon as the formation was sighted they came under controlled 4in barrage from ULSTER QUEEN and NIGERIA and spasmodic fire from the rest of escort.
Enemy aircraft immediately split up and thereafter manoeuvred separately and futilely around convoy, dropping a few bombs near the A/S trawler astern of the convoy, but never, with one exception closing to a bombing position on the convoy. The one exception attacked through cloud on Port bow of ULSTER QUEEN, received the full benefit of all the ships close range weapons, some from NIGERIA and machine gun fire from another of the escort, and was shot down two cables (about 400yds) from ULSTER QUEEN.
3. In this, and all subsequent air attacks experienced, climatic conditions were identical, namely solid cloud ceiling at 600 to 1,000 feet with extreme visibility on sea level.

4. On the 2nd May "NIGERIA having reached 12 degrees east parted company, leaving instructions that ULSTER QUEEN was to remain stationed between nos. 3 and 4 columns.

ULSTER QUEEN took over constant R.D.F watch on her Type 279. Convoy rigorously shadowed all day by a Blom and Voss and a Dornier 18. Finding they were fired at whenever within 16,000 yards of ULSTER QUEEN, the shadowers kept away at 9 or 10 miles distance.

Because, the night before, the escort had had plenty of warning (from NIGERIA) of the approach of enemy aircraft, it is understood that similar ample warning was expected by them from ULSTER QUEEN.

As explained in my letter of 31st May, ULSTER QUEEN's Type 279 warning set completely failed to give any warning of aircraft approach at any time in the Arctic Seas.

Consequently, at any rate some destroyers of the escort were in the 3rd degree of readiness when enemy torpedo aircraft attack developed just before midnight.

The torpedo aircraft were first sighted by ULSTER QUEEN distant about 6 miles on Starboard bow of convoy, coming in very low (at 20 to 30 feet above sea). ULSTER QUEEN blew a long fog horn blast, hoisted signal for "air attack imminent" and commenced 4in barrage.

Owing to ULSTER QUEEN's station between columns this 4" barrage could not be fired low enough and in fact had to be checked almost at once as the field of fire was so badly masked by two Merchant ships that the approaching aircraft could not at times be seen above the line of the upper works of the intervening Merchant ships.

The two destroyers SOMALI and MATCHLESS, nearest to the line of approach of the enemy aircraft, (probably because an enemy submarine had attacked from the same quarter at the same time) were not observed to fire a shot at the enemy.

Consequently the torpedo aircraft formation was quite unbroken when it arrived at its release position, which appeared to be inside the A/S screen.

As soon, however as torpedoes had been dropped, the aircraft zoomed up clear of the ships masking our fire. One aircraft immediately hit by ULSTER QUEEN's fire, passed a cable ahead of this ship, burning in the nose and crashed in flames one cable on the Port bow. Another which turned away to pass down Starboard side of the convoy was also badly hit and last seen emitting much smoke and dropping; but was not actually seen to crash.

The enemy torpedo aircraft were Heinkel III, and only three were seen by ULSTER QUEEN, but three others were positively seen by other ships with a better view.

Three ships of the convoy were hit and sunk. ULSTER QUEEN had no difficulty in avoiding, by swinging slightly, one torpedo that would just not have cleared the ship ahead.

Torpedo tracks were clearly visible when nearly end on.

5. Earlier on the 2nd May the Polish submarine P551, which had apparently strayed 150 miles from her patrol area and come on the convoy route was attacked and sunk by St ALBANS and another destroyer

6. All day 3rd May, the convoy was still being shadowed. About 2230 GMT that night a formation of four Junkers 88 and two reconnaissance aircraft were sighted by ULSTER QUEEN low down about seven miles distant on the Starboard quarter of the convoy.

This ship sounded the usual alarm signals and opened 4in controlled fire. BADSWORTH also seen to open fire at the same time.

The aircraft formation immediately split up and endeavoured to approach from different sectors, some of them using cloud cover.

The gunnery unit of type 279 R.D.F here proved useful and with both the ships directors controlling independently, the enemy aircraft showed no inclination to come within bombing range, in the face of the combined 4" fire of ULSTER QUEEN and BADSWORTH. Two bombs only were dropped near the A/S trawler astern of the convoy.

A Junker 88 hit by 4in barrage from ULSTER QUEEN's foremost group was seen to crash by three ships in the convoy and some escorts.

7. For the remaining days of PQ15's voyage, snow storms, ice floes and finally a half gale prevented further attacks.

8. At Kola Inlet, ULSTER QUEEN was anchored among the shipping off the Rosta Naval Yard, to provide A/A protection.

During the fifteen days the ship was here, enemy low level bombing and dive bombing attacks were made on the shipping on ever fine, clear weather day, namely on approximately 50% of these days. The favourite hours of attack were 1000hrs and 1530hrs.

