

The convoy bore 222 degs., 7 miles at 1605, steering 270 degs. with CLAN CAMPBELL lagging and being supported by CARLISLE and AVON VALE. At 1607 the striking force altered to 270 degs. at 20 knots and were 5 miles abeam of the convoy by 1640.

At 1450, the Rear Admiral Commanding, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron, ordered the convoy to steer west, and they had altered to that course at 1500.

29. CARLISLE and AVON VALE (the special smoke-laying division) had hauled out to the northeast and laid smoke between the enemy and the convoy, keeping in V/S touch with the Striking Force. When CARLISLE saw the striking force returning towards the convoy she rejoined it but was ordered to keep closer to it by signal from the Rear Admiral Commanding, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron, at 1610.

Air Attack.

30. Heavy air attack was made throughout the whole of this period mostly on the convoy but also on the striking force. Whilst the striking force was rejoining the sound of the 4 in. fire from the Hunts and CARLISLE was most impressive, resembling continuous pom-pom fire even though heard at a distance of 8-10 miles.

31. In view of this intensive attack CARLISLE was asked at 1605 if she had enough ships to cover the convoy from air attack.

CARLISLE replied "No, we have used 1/3 of our outfit" at 1611 and SOUTHWOLD reported at 1633 "Nine attacks so far. Forty per cent. 4 inch ammunition remaining".

Accordingly, at 1631, the Fourteenth Destroyer Flotilla (forming the 1st Division) were ordered to cover the convoy from air and surface attack from the southward in order to back up the H.A. fire.

PHASE II.

32. Reports

1637 "4 unknown 042 degs. 9 miles course unknown" received from ZULU.

1640 "3 cruisers 035 degs. 15 miles" received from EURYALUS.

1648 C.S.15 reported "1 battleship and 4 cruisers bearing 035 degs. 15 miles. Course 215 degs."

1708 C.S.15 reported that enemy battleship was accompanied by cruisers and destroyers.

(NOTE.—There is no confirmation that any destroyers were present nor is it considered now at all likely that they were.)

33. At 1640, when the second sighting reports were received, Divisional Leaders at once led out to the northward as for carrying out "ZLG" although on this occasion no signal was made except that, at 1655, the Convoy was ordered to steer south, which they did.

34. The 4th Division led out on a course 010 degs. sighting an 8-inch cruiser ahead which was engaged at 1643, opening fire at the same time as 2 enemy cruisers (one 8-inch and one 6-inch) opened fire on 4th Division.

The enemy disposition at that time was 4 cruisers (probably two 8-inch and two 6-inch) on a line of bearing about 110 degs., 1 mile apart, steering about 230 degs. The battleship

and 2 cruisers were farther to the eastward also steering about 220 degs.-230 degs.

CLEOPATRA Hit.

35. At 1644 the second salvo from the 6-inch enemy cruiser scored one hit on the starboard after end of CLEOPATRA'S bridge, wrecking the Air Defence Position and starshell sights, bringing down all except one aerial and one set of halyards and killing 1 officer and 14 men, and wounding 1 officer and 4 men. CLEOPATRA continued firing until 1648, but turned away into smoke to the westward. Straddles continued for a few minutes after this. About this time, the battleship was also firing at the 4th and 2nd Divisions, but was out of range from cruisers' armament. No other hits were obtained on our ships at this time, but one casualty resulted in CLEOPATRA from a near miss.

36. DIDO leading the 2nd Division opened fire at 1644 at an enemy cruiser, but results could not be observed owing to smoke and spray. The 2nd Division conformed to the movements of the Flagship.

Smoke.

37. All ships continued to make smoke from 1642 until the end of the action about 1913. There was therefore an enormous area of smoke which lay well in the existing weather conditions of a 25-knot wind from southeast. The enemy tried after this contact to make touch with the convoy by passing round the western end of the smoke (to leeward) and was therefore effectually held away from the convoy as he would not approach the smoke, which was drifting towards him at 25 knots.

38. Captain (D), Fourteenth Destroyer Flotilla with the 1st Division receiving at 1640 an incomplete V/S signal* from the Rear Admiral Commanding, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron, "Feint at . . ." gave up proceeding towards the convoy and made smoke between the convoy and the enemy gradually working to the southwestward. Owing to the lack of enemy reports at this time, he did not know the exact position of the enemy from 1645 to 1745 when he saw gun flashes.

39. ZULU and HASTY (3rd Division) after sighting and reporting the enemy at long range at 1637, made smoke and conformed generally to the movements of the Admiral. No opportunity to fire guns or torpedoes was found during this phase.

40. Captain (D), Twenty-Second Destroyer Flotilla with the 5th Division, sighted what was thought to be two destroyers, but is now believed to have been one cruiser at 1640 and engaged the enemy with gunfire. The enemy was apparently hit, turned away to the northward and was not seen again.

At 1649, he sighted 2 cruisers and the battleship and the 5th Division continued to the westward in the hopes of achieving a favourable torpedo firing position.

41. At 1659, Captain (D), Twenty-Second Destroyer Flotilla, had three cruisers in sight and the 5th Division engaged them on a north-westerly course until the battleship was sighted at 1705, when course was altered away to avoid

* Admiralty footnote: V/S signal—Visual Signal, in this case by light.