

cancelled, and the Fleet withdrew to the fuelling area after the second day's strikes had been landed on. The necessity to withdraw was accentuated by certain ships having been short of fuel at the commencement of the operation. CTF 57 assumed tactical command.

#### 28th March.

At 0730 made contact with Task Unit 112.2.5 and Task Unit 112.2.1 in area Midge, a rectangle extending 50 miles to the south and 100 miles to the west of  $19^{\circ} 55' N$   $129^{\circ} 40' E$ : fuelling and transfer of aircraft were continued throughout the day.

The Fleet was divided into two groups for this operation, the non-fuelling group proceeding so as to remain within touch of the fuelling group. The Fleet disengaged from the Tanker Group for the night.

#### 29th March.

The Rear Admiral Commanding Destroyers transferred from H.M.S. EURYALUS to H.M.S. WHIRLWIND and proceeded in the afternoon with H.M. Ships STRIKER and CRANE for Leyte. H.M.S. EURYALUS then rejoined Task Unit 5 with the remainder of the cruisers.

During the day mails and correspondence brought out by the Tanker Group were distributed by destroyers around the Fleet. For the night the Fleet formed up into Cruising Disposition 5A. H.M. Ships QUALITY and WHELP rejoined Task Force 57, and H.M. Ships KEMPENFELT and WHIRLWIND rejoined the Tanker Groups.

#### 30th March.

At 1430 fuelling was completed and the Fleet formed up in Cruising Disposition 5B. Departure was taken at 22 knots for the operating area and A.C.1 assumed tactical command.

#### 31st March.

It may be assumed in this narrative henceforward that CAPS and ASPS were part of the normal daily flying programme. At 0530 H.M. Ships ARGONAUT and WAGER were detached to a position  $300^{\circ}$ , 30 miles from the Fleet centre to act as pickets to prevent enemy aircraft returning with our own strikes. H.M.S. ARGONAUT was chosen for this purpose as having the most suitable radar. At 0630 a fighter sweep was sent in from a flying-off position  $23^{\circ} 10' N$   $125^{\circ} 23' E$  and thereafter fighter patrols were maintained over Ishigaki and Miyako. There appeared to be little activity in either island. Two bomber strikes were sent against Ishigaki airfield, installations and barracks.

U.S.S. KINGFISH again did useful service and rescued the crew of an Avenger which had ditched.

At dusk the Fleet disengaged to the south westward and CTF 57 assumed tactical command. Two fighters were kept at readiness from moonrise but the Fleet was not shadowed.

#### 1st April.

A.C.1 assumed tactical command; H.M. Ships ARGONAUT and WAGER opened out to their picket positions before the fighter sweep was sent in at 0640 from a flying-off position  $23^{\circ} 26' N$   $125^{\circ} 25' E$ .

At 0650 bogeys were detected by radar to the westward, height 8,000 feet, closing at 210 knots. The fighter sweep was recalled to intercept and additional fighters were flown off.

The raid split up more than 40 miles from the Fleet. The first interception was by Corsairs from H.M.S. VICTORIOUS which shot down one enemy. Seafires shot down two more close to the Fleet and a fourth was destroyed by Hellcats recalled from the fighter sweep. At 0705 the Fleet had been alerted to "Flash Red" and a few minutes later the enemy planes commenced their attacks.

One enemy single-engined aircraft machine-gunned H.M.S. INDOMITABLE in a low attack killing one rating and wounding two officers and four ratings. Still flying very low it made a similar attack on H.M.S. KING GEORGE V but without causing casualties. Considerable difficulty was experienced in identifying enemy from our own planes who were hard on the enemy heels.

At 0727 an enemy plane dived into the base of H.M.S. INDEFATIGABLE's island. Four officers and ten ratings were killed, and sixteen of her complement wounded. The flight deck was put temporarily out of action, but within a remarkably short time, and in a most creditable manner, aircraft were again being operated from this ship, although that day on a reduced scale.

At about 0755 H.M.S. ULSTER was near missed by what appeared to be a 500 lb. bomb from an aircraft then being chased by one of our fighters. She reported that the bulkhead between the engine-room and the after boiler-room had blown, flooding both compartments, but that the ship was floating well. Casualties were two killed and one seriously wounded. She was unable to steam but her armament remained effective. H.M.A.S. QUIBERON was ordered to stand by her and as soon as the raid was over H.M.N.Z.S. GAMBIA was ordered to tow her to Leyte.

At 1215 a bombing strike was sent in against Ishigaki to bomb airfields and runways. No activity was noted. At 1430 reports were received from combat patrols over the islands that more aircraft had been sighted at Hirara and Ishigaki airfields. These were attacked by the fighter patrols and were followed by a fighter sweep. It was estimated that about 14 enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground during this attack and others damaged.

At 1730 a low flying bogey was detected by radar to the north westward. Hellcats were sent to intercept this raid which developed into 2 plus but the enemy avoided them in cloud. Soon afterwards the Fleet sighted the enemy and opened fire, sometimes, it is regretted, at friendly fighters. One enemy aircraft dived on H.M.S. VICTORIOUS; her swing under full helm was successful and the plane touched its wing only on the flight deck edge spinning harmlessly into the sea where its bomb exploded clear of the ship. The manuscript instructions to the pilot were blown on board H.M.S. VICTORIOUS; this interesting document, denoting priority of targets for suicide planes, has been translated and the contents forwarded to intelligence centre. It seems certain that VICTORIOUS's guns hit this aircraft during its dive.