All attacks followed the same course. A formation of up to twelve JU88 with fighter escort would cross over the inlet at about 15,000 feet, wide of the know A/A batteries, then arrive over the shipping from low over the hills on the east, in unbroken formation, and bomb while heading for home.

Russian A/A batteries and ULSTER QUEEN would open fire and usually succeeded in spoiling the bombing aim. Then after the formation had been scattered by gunfire, the Russian fighter aircraft would appear.

In the course of these attacks, two JU88 were shot down by the combined gun fire, but on the 18th May, one of the two occasions on which a deliberate attack was made on ULSTER QUEEN by aircraft detached from the main body, one JU88, engaged by ULSTER QUEEN alone was shot down by 4" fire.

In the course of all of these attacks, only two merchant ships were hit during the time spent at Murmansk and neither of these ships were covered by ULSTER QUEEN.

9. During the stay at Murmansk a pulling regatta, spread over several days was organised in ULSTER QUEEN to divert the minds of the ship's company from air to muscle.

10. The return voyage with Convoy QP12 was surprisingly uneventful.

The convoy was only shadowed for a short time on 25th May, when EMPIRE MORN's Hurricane was sent up and shot down the offending Fokker Wolf 200, as is reported elsewhere.

THE MENACE AND THE MEANS

11. The degree of menace to North Russian Convoys in order of importance is:-
 1. Attack by enemy Cruisers or Pocket Battleship.
 2. Air attack.
 3. Destroyer Attack.
 4. Submarine Attack.

With these the enemy has supreme reconnaissance facilities, supported by A.S.V and R.D.F.

We have no air cover for approximately 1,000 "Vulnerable" miles, except for doubtful Russian protection for the last 60 miles.

We have no Cruiser escort, as a rule East of 12 degrees east.

12. The Submarine danger is placed last because the continuous daylight of the Northern Summer, coupled with the strong A/S escort usually provided for the convoy, react very unfavourably to the Submarine. The Submarine menace hardly concerns and only remotely interests the A/A ship in the Russian Convoy.

13. The prevailing climatic conditions during the Northern Summer, on the other hand, greatly favours the air menace.

Of all forms of Air Attack the Torpedo-aircraft attack is the most deadly.

Almost as deadly is the very low-flying bomb attack, termed the "English Attack" by the German airmen, well known in the Southern Irish Sea and on the East Coast of England, but not as yet introduced in the Arctic.

Nothing that has happened has caused me to modify in the least my opinions regarding Air Defence of a Convoy, culled from experience gained in the Southern Irish Sea when it was more active.

These opinions are: -

(a) However crammed with short-range A/A weapons the ships of the convoy or escort may be the success or failure of any form of Air Attack depends, in the first place, on controlled fire from long-range weapons.

(b) The correct stationing of the A/A ship is outside, but close to, the wing column of the convoy on the side on which the attack is expected. Preferably the A/A ship should have sufficient flexibility of speed to vary frequently her position from ahead to astern on that side. In this position the A/A ship has scope to use her long-range weapons effectively through 180° and anything that gets past and over the convoy can be tackled by her close range weapons.

I am convinced that had not the German reconnaissance aircraft on May 2nd noted, for fourteen hours, the A/A ship of PQ15 boxed up in the middle of the convoy (against my wish), the torpedo aircraft that night would not have attacked in a bunch, all on the one bearing most favourable to themselves and least favourable to us.

(c) Since synchronised attacks from different bearings are to be expected, it follows that two A/A ships, on opposite sides working in echelon, are required for the adequate A/A protection of any convoy.

14. For any form of surface vessel attack it should be recognised that the A/A ship, provided she is not occupied by aircraft, can and should provide heavy effective covering fire for our Destroyers' counter attack, while at the same time laying smoke floats to screen the convoy.

COMMAND

15. Because each North Russian Convoy is a Home Fleet Operation, it seems the Command of the escort must always be vested in a Home Fleet Officer. Yet, it is very possible that in many cases the Senior Officer of the Western Approaches

component of the escort is more experienced in convoy protection and can better appreciate the limitations of Merchant Ships in Convoy.

16. Rightly or Wrongly, from ULSTER QUEEN's association with convoys PQ15 and QP12, I formed the impression that the Home Fleet regard the A/A Ship as a sort of hermaphrodite, not quite Man-o-war, nor Merchant ship and as such barely entitled to have a knowledge of its subject.
- At the escort conference for PQ15, although I quite definitely proposed where the A/A ship should be stationed, I found that the Senior Officer had already decided the stationing of the ship.
- I was not invited to the Escort Conference for QP12, but managed later at the Masters' Conference, to arrange amicably with the Senior Officer my ship's stationing.

