

to 18 knots and the third 18 to 15 knots, Force "H" maintaining an intercepting position to the eastward throughout.

26th May.

6. During the night the north-westerly wind and sea increased, and speed had to be reduced to 23 knots at 2115, to 21 knots at 2340, to 19 knots at 0020 and finally to 17 knots at 0112.

7. In consequence of this reduction of speed, which the BISMARCK with a following sea would not have suffered, course was altered to 000° at 0300/26 to reach the best position for flying off the search.

8. The latest intelligence regarding the German battle-cruisers was contained in a reconnaissance report that they were still at Brest at 1515/23. This lack of information caused me some anxiety as I could not entirely discount the possibility that one or both battle-cruisers might have put to sea to support BISMARCK. With this possibility in view a security patrol was flown off at 0716 to search to the west and northward before assuming A/S duties.

9. It had been intended that the first search should cover the area bounded by 47° 30' N. 21° 30' W., 49° 00' N. 23° 40' W., 52° 25' N. 20° 00' W., 51° 40' N. 17° 00' W., but owing to the head seas experienced during the night the area for the search, measuring some 280 miles by 120 miles was transferred 35 miles to the south-east.

10. Ten Swordfish were flown off at 0835 from position 48° 26' N. 19° 13' W. Two cross-over patrols by Catalinas, arranged by the Admiralty, lay along the western edge of ARK ROYAL's reconnaissance. Weather conditions at this time were wind from 320° force 7, sea rough, sky overcast, visibility 10-12 miles. It had been hoped to increase the density of the search by the use of Fulmars, but weather conditions rendered this impracticable. ARK ROYAL's round down was rising and falling 56 feet at times, as measured by sextant. The handling of the aircraft on the flight deck was always difficult and several slid bodily across the deck which was wet with spray.

11. At 0930 the A/S patrol was landed on; no relief was flown off in order that every available aircraft should be available for a torpedo striking force. Whilst the search was in progress Force "H" proceeded at 15 knots on a course of 015° to reach a position to windward so that the operation of aircraft would not be impeded by subsequent alterations of course of the BISMARCK should the latter be located.

12. At 1030 a Catalina (Duty Z) made a report of "1 BS 240° 5 miles steering 150 from position KRG7 3313". This report, received at 1050, placed the enemy 285° 112 miles from RENOWN. An amplifying report five minutes later gave the enemy's speed as 20 knots. I instructed ARK ROYAL to fly off two shadowers fitted with long range tanks to gain touch, as I feared the Catalina's position might be somewhat inaccurate in view of the weather conditions and the distance from her base. As the reconnaissance aircraft had already

reached the limit of their search I decided not to recall them by wireless, but informed ARK ROYAL that I would continue the present course and speed until they had returned when a full scale striking force was to be prepared.

13. At 1114 the Catalina reported that her hull had been holed by shrapnel and requested instructions. I asked ARK ROYAL how many aircraft would be required to ensure gaining contact; she replied 6 but proposed to fly off the two aircraft fitted with long range tanks at once to carry out a square search.

14. At this time (1125) the Catalina lost touch and I instructed ARK ROYAL to send at least 4 aircraft. Before these could be flown off one of ARK ROYAL's aircraft reported in touch (at 1114) but also reported the enemy as a cruiser and gave the position of the enemy as 77 miles to the west of Force "H". This was some 25 miles further to the eastward than the Catalina's report but was considered to be a more accurate position in view of the shorter time interval between departure and sighting. Seven minutes later a second aircraft of the reconnaissance gained touch and reported that the enemy was a battleship. The aircraft on track 305° was the first to sight followed by the aircraft on track 285°. There were five more aircraft to the northward of these two and three more to the southward. These aircraft were on their way back to the ARK ROYAL when touch was first gained. The long range shadowers were flown off at noon and the majority of the reconnaissance landed on. Force "H" was then manoeuvred to the south-east on a course 140° at 24 knots, my intention being to maintain the weather gage for flying operations, to avoid loss of bearing on BISMARCK, and to keep within about 50 miles of the enemy to facilitate the launching of T/B attacks. Should it be desirable for RENOWN to attack unsupported it was my intention to do so from up wind and astern with the object of causing him to turn and thus slow up his retreat, and also to enable full use to be made of smoke.

15. The two shadowers were relieved as necessary throughout the day. Touch was maintained continuously and excellent reports transmitted until the shadowers were finally recalled at 2230.

16. Orders were received from Admiralty at 1145 that RENOWN was not to become engaged with BISMARCK unless the latter was already heavily engaged by either KING GEORGE V or RODNEY.

17. The Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, reported his position at 1050 as 51° 37' N. 20° 42' W., closing the ship reported by the Catalina, and requested Admiralty confirmation that the report did not refer to RODNEY. This was confirmed by Admiralty.

18. At 1208 the Catalina reported 4 UN* 050° 10 miles steering 140° from position KRG7 4731. It was assumed that these were four of the five destroyers which had just parted from Convoy W.S.8B, and who were now some 50 miles W.N.W. of the BISMARCK.

Admiralty footnote—

* UN—unknown vessel.