



SUPPLEMENT TO The London Gazette

Of TUESDAY, the 25th of MAY, 1948

Published by Authority

Registered as a newspaper

WEDNESDAY, 26 MAY, 1948

THE CARRIER BORNE AIRCRAFT ATTACK ON KIRKENES AND PETSAMO.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 12th September, 1941, by Admiral Sir John C. Tovey, K.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet.

Home Fleet.

12th September, 1941.

Forwarded. The material results of this operation were small and the losses heavy. This had been expected. The heaviest losses occurred in the squadrons from the VICTORIOUS and there is no doubt that some of the survivors felt that an attack on such poor targets against heavy opposition was not justified and their morale was rather shaken until they appreciated the political necessity for the operation.

2. Attacks by low performance aircraft in broad daylight where fighter opposition is present can only hope to achieve results commensurate with their losses if complete surprise is obtained. On this occasion the force was extremely fortunate in the weather conditions which allowed it to make the long approach to the flying-off position without being seen; but the good fortune did not last quite long enough, and they were reported by an enemy aircraft just before the Striking Force left.

3. It would perhaps have been better to time the attack to take place during the night, even in this region of perpetual summer daylight, in the hope that the enemy reconnaissance and defences would then be less alert. This would also have avoided an approach directly into the sun.

4. The lack of enterprise on the part of the enemy which enabled the force to withdraw

without being attacked by aircraft is encouraging.

5. I concur in the remarks of the Rear Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, in paragraph 53 of his report. The lack of time for training and preparation was mainly responsible for such small errors in execution as took place. I concur also in paragraph 54. It was not possible for the force to provide its own reconnaissance without sacrificing the vital factor of surprise. I consider it essential that steps should be taken to remedy the present complete lack of air reconnaissance in Northern and Northwestern Norway.

6. With reference to paragraph 52 of the report of the Rear Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, the importance of the Command being in the carrier in purely air operations is appreciated; but, although the question did not arise on this occasion, it is considered preferable in the case of surface attack that the Senior Officer should be in a ship of the supporting force.

7. The gallantry of the aircraft crews, who knew before leaving that their chance of surprise had gone and that they were certain to face heavy odds, is beyond praise. The conduct of the operation by the Rear Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, the handling of ships by their Commanding Officers in most difficult conditions, the keenness and efficiency of all officers and men, especially of the deck handling parties in the carriers, are much to be commended. I trust that the encouragement to the morale of our Allies was proportionately great.

(Signed) JACK C. TOVEY,

Admiral,
Commander-in-Chief.