PERSONNEL AND MATERIAL

17. Temperatures from 15 to 20 degrees of frost, with much snow, were encountered throughout the much of Convoy PQ15.
- While the convoy was being shadowed, it was necessary to keep the hands on 1st degree of readiness for long periods during the likeliest of times for attack - since no reliance could be placed on the RDF warning set.
- The action quarters most difficult to man in a hurry are the two directors. Consequently the Control Officers and their crews, when not closed up on watch had to sleep and eat no further away than their respective transmission stations.
- The provisions of snow shelters at certain exposed gun quarters is necessary.
- The main system of warming the ship namely heated air pumped through the ventilation trunks, proved utterly futile.
18. In cold weather it was found most necessary to work all moving parts of all the Armament and Directors and the locks of Pom Poms and ½in guns, every twenty minutes without fail. Otherwise they quickly stiffened and missed fire. The horrible state of affairs described in "Experiences of a trawler" in Part II page 5 of Western Approaches News Bulletin of April 1942, is unthinkable in an A/A Ship.
19. For all occasions of engaging aircraft it has been found essential that the Forward and After 4in Groups shall be controlled by their respective Directors, working independently of each other.
- The only occasion visualised on which all guns will be on one Director is when engaging surface vessels.
- For the above reason, a "Hunt" Class Destroyer, fitted with only one Director is not an efficient substitute for an A/A Ship.

Letter of proceedings of HMS ULSTER QUEEN

with

Convoy PQ18, 30th August to 25th September 1942

1. HMS ULSTER QUEEN sailed from Bangor at 0600hrs, Sunday 30th August 1942 with HMS ALYNBANK in company to rendezvous in the searched channel with four corvettes, HM Ships BRYONY, BERGAMOT, BLUEBELL and CAMELLIA. The corvettes formed A/S screen ahead and at 1600hrs, 31st August HMS ACHATES overtook and joined the force, which arrived Hvalfiord at 0800A 3rd September. Commanding Officer attended the local convoy conference and Rear Admiral (D)'s conference.
2. Eight merchant ships and close escort (Senior Officer; Commander (Act.) A.B Russell, Royal Navy, in HMS MALCOLM) left Hvalfiord at 0800A Monday 7th September to join Convoy PQ18 off Reykjavik, which proceeded west about in two columns until clear of the North Cape of Iceland. The convoy consisting of 40 ships under Commodore R.K Boddam-Whetham RNR was reformed in 10 columns of 4 ships, but the middle columns were increased by the addition of two fleet oilers, GREY RANGER and BLACK RANGER, the rescue ship HMS COPELAND, and three small motor sweepers Nos. 512, 503 and 590. Convoy was formed up and proceeded on a northerly course by 1200A the 8th September and close escort was joined by HM Submarines P614 and P615 that evening.
3. At 1700A/8th a Focke-Wolfe was sighted and reported by ULSTER QUEEN but not engaged. HMS SCYLLA, eight Home Fleet destroyers and the auxiliary carrier AVENGER joined this convoy next day. Shadowing enemy aircraft were in constant attendance from now onwards, and our own flying boats carried out A/S patrols until the 11th September.
4. At dawn on Sunday 13th September the two rear ships of the starboard wing column were torpedoed by U-boat. Rear Admiral (D) and eight more Home Fleet destroyers rejoined the escort at 1400A the same day and a few minutes later the first air attack was delivered by the enemy.
Some 40 He111s came in on the starboard beam flying very low and pressed their attack home with great determination in face of a tremendous fire from escorts and convoy. The two starboard columns were wiped out and in all eight ships were sunk. Medium level bombing from cloud level (about 2,000 feet) took place at the same time but though a great many bombs were dropped, no hits were observed. ULSTER QUEEN and ships of the port section barely came into action. Five He115s (floatplanes) followed immediately presumably on rescue service as they were not seen to attack.
At dusk – 2045A – an unknown number of He115s made a torpedo attack, which was completely unsuccessful, and several were seen to fall in flames. This success for the convoy and Rear Admiral Burnett's inspiring leadership greatly heartened all hands after the earlier disaster.
5. At 0300A/14th the ATHEL TEMPLAR, half a mile astern of station was torpedoed by U-boat and at 1240A/14th in clear calm weather with 8/10 cloud at 2,000 feet,

