

Blockade Interdicts Allied Reinforcements

Canadian Support Not Enough to Stem Defeat

by Tom Tanner, AP (Axis Press)

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Fierce combat erupted as the reinforced Axis High Seas Fleet again intercepted the Allied Fleet near here. Significant damage was inflicted in a series of engagements that saw the first appearance of Canadian support for the Allied cause and the disgrace and then redemption of one of our own.

HMS WARSPITE 2 (CAPT Bob Pottle) (26-2-1) from the Canadian North Atlantic Battle Squadron was the sole Canadian reinforcement that arrived to support the Allied Fleet. Sources within the High Seas Fleet (HSF) were unable to determine whether the light response was due to excessive losses to blockading U-boats or an inability to support operations so far from home waters. Nevertheless, the spirit of the Allied Fleet was raised after its crushing defeat on Monday and it looked forward to the new battle with renewed determination.

In a battle full of punishing combat, the HSF pressed home their attack upon the Allied vessels at sea. Early on it was realized that USS MARYLAND (CAPT Steve Pavlovsky) (40-8-7) was in trouble and eventually slipped below the seas under the crushing might of Axis forces. In the second sortie HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH (CAPT Paul Broring) (39-4-9) joined MARYLAND beneath the waves, reportedly the victim of a torpedo from a German U-boat though the QE's captain insists he was rammed. The Allied flagship USS NORTH CAROLINA (ADM Dave Vogtman) (56-6-9), battleships USS ARIZONA (CAPT Don Fisher) (20-1-11) and IJN MUSASHI (ADM Carl Camurati-san) (97-2-11) also took significant damage.

The carnage inflicted on the Allied Fleet came at a high cost as the HSF lost two of its own ships. Astonishingly both ships were under the command of the same captain when they went down. Kapitän Dave Tuttle lost SMS KRONPRINZ (13-2-5) when his pumps gave out in the first sortie. KAPT Tuttle was rescued and put in command of the recently salvaged SMS NASSAU, taking command from his father KDR Seal Tuttle. Unfortunately the pump problem was also passed to the NASSAU, which foundered in the second sortie with moderate damage (8-4-10), and KAPT Tuttle again found himself leaving a sinking ship. The battle ended in an Axis victory of 8415 points to 5290.

Rescued once more, KAPT Tuttle was brought before ADM Tom Tanner on the Axis Flagship SMS HINDENBURG (53-9-14) where he was court-martialed, reduced in rank to Korvettenkapitan and assigned convoy duty as the commander of the aircraft carrier DKM GRAF ZEPPELIN. It would turn out to be a fortuitous demotion.

HINDENBURG itself was almost lost when damage in the first sortie ruptured the forward magazines (CO2 supply line) after returning to port. The force of the blast blew out the bow plating above the armor belt and almost launched both forward turrets into low orbit. At the time of the explosion ADM Tanner was ashore at his Headquarters coordinating the next sortie and was heard to comment, "Somebody's going to have a bad day." When reports arrived that the flagship was the source of the explosion, ADM Tanner immediately traveled to the scene expecting to supervise a salvage operation but was delighted to see that the crew had all fires under control and the ship was not taking on any water. A short drydock period returned HINDENBURG to service for the second and subsequent sorties.

After resting, both fleets attempted convoy runs to resupply their forward bases. The Allied merchant ship TRADER I (CAPT Marty Hayes) made four successful runs and the aircraft carrier USS HORNET (CAPT Don Fisher) made two. But this could not overcome the might of the Axis Merchant Fleet (AMF). After years of being outnumbered a concerted building program yielded no less than four Axis convoy ships operational. Kommodor Ken Kelly was placed in charge of Axis convoy operations and he ran a well oiled machine that saw as many as three of the vessels running in a true convoy at any one time. KMDR Kelly, flying his flag from the Italian seaplane carrier GUISEPPE GARIBALDI, completed three successful runs carrying cargos of Axis Clams while KAPT Aiden Kelly in the captured escort carrier USS SANTEE made four runs. KAPT Nate Graham in the captured LST made an additional five runs! But the bulk of the points were earned by the yoeman work of KKPT Tuttle in the GRAF ZEPPELIN which made five successful runs at 1500 points each, three of them without patching damage.

The fight to stop the convoys was a viscous one as well that had its own victims. With few Allied convoy ships to engage the Axis Fleet took the battle to the Allies, dispatching the ESPANA (CDR Kevin Plummer). DKM ADMIRAL SCHEER (KDR Barry Tighe) used its triple bow guns to great effect taking out the Allied supply depots early on despite opposition from IJN MUSASHI and USS NORTH CAROLINA, preventing Allied warships

from reloading after the first half hour. The Axis depots were taken out soon after, but the superior number of Axis ships allowed the pressure to be maintained on the Allied convoys.

For his valiant and significant efforts contributing to the 15,500 to 6400 point victory over the Allies, KKPT Tuttle was reinstated to the rank of Kapitan and command of the salvaged SMS KRONPRINZ was returned to him.

After two brutal days of combat the Axis Fleet had a comfortable 39,020 to 21,045 point lead over the Allies. But experience last year had taught the Axis High Command that discipline must be maintained until the end. Especially with Night Battle quickly approaching.