

# Operation Berlin, Prelude to Rheinübung

A NEW SCENARIO FOR THE CHASE OF THE BISMARCK BY ALLYN VANNOY

**Operation Berlin** was conducted by German battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* against Allied shipping in the North Atlantic between January 22 and March 22, 1941. The objective was to intercept convoys sailing from Canada to Britain. In command of the two ship task force was Admiral Johann Lütjens, with orders forbidding attacks on convoys escorted by forces of equal strength.

The British expected German warships to sortie, and had assigned battleships to escort convoys while deploying cruisers to intercept German warships attempting to break out into the Atlantic.

Seven supply ships were dispatched into the Atlantic ahead of *Operation Berlin* to support the raiders. The cruiser *Admiral Hipper* was to sortie from Brest, France, and attack convoys between Gibraltar, Sierra Leone, and Britain, diverting British forces away from the battlecruisers.

The two warships set to sea on December 28, but returned to port due to storm damage. They then departed Kiel on January 22, 1941.

On February 1, the cruiser *Admiral Hipper* departed Brest.

B-Dienst (the Kriegsmarine Intelligence Service) intercepted radio traffic that reported a convoy leaving Halifax. On February 8, *Scharnhorst* spotted the convoy, but discovered it included the battleship *HMS Ramillies*. Following orders, Lütjens called off the fight before it even began.

On February 11, Lütjens ordered the *Hipper* to engage a convoy steaming between Gibraltar and Britain. The next day *Admiral Hipper* attacked an unescorted convoy and sank seven ships, then returned to Brest on February 15.

On February 22, the German battlecruisers encountered several ships 500 miles east of Newfoundland. They sank five vessels.

Lütjens decided to shift operations to the eastern Atlantic and attack convoys between Sierra Leone and Britain. On March 7, the German warships sighted a convoy northeast of the Cape Verde Islands, but was escorted by the battleship *HMS Malaya*.

On March 11, Lütjens received a signal from Navy Group West directing *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* to cease operations against Halifax convoys on March 18.

They encountered merchant ships south of Cape Race, Newfoundland. On March 15, they sank three tankers and capturing three tankers.

The following day they sank ten merchantmen, but when the *HMS Rodney* appeared the German warships steamed away.

The Home Fleet sortied as the battleships *HMS King George V* and *Rodney* were assigned to escort convoys leaving Halifax. The *HMS Nelson*, accompanied by a cruiser and two destroyers, took up a position south of Iceland. B-Dienst reported the battlecruiser *Repulse* and carrier *Furious* had departed Gibraltar on a westerly course.

The German battlecruisers were to distract the British so that the *Admiral Hipper* and *Admiral Scheer* could return to Germany and also directed the battlecruisers to sail to Brest so that they could prepare to join a raid into the Atlantic by the battleship *Bismarck* and heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* in April. *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* refueled at sea on March 18, and set course for France.

Lütjens problem in reaching the French port was that he knew *HMS Malaya* was in the vicinity of the Cape Verde Islands, and that Force H was somewhere at sea. Lütjens therefore looked to make his approach in darkness, hoping to reach Brest at dawn on the 22nd.

At 5:30 PM on March 20, a reconnaissance aircraft from Ark Royal spotted the German warships 600 miles northwest of Cape Finisterre on the Spanish coast.

On March 21, the Admiralty ordered the battleship *HMS Queen Elizabeth* and battlecruiser *HMS Hood*, patrolling south of Iceland, to proceed south at full speed. Several cruisers were also ordered south and a destroyer flotilla sailed from Plymouth.

A Coastal Command Hudson detected the German battlecruisers within 200 miles of the French coast on the evening of March 21. The two warships reached Brest the next day. The *Admiral Hipper* reached Kiel on March 28, the *Admiral Scheer* two days later.

*Operation Berlin* was the most successful of the Kriegsmarine's surface raiding missions, sinking or capturing 22 ships. The Allied North Atlantic convoy routes were disrupted, delaying delivery of some supplies. By diverting the Home Fleet, the operation also allowed *Admiral Hipper* and *Admiral Scheer* to safely return to Germany.

The German Naval Staff and Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, commander of the Kriegsmarine, believed that the success of *Operation Berlin* and other raids conducted by surface vessels

during 1940 and early 1941 demonstrated that further such attacks remained viable. But several changes were made to surface raiding tactics based on lessons learned from the operation. The prohibition against engaging forces of equal strength was softened to allow battleships to engage escorting warships while their accompanying cruisers attacked convoys.

The perceived success in evading the British convinced Admiral Raeder that *Bismarck* could safely operate in the North Atlantic. In six weeks of his return, Lütjens would be heading for the Denmark Strait aboard the *Bismarck*.

**SCENARIO:** Operation Berlin (conclusion)

**GAME LENGTH:** March 15 to 22

**GERMAN SETUP:**

**Within 2 hexes of the south map edge:** *Admiral Sheer (Köln)*

**Brest:** *Admiral Hipper (Prinz Eugen)*

**Within 3 hexes of hex N9:** *Scharnhorst and Gneisenau (KG 1)*

**5 tankers** - freely placed

**Air units** - per *The Chase of the Bismarck* set up

**BRITISH SETUP:**

**Convoy duty:** *Ramillies, Rodney, King George V, Revenge, London, Cairo, Exeter*

**H22:** *Nelson, and KGV flotilla*

**J24:** *Hood*

**AH19:** *Force H (Ark Royal, Renown, Sheffield, Ark Royal flotilla)*

**Gibraltar:** *Repulse and carrier Furious (Victorious)*

**S26:** *Channel Flotilla*

**C20:** *Norfolk*

**E21:** *Suffolk*

**F25:** *Manchester*

**G25:** *Birmingham*

**H25:** *Arethusa*

**X22:** *Edinburgh*

**Scapa Flow:** *Kenya, Galatea, Hermione, Aurora*

**Air units** - per *The Chase of the Bismarck* set up

**SEQUENCE OF PLAY**

**7. Chase Phase addition - B-Dienst intercepts**

The German Player rolls a 1d10; the result is the number of hexes that the Player may call out anywhere on the map. If there are Allied ships in the hex, the Allied Player must identify them.

## Victory Points Table

Condition		Victory Points
Scharnhorst and Gneisenau sunk		Allied Operational Victory
End of game	Scharnhorst and Gneisenau undamaged at sea with at least 10 FP remaining	-4 VP
	Scharnhorst and Gneisenau in port at Norway of Germany	-5 VP
	Admiral Hipper or Admiral Sheer in port at Germany	-3 VP
	Scharnhorst and Gneisenau in port at France	-6 VP
	End of game Turn Track (Applies if no other "End of game" VP conditions apply)	-10 VP
Scharnhorst and Gneisenau out of emergency fuel		-15 VP
Each convoy sunk		Variable (0.5 - 2 VP markers, see 11.3)
Each single merchant ship sunk		0.5 VP
BB, CV BC, CA	Sunk	VP equal to damaged # of Hull boxes
	Damaged	1 VP for every two hits on the same ship
All others	Sunk	1 VP per sunk ship
	Damaged	--