when between Spitzbergen and Hope Island, two more torpedo bombing attacks were delivered but the enemy had fortunately changed his tactics. 25 He11s came in from ahead low through the screen and spread across the full front, then split for the main attack to come down outside the port wing and about 25% between the outer starboard columns. ULSTER QUEEN steamed out to meet the main attack and cover AVENGER flying off her fighters. ULSTER QUEEN had time to circle back to her position No. 4 in the 2nd column to open fire on medium level bombers who were about 15 minutes too late to synchronise their attack. Bombs fell wildly, as well as amongst the convoy, but there were no casualties from either bombs or torpedoes. However at 1405A, a second wave of about the same number and type of torpedo bombers made an exactly similar attack but the greater weight went this time against the starboard section and it seemed that both waves had had the AVENGER as their main objective for she was on this occasion on the convoy's starboard quarter. Two ships were torpedoed but one remained with the convoy and reached her destination. The other, the MARY LUCKENBACK, blew up with the most tremendous explosion sending a vast column of fire and smoke many thousands of feet high which carried one enemy aircraft away with it.

ULSTER QUEEN's fire was again masked by the port wing column and it was necessary to steam out to the flank to meet with aircraft, still flying low, but who apparently had unloaded their torpedoes for none were seen. She again regained her ordered position before the bombers arrived. Bombing continued until 1530A, finishing with two bombs which failed to explode falling 30 yards off ULSTER QUEEN's port bow. It is not possible to say how many aircraft were destroyed, but in the first T/B attack two were seen to crash under ULSTER QUEEN's controlled 4in and close range fire and in the second phase, one under close range fire was also seen to crash, but many other ships of all descriptions were also firing at them.

6. The whole convoy was now obviously in great heart and the grand leadership of Rear Admiral (D) was again proved. His broadcasts and the SCYLLA's action were an irresistible combination.
7. The last phase of the main air attack commenced at 1240A the next day, 15th September but no torpedo planes came out. A continuous high level bombing attack by Ju88s was kept up until 1630A but the enemy seldom left cloud cover. Bombs fell amongst the convoy and as far out as 5 miles but no ships were hit though some fell most uncomfortably close.
The after control carried out one excellent controlled run with Type 285 commencing unseen, but obtaining a fortunate correction through a cloud gap, hit the aircraft which was seen to lose height and at least one parachute left the machine. No other ships were firing and the aircraft was almost certainly destroyed.
8. The weather up till now had been calm with little or no sea and extreme surface visibility but mainly overcast sky with the cloud level averaging 2,000 feet. On the evening of 15/9 visibility deteriorated in mist and drizzle with fog patches.
9. QP14 was not seen when the rendezvous on the Longitude of 46°30'E was reached and at 1500hrs on the 16th September, Rear Admiral (D) in SCYLLA, Home Fleet destroyers and oilers, ALYNBANK, and the submarines left PQ18 to join QP14.

10. Throughout the passage many submarine and non-sub contacts were depth charged by the escorts, submarines were reported coming down the columns, and the presence of U-boats was continually in evidence though the number and even the authenticity of the genuine article cannot be estimated but undoubtedly there were very many. They sank three merchant ships in all.

11. For the remainder of the passage to the White Sea submarine contacts continued to be attacked day and night by the close escort so successfully that no U-boat got a torpedo home. With course altered from Cape Kanin towards Cape Gorodstski it seemed the main difficulties were past, but shortly before 1000hrs on the 18th September, Type 279 plotted a large group of aircraft coming in from the westward. He11s flying low were sighted on the starboard quarter at 1020. ULSTER QUEEN had taken up a position in the rear between the 4th and 5th of the seven remaining columns when the main escort left. A turn was made to bring all main armament to bear, and fire opened at 10,000 yards. The enemy had again altered his tactics and now attacked from eastern. 12 He11s spread across the rear of the convoy deploying to line abreast, on the same course. Commanding Officer of the ULSTER QUEEN omitted to launch the CAM ship's hurricane to meet this attack, which however had to face a good barrage from a Russian destroyer, the SHARPSHOOTER, and the ULSTER QUEEN as well as the rear ships and smaller craft. Torpedoes were slipped from 3-4,000 yards out and seemed to break surfaces and finish their run against the rear ships but one vessel, the KENTUCKY, No. 2 of the port wing column was hit and dropped astern. Cloud was 8/10 and thin, and through this a high level bombing attack by Ju88s was synchronised with the T/B attack but no damage was done till later. At 1130C another wave of 12 He11s delivered a nearly similar torpedo attack, SS EMPIRE MORN's Sea Hurricane was launched to meet it and it is now known the pilot of this aircraft shot down two Ju88s. It was a disgrace to see two of the convoy open up close range weapons on the hurricane from the moment it was launched until it was out of range, happily intact; and there was no way to stop the imbeciles. The only tactical variation in this torpedo wave was that it divided into two sections to attack the port and starboard wings respectively. The port group let go together quite 4,000 yards out and from heights varying between 50 and 150 feet, those at the highest level causing their torpedoes to shoot into the air after impact, whilst the starboard group made a much more determined effort by closing to 1,000 yards. Even so, most torpedoes appeared to finish their runs amongst the rear ships and at least eight broke surface around the ULSTER QUEEN, who had again turned stern on as soon as they were seen to drop. Bombing from cloud level continued with the torpedo bombing but the only casualty from bombs or torpedoes was by a well executed dive on the disabled KENTUCKY miles astern. This airman just beat SHARPSHOOTER's stout effort to put a salvage party on board. After the first phase, two columns of black smoke were seen astern and stationary which are hoped to have been He11s. In the second phase, one HE111 was seen to capsize and crash after bumping one of "Y" mounting's splashes, one was seen banking steeply in the barrage and as only 9 appeared out of the 12 counted coming in, these two are considered to have been destroyed. A third who flew low between the 3rd and 4th lines was fired on by all ships irrespective of good neighbourliness and it crashed amongst the forward screen immediately after a round from "B" mounting was seen to hit it. The known score was therefore 2 destroyed, 1 probable and 2 possible and the total for the convoy 4 down for certain.

