

10. The operation is well described in ILLUSTRIOUS' report and needs no elaboration. It was admirably planned and the determined and gallant manner in which it was carried out reflects the highest credit on all concerned.

11. The results achieved,* as disclosed by subsequent photographic reconnaissance, appear to have been:—

One CAVOUR class battleship beached and apparently abandoned.

One CAVOUR class battleship heavily damaged and beached.

One LITTORIO class battleship damaged and subsequently docked in the Taranto graving dock.

There is no definite evidence of damage to cruisers and small craft as a result of the bombing attacks but it seems probable that two cruisers may have been hit.

12. This was the first occasion on which Duplex pistols were used in the Mediterranean. It is considered that the results achieved have proved the value of this weapon and that the many years of research and experiment devoted to its development have been well repaid.

13. There can be little doubt that the crippling of half the Italian Battlefleet is having, and will continue to have, a marked effect on the course of the war. Without indulging in speculation as to the political repercussions, it is already evident that this successful attack has greatly increased our freedom of movement in the Mediterranean and has thus strengthened our control over the central area of this sea. It has enabled two battleships to be released for operations elsewhere, while the effect on the morale of the Italians must be considerable. As an example of "economy of force" it is probably unsurpassed.

(Sgd.) A. B. CUNNINGHAM.
Admiral.

From:—The Commanding Officer, H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS.

Date:—13th November, 1940.

INTENTION.

It was intended to carry out this operation as proposed in Rear-Admiral Aircraft Carriers, Mediterranean's 00478/97 of 28th October, 1940, as amended by Rear-Admiral Aircraft Carriers, Mediterranean's 00478/106 of 6th November, 1940.

2. The proposed plan was as follows:—

(i) H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS and escort to be in position 270 degrees Kabbo Point (Cephalonia) 40 miles at 2000 on November 11th and fly off the first range of 12 aircraft

* Admiralty footnote:—

From subsequent information it was confirmed that the results were:—

Battleship CAVOUR—Hit by one torpedo abreast No. 2 turret. Bulkheads gave and after some hours ship sank.

DUILIO—Hit by one torpedo near No. 2 turret. Sank by the bows.

ITALIA—Hit by three torpedoes—two on the starboard side forward and one port side aft. Sank.

Cruiser TRENTO—Hit by one bomb which perforated the deck and side but failed to explode.

Destroyer LIBECCIO and PESSAGNO—Slight damage from near miss bombs.

at that time. The second range of 12 aircraft to be flown off in about the same position at 2100.

(ii) The first attack to be made at about 2245 and the second at about 2345 and aircraft to be landed on in position 270 degrees Kabbo Point 20 miles.

(iii) Both attacks to be carried out in the following form:—

"The squadron of 12 aircraft to pass up the centre of the Gulf of Taranto and approach the harbour from the south-west. The primary attack to be by six torpedo aircraft against the battleships in the Mar Grande. This attack to be immediately preceded by two aircraft dropping flares (and bombs) along the eastern side of the Mar Grande in order to illuminate the targets and distract attention from the torpedo aircraft, and by four aircraft making a dive bomb attack on the attractive target presented by the line of cruisers and destroyers in the Mar Piccolo. It was expected that this attack would also distract attention from the torpedo attack."

NARRATIVE.

Preliminary Movements.

3. ILLUSTRIOUS had left Alexandria on November 6th with the Mediterranean Fleet in order to carry out Operation "Coat" (M.B.8)*.

4. Before sailing from Alexandria, in order to provide the maximum number of aircraft that could be flown off in two ranges with no surface wind (24), and as EAGLE, to their great disappointment, was unable to take part in the operation due to defective petrol tanks, eight pilots and eight observers were embarked in ILLUSTRIOUS from EAGLE, all being experienced in night flying. Five of EAGLE'S Swordfish were also embarked.

5. All Swordfish aircraft embarked were fitted with the 60 gallon internal auxiliary petrol tanks.

6. The only incidents that affected the operation during the preliminary movements were that three Swordfish forced landed in the sea on November 9th, 10th and 11th respectively and the aircraft were lost, thus reducing the number available for the Striking Force to 21. The crews were, however, picked up, two crews returning to ILLUSTRIOUS at Malta, the third being picked up by GLOUCESTER and flown on board in GLOUCESTER'S Walrus in time to take part in the operation.

7. While at Malta the opportunity was taken to discuss with Air Officer Commanding, Mediterranean, the reconnaissance and meteorological forecasts required, and on the morning of November 11th one aircraft was flown to Malta to collect some extremely good photographs of Taranto taken by the Royal Air Force on the previous day. Further reports were received from Air Officer Commanding, Mediterranean and Royal Air Force reconnaissance aircraft during the day confirming that no important movements had taken place,

* Admiralty footnote:—

Operation "Coat" was an attack by Naval aircraft from H.M.S. ARK ROYAL on Cagliari (Sardinia), on 9th November, 1940.