

been escorting OG 69 throughout the morning, attempted to engage the German aircraft but failed owing to a lack of speed.⁶² The German aircraft reported by radio to the BdU several positions for OG 69. However, the D/F bearings obtained from the aircraft's homing signals 'were unfavourable, converging at a sharp angle, so that it could be seen only that the convoy must be East of the U-boats'. The situation was further confused for BdU by multiple reports from the U-boats, as well as from reconnaissance aircraft, which led the German command authorities to conclude that 'the convoy had dispersed into several part-convoys'.⁶³ Nevertheless, the U-boats remained in contact with OG 69 throughout 28 July⁶⁴ and at 19.52, in an obvious attempt to clarify the situation, the BdU ordered that the U-boat operating against OG 69 report their 'exact positions'.⁶⁵

At 20.12 an RAF Coastal Command Catalina aircraft informed the escort of OG 69 that it had attacked a U-boat 12 miles astern of the convoy. HMS *Pimpernel* and HMS *Larkspur* were ordered to conduct a search for the U-boat astern of OG 69. When HMS *Larkspur* was passing down the port side of the convoy, at 20.25, HMS *Fleur-de-Lys* sighted a periscope. As HMS *Fleur-de-Lys* was turning to attack the periscope, at 20.27, torpedoes exploded against the sides of two merchant ships of the convoy. The U-203 had fired four torpedoes from a point off the port side of OG 69. One torpedo each hit the merchant ships *Lapland* and *Norita*.⁶⁶ Both merchant ships sank almost immediately. The two other torpedoes, fired by the U-203, passed near to HMS *Rhododendron* without hitting any of the British ships. Immediately after the torpedoes hit the two ships, HMS *Larkspur* attacked a sonar contact with depth charges off the port side of OG 69. Following the corvette's attack the contact was not regained. Just as the torpedoes exploded, HMS *Fleur-de-Lys* obtained in its turn another sonar contact, which it attacked with a full pattern of depth charges. However, a second and then a third attack had to be made with only single depth charges because the corvette's supply of these munitions was nearly exhausted. HMS *Rhododendron* then attacked HMS *Fleur-de-Lys*'s sonar contact with six more patterns of depth charges before also expending her supply of these munitions as well as losing sonar contact.⁶⁷ In this series of depth charge attacks the U-203 was in fact damaged and forced to break off the operation and return to base.⁶⁸ Afterwards HMS *Rhododendron*, screened by HMS *Fleur-de-Lys*, rescued the survivors of the *Lapland* and *Norita*.⁶⁹

No further attacks were made by the U-boats on OG 69 and the three remaining merchant ships of the convoy, escorted by five corvettes, arrived off Lisbon on 31 July.⁷⁰ On 29 July, for a number of reasons, the BdU concluded U-boat operations against OG 69. One of the reasons for such a decision was the incapability of a number of U-boats – U-68, U-203, U-561, U-331 – either because they were damaged in the course of the battle or because they lacked the fuel to continue operations.⁷¹ Another reason contributing to the decision by the BdU to end the operation against OG 69 was a growing uncertainty among the German command authorities as to the actual location of the convoy. On 29 July at 04.27 the U-331 was the last U-boat to report the position of the convoy.⁷² Several hours later the BdU apparently lost track of the convoy and subsequently failed to fix OG 69's position from a report and bearings transmitted by a GAF reconnaissance aircraft.⁷³ Then in the evening of 29 July the BdU received a report that an Italian submarine was in contact with OG 69. However, no attack was undertaken by the Italians and contact with the British convoy