

9. Two ships (of about 2,000 tons each) under way, were attacked by, it is thought five aircraft. Both ships were on fire when last seen. Nothing was seen of the attacks made by the last three aircraft. Five out of the eight aircraft of this squadron were lost.

10. It is hoped that further damage was done by the aircraft which did not return, but observation was most difficult for all aircraft on account of the fighter interference.

General remarks.

11. The enemy reconnaissance aircraft sighted Force "P" at the most unfortunate moment, as it was too late to call off the attack and yet gave the enemy plenty of time to prepare for the arrival of the striking force. With all chance of surprise gone, and with a cloudless sky, heavy casualties were inevitable, yet the attack was pressed home with great determination and gallantry and I consider that the conduct of all who took part is deserving of the highest praise.

12. From a military point of view the attack was a failure as we lost eleven Albacores and two Fulmars and had eight Albacores damaged, while we shot down two M.E.110s, one M.E.109, one JU.87, probably one M.E.110 and one M.E.109 and damaged one JU.87. We also obtained hits with two torpedoes on BREMSE and at least one each on two Merchant Ships and probably one each on two more Merchant Ships. It is a pity that there were not more torpedo targets.

13. The fact that the Fighter Squadron climbed to 1,000 feet before reaching the

Ribachi peninsula might have led to their being detected by the enemy's R.D.F. and so giving away surprise. In the event, due to Force "P" having already been sighted, I do not think it mattered. It was none the less a mistake.

14. It is interesting to note that the Germans used all types of aircraft to engage our attacking force. It is reported by our aircraft crews that the JU.87s were armed with extra machine guns and possibly with cannon as well. It is much to the credit of the crews of our Fulmars that they shot down three enemy aircraft of superior types for the loss of only two Fulmars.

15. Should it be found necessary on a future occasion to carry out a similar attack, i.e. one where complete surprise is unlikely and where lack of reconnaissance leaves both the strength of the defence and the number of targets in doubt, it is suggested that there would be better chances of success by using a smaller force of T.S.R.s and a large force of fighters.

16. It was arranged to refuel the Hurricanes in VICTORIOUS while the striking force was away. Two of them would not start after refuelling and had to be kept on deck. The resulting congestion caused a delay in the landing-on programme just at the time when (but for lack of initiative) the German bombing attack should have developed. Thus this delay might have had serious consequences.

(Signed) H. C. BOVELL,

*Captain, R.N.
Commanding Officer.*

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