

08.09 reporting what appeared to be a second convoy steering a southwesterly course.⁴⁹ The confusion was not cleared up for the BdU by the GAF either. Two reconnaissance missions were ordered to be flown by FW 200 aircraft from France in the vicinity of OG 69. The aircraft reported two convoys in two different positions. Further, the positions reported by the aircraft and the bearings obtained from the U-boats were not compatible. In the end the BdU concluded that it was probable that OG 69 had divided into two groups, which was in fact the case.⁵⁰

The problem of the two different convoys was resolved during the afternoon of 27 July when the U-371 lost contact with the enemy and the BdU ordered the U-boats to concentrate against OG 69, or that part of it that was still being shadowed by the U-126.⁵¹ At 19.46 the U-126, the shadower, was given permission to attack.⁵² During 27 July the 11 remaining ships of Convoy OG 69 continued steaming to the south. At 18.00B Lieutenant Commander C. B. Coventry RNR, of HMS *Jasmine*, became the senior officer and commander of the convoy's escort when Treasure-Jones, with HMS *Sunflower* and HMS *Alisma*, was ordered by the Admiralty to return to Britain. Several hours later the corvette HMS *Fleur-de-Lys* joined OG 69 to bring the strength of the escort up to six corvettes.⁵³ And at 23.30B the convoy's mean course was altered to 130 degrees to begin the run southeast to Lisbon.⁵⁴

At 23.51 the U-126 fired a salvo of six torpedoes – four from her bow tubes and two from her stern tubes – into the main body of OG 69. One torpedo hit the merchant ship *Erato*, the vessel on which the commodore of the convoy was embarked. A second torpedo hit the merchant ship *Inga I*.⁵⁵ Both merchant ships quickly sank. However, as the *Erato* was sinking, Commodore C. M. Ford RNR made the signal for the convoy to disperse. Three merchant ships – *Ruth I*, *Pelayo* and *Sheaferown* – obeyed this signal, breaking away from the convoy and continuing the voyage independently.⁵⁶ The remaining merchant ships did not follow the signal to disperse and remained under the escort of the force of corvettes. No U-boats were seen by the ships of the escort during the torpedoing of the *Erato* and *Inga I*. However, HMS *Begonia*, which had been detailed to rescue the survivors of the two torpedoed merchant ships and was dropping astern of OG 69, did obtain a sonar contact, then attacked with four depth charges without result. HMS *Begonia* remained astern of OG 69, picking up survivors from the two torpedoed merchant ships until 08.00 when she began to steam to rejoin the convoy.⁵⁷

The last German attack on OG 69 that occurred during the morning of 28 July took place at 04.26 when the U-561 fired three torpedoes at the ships of the convoy, hitting the freighter *Wrotham*.⁵⁸ This ship, sailing in ballast from the Clyde to Huelva, was hit by one torpedo on the starboard side in number two hold upon which it rapidly sank. Following this attack HMS *Pimpernel*, firing star shells, conducted a search for the U-boat without any result before she, and HMS *Fleur-de-Lys*, rescued all 26 members of the *Wrotham*'s crew. It was at this point that HMS *Begonia* was detached from the escort of OG 69 to proceed to Gibraltar with survivors from the torpedoed merchant ships, causing the strength of the escort of the convoy to be reduced.⁶⁰ At 08.30 on 28 July Convoy OG 69 consisted of only five merchant ships escorted by five corvettes⁶¹ supported by an RAF Coastal Command aircraft operating out of Gibraltar.

During the mid-morning of 28 July two more German FW 200 reconnaissance aircraft shadowed OG 69. An RAF Coastal Command Catalina aircraft, which had