

leadership and masterly handling of the force by Rear Admiral Philip L. Vian, K.B.E., D.S.O., produced a heartening and thoroughly deserved victory from a situation in which, had the roles been reversed, it is unthinkable that the convoy or much of its escort could have survived.

(Signed) H. H. HARWOOD,  
Admiral,  
Commander-in-Chief.

#### ENCLOSURE

Office of Rear Admiral Commanding,  
Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron.  
31st March, 1942.

#### OPERATION M.G. ONE—REPORT.

(20th March to 24th March, 1942.)

Herewith is forwarded the report on Operation M.G. One, which includes an account of an action against Units of the Italian Fleet in the Gulf of Sirte on 22nd March, 1942.

(Signed) PHILIP VIAN,  
Rear Admiral Commanding,  
Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron.

#### PART I—NARRATIVE (GENERAL).

1. The Convoy and Escort arrived in position "N" (Lat. 034 degs. 10 mins. North, Long. 020 degs. 00 mins. East) at 0600, the appointed time, on 22nd March, 1942.

#### Westward Passage—Tactical Problems.

2. The problems presented on passage to this point had been:—

(a) To steer such courses, after being reported, which, while keeping the force within fighter range, avoided crossing the track of the last reported line of advance. The track used is shown on the strategical plot: it is known that one U-boat made contact.

(b) To afford protection to the A/S Screen from U-boat attack when, through the slow speed of S.S. CLAN CAMPBELL, it became necessary to discontinue the convoy zig-zag.

Protection was afforded by a modified form of E.Y. (Conduct of the Fleet); the screen zig-zagged as a whole across the front of the units screened.

3. At 0800 on 22nd March, 1942, PENELOPE and LEGION having joined, course was set 250 degs. 13 knots.

The southerly course was chosen in view of P.36's 0131B of 22nd March, received at 0518, reporting that the enemy had left Taranto; it was my wish to delay contact until evening, if practicable.

#### Strategical Background.

4. In the action to follow, the strategical considerations governing the courses of action open to me were:—

(i) The convoy, if it were to reach Malta at all, must arrive within a very few hours of daylight.

(ii) Force B could not be oiled at Malta.

(iii) Air reconnaissance from Malta could not be expected on Day 3.

#### Tactical Plan.

5. The tactical plan evolved on 4 (i) above is contained in the Operation Orders, and was based on the consideration that the convoy

must steer west, not south, for the greater part of the engagement.

6. From 4 (ii) above it was clear that the enemy must be driven off by dark since, if involved in night operations to the westward, the oil situation for the return passage to Alexandria would be most difficult.

7. The probable absence of air reconnaissance rendered it imperative that Cruisers and Fleet Destroyers should be able to move out from a Cruising Disposition designed to meet air attack into a disposition suitable for surface action with the least possible delay.

8. The tactical plan was exercised off Alexandria by the cruisers and some of the fleet destroyers about a month before the action.

#### Air—22nd March.

9. No air reconnaissance from Malta proved practicable. The enemy commenced shadowing at 0930; air attack began a few minutes later and was continued, with increasing intensity, until dusk.

It is estimated that for shadowing, high-level bombing, torpedo-bombing, and spotting, the enemy employed 150 aircraft during the day.

#### First Contact.

10. H.M.S. EURYALUS, as in 1805, first sighted the enemy. Contact was made with 4 ships, range 12 miles, first thought to be 3 battleships, at 1427—much earlier than was expected. Cruisers and Fleet Destroyers concentrated on their leaders in 5 divisions on a northerly course, and when at a suitable distance from the convoy turned east and laid smoke in accordance with the plan. The gun action commenced at 1436. By 1444 it was clear that the composition of the enemy was in fact one eight-inch and three six-inch cruisers: our force was ordered to steer towards the enemy, who broke off the engagement at 1515 and were lost to sight to the northward.

#### Second Contact.

11. At 1637, four enemy ships made contact: at 1640, three more. The composition of this force was the battleship LITTORIO, two eight-inch, three six-inch cruisers and one vessel never identified.

The same tactics were pursued as before, our cruisers and destroyers steering easterly and westerly courses to lay smoke, the enemy working round to the southwest to cut off the convoy from Malta.

In view of the weight of the air attack on the convoy, I was forced to order the smoke-laying division—CARLISLE and two Hunts—to rejoin the convoy and join in its air defence.

This meant that Cruisers and Fleet Destroyers had to lay smoke, not only to cover themselves, but also to cover the convoy.

Smoke laid for the latter purpose seriously hampered gunfire: while CLEOPATRA, normally at the head of the formation, fired 1,000 rounds in low angle.\* PENELOPE, generally in the centre, fired 64, and ZULU, leading a division in the rear, none.

12. CLEOPATRA was hit on the after part of the bridge at 1644, but in turn a palpable hit on the bridge of a Bolzano was obtained, probably by DIDO.

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