

was soon lost.⁷⁴ Having wrongly concluded, probably due to a lack of information, that OG 69's destination was Gibraltar rather than Lisbon, the BdU, after obtaining information from communications intelligence that a British convoy was about to sail from Gibraltar, changed strategy and ordered those U-boats still operating against OG 69 to move south and establish a patrol line for the interception of ships arriving at as well as departing from Gibraltar. It became the intention of the BdU that the remaining ships of OG 69 should be intercepted and attacked as they were entering Gibraltar.⁷⁵

The battle for Convoy OG 69 was the first of a series of battles fought over British convoys sailing between Britain, Lisbon, Gibraltar and the South Atlantic during the summer and autumn of 1941. This battle also inaugurated the use of communications intelligence to detect a convoy and the subsequent use of GAF reconnaissance aircraft to track the British ships for as long as necessary, which in this case was for five days, while at the same time homing by means of radio bearings U-boats to the enemy formation. The combination of such technology and its application were clearly effective. The operation against OG 69 was a German clear victory despite the fact that, at the time, the BdU had overestimated the magnitude of their success. They claimed to have sunk two escorts and 19 merchant ships totalling 108,000 gross registered tons when in fact none of the escorts and only seven merchant ships,⁷⁶ totalling some 25,000 tons, were sunk during operations against OG 69. Even though the operation against OG 69 was overall a success for the U-boats, the BdU recognized that due to the inexperience of the commanders of the U-boats many mistakes in navigation and tactics had occurred during the operations against the convoy, which had diminished the potential scale of the victory. Probably the tactic of firing, at long range, salvoes of torpedoes into the main body of a convoy rather than aiming a missile at an individual ship was introduced to overcome the inexperience of the commanders of the U-boats. However, it was believed at the BdU that in the future fewer errors and mistakes would be committed due to the increasing experience and competence of the U-boat commanders and although they also recognized that the latter would require additional training in the tactics of attacking convoys. From the operations against OG 69 the BdU also concluded that continued co-operation between the aircraft of the GAF and the U-boats could prove useful in the war against British shipping. Most important of all, the BdU further concluded that attacks against British convoys must be continued for such attacks were worthwhile in the conduct of the war and because it would be only through successful attacks on convoys that the U-boats could have a decisive effect on the course of the war.⁷⁷

To Britain the voyage of Convoy OG 69 was a 'bad passage' owing to failures in organization and command compounded, on their side too, by a general lack of training and experience. It was not known by Britain at the time that failures in signals security had provided Germany with the information required to locate and intercept the convoy. In addition an asset of the British, namely their ability to read in a timely fashion the coded radio messages sent to and by the U-boats, usually valuable, had no effect on the conduct and outcome of the battle. As for the routing of the convoy, there had existed a difference of opinion. Some of the British argued that OG 69 should have followed a southerly route farther out in the Atlantic to the west. Instead, by proceeding south along 15°W and then 17°30', the convoy had