12. The help signal was made at 1045C, but fighter escort did not appear till about 1230C. High level bombing continued until 1210C without further result.
13. The reinforcement of four Russian destroyers was a great help and excellently handled. It joined a.m. on the 17th September.
14. Rescue tugs from Iokarka were asked for but the request was cancelled when KENTUCKY was seen to blow up.
15. Two columns were formed off Cape Gorodetski and until the Dvina Bar was reached at 1800C/19th, the convoy's troubles were purely navigational. At 1600/19th weather began to deteriorate and by 1800C/19th a full north westerly gale was blowing, with darkness coming on. The Commodore ordered the convoy to anchor, but ships dragged or parted their cables and by daylight were widely scattered. During the gale at 1535C/20th a high level bombing attack, of which warning had been received, was made by 12 Ju88s from 8/10 cloud level of 2,000 feet. This again was half-hearted effort and no damage was done. ULSTER QUEEN closed the largest section of about 10 ships and put up controlled and long barrage. The enemy retired after about half an hour having achieved nothing. At 2030C/20th when quite dark, an aircraft, a JU88, flew less than mast height over the bows of ULSTER QUEEN and a burst from one Oerlikon failed to hit him the surprise was certainly mutual.
16. Weather moderated during the night and a convoy commenced going up harbour a.m./21st. By early evening all ships seemed to have gone in but three Americans were seen to be aground on the bar so ULSTER QUEEN decided to remain to seaward to give A/A protection with a Russian destroyer and the BRITOMART in company. S.B.N.O. Archangel also signalled that ULSTER QUEEN should carry out this duty and at 1442C/21st, two Ju88s made a surprise attack from the landward. One dropped a stick amongst the stranded ships and one dived on ULSTER QUEEN in face of all weapons. Bombs missed 40 yards off port quarter and no damage was done, nor to the ships aground nor the Ju88s.
17. It was decided to give the ship a rest that night 21st/9 and S.B.N.O. Archangel concurring, ULSTER QUEEN proceeded to anchor 8 miles up the river at dusk. However, Archangel was raided that night, they raiding apparently extending down the river to Mogjugski Island. A heavy detonation was seen on the flats about a mile across the river and some object fell close on ULSTER QUEEN's starboard bow about midnight – either a bomb, which failed to explode, or a mine. After this water had been swept without result, the ship returned to seaward of the bar at dusk on the 22nd September.
18. On 25th September, salvage was successful and ULSTER QUEEN proceeded up river to Archangel and Bakharitza, anchoring at 1945C/25th **having been at nothing less than defence stations for 18 days.**

REMARKS

19. Commander A.B Russell's handling and conduct of the close escort was admirable and always gave full confidence. He was ably supported by Commander A.D.H Jay, HMS HARRIER, Senior Officer of the outward-bound Minesweeping Sloops. HMS COPELAND, well handled, and quick to work, was a valuable asset to the convoy and saved much suffering. HMS AVENGER after a slow start, must have contributed most of all to the safe arrival of those ships which reached the White Sea. The imperturbability and the unobtrusive handling of the two submarines impressed ULSTER QUEEN highly – they were a strong moral support. Lastly the behaviour and achievement of the three small motor minesweepers Nos. 503, 512 and 590 were splendid. Whenever casualties occurred these indomitable little ships immediately closed and assisted in rescue or such work as was required with great effect and ability. They used their A/A weapons on all possible and occasions. The convoy was fortunate in being under such an experienced Commander as Rear Admiral Boddam-Whetham, and on the whole they supported him well but were slow sometimes in obeying all emergency turns and in some cases horribly dangerous with their close range guns.

