

the sight of two battleships steering straight for them would shake the nerves of the range-takers and control officers, who had already had four anxious days and nights.

The Approach.

81. Between 0600 and 0700, D/F bearings of a series of reports by MAORI enabled the relative position of the enemy to be deduced with reasonable accuracy. The BISMARCK had settled down to a course of about 330° , at 10 knots. The horizon to the north-eastward was clear and the light good, but south of east were rain squalls and a poor background. The strong wind and heavy sea made it most undesirable to fight to windward. I decided to approach on a bearing of west-north-west and, if the enemy held his course, to deploy to the southward, engaging him on opposite course at a range of about 15,000 yards and subsequently as events might dictate. At 0737, when the enemy bore 120° , 21 miles, course was altered to 080° to close: RODNEY was stationed on a bearing of 010° and instructed not to close within six cables of me and to adjust her own bearing. NORFOLK was shadowing from the north-westward, ready to carry out flank marking for the battleships, and at 0820 she came in sight and provided me with a visual link. It had been necessary to alter course on the way in to avoid rain squalls and to allow for the reported alterations of course of the BISMARCK, but at 0843 she came in sight, bearing 118° , 25,000 yards, steering directly towards us, our course at this time being 110° .

The Action.

82. RODNEY opened fire at 0847, followed one minute later by KING GEORGE V and then by the BISMARCK. The BISMARCK had turned to starboard to open 'A' arcs, and directed her fire at RODNEY. This turn of the enemy made it look as if it would be better for us to deploy to the north-eastward, and I hoisted the signal to turn to 085° ; the BISMARCK, however, almost immediately altered back to port, so the negative was hoisted and I indicated my intention to turn to 170° . RODNEY, who wished to open her 'A' arcs, had anticipated the hauling down of the first signal and started to alter course to port; KING GEORGE V also had altered 20° to starboard to open her distance from RODNEY; so that the ships were well separated, which was entirely in accordance with my wishes. The BISMARCK's fire was accurate at the start, though it soon began to fall off; she made continual alterations of course, but it is doubtful whether these were deliberate.

83. The range was now 20,000 yards and decreasing rapidly, the general trend of the enemy's course being directly towards us. Shortly after our turn to the southward, the BISMARCK shifted her fire to KING GEORGE V. By 0905 both KING GEORGE V and RODNEY had their secondary armaments in action. At this stage the effect of our gunfire was difficult to assess, as hits by armour piercing shell are not easily seen; but after half an hour of action the BISMARCK was on fire in several places and virtually out of control. Only one of her turrets remained in action and the fire of this and of her secondary armament was wild and erratic. But she was still steaming.

84. Some interference from our own funnel and cordite smoke had been experienced, and at 0917 the course of the battlefleet was altered towards the enemy and right round to north, RODNEY again anticipating the signal. When the turn had been completed, the lines of fire of KING GEORGE V and RODNEY were approximately at right angles; a heavy volume of fire could be produced without interference in spotting between the two ships. DORSETSHIRE had been firing intermittently since 0902 from the other side of the enemy, as had NORFOLK from her flank marking position.

85. In order to increase the rate of hitting, the battleships continued to close, the range eventually coming down to 3,300 yards. By 1015 the BISMARCK was a wreck, without a gun firing, on fire fore and aft and wallowing more heavily every moment. Men could be seen jumping overboard, preferring death by drowning in the stormy sea to the appalling effects of our fire. I was confident that the BISMARCK could never get back to harbour and that it was only a matter of hours before she would sink.

86. The shortage of oil fuel in KING GEORGE V and RODNEY had become acute. It was not merely a matter of having sufficient oil to reach one of our harbours: I had to consider the possibility of damage to fuel tanks by a near miss from a bomb or a hit by a torpedo; this might easily result in the ship being stopped in an area where U-boats were known to be concentrating, and where I had been warned to expect heavy air attack. Further gunfire would do little to hasten the BISMARCK's end. I therefore decided to break off the action with KING GEORGE V and RODNEY, and I instructed any ships still with torpedoes to use them on the BISMARCK. DORSETSHIRE anticipated my order and torpedoed the BISMARCK at close range on both sides: she sank at 1037 in position $48^{\circ} 09' \text{ N. } 16^{\circ} 07' \text{ W.}$ Although her sinking had been seen from the after Director Control Tower in KING GEORGE V, the fact did not become known to me until 1100 and I informed the Flag Officer Commanding, Force 'H', that I could not sink the BISMARCK with gunfire: this signal (1045/27th May), which was perhaps unfortunately phrased, was addressed only to him and was intended to ensure that he should take any steps which might help to hasten her sinking: when intercepted by others, it may have caused some misunderstanding.

87. The BISMARCK had put up a most gallant fight against impossible odds, worthy of the old days of the Imperial German Navy, and she went down with her colours still flying. DORSETSHIRE picked up four officers, including the Third Gunnery Officer, and 75 ratings; MAORI picked up 24 ratings; but at 1140 DORSETSHIRE sighted a suspicious object, which might have been a U-boat, and ships were compelled to abandon the work of rescue. Some of the remaining survivors may have been rescued by the Spanish cruiser CANARIAS.

88. From the information available, it appears that the BISMARCK suffered three hits by gunfire on 24th May, one hit by aircraft torpedo on 25th May and two on 26th May, two hits by destroyer torpedoes early on