

Outline Plan of Operation.

7. On the 13th July, I informed the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean and other authorities that in view of the priorities assigned by the Admiralty and the routes advocated by Vice-Admiral, Malta, I considered that M.G.1 should sail a.m. D.3, splitting into three groups after dark, each group proceeding at best speed. The route to be followed to be close inshore by Cape Bon and subsequently through the Galita Channel.

Subject to no enemy forces being present, cruisers and Hunts of Force X* to part company from "Substance" at 0700 on D.4 and proceed to Malta so as to discharge and refuel before arrival of "Substance".

The destroyer escort of "Substance" to be refuelled by 2000 on D.4 at latest and sailed so as to reach the eastern end of Skerki Channel about 0430 on D.5, the remainder of Force X having passed this point about 0400.

Force H† to withdraw to the westward on reaching the entrance of the Skerki Channel on D.3 remaining if possible out of range of shore-based fighters during D.4 but with the object of distracting attention from M.G.1.

Forces H and X to rendezvous shortly after dawn on D.5. Providing no enemy surface forces were in the vicinity, 6 Swordfish to be flown off to Malta, early a.m. on D.5.

Preliminary Movements.

8. The first movement of destroyers from Gibraltar in connection with the operation took place on the 14th July. These movements, which it is unnecessary to describe in detail, were designed to enable all personnel to be transferred under cover of darkness, all destroyers to have the maximum amount of fuel on board after passing through the Straits, and for the cruiser escorts to arrive at Gibraltar in pairs relieving one another on successive nights in the hope that the change of ships would not be too noticeable.

9. All these movements were carried out according to plan and by 2000 on the 20th July, the situation was as follows:—

(a) In harbour at Gibraltar—

PASTEUR accommodating balance of troops for transfer to H.M. Ships. MANCHESTER, ARETHUSA, LEINSTER, COSSACK, MAORI, SIKH, waiting to embark troops after dark and then sail to eastward to join convoy.

Force H consisting of RENOWN, ARK ROYAL, HERMIONE, FAULKNOR, FEARLESS, FOXHOUND, FIRE-DRAKE, DUNCAN.

(b) Due in at Gibraltar at 2130—

FORESIGHT, FURY, FORESTER to refuel and sail to the eastward.

Admiralty footnotes

* Force X was composed of H.M. Ships EDINBURGH (Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron), MANCHESTER, ARETHUSA, MANXMAN, COSSACK (Captain (D), 4th Destroyer Flotilla), MAORI, SIKH, NESTOR, FEARLESS, FOXHOUND, FIRE-DRAKE, FARNDAL, AVON VALE and ERIDGE.

† Force H was composed of H.M. Ships RENOWN (Flag Officer Commanding, Force H), NELSON, ARK ROYAL, HERMIONE, FAULKNOR (Captain (D), 8th Destroyer Flotilla), FORESIGHT, FURY, FORESTER, LIGHTNING, and DUNCAN.

(c) *Approaching the Straits from the westward and due to pass Europa at 0145/21—*

EDINBURGH (Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron*), NELSON, MANXMAN, NESTOR, LIGHTNING, FARNDAL, AVON VALE, ERIDGE with 6 M.T. ships forming the convoy.

Departure from Gibraltar.

10. At 0140 on 21st July just before ships in harbour were due to sail, heavy Levant squalls sprang up combined with dense fog. These conditions made departure difficult and the programme was considerably delayed. Force H destroyers should have slipped at 0240, but at this time MANCHESTER and LEINSTER were still at their berths, though ARETHUSA had slipped from the north end of the detached mole. Fog was very patchy and MANCHESTER at the south end of the detached mole was invisible from RENOWN at the north end of the south mole.

11. About 0320 the squalls decreased in intensity and the fog cleared sufficiently to allow MANCHESTER to sail, followed by LEINSTER. RENOWN, preceded by ARK ROYAL and destroyers, slipped at 0426, 1½ hours late on the programme arranged. By this time the harbour and bay were clear of fog though it persisted south of Europa.

12. Owing to the fog, ships were ordered at 0412 to proceed independently to the eastward until daylight. The course and speed of advance of all ships were laid down in the Operation Orders, a copy of which had been supplied to the Naval Liaison Officer in LEINSTER. At 0530 a merchant ship passed two miles to starboard of RENOWN on opposite courses. Half an hour later all ships which were to form on RENOWN were in station and proceeding eastward at 20 knots to draw abreast of the convoy in order to exchange destroyer screens.

Movements on 21st July (D.1).

13. Three Swordfish from North Front arrived over ARK ROYAL at 0630, but before landing on were ordered to search ahead to a depth of 40 miles to locate and report the position of all ships taking part in the operation. These aircraft reported having sighted all units including LEINSTER.

14. Hereafter ships formed on RENOWN will be referred to as Group 4, and those formed on the M.T. ships as Group 5. The three Tribals, COSSACK, MAORI and SIKH, who should have escorted LEINSTER to join Group 5 overtook and joined Group 4. Having failed to locate LEINSTER in the fog they proceeded independently in accordance with the instructions referred to in paragraph 12. Speed was increased to 20 knots at 0830. Visibility improved and by noon was normal.

15. At 0915 information was received from the Vice-Admiral Commanding, North Atlantic that the personnel ship LEINSTER was ashore near Cape Tarifa. This seemed an improbable position and since LEINSTER had been reported by the air reconnaissance it was not

Admiralty footnote :

* Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron—Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret, the Senior Officer of Force X.