

8th April.

American Task Group 52 was instructed to cover Sakishima during the day in the absence of Task Force 57.

0600. Met Task Unit 112.2.5 and Task Unit 112.2.1 in position Cootie One 21° 12' N 128° 44' E and commenced to refuel the Fleet in excellent weather conditions. By dusk all ships except one battleship and one carrier had fuelled from the 5 tankers. H.M.C.S. UGANDA, H.M. Ships URCHIN and URSA, reinforcements together with H.M.N.Z.S. GAMBIA re-joining after towing the damaged H.M.S. ULSTER to Leyte, joined TF 57.

9th April.

0630. Recommenced fuelling, which was completed by 1500. H.M.S. UNDAUNTED from Leyte rejoined TU 112.2.5. H.M.S. WHIRLWIND joined Task Force 57 from TU 112.2.5. H.M.S. WHELP with A/S defects was despatched to Leyte.

1315. SWIFTSURE, UGANDA and GAMBIA carried out independent exercises until 1615. American Task Group 52 was instructed to cover Sakishima during the day.

At 1530 Task Force 57 proceeded, setting course to carry out final strikes on Sakishima on 10th and 11th April: the programme envisaged their returning to Leyte thereafter.

At 1650 the following signal was received:—

C IN C PAC (R) CTF 57

From COM 5th Fleet

On 11-12 April propose Task Force 57 strike Shinchiku and Matsuyama airfields. Request you arrange SOWESPAC AIR hit Southern Formosa fields same days. COMSUBPAC assign lifeguards to stations 9, 10 and, if possible, 11 on these days. TG 52.1 will maintain neutralisation Sakishima Gunto.

Shortly after, the following signal was also received:—

CTF 57 and 51. From COM 5th Fleet

CTF 57 cancel 10th April Sakishima operations. TG 52.1 continue neutralisation that day. CTF 57 advise if following not within capabilities. If approved by C IN C PAC, CTF 57 strike Shinchiku and Matsuyama airfields Formosa 11-12 April.

These were the first intimation that a change of plan was contemplated for TF 57; it looked an attractive change.

It had already been decided that, although both pilots and aircraft were beginning to feel a strain, the possibility of carrying out a fifth operational period against Sakishima Gunto was acceptable, provided it could be on a light scale. The Formosa operation, involving our maximum strength and flying 50 miles over enemy land, would, I judged, probably preclude further operations before the return of the Fleet to Leyte. These extended operational periods bring considerable strain on to the maintenance and handling crews on the carriers which, together with the operational fatigue factor of pilots, are of considerable importance. There is a great deal to be studied in respect of the personnel in this matter under conditions out here, and after further experience a comprehensive report will be forwarded.

I informed A.C.I. that should we undertake the Formosa operation I would inform COM

5th Fleet that the fifth operation period would not take place. The Fleet would then arrive back at Leyte on the date as arranged between C.-in-C., B.P.F. and C IN C PAC. After receiving A.C.I.'s reply at 1817 I made a signal to inform COM 5th Fleet that we were ready to attack Formosa.

Assuming that we should act in accordance with the above, the Fleet remained to the south during the night instead of proceeding back to its flying-off position from the Nansei Shoto operation, maintaining a moderate speed, the extra maintenance time being welcome.

A signal received from C IN C POA confirmed that above assumption had been correct, and approval was finally received from C IN C PAC in the early hours of the 10th April.

10th April.

The Fleet continued patrolling in the southern area during most of the day. I received an appreciation and air plan from A.C.I. at an early hour; at 0845 his Chief Staff Officer was transferred to KING GEORGE V by destroyer and the various details discussed. After this discussion the following signals were made to inform all concerned of my intentions:—

COM 5th Fleet (R) C IN C POA Both H.Q., CT 50.5, C.-in-C., B.P.F., CTG 52.1, CTF 112 COMAAFSWPA, CINCSWPA.

From approximate position Samson 196 deg. 30 min. from western tip Yonakuni Jima will strike Matsuyama and Shinchiku airfields 11-12 April forenoons. CTF 57 originator. Will replenish Cootie area 13th April. On 16th will arrive Leyte.

COM 5th Fleet (R) C IN C PAC both H.Q.s. CTG 50.5. From CTF 57

Request Dumbo* aircraft from 0830 to 1130, 11 and 12 April so TF 57 can leave vicinity Formosa after strikes. Advise and indicate call signs. Fighter escort by TF 57. Rendezvous western point Yonakuni Jima 0830 for Dumbo and fighters both days.

The plan as finally evolved was to strike Matsuyama airfield from a dawn flying-off position 23° 58.5' N 122° 46' E, retiring to the south east after strike returned. A similar strike was planned for the morning of the 12th on Shinchiku after which the Fleet would return to the oiling area. Both the above strikes were to be with the maximum available aircraft. In view of the fact that the Fleet would be operating some 50 miles from Formosa, a CAP of twenty with Jacks seemed desirable.

During these operations it would at times have been preferable to divide the Fleet in two, so that, whilst one half was sustaining air superiority over our target, the other could be away refuelling; this was however precluded *inter alia* by the fact that two carriers provide insufficient aircraft to maintain the Fleet CAP even on a lessened scale as well as to provide the strike. The position is analogous to a Fleet which, although it has enough destroyers to form a A/S screen and a striking force, cannot reasonably operate in two halves because there would then only be enough destroyers left to provide one or the other.

Admiralty footnote:—

* Dumbo—air-sea rescue aircraft.