

Corsairs were vectored out to intercept and got within three miles of the bogey. These aircraft had however been brought down to 6,000 feet as it was thought the enemy was diving. After this failure the fighters were recalled in order to land them on before darkness fell. The two last Corsairs landed on about 20 minutes after sunset with clouds reducing the rapidly failing light.

57. The enemy aircraft remained in the vicinity until about 1910. It is doubtful if the fleet was sighted but the enemy appeared to be aware of our approximate position.

58. The fleet was steering a course towards Ceylon while this aircraft was in contact.

Third Oiling and Passage to Fremantle

59. Force 63 proceeded westward at 23 knots throughout the night of 29th-30th January in order to join the oilers sufficiently early on 30th January to complete fuelling on that day. Fuelling was started at 1315 and was finished by 2200, all ships with the exception of VICTORIOUS and ILLUSTRIOUS either filling up or topping up for the passage to Fremantle.

60. URSA, after oiling, was detached to take messages to Cocos Island for transmission and to proceed independently.

61. Force 63 arrived at Fremantle at 0600 local time 4th February.

APPENDIX TO NARRATIVE

Statement of Results

Bomb Damage to specific buildings confirmed by photographs

(Photography ceased on account of smoke before raid was completed.)

(a) *Pladjoe*

<i>Target</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Crude distilleries and run down tanks ...	Hits.
Reforming unit ...	Hits in area—probably about 30 per cent. destroyed.
Redistillation unit ...	
Cracking unit ...	
Distillation units ...	
Main boiler and electric power house ...	Probably one hit and two transformers destroyed.

(b) *Songei Gerong*

Boiler and electric power houses ...	Direct hits claimed, but not shown by photographs; photography ceased about half time.
1,000 lb. cracking plant ...	All hit.
Fractionating columns ...	
Coke stills ...	
Pipe stills and re-run stills ...	
Depropaniser ...	Probably hit.
750 lb. cracking plant ...	Probably hit.

H.M.S. VICTORIOUS.

25th January, 1945.

REPORT OF AIR CO-ORDINATOR ON FIRST STRIKE

I have the honour to submit the following report on the conduct of the air strike against Palembang, Sumatra, on the morning of Wednesday, 24th January, 1945:—

2. Form Up

VICTORIOUS group was flown off and formed up in 25 minutes. At this time (0645), all the groups appeared ready and the Strike Leader (INDOMITABLE) should have commenced his circuit of the force, since time for departure was 0655. He was so long in coming that I flew over to INDOMITABLE's sector to see if there was any trouble. But their squadrons were all formed up and the additional circuit made was unnecessary and delayed departure at least five minutes. On future occasions I will break R/T* silence if necessary, to prevent similar delays.

Circuit of the force was commenced at 0650 and departure taken at 0704. The strike was thus nine minutes late, but it was just as well, since if they had been on time, the Fireflies (INDEFATIGABLE) would not have joined up before the strike reached the target.

3. Base to Coast

All went according to plan here except that the escort, instead of remaining at the same height as the bombers, as had been previously arranged took up their correct escort intervals.

An accurate landfall was made at 0718 at 4,500 feet.

4. Coast to Target

The climb was continued to 7,000 feet in order to clear the mountains. This height was not lost again, as had been arranged, and I am not clear why the Strike Leader had to alter this part of the plan. The weather was excellent for the strike. Thin 10/10th at about 20,000 feet which enabled pilots to look into the sun with ease; and very low 10/10th stratus covering large areas. Visibility was about 60 miles and the wind from the south-east.

The formation of both the strike and escort was exceptionally good. For reasons unknown, one Avenger from INDEFATIGABLE's squadron started to straggle. I have a photograph of this and have sent it to the squadron in the hope that it will teach them what not to do.

At 0738 we passed over Matapoera at 7,500 feet and observed three landing strips. Details of these have been reported separately. At 0803 the strike reached 12,000 feet. This was only 12 minutes before the attack and I do not consider soon enough. From the escort point of view, we want the strike at its top

Admiralty footnote:—

* R/T—radio-telephone.