

punishment. At 1720, however, HAVOCK suffered damage, her speed was reduced to 16 knots and she was detached to join the convoy. Shortly afterwards, a further attempt to attain a position of torpedo advantage was made but conditions were unfavourable and a southerly course was continued.

42. Between 1701 and 1712 the 4th Division engaged dimly-seen enemy ships at a range of about 14,000 yards. Enemy gun flashes were seen in this direction (010 degs. to 000 degs.) at this time and splashes were seen round the 4th Division. No results could be observed of this action.

43. Between 1703 and 1710 the 2nd Division engaged the westward of the three cruisers being engaged by the 4th Division, and this ship was identified as Gorizia type. Nine controlled broadsides were fired from DIDO and hits were seen during the 6th and 7th broadsides. This was also seen by ZULU.

At 1705, the battleship opened fire on the 2nd Division who retired under smoke at 1707.

44. The 4th Division opened fire on an enemy ship at extreme range at 1727 for a few salvos. It appears probable that the enemy was at that time out of range. The 4th, 2nd and 3rd Divisions continued to steer alternate easterly and westerly courses until 1740, covering the convoy with smoke.

ZULU reports sighting 2 Trento class cruisers and 3 destroyers (which were certainly 6-inch cruisers) from the eastern end when clear of smoke, and the battleship and one cruiser from the western end during this period. The enemy were always at long range (outside 4.7" range) and well clear of the smoke.

#### *Convoy.*

45. During this phase, the convoy had turned south at 1655 but BRECONSHIRE turned them back to west at 1720. The Rear Admiral Commanding, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron's 1716 signal to SOUTHWOLD ordering convoy to steer south was transmitted at 1719 and by 1730 they had again been shepherded on to a southerly course.

BRECONSHIRE turned the convoy to 225 at 1745 but SOUTHWOLD repeated Rear Admiral Commanding, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron's order to steer south and the convoy turned back to south at 1800. This complied also with Captain (D), Twenty-Second Destroyer Flotilla's signal timed 1758.

#### *Air Attack.*

46. Continued heavy air attack was made on the convoy throughout phases 2 and 3; and CARLISLE and the Hunts did fine work in keeping up their high rate of accurate fire in the heavy sea then running. Some enemy aircraft were shot down and no damage was sustained by convoy or close escort.

Numerous attacks by single aircraft were also made on the various divisions of the striking force but were hardly noticed in the general melee. Close range weapons combated these attacks whenever they developed and the larger H.A. guns were used when not employed in low angle.\* No damage resulted.

\* Admiralty footnote: Low angle—i.e., at ship targets.

#### PHASE III.

*The enemy endeavouring to work round to Leeward of the smoke. 1740-1820.*

47. During this phase of the action, Captain (D), Twenty-Second Destroyer Flotilla in SIKH with the 5th Division bore the brunt of the enemy's fire.

At 1740 SIKH sighted the enemy battleship bearing 330 degs. 16,000 yards, and continued to engage it by gunfire until about 1820. Neither HERO nor LIVELY (the remaining ships in the Division) could know what was happening as SIKH's smoke effectively hid the enemy from them. SIKH was straddled at 1748 and, in Captain (D), Twenty-Second Destroyer Flotilla's words, "in order to avoid sinking with all torpedoes on board" 2 torpedoes were fired at 1750. No result was observed. SIKH broke off this action at 1820 by turning to a northerly smoke laying course.

48. At 1800 Captain (D), Twenty-Second Destroyer Flotilla ordered the convoy to steer south. This confirmed earlier instructions, and the convoy continued to be effectually covered by smoke. The convoy turned to the westward between 1825 and 1840 on receipt of the Rear Admiral Commanding, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron's signal timed 1819—but then resumed a southerly course until 1900 when BRECONSHIRE ordered "Carry out Operation "B".\*"

49. During this phase the 5th Division's smoke hid the enemy almost continuously from the rest of the striking force. Captain (D), Fourteenth Destroyer Flotilla in JERVIS with the 1st Division maintained a southwesterly course between the enemy and the convoy, making smoke.

The 2nd, 4th and 3rd Divisions also made ground generally to the southwestward, making smoke. The smoke was drifting at over 25 knots to the northwestward and several attempts to cut through it in west-northwesterly direction (towards the enemy) failed. The smoke continued to lie extremely well and for a long time.

At 1759 the general signal was made "Prepare to fire torpedoes under cover of smoke".

50. At 1802, however, CLEOPATRA had worked through the smoke to get a view of the battleship bearing 310 degs. at about 13,000 yards with a slightly closing inclination. Fire was opened and at 1806 she turned to port and fired 3 torpedoes, as the battleship disappeared again behind drifting smoke. No results were therefore observed, but from the later positions of the enemy it is evident that she observed and turned away from this attack, further delaying the moment at which she might sight the convoy and slightly relieving the pressure on the 5th Division.

DIDO leading the 2nd Division found, when she emerged from smoke that the enemy had in fact turned away under cover of smoke and so the 2nd Division was unable to fire torpedoes. ZULU sighted at too long a range and in a disadvantageous position, so the 3rd Division was also unable to fire.

\* Admiralty footnote: Operation "B"—Dispersal of convoy to proceed independently to Malta during dark hours.