

C H A R Y B D I S from Gibraltar and INDOMITABLE and PHOEBE from Free-town, for Operation "Berserk." "Berserk" was subsequently carried out according to plan and was of the utmost benefit in exercising fighter direction and co-operation between the three carriers.

6. The convoy under a bogus W.S.* name escorted by NIGERIA (flag of Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron†), KENYA and destroyers sailed from the Clyde during the night 2nd/3rd August and joined my flag the following morning.

7. Just prior to sailing, but after the "normal" convoy conference, Rear-Admiral Burrough held a meeting with the Masters of the M.T. ships on board his flagship at which the whole plan was explained to them in detail. A meeting with radio operators of the M.T. ships was also held when all details regarding fleet communications and procedure were fully explained. These two meetings were invaluable.

8. Personal messages signed by the First Lord of the Admiralty wishing the Masters "God Speed" and contained in envelopes marked "Not to be opened until 0800/10th August" were handed to the Masters. This act of courtesy and encouragement was very highly appreciated.

9. Shortly before leaving Scapa the Admiralty decided that FURIOUS should carry out Operation "Bellows," to reinforce Malta with Spitfires, concurrently with "Pedestal." The necessary additions and amendments to the Operation Orders were made and subsequently distributed to all ships and authorities concerned.

10. Owing to technical difficulties connected with the aircraft's propellers, and FURIOUS's humped flying deck, FURIOUS was unable to sail with the main body. She later proceeded at high speed with MANCHESTER and joined my flag on D minus 3.

11. The passage of the convoy from the United Kingdom to the rendezvous with the aircraft carriers west of the Straits was wholly successful, though there were many alarms over U-Boat contacts en route.

12. The convoy was repeatedly exercised in anti-aircraft gunnery, in emergency turns and in changing from one cruising disposition to another, using both flags and short range W/T. The risk to security in breaking W/T silence was accepted and as a result of these exercises the convoy attained an efficiency in manoeuvring comparable to that of a fleet unit.

13. Unfavourable weather conditions coupled with unsuitable equipment and an inexperienced crew in ABBEYDALE, prevented all the ships taking part in "Berserk" completing with fuel at sea. This entailed sending additional large and small ships into Gibraltar on the night of D minus 2 and D minus 1, thus throwing further heavy commitments on the already complicated organisation required from

the Vice-Admiral Commanding, North Atlantic.

14. It gives me great pleasure to record the excellent way in which these heavy commitments were met by the Vice-Admiral Commanding, North Atlantic, and all concerned at Gibraltar.

15. During the afternoon of D minus 1, the dummy air attacks on the force, followed by a fly past for identification purposes, were carried out and proved to be of the utmost benefit, for exercising the radar reporting and fighter direction organisation and for giving everyone an opportunity for studying the characteristics and markings of our own aircraft. They did, of course, entail a great volume of W/T and R/T traffic which must have been very apparent to enemy or enemy-controlled listening stations. This risk to security was considered acceptable when balanced against the benefit to be derived from the practices.

16. At 1330 when INDOMITABLE joined my flag it is believed to have been the first occasion when five of H.M. aircraft carriers have ever operated in company at sea simultaneously.

17. The passage of the Straits and D.1 (10th August) were uneventful. Fishing boats and one merchant vessel were passed at close quarters, but aided by a moonless night and indifferent visibility it is improbable that the force was sighted from the shore. Reports received later showed, however, that the enemy was fully cognisant of our passage of the Straits.

18. D.2 (11th August) was marked by the following important occurrences:—

(a) The successful completion of the large fuelling programme, thanks very largely to the extreme efficiency shown by DINGLEDALE and BROWN RANGER. In previous similar operations it has not been necessary to provide for so large an oiling programme since ships going to Malta have been able to fuel there. In this case Malta had no oil to spare. The problem of oiling 3 cruisers and 26 destroyers at sea, under enemy observation and in U-Boat infested waters, was an anxious one, failure of which could have seriously upset the whole plan.

(b) The tragic sinking of EAGLE, which quite apart from the loss to the fleet of a well tried and valuable carrier, at once bereft the force of 25 per cent. of its fighter strength.

(c) The large number of sightings and reportings of torpedoes and U-Boats, a proportion of which may well have been actualities.

(d) The successful execution of Operation "Bellows" whereby 37 much needed Spitfires reached Malta safely.*

(e) The continuous snooping throughout the day despite all our fighters could do to prevent it; and the heavy, but fortunately unsuccessful, air attack at dusk. Our fighters competed manfully at great height against the snoopers but the speed and the height

Admiralty footnotes.

* W.S. convoys were normally those from U.K. to Suez via Cape of Good Hope

† Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron—Rear-Admiral H. M. Burrough, C.B., D.S.O.

Admiralty footnote:

* The distance from Malta at which these Spitfires were flown off from FURIOUS was 584 to 555 miles.