

and a Royal Air Force aircraft carried out a patrol of the Gulf of Taranto until 2230 to ensure that the Italian Fleet did not leave harbour unobserved.

Flying Off Aircraft.

8. At 1800 on the 11th in position 37° 33' N. 19° 35' E. ILLUSTRIOUS and escort comprising 3rd Cruiser Squadron GLOUCESTER (C.S.3) BERWICK, GLASGOW, YORK, HYPERION (D.2) ILEX, HASTY and HAVOCK were detached by Commander-in-Chief and steered as requisite for the flying off position.

9. At 2035 the first range commenced to fly off, course 060° speed 28 knots and all twelve aircraft of the first striking force were off by 2040. The surface wind at this time was light and variable, the upper winds westerly and about ten knots and 8/10 thin cloud at 8000 feet. The moon was threequarters full.

10. The second range of nine aircraft commenced flying off at 2128 and 8 aircraft were off by 2134. The ninth aircraft (Clifford/Going) was accidentally damaged and had to be struck down to the hangar for repairs to the wing fabric. It was at first considered that this aircraft could not be flown off in time for the attack but in view of the confidence of the crew that they could catch up, and their keenness to take part in the attack, it was flown off at 2158.

Narrative of First Attack.

11. The first striking force having taken off formed up in a position 8 miles 015° from the position of ILLUSTRIOUS at the time of flying off, and at 2057 set course for Taranto then distant 170 miles.

12. At 2115 when at a height of 4,500 feet the squadron entered the base of a cumulus cloud and some aircraft became separated with result that the whole squadron of twelve did not arrive at Taranto simultaneously.

13. The squadron commander continued with eight aircraft (5 torpedo, 2 flare droppers and one bomber). They sighted flashes of H.E. at 2252. At 2256 the flare droppers were detailed to lay their flares along the eastern side of the harbour. The other four aircraft having lost their leader, all made their attacks independently.

14. INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVES.

(i) *Williamson/Scarlett.*

Task: Torpedo attack on the battlefleet. Did not return. Last seen by Sparke at 4,000 feet over San Pietro Island.

(ii) *Sparke/Neale.*

Task: Torpedo attack on battleship.

Came in at 4,000 feet over San Pietro Island with Williamson (4A) who was last seen at 4,000 feet over the centre of the Mar Grande. At this point the pilot broke away and started his dive. The aircraft was down on the water about half way across the Mar Grande and the Taranto shoal breakwater was crossed about 2/3rds of its length from the shore at a height of 30 feet and the floating dock was observed to starboard. The original intention had been to strike at the more southerly LITTORIO (B in Plan 1) but the pilot was unable to identify it. He saw, however, the most easterly CAVOUR (E in Plan 1) directly ahead and he

dropped his torpedo at a range of approximately 700 yards. An explosion, probably that of the torpedo, was observed at the ship about a minute later. "Get away" was made by a sharp 180° turn to port over the Taranto shoal breakwater. Intense A.A. fire was experienced from the batteries at the entrance to the harbour both during the approach and the "get away." The aircraft landed on at 0120.

(iii) *Macaulay/Wray.*

Task: Torpedo attack on battleship.

This aircraft was part of the Sub-Flight led by Williamson and its narrative follows closely that of Sparke/Neale, the most easterly CAVOUR (E in Plan 1) being the target in this case also. The torpedo was dropped at approximately 600 yards range. While making a "get away" balloons were seen by the observer in a line outside the Taranto shoal breakwater at 1,000 feet. A.A. fire was experienced from the batteries on the eastern side of the harbour and from the southern batteries during the "get away." The aircraft returned without incident and landed on at 0125.

(iv) *Kemp/Bailey.*

Task: Torpedo attack on the battleships.

Came in from the west over the westerly breakwater at a height of 4,000 feet. At that time A.A. fire was met from Rondinella point on the mainland and from Lo Scanno on San Pietro Island. Fire was continued from batteries along the shore as the aircraft dived down to a position midway between Taranto Island and the most northerly cruiser, where the pilot flattened out on a line for the more northerly battleship of the LITTORIO class (A in Plan 1). Prior to reaching the water level intense A.A. fire was met from the cruisers and from small merchant vessels lying inshore off Taranto Island. Projectiles from the cruisers were observed to hit the merchant vessels and the fire only ceased when the aircraft passed between the merchant ships. The torpedo was dropped at 2318 in a position estimated at 1,000 yards from the LITTORIO and the pilot was satisfied that the aim was accurate. The observer saw the torpedo running correctly. Immediately after the drop, fire was re-opened from the cruisers. The pilot then turned to starboard and passed slightly to the westward of the end of the breakwater which extends from the eastern shore to Taranto Shoal. He continued flying a southerly course until clear. A fire was observed in the direction of the seaplane hangars. The aircraft then returned to the ship without incident.

(v) *Swayne/Buscall.*

Task: Torpedo attack on battleships.

Having got detached from the leader this pilot waited off the harbour for ½ hour for the arrival of the other aircraft. The first flare was seen and the pilot came in at 1,000 feet over the westerly breakwater, encountering severe A.A. fire from the ships and batteries at the entrance. Flying easterly across the Mar Grande and losing height until reaching the end of the Taranto Shoal breakwater he made a sharp turn to port so as to approach the more northerly LITTORIO (A in Plan 1) from the east. The torpedo was dropped at about 2215 at a range of approximately 400 yards and the