

46. *Surprise.*—Our attempt to pass the convoy into the Mediterranean without the enemy's knowledge resulted in a very complicated fuelling programme during dark hours at Gibraltar in the days preceding D.1. Operation "Berserk," invaluable in itself, was a further source of embarrassment from the fuelling point of view. With the efficient intelligence service which it appears the enemy now has in the Gibraltar area it may be argued that the small chance of effecting any surprise is not worth the complications and difficulties of attempting to do so. I think, however, it would be wrong to take this line. Until the enemy's reconnaissance forces actually see us in the Mediterranean he cannot be sure his intelligence is correct, and any uncertainty we can create in his mind must be all to our benefit.

47. It would, however, be better, if circumstances permitted, to carry out the necessary and invaluable aircraft carrier co-operation exercise further away, preferably north of Ireland, on another occasion.

48. *Re-fuelling destroyers on D.2.*—The re-fuelling of CAIRO and 24 destroyers between 0600 and 2030 on D.2 was an accomplishment redounding very greatly to the credit of BROWN RANGER and DINGLEDALE. But the Masters of these ships would be the first to admit that fortune favoured us. The weather was good and a light easterly wind enabled the desired course to be maintained whilst fuelling was in progress.

Such fortune cannot be expected on all occasions, more particularly in winter months, and the failure or partial failure of fuelling plans must be provided for.

49. Furthermore one must always have in mind the possibility of the oiler(s) being damaged or sunk by enemy action. Hitherto the oilers have borne a charmed life, though on this occasion they experienced alarms on account of both enemy aircraft and submarines.

50. *Co-operation by other Commands.*—Information I received showed that part of the enemy's air forces which attacked the fleet on D.2 and D.3 were operating from Trapani and recently had been based at Heraklion. It seems probable, therefore, that the enemy moved some air squadrons from Greece, and possibly also from Crete, for the occasion.

51. The diversionary convoy from Haifa and Port Said was planned by Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, with a view to dissuading the enemy from any such re-disposition of his air forces, and I had hoped that the Army would have helped to further this end by staging an attack in Egypt. In this hope I was disappointed.

52. The attacks on Sardinian and Sicilian aerodromes by bomber forces from Malta and Egypt were valuable contributions to our plan and it is believed they achieved effective results.

53. The losses suffered by Force F were regrettably heavy and the number of merchant ships which reached Malta disappointingly

small. But I have no fault to find with the personnel of the fleet because better results were not achieved. On the contrary, Commanding Officers, generally, have praised the fine bearing and spirit shown by their ships' companies, many of whom were very young and to whom battle was a new experience. I am proud to associate myself with these tributes, and in particular give credit to those whose duties kept them below decks during submarine, air and E-Boat attacks.

54. The constant A/S vigilance shown by the destroyers under the leadership of Captain R. M. J. Hutton (Captain (D), 19th Destroyer Flotilla) and Acting Captain R. J. Onslow (Captain (D), 6th Destroyer Flotilla) for a period extending over 14 days is deserving of much praise. It is true that the submarine which sank H.M.S. EAGLE was undetected but I am very sure that their watchfulness foiled many another attack.

55. That 27 emergency turns were made on passage to the Straits and 48 during D.1, D.2 and D.3, consequent on warnings given by the A/S screen, is an illustration of the value of their work. Besides this, their defence of the fleet against torpedo bomber attack was so successful that only one torpedo bomber aircraft managed to get past them.

56. The work of the aircraft carriers (H.M.S. INDOMITABLE, Captain T. H. Troubridge, and H.M.S. VICTORIOUS, Captain H. C. Bovell) under the command of Rear-Admiral Lyster, was excellently performed, while that of their fighters was magnificent. Flying at great heights, constantly chasing the faster JU. 88s, warning the fleet of approaching formations, breaking up the latter, and in the later stages doing their work in the face of superior enemy fighter forces, they were grand. The fact that 39 certainties were shot down by them and the probability that at least the same number were incapacitated is a remarkable measure of the success of the carriers, their teamwork and their fighters and of the able and inspiring leadership of Rear-Admiral A. L. St. G. Lyster, C.B., C.V.O., D.S.O.

57. Tribute has been paid to the personnel of H.M. Ships but both officers and men will desire to give first place to the conduct, courage and determination of the Masters, officers and men of the merchant ships. The steadfast manner in which these ships pressed on their way to Malta through all attacks, answering every manœuvring order like a well trained fleet unit, was a most inspiring sight. Many of these fine men and their ships were lost but the memory of their conduct will remain an inspiration to all who were privileged to sail with them.

58. The task of Force X was always difficult and hazardous. Unhappily a serious disaster befell them almost at once and heavily tipped the scales in favour of the enemy. Nevertheless they continued undaunted and determined, and fighting their way through many and heavy attacks by U-Boats, E-Boats and aircraft, they delivered five of their charges to Malta and then fought their way back to Gibraltar. In doing this they showed a display of fortitude and