

of the JU.88s made the fighters' task a hopeless one. It will be a happy day when the fleet is equipped with modern fighter aircraft.

D.3 (12th August).

19. As the force moved east it was to be expected that the U-Boat and air threat would progressively increase. Additional anti-submarine measures were taken to counter the U-Boat concentration which was believed to have been disposed in an area near Galita and our vigilant A/S screen had the satisfaction of achieving a "kill" of one Italian submarine.* H.M.S. ITHURIEL delivered the *coup de grace* to this submarine by ramming it and in doing so badly damaged herself and put her asdic gear out of action. The submarine when it came to the surface after being depth charged was obviously "all in" and I thought the expensive method chosen by the Commanding Officer, H.M.S. ITHURIEL, to sink it quite unnecessary. Moreover, I was disturbed at the resulting absence of ITHURIEL from the screen when an air attack was impending.

20. Throughout the day the force was under continual observation by aircraft which were protected, progressively more strongly, by fighters. During the day the force was subjected to three very heavy air attacks; whilst Force X, after parting company, was attacked at dusk by bombers and torpedo bombers.

21. During daylight hours our fighters, though frequently greatly outnumbered, continued their magnificent work both in reporting approaching raids and in shooting down enemy aircraft. Success also attended our A.A. guns though more from their deterrent effect than from the