PERSONNEL

20. The conduct and bearing of the company of the ULSTER QUEEN under prolonged strain was of a very high order. They remained keen, cheerful and alert, although at the end were visibly weary. Their health remained excellent.
21. Though no incidents occurred where any individual could distinguish himself, a list of recommendations for award of decorations is enclosed.

GUNNERY

22. Rear Admiral (D) had given definite orders for A/A Ships to remain strictly in their allotted positions. He had sympathetically moved ALYNBANK one column inwards for her protection against U-boats, that is into the 3rd column from the flank, but on representation, conceded to ULSTER QUEEN remaining in the 2nd column from the other flank when told of her greater manoeuvrability. It was pointed out to him that fire was the greatest danger, T/B low flying attacks, would be masked and the ship impotent, but his view seemed to be concentrated on high angle defence and gave positive orders to this end. However, the first day's attack decided Commanding and Gunnery Officers to alter tactics of ULSTER QUEEN as A/A ship when the scale and weight of attack which had not been foreseen was realised. R.A.D's acceptance was taken as obvious and for granted after ULSTER QUEEN was given and took her first chance. The plan now was, that when T/Bs, were seen to commence their approach run, ULSTER QUEEN would turn to meet them at full speed and employ all the excellent qualities of manoeuvring which the ship possesses, and bearing in mind the tonic effect on morale given by attacking. As soon as torpedoes were seen to drop, ship would return to station for H/A defence. Gunnery Control Officers were to estimate ranges and apply appropriate settings (which had been previously memorised) from 14,000 yards down to short barrage in

2,000 yards steps and using eye-shooting control. They were to put up the short barrage in ample time at full blast until T/B attack was expended. This was done and did seem to counter deliberate aimed runs and again emphasising that long-range 4" gunfire is the only way to break up a T/B attack.

High Angle As is seen from the narrative, M/L bombers confined themselves in the main to cloud cover. In this respect.....

23. R.D.F

Type 285: was seldom employed owing to the rapidity with which targets appeared and disappeared on the scan and were lost before the time lag in obtaining the rate could be worked off. This set is so obviously extremely effective that the ? Unfortunately the forward set is hampered by mechanical faults to the laying apparatus of its director.

Type 279: was in constant use and was reliable mechanically and invaluable operatively. The results obtained were all that is claimed for it.

Type 272: broke down electrically and mechanically (severed leads) before PQ18 sailed, but fortunately there was no call for its use.

25. Control: All systems worked well and no remarks are offered except of a local order - PORCUPINE - passed by loud hailer and telephone to meet simultaneous attacks from different directions. Immediately all guns cover separate sectors and go into local control, and rapid fire except "Y" mounting which remains under its own director. This was done on one occasion most satisfactorily.

26. Break Downs: Fore control circuits were broken on one occasion when a near miss brought the generator in use off the board. "A" and "B" guns went into local control immediately and fully repaid the long hours of drill expended to this end.

4" Guns fired a total of nearly 1,100 rounds with one jamb at the right gun of "Y" due to bad loading. There were no miss fires.

Close range: An Oerlikon (?) shell from a merchant ship hit the port pom-pom cutting one electrical lead and causing the heater jacket of No. 4 barrel to slip back and jamb it, but it was in action again within five minutes.

For the rest, jams numbered less than half a dozen and were entirely of a routine nature quickly overcome. It is noteworthy that the quadruple ½" did not miss a round.

27. Supply Close range: supply was fully tested for the first time. Supply parties had been reinforced by volunteer Stewards and Cooks who "produced the goods".

4" guns ready use lockers had to be resorted to, to keep guns in action occasionally when the rate of fire outstripped the supply.

28. Fire Discipline 4" Guns was good at all times. Close range: Forward Oerlikons and ½"s opened fire too soon, nor would they obey the check fire gong. These tendencies were overcome about the time of the third action, being corrected through the medium of the loud hailer.

29. Communications: Both V/S AND W/T staffs were too small and for some reason in ULSTER QUEEN are only half the numbers of the other A/A ships. Two telegraphists were borrowed from Home Fleet ships and eased the situation as there were three lines to man when transmitting R.D.F. reports. This devolved upon V/S

staff during W/T silence and also ULSTER QUEEN performed the duties of repeating ship for the rest of the convoy.

