

Of four other aircraft intended to take part in the attack, two could not be flown off and two returned to the carrier owing to unserviceability. The Albacores achieved complete surprise, destroying two aircraft and damaged others while the Fulmars attacked a number of C.R.42s and JU.87s and damaged a number of them. During the forenoon enemy aircraft were continually being detected. The eight remaining serviceable aircraft in FORMIDABLE made 24 flights in the course of the forenoon during which there were 20 combats. Two enemy aircraft were shot down for certain and two were probably destroyed. One Fulmar was lost. At 1320 Force A was attacked by 20 aircraft which approached from the African coast. In dive bombing attacks FORMIDABLE was hit twice. Her starboard side was blown out between 17 and 24 bulkheads and "X" turret, cable and accelerator gear were put out of action. During the same attack NUBIAN was hit right aft and had her stern blown off but she was still able to proceed at 20 knots.

67. Intelligence had shown that the Germans were using Melos harbour as an assembly point for craft to invade Crete. Orders had been given to Vice Admiral 1st Battle Squadron to detach D.14 with NUBIAN, KANDAHAR and JANUS to raid Melos harbour during the night of 26th/27th May. AJAX and DIDO were also to have been detached from Force A to make a feint as though intending to pass Kaso Strait at 2200/26th and then return to Alexandria after dark. The signal from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, ordering these movements reached Vice Admiral 1st Battle Squadron during a bombing attack and at a time when he was occupied with the damage to FORMIDABLE. When the Vice Admiral saw the signal he considered it was too late for D.14 to attack Milo and be clear south of Crete by daylight. He, therefore, cancelled both the operation and the feint. At 1719 the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean sent a signal which also cancelled the Melos operation.

68. After dark FORMIDABLE with VOYAGER, VENDETTA, HEReward and DECOY (who had joined at 2000) were detached from Force A so as to arrive Alexandria at daylight 27th May. The remainder of the force operated during the night to the north westward of Alexandria, and at daylight 27th May, proceeded towards Kaso to meet ABDIEL.

69. Although it was realised that there would be considerable risk in sending slow merchant ships to Crete it was so important to maintain supplies to the island that it was thought the attempt should be made. Convoy A.N.31, consisting of two ships, escorted by AUCLAND, left Alexandria at 0500/26th May. It was arranged for CALCUTTA and DEFENDER to join the convoy at 0600/27.

70. GLENROY, escorted by STUART, COVENTRY and JAGUAR had left Alexandria at 2000/25th May with a Battalion of the Queens Regiment. The force was subjected to bombing attacks by reconnaissance aircraft during the forenoon of 26th May. At 1820 there were two heavy dive bombing attacks by aircraft formations. One aircraft was shot down and one appeared to be damaged during these attacks. A final attack by low flying torpedo

bombers occurred at 2050. GLENROY avoided the torpedoes but received slight damage and 11 casualties from near misses and machine gun attacks. Three of her landing craft were holed and a large dump of cased petrol on the upper deck caught fire. The fire lasted for one and a half hours, during which time the ship had to steer south in order to bring the wind aft. One of the landing craft at the davits had to be cut adrift owing to the proximity of the flames. With 800 troops on board and a large cargo of petrol, GLENROY was in a nasty situation, but the fire was put out by 1950, when a northerly course for Crete was resumed. Half an hour later GLENROY decided that the operation of landing the troops at Tymbaki must be cancelled owing to shortness of time, reduction in available landing craft and unsuitable weather for landing on a beach. GLENROY and escort were accordingly turned back for Alexandria at 2115.

71. In Crete our troops were compelled to withdraw still further towards Suda and it was felt that it could not be long before the whole front in that sector collapsed.

Our troops in the Heraklion sector had fared better. Two of the "I" tanks landed by "A" Lighter Number 2 at Tymbaki and the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders landed at the same place by GLENGYLE had broken through from the south. The enemy had landed large numbers of men by parachute and troop carrier but had been successfully held at nearly all points.

72. During the night 26th/27th May, ABDIEL, HERO and NIZAM landed 750 Special Service Troops and Army stores in Suda Bay. This was the last reinforcement that was sent into the island. These ships left for Alexandria with 930 men who were not required in Crete.

27th May, 1941.

73. The naval situation at daylight on the 27th May was:—

(a) Force A, now consisting of QUEEN ELIZABETH, BARHAM, JERVIS, JANUS, KELVIN, NAPIER, KANDAHAR and HASTY, were about 250 miles south east of Kaso. (AJAX and DIDO were detached at 0600 to Alexandria).

(b) ABDIEL, HERO and NIZAM had disembarked troops at Suda and were on their way back to Alexandria via the Kaso Strait, carrying 930 personnel not wanted in Crete.

(c) AJAX and DIDO had been detached from Force A at 0600 and were returning to Alexandria in accordance with the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's original intention (see paragraph 67).

(d) AUCLAND with Convoy A.N.31 was about 150 miles north west of Alexandria, making for Crete.

(e) GLENROY and escort were returning to Alexandria.

74. From messages received from the General Officer Commanding, Crete, and the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda Bay, it was clear that the enemy had broken through our line defending Suda with great suddenness. Four days earlier the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda, had foreseen that this might happen and had taken a number of precautionary measures which would facilitate arrangements for evacuation.