



A map showing the ten-day voyage of the UK-Russia convoys. After day four these convoys went beyond the range of Allied land-based air cover and faced attack from German aircraft based in Norway.

the escort carrier's embarked Sea Hurricanes and Swordfish had helped close that Arctic air gap, but no further carriers could be spared until *Chaser* escorted convoy JW.57 in February 1944. Two carriers per convoy was only finally achieved with JW.58 in March 1944 when *Tracker* arrived at Scapa to join *Activity*.

Enigma decrypts reported the battleship *Tirpitz* repaired and in northern Norway's Altenfjord. Convoy JW.58 was to be formed around the US cruiser *Milwaukee*, a gift from the US to Russia now under RN protection. Walker was told that no matter what, *Milwaukee* was to arrive safely, avoiding Churchill the embarrassment of explaining to Roosevelt and Stalin its sinking. To deal with a possible sortie against the convoy by *Tirpitz* was *Tungsten*, a distant cover force, comprising two battleships, two fleet carriers, four escort carriers and eighteen cruisers and destroyers. Admiral Dönitz in Berlin had decreed that JW.58 "must not be allowed to get through unscathed".

When the convoy of 49 merchantmen, the largest convoy to Russia ever assembled, sailed from Loch Ewe on 27 March, 33 warships had been gathered for local and close escort under Rear-Admiral Frederick Dalrymple-Hamilton flying his flag in the new anti-aircraft cruiser *Diadem*. *Tracker* had twelve Avengers and seven Wildcats embarked while *Activity's* No. 819 Squadron