

lost contact and rejoined. Seven minutes later the destroyer in position H (on the port quarter) investigated a contact and carried out an attack but reported non-sub. This sequence of events makes it appear possible that a U-Boat attempted to break through the port screen but was foiled by PATHFINDER.

33. At 1200 a raid was reported coming in from ahead. It was intercepted by fighters. One was shot down, the smoke of which could be seen from the fleet. The aircraft were sighted by ASHANTI at 1210 and cruisers and destroyers in the van opened fire one minute later. This formation was of at least nine aircraft which dropped parachute mines in the path of the fleet. An emergency turn of 90 degrees to port was executed to avoid these. Several explosions some distance to the south-eastward at about 1229 were probably these mines detonating. One minelayer was probably shot down by destroyer. No damage was sustained by any ships.

34. This attack was followed by a large number of torpedo bombers which came in in formation of 5 or 6 on the port bow, port beam and finally on the starboard quarter. None of these attacks were pressed home and no aircraft penetrated the destroyer screen.

35. All dropped their torpedoes well outside the screen and outside range of the convoy. Several destroyers on the port side were near missed by torpedoes. One torpedo bomber was probably shot down by ships' gunfire.

36. The torpedo attack was closely followed by attacks by a large number of JU.88s which dive bombed and also dropped small canisters with small black parachutes. DEUCALION was near missed and had her speed reduced. BRAMHAM was detailed to stand by her. She reported that No. 1 hold was half flooded and No. 2 completely flooded, but later added that she could steam at 10 knots. I ordered BRAMHAM to escort her via the coastal route to Malta. NELSON, RODNEY, CAIRO and several M.T. ships were very near missed. One JU.88 was probably destroyed by gunfire and several damaged.

37. At 1345 two Italian Reggione fighter-bombers dived on VICTORIOUS. After releasing their bombs, one of which glanced off the flight deck without exploding, they flew low over the convoy. As VICTORIOUS was flying on at the time, these were taken for friendly fighters and they got away practically unfired at. The bombs were estimated at about 100 lbs.

38. Meanwhile TARTAR on the starboard quarter reported a submarine in sight and carried out a depth charge attack. No further report was received.

39. At 1417 ZETLAND was seen to alter course and steam to the southward at high speed. He reported "submarine on the surface on the horizon, bearing 200 degrees." This submarine was no danger to the force and ZETLAND was ordered back to her station. The information was passed to BRAMHAM, who, with DEUCALION, was near the bearing. The submarine was not seen in NELSON.

40. The following two hours, until the next air attack developed, brought innumerable

reports of submarine sightings and asdic contacts. As an additional A/S measure, at Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron's suggestion, I had ordered Captain (D), 19th Destroyer Flotilla to arrange for a depth charge to be dropped by a destroyer on each side of the screen every ten minutes between 1400 and 1900.

41. At 1616 PATHFINDER in position C (on port bow) reported a confirmed asdic contact which she heavily attacked with two patterns in quick succession. ZETLAND who had joined PATHFINDER remained until the contact was no longer a danger when she rejoined at 1641.

42. At 1649 ITHURIEL in position I (port quarter) sighted a periscope and part of a conning tower on her starboard bow and immediately attacked. She obtained contact at 900 yards and carried out a counter-attack by asdics. This attack brought the U-Boat to the surface and ITHURIEL opened fire, turned and finally rammed it. This U-Boat sank before anything of value could be removed from her, although the boarding party managed to reach the conning tower. The U-Boat was the Italian COBALTO: 3 officers (including the Captain) and 38 ratings were taken prisoner. It is probable that this submarine was the one which PATHFINDER so heavily attacked.

43. Meanwhile at 1640 TARTAR in position U (starboard quarter) reported "torpedo in sight starboard" and immediately counter-attacked. A few minutes later LOOKOUT in the next position astern of TARTAR (position V) reported submarine in sight. Both these ships obtained asdic contact and hunted until the U-Boat was no longer a menace, each ship having made two deliberate attacks.

44. At 1726 I ordered WILTON to join Force X as BRAMHAM was detached escorting DEUCALION and at 1813 I informed the force that Force Z would turn to the westward at 1915.

45. Reports of small formations of enemy aircraft were coming in and it became evident before long that the enemy might be expected to make an air attack on a considerable scale. Our fighters made contact with enemy formations at about 1736 and reported that they were heavily escorted by fighters.

46. At 1749, ITHURIEL, who had not yet rejoined after picking up prisoners and shoring up his foremost collision bulkhead after ramming COBALTO, was attacked by 4 JU.88s and 1 C.R.42 fighter-bomber. She sustained no further damage but her speed had been reduced to 20 knots by the ramming and her A/S had been put out of action.

47. Course was altered in succession to 121 degrees at 1800, this being the course to pass through the Skerki Channel.

48. At 1830 the first enemy formation was sighted. It is believed now that there were from 100 to 120 enemy aircraft in the vicinity, many of them fighters. Against them we had 22 fighters in the air, who continually harassed and broke up the enemy formations.

49. The first attack commenced at 1835 and comprised at least 13 torpedo bombers; simultaneously an unknown number of high level