

Sunflower received a radio message from the Admiralty in London 'stating O.G. 69 was being shadowed by aircraft and that U-boats were in the vicinity'. Later in the afternoon two corvettes, HMS *Kingcup* and HMS *Dianella*, were detached from the convoy on orders from Western Approaches Command. Just before midnight half the convoy, that is, those merchant ships which were under orders to proceed independently to destinations in the South Atlantic and which numbered 13, were also detached from OG 69 and steamed off in a southwesterly direction. Nevertheless, Treasure-Jones 'anticipated', probably from German radio transmissions coming from the vicinity of the British ships, that the convoy would be attacked during the night.³⁰

On 26 July a German reconnaissance aircraft reported the position of OG 69 as being in BE 4310 on the German grid map and the BdU calculated, on the basis of the D/F bearings from six different U-boats on radio transmissions from the FW 200 aircraft, that the position of the British ships would be at 1200 on 26 July in German grid map square BE 5650. Nevertheless, the BdU's and the GAF aircraft's estimated positions for OG 69 differed by 215 miles. The situation became more confused when the U-371 reporting from square BE 5650, the estimated 'position of the convoy', claimed that there were no British ships in sight; at the same time a D/F bearing of 241 degrees had been obtained on a radio transmission from the GAF reconnaissance aircraft. On the basis of all this information, it was finally concluded by the BdU that OG 69 was to the southwest of the U-371 and that the U-boat was most likely astern of the convoy; the BdU further concluded that the D/F bearing of 241 degrees had been the actual course of the British ships. The failure of the U-boats to gain contact with OG 69 was thought by the BdU to be due 'to a fundamental fault in navigation or in decyphering by the aircraft'. For several hours after the GAF aircraft's report of sighting the convoy, and with some seven U-boats located in what was thought to be the immediate vicinity of the British ships, but with no contact having as yet been obtained, the BdU began to embrace the theory that Britain had in fact transmitted false homing signals to mislead Germany. According to this theory a British warship, while steaming away from OG 69, had transmitted the homing signals which had been D/Fed by the U-boats while the convoy had 'in reality deviated on to another course'. However, the situation became clear at 16.09 and 17.13 when the U-68 radioed the BdU in these two instances to report that Convoy OG 69 was indeed in sight.³¹ Thereupon the BdU ordered the U-68 to shadow the convoy and to home by means of radio signals other U-boats on to the British ships. At the same time the other U-boats were ordered to radio 'yes' when they had gained contact with the convoy and then attack.³² At 21.53 the U-79 reported being in contact with OG 69.³³ This contact report was soon followed by radio messages from the U-126 and U-203 which were also reporting contact with the British ships.³⁴

The U-79, beginning at 00.21 on 27 July, fired a salvo of five torpedoes into the main body of OG 69 hitting and sinking, as a result, the merchant ship *Hawkinge*.³⁵ It was in fact during the attacks against OG 69 that Germany first adopted the tactic of firing salvos of torpedoes at long range into the main body of a convoy rather than undertaking attacks at close range on specific ships.³⁶ When the torpedo hit the *Hawkinge* a 'dull explosion' was heard on board HMS *Sunflower* and then two star shells and snowflake flares were seen. Treasure-Jones ordered the convoy to make an emergency turn to starboard. As the convoy was turning onto the new course HMS