

GROUP 'A' 1943

Skerryvore to Trincomalee

In December 1943 a force called GROUP A comprising the battleships RENOWN, VALIANT and QUEEN ELIZABETH, and the aircraft carriers ILUSTRIOUS and UNICORN left UK for the Indian Ocean. They were escorted all the way to the Indian Ocean by the destroyers TENACIOUS, KEMPENFELT, TERMAGENT and PARRETT; as far as Port Said by the destroyers DUCKWORTH, BLACKWOOD, DOMETT, BERRY, COOKE, ESSINGTON; and from Aden by the destroyers ROTHERHAM, ROEBUCK, RACEHORSE, RAPID and NORMAN. During the course of the deployment various other escorts joined and left and some of those named above were withdrawn or rerouted for one reason or another.

The Battleships and escorts left Scapa Flow on December 30th, the Carriers and their escorts left the Clyde on the same day and they all rendezvoused on the 31st about 45 miles out into the Atlantic.

The force refuelled in Gibraltar on 5th/6th January 1944 and then proceeded through the Mediterranean to Port Said where they arrived on 12th Jan. The transit of the Suez Canal was undertaken on the 12th/13th and after refueling in Suez Bay and transiting the Red Sea the force arrived in Aden on 19th January.

On the 27th Jan, RENOWN, escorted by ROTHERHAM and NORMAN parted company with the force for Colombo and the remainder of the force continued on to Trincomalee, where they arrived on the 28th Jan.

What follows, is the (classified Secret) report by Vice Admiral Arthur Power, who was Vice Admiral commanding the 3rd Battle Squadron (the 3 battleships), Second in Command of the Eastern Fleet, and the Commander of force Group A.

Paras 0 to 57 are daily reports, the following paras are GENERAL REMARKS.

It's an interesting insight....!

"58. Group A left the United Kingdom with each ship in a different state of incomplete training; there was no opportunity for any exercises at sea as a group before leaving, and no opportunity for harbour drills with all ships in company. The screen was without any experience or training in the work they were to carry out on passage. The group concentrated at sea off Skerryvore on 30th December; this meant that ships had to sail from various ports in Scotland in the middle of a festive season. Fortune was tempted and reacted kindly but a repetition of this experiment is not advocated.

59. The standard of efficiency of the visual and other means of communication was very low indeed whilst the "Sea Sense" of some units in company left much to be desired and necessitated more signaling than is normally required. Improvement was steady, but it was

not until a week at sea had passed that normal watchkeepers were able to deal with simple signals themselves and did not feel obliged to call the watch below. Without efficient communications a formation of ships is wide open to attacks, which appear insignificant.

60. The passage of 30 days during which no officer or man went ashore was of the greatest benefit to all and made a large percentage of the young and untrained personnel realise that cinemas and dance halls are not necessary to health and happiness. The exceptionally fine weather throughout the passage added to the enjoyment and health. The engine room personnel stood up extremely well to a long period of steaming with a big change in climatic conditions.

61. The need to adhere to programme dates and the high speed necessary to do so somewhat limited the amount of training carried out. In the aircraft carrier's failures in Barracuda and Corsair aircraft made modifications necessary during the passage, and this curtailed flying training. However, much general sea knowledge and sea sense has been acquired by all and, from the point of view of training, the passage was a success. The Gulf of Suez is an admirable exercise area and could with advantage be more generally used.

62. There has, up to date, little opportunity of assessing the quality of ships companies other than that in RENOWN. As a provisional estimate it is fair to state that there is good material on which to work and, with very, firm leadership, in about 3 months time a satisfactory standard may be reached. At the present time officers and men are rather anaemic and there is an acute shortage of leaders.

Sgd (ARTHUR POWER)

Vice Admiral"