

When taking off for the Ishigaki strike, one Avenger crashed into the sea, but the crew were rescued unhurt by the safety destroyer.

At 0827 an enemy aircraft approached the Force at a great height. Our fighters could not get high enough to intercept through lack of oxygen, and the enemy entered the artillery zone. Fire was opened in blind control, but the enemy was never seen and retired to the westward.

Before deciding to disengage from the carriers for bombardment I weighed up the following considerations:—

(a) The need for bombardment in an endeavour to reduce A.A. fire ashore.

(b) Conditions for bombardment near the target had been reported as excellent.

(c) The effect on morale of ships of the bombarding force would be most beneficial.

To be balanced against this I took into consideration the fact that the Fleet had been sighted. That in itself was nothing strange, and had happened several times before without being followed by any attack on the Fleet.

After discussing the situation with A.C.I, I detached with the bombarding force at 1000 in position $23^{\circ} 54' N$ $125^{\circ} 10' E$ and closed Miyako at 24 knots. The carriers provided an additional CAP for this force as well as aircraft for spotting.

At 1155 the bombarding force passed through position $24^{\circ} 33.5' N$ $125^{\circ} 10' E$ on the bombarding course of 070° at 15 knots. H.M. Ships KING GEORGE V and HOWE were in open order line ahead and screened by 25th Destroyer Flotilla and H.M. Ships EURYALUS and BLACK PRINCE who occupied the two port, i.e. inshore, positions on the screen. H.M.S. SWIFTSURE, H.M.N.Z.S. GAMBIA and H.M.C.S. UGANDA in open order line ahead were stationed 270° 3 miles, i.e. fire off port quarter of the Fleet Flagship. Conditions were ideal.

At 1205 fire was opened. H.M. Ships EURYALUS and BLACK PRINCE carried out a simultaneous "air burst" shoot on the A.A. defence area of Nobara airfield. H.M. Ships KING GEORGE V and HOWE bombarded Hirara airfield and the A.A. defence area to the north of the airfield, respectively. On completion of the "air burst" shoot H.M. Ships SWIFTSURE and H.M.N.Z.S. GAMBIA bombarded Nobara airfield, and H.M.C.S. UGANDA Sukama air strip.

In spite of comparatively close ranges, no form of opposition from the shore was encountered. Fire was ceased at 1250.

Photographs show that the runways at Nobara and Sukama were well hit and that all rounds from H.M.S. HOWE fell in the target area, but no photographs were obtained to show results by H.M.S. KING GEORGE V.

A few minutes after bombardment was commenced I received a signal from A.C.I to say that H.M.S. FORMIDABLE had been hit and was reduced to 18 knots. I accordingly informed the Bombarding Force and instructed ships to speed up the bombardment. As signals were corrupt and the situation not quite clear I ordered the cease fire a little earlier than planned and at 1247 turned the force to the southward and closed the carriers at 25 knots.

As soon as the Bombarding Force had disengaged, A.C.I formed the eight destroyers

left with him so that two destroyers were equally spaced between each carrier and on the line joining adjacent carriers. This provided the best natural gun support and clear arcs of fire.

At about 1100 three small groups of bogeys were detected to the westward, and were soon followed up by a fourth. Probably 16 to 20 enemy aircraft were employed with some acting as decoys. Fighters engaged one group working round to the southward, but one Kamikaze group penetrated to the carriers and was first detected when a plane was seen diving on the Force. Analysis shows that this group escaped detection either because, in the absence of the Bombarding Force, too many of the reduced number of radar sets were fully engaged tracking the diversionary planes and too few acting as warning sets, or else because they made a very low approach followed by a very high climb at about 15 miles range.

There were no bandits on the screen within 20 miles when at 1131 a Zeke was seen diving from a great height on to H.M.S. FORMIDABLE and engaged by gunfire. A.C.I thereupon manoeuvred his Force under wheel at high speed by successive emergency turns. Though reported hit by close range weapons from his target, the Kamikaze crashed into the flight deck of H.M.S. FORMIDABLE near the island structure and started a large fire in the deck park of aircraft. A.C.I manoeuvred the formation to keep in close touch with the damaged ship, whose speed was temporarily reduced to 18 knots.

The Kamikaze appeared to release his bomb just before the aircraft hit the deck, causing the following damage: casualties 8 killed and 47 wounded; 1 Corsair and 10 Avengers damaged, beyond repair; all radar except one set put out of action; both barriers damaged, the forward one irreparable; flight deck holed 2 feet square, indentation 10 feet square and 2 feet deep at the centre; armoured deck splinter passed through hangar deck, horizontal partition between down takes, escape hatch which was shut, and so to the centre boiler room where it caused slight damage and loss of steam, and finally pierced the inner bottom.

Two minutes later, at 1133, 2 enemy aircraft crashed in flames ten miles to the southward, the result of our fighters.

At 1134 a Zeke flying from forward to aft off the starboard bow of H.M.S. INDOMITABLE was engaged by 4.5 in. guns and temporarily disappeared in cloud. It soon reappeared diving at the ship as steeply as about 60° from the starboard beam. The Force was turning to starboard at the time and H.M.S. INDOMITABLE's wheel was increased to hard over. As the plane approached it was heavily engaged by close range weapons from the ship and set on fire; it flattened out at the last moment, deck landed on the flight deck, and bounded over the side, taking the radar arrays of the port midships directors with it. The bomb appeared to explode shortly after the plane submerged.

At 1142 another Zeke dived steeply on H.M.S. INDOMITABLE whose close range weapons and those of H.M.S. QUALITY hit him hard and often. The aircraft burst into flames and crashed into the sea about 10 yards off the starboard bow of the ship.