

0625. CAP and ASP for the Fleet flown off.

0635. In position 23° 16' N 125° 36' E flew off CAPS to cover both islands. The craters in the runway at Miyako airfield were observed to be filled in. At 0650 the picket cruiser and destroyer not being required under the circumstances were ordered to rejoin the Fleet.

At 0850 the Fleet was detected by an enemy aircraft who escaped in cloud.

Hellcats returning from Miyako in the forenoon shot down a Frances* after a 30 mile chase.

Avengers bombed and hit Hirara runway and town, and bombed Nobara, Sukhama and Myara airstrips causing fires.

Fighters attacked radio and radar stations, sank two junks and blew up a bowser.

At about 1700 bogeys were detected on the screen. Fighters intercepted them and splashed one Judy.† One enemy aircraft out of an estimated raid of four broke through in cloud and later dived on H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS, who took radical avoiding action. The suicider's wingtip hit the island, spinning the aircraft into the sea where the bomb exploded. Only slight damage and no casualties were caused. Ship probably hit aircraft in dive.

One Judy and another unidentified enemy plane flying low were engaged by destroyers of 4th Destroyer Flotilla on the screen, one being hit by gunfire. Corsairs and Hellcats closed the Judy and shot it down in flames after it had jettisoned its bomb. The other plane was seen in flames on the horizon about five minutes later and is considered to have been destroyed by the 4th Destroyer Flotilla. A second Judy orbiting the Fleet at about 10 miles range was intercepted by Corsairs and Hellcats and splashed.

Most regrettably one Seafire was shot down by gunfire of the Fleet during the raid: the pilot was not recovered.

During the day our own losses were the one Seafire shot down by the Fleet, 2 Corsairs by bomb blast and one Avenger which crashed on taking off.

Total enemy losses for the day were:—

Destroyed—airborne 4, suicide 1, on ground 1; total 6.

Damaged—6.

Two junks were sunk.

Although it was judged some enemy aircraft had probably passed north of the area to join in the big attacks on the Americans at Okinawa, no use was being made of the Sakishima airfields.

After the dusk CAP had been flown on, the Fleet disengaged to the south eastward and CTF 57 assumed tactical command.

During the day the following signal was received:—

To:—COM 5th Fleet (R) CTF 58 CTF 57 CTF 51 CTF 56 CTF 17

From C IN C PAC

I share your hope we can bring enemy to decisive battle. Expect all out enemy reactions in prospect. Good luck.—Nimitz.

Admiralty footnotes:—

* Frances—Japanese torpedo-bomber.

† Judy—Japanese reconnaissance aircraft.

7th April.

In view of Admiral Nimitz's appreciation that an all out enemy air reaction against the land and sea forces in and around Okinawa was imminent, the bombardment of Ishigaki planned to take place p.m. was cancelled in favour of air operations only, clouds over the island also influencing this decision.

A report was received that an enemy surface force had been sighted in the early hours leaving the Inland Sea and steering to the southward.

0530. A.C.I assumed tactical command.

The plan for the day was to maintain a constant CAP over the enemy airfields during daylight bombing, straffing when targets offered. The weather at dawn was good and the clouds higher than yesterday.

0530. H.M. Ships ARGONAUT and URANIA were detached to the north westward to act as picket, with orders to rejoin at 0810.

At 0610 CAPS for the Fleet and islands and ASP were flown off from position 23° 16' N 125° 36' E. The island CAPS reported little activity on the islands, but noticed that bomb craters on Ishigaki had been filled in, and that Hirara and Nobara airfields appeared serviceable. It was therefore decided to send in three bomber strikes during the day to re-crater these fields. This was successfully carried out without loss.

In the afternoon H.M.S. URANIA escorted by 2 fighters was despatched to the rescue of a Corsair pilot who had lost his way and landed in the sea about 70 miles from the Fleet. An American Privateer, having reported him, dropped dinghies and remained in the vicinity until relieved by Fireflies. H.M.S. URANIA recovered the pilot, but he was unfortunately found to be dead. The afternoon strike destroyed one and damaged other aircraft found on the ground at Nobara.

Enemy search planes were again active early in the day; making intelligent use of the 9/10 cloud cover they were not sighted by fighters sent to intercept.

By the end of the day all runways in the island were left well cratered and unserviceable. All visible aircraft had been attacked and there was no activity on any airfield.

During the day the enemy lost 3 aircraft destroyed on the ground and 4 were damaged. 4 fishing vessels and 3 luggers were damaged.

Our own losses were 2 aircraft (by flak) and 4 from other causes.

CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1930, and the Fleet set course to refuel in area Cootie, an American area closer to our operating area than areas Midge or Mosquito and which C IN C PAC had approved our using.

In the evening it was learned that aircraft of TF 58 had dealt severely with a Japanese surface force which had sallied forth from the Inland Sea. Reports, which indicated that the enemy lost 1 battleship, 1 cruiser, 4 destroyers sunk, with 2 destroyers burning, filled us with admiration and at the same time, it must be admitted, with envy.