30. Proposals: Blast blew down the retaining handles of the ready use lockers. Proposals will be put forward for modification to prevent this danger. Another pair of Oerlikons is required aft to protect "Y" mounting and after control from attack from astern. Proposals for placing these will also be forwarded.
31. Merchant Vessels: The wild firing of some of the merchant ships was at times highly dangerous, being particularly noticeable amongst the Americans – indeed ULSTER QUEEN had one man at "Y" gun very slightly wounded and sustained her only damage in this manner. Finally it should go on record that in the first few and last few miles of the passage, two decided and almost successful but quite unnecessary attempts were made to ram ULSTER QUEEN also, alas, by our allies.

Convoy PQ18 7th -25th September 1942 (ADM 199 / 758)

PQ18 was an outbound convoy from Iceland to Kola Inlet and Murmansk. It endured the largest number of air attacks of any of the Russian convoys and as a result 12 of the ship's company were recommended for decorations. They were:

MANN, William Lt Cdr

William Mann was a 57yr old Lt Cdr who signed on a T124x (commonly known as 'The Articles'), are usually signed by merchant seamen to bring them under the Naval Discipline Act (NDA). This suggests the Lt Cdr Mann was a retired Royal Naval Reservist (RNR) but still in the merchant service and recalled for active duty.

WARE, Frederick Charles; Leading Seaman
STANBRIDGE, Thomas John; AB
McNEIL, Charles Duncan Campbell; Lt RNVR
CONNELL, James William; CPO
KENNY, John Francis; Act PO Ty
CASEY, Thomas Henry; Ordnance Artificer 1st Class
IRVINE, Clements; Diesel greaser (T124x)
DIXON, Walter Rider; Act Ldg Seaman
MAIR, Sydney James; AB
GREEN, Albert Edward; Asst. Steward (T124x)
BRIDGEMAN, William George; Act Gunner

Details of air attacks:

Date	Time	Aircraft	No.	Losses
13 th Sept	2045A 1445A	He115's	9+	
		He115's	40	
		Ju88's	12+	
		Do215	at least one	None
14 th Sept	1240 & 1530	He115's	25+	
		Ju88's	12-20+	8 ships sunk 2 stopped
15 th Sept	1240A	Various	30+	2 ships hit
18 th Sept	1030A	He115's	12	
		Ju88's	24+	2 ships lost
20 th Sept	1535A	Ju88's	12-24	None
21 st Sept	1442C	Ju88's	2	

Total of 10 ships lost and 4 damaged.

4th - 6th January 1942 Convoy DSM 16

In addition to the above there was a friendly fire incident, apparently arising from a lack of communication, whilst the ship was escorting convoys in the Irish Sea in January 1942. The complete report has not been copied but the following details were contained within it:

Pos'n: 51°46'N 50°23.5'W
Course: 334 deg
Speed: 7 kts
Time: 1825hrs.

Three aircraft presumed hostile located. RDF bearing 104 deg at 34 miles (2); 102 deg at 33 miles (1). Blind barrage of 3 salvos fired at range 10,000yds; second barrage fired at range 8,000 yds.

4th January: 2245hrs

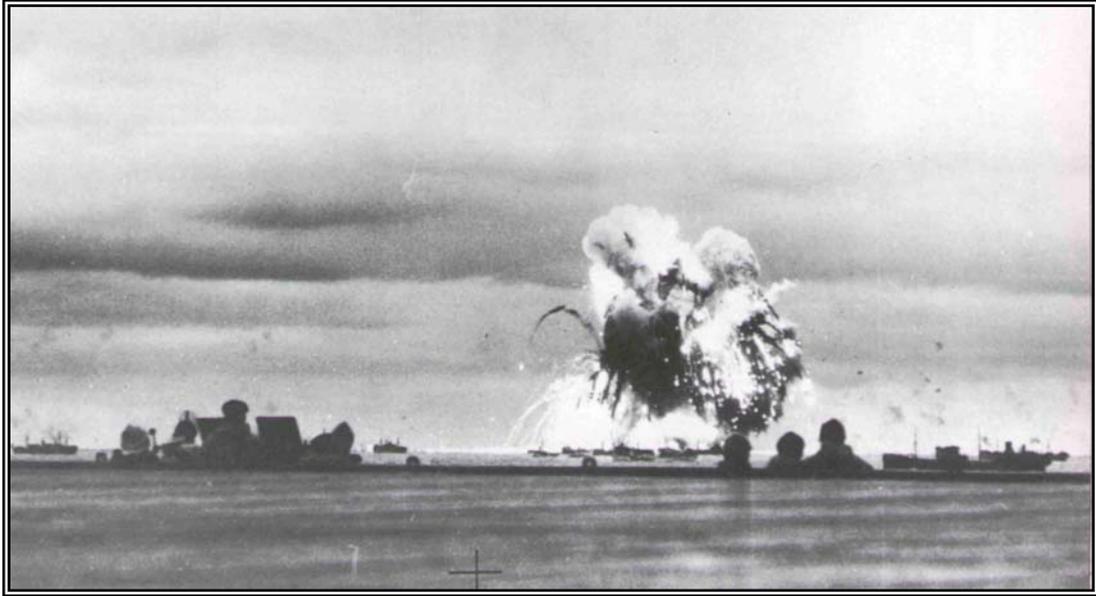
Aircraft presumed hostile approached convoy. When they were dead astern of the convoy and thought to have convoy in sight, ULSTER QUEEN commenced firing a blind barrage at range 6,000 yds.

5th January: 1328hrs

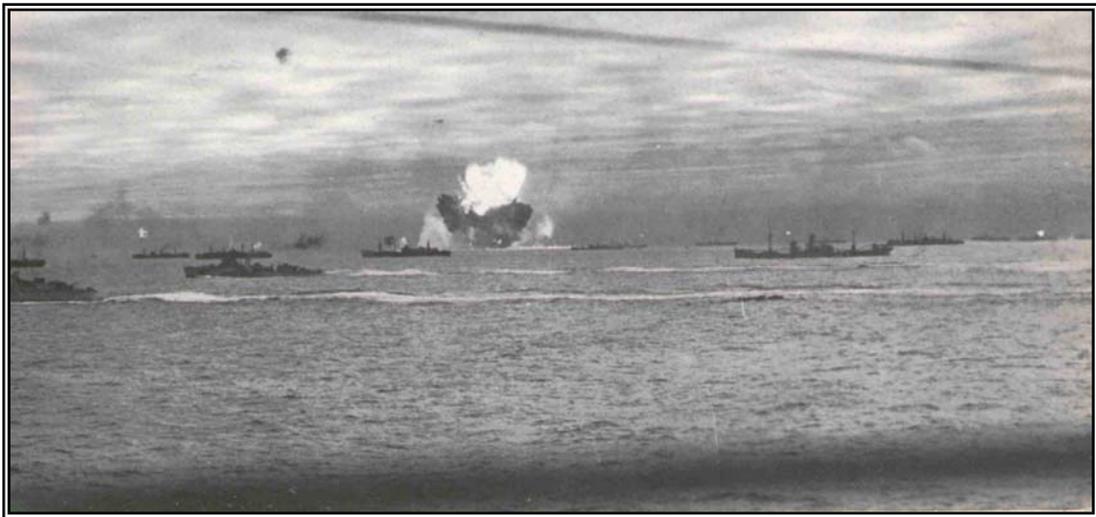
An aircraft resembling a Ju88 was seen coming out of the north at very high speed. The aircraft made no attempt at identification and at range 5,000 yds ULSTER QUEEN opened fire. The aircraft was seen to lose height but was soon lost astern.

Apparently the aircraft were engaged in CGI practice in the area but ULSTER QUEEN had not been informed that aircraft would be operating in the vicinity of the convoy. Identify Friend or Foe (IFF) was 'on' but when aircraft are CGI controlled the IFF signal has to be reduced because of the sensitivity of the CGI set, resulting in the ship's RDF not recording the IFF signal from the aircraft.

PQ18



The end of the American Liberty ship MARY LUCKENBACH, Monday 14th September 1942, during PQ18. A lone steward survived the explosion of her cargo of ammunition.



A tanker explodes, possibly the oiler ATHEL TEMPLAR, which was torpedoed by U457 on 14th September. ATHEL TEMPLAR could not be kept afloat and had later to be sunk by the escorts. PQ18 was persistently shadowed by U-boats, but good work by the escorts and HMS AVENGER's three ASW Swordfish did much to keep them at bay. U 457 was sunk three days later by HMS IMPULSIVE.



A photograph taken from HMS AVENGER during the first air attack on PQ18. Five German aircraft can be seen flying amid the intense AA barrage put up by the escorts. In an effort to avoid the torpedoes the Commodore ordered an emergency 45 degree to starboard, but many of the American ships, who were unused to the rigid discipline required of merchant ships in convoy, ignored or misunderstood the signal and as a result six of the seven ships in the two starboard columns were hit.



HMS ESKIMO in the foreground with the Hunt-class HMS WHEATLAND's stern just visible clear of the bomb blast.