

5. It had been apparent since the beginning of the operation that however thoroughly the airfields were neutralised by day, the enemy was determined and able to effect repairs by night. The lack of night intruders to prevent this was keenly felt as it was evident that intermittent heckling of the airfields during the night would have slowed down the activities of the enemy working parties. Furthermore, the need for night fighters to protect the Fleet, particularly during the moonlight periods, is outstanding; so is the need for a night carrier. In this respect it was perhaps very fortunate that during our first strikes on 27th March, when the Fleet had been approached at 0245, *INDOMITABLE* flew off a Hellcat who successfully drove off the enemy aircraft, then remaining up till dawn. This may have given the Japanese the impression that we were night fighter equipped.

The problem of getting night fighter aircraft, including a night carrier, has been taken up separately, but the solution cannot be expected in the near future.

6. A further bombardment had been planned for the latter stages, but had to be cancelled on two successive days owing to weather. After the second cancellation on 9th May, damage to carriers and shortage of aircraft rendered any further bombardment unwise.

7. The assistance of the United States authorities at Leyte was greatly appreciated, and I must once more express my admiration and gratitude for the excellent arrangements for air-sea rescue by means of Lifeguard submarines and Dumbo aircraft.

8. The activities of the Fleet Train are the subject of a separate report. The service given in the fuelling area continued to improve throughout, and for this the Fleet owes much to Rear-Admiral Fisher. The regular delivery of mail, to take one instance, went far to maintain the general morale.

9. This operation has presented the British Fleet with several novel features; in particular it has stressed the strenuous efforts required from carriers who have no spare pilots and who could well benefit from a larger complement. They have unfortunately little extra accommodation available.

In other ships the principal problem was, perhaps, to maintain alertness and interest while engaged on less active duties.

I feel however that the Fleet as a whole kept in good heart throughout and did, I trust, what was required of it.

10. The Vice-Admiral Commanding the First Aircraft Carrier Squadron has remarked in his report on the manner in which the carriers contrived to remain in operation in spite of damage; I wholeheartedly subscribe to his views. Their achievements, however, derived directly from the sustained determination and leadership of Vice-Admiral Sir Philip Vian himself, for to him fell the conduct and handling of the Fleet during its most active periods.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Signed) BERNARD RAWLINGS,

Vice-Admiral.

The Commander.

United States Fifth Fleet.

NARRATIVE.

On 23rd April TF 57, 32 days out from Ulithi, was brought to anchor in San Pedro Roads, Leyte, and commenced making good defects and replenishing from ships of the Fleet Train.

The partial replenishment carried out at Manus in early March had been difficult due to the great distances between ships, the extreme shortage of craft and the necessity for Fleet training.

The berthing plan at Leyte giving greatly reduced distances which had been arranged by R.A.F.T. before the Fleet arrived made matters considerably easier.

The fuelling, ammunitioning, storing, etc. of the Fleet commenced p.m. on the 23rd and continued throughout the week, aided by favourable weather.

Boats were again very short and quite insufficient for libertymen to be landed. Since the libertymen could not get to the beer, I authorised the beer to be brought to them, the amount available allowing one bottle per day per head; this innovation proved immensely popular.

Every Commanding Officer reported enthusiastically on this matter, there were no "scenes," and I have no doubt whatever that it was a great and well deserved boon in a period of hard work in great heat.

Prior to their departure to refit, H.M. Ships *ILLUSTRIOUS* and *ARGONAUT* were fleeced of available stores and spare gear to meet Fleet requirements.

The heat and lethargic effect of the climate which being drier was not quite so marked as at Manus, made conditions very trying for personnel employed, between and below decks, on maintenance, boiler cleaning, etc. Much work of this type had to be done at great speed and personnel concerned did well. Office work, occasioned by the inevitable influx of correspondence after such a long period at sea, was no less trying. There was in fact, little time for rest or relaxation for officers or ratings during this period and after a day or two most of us, I feel sure, wished ourselves back at sea again.

Precautions were taken against possible attack by midget submarines, explosive motor boats, and suicide swimmers, but no suspicion of attack developed.

No air raids were experienced, although the Fleet was alerted on a few occasions at night by "Flash Red" from the shore station.

On arrival at Leyte I waited upon Admiral Kincaid, Commander 7th Fleet, and with him met Vice Admiral J. L. Kauffman, Commander Philippine Sea Frontier and Rear Admiral R. O. Davis, Commander Amphibious Group 13. They all lunched on board my Flagship. Commodore E. M. Evans-Lombe, Captain (S) J. R. Allfrey, Chief of Staff and Secretary to C.-in-C., B.P.F., after most useful discussions with Flag Officers of the Task Force, left Leyte by air for Guam: Captain E. C. Ewen, U.S.N., Liaison Officer with TF 57, travelled with them.

Uppermost in my mind during the first few days at Leyte was the question of the future employment of Task Force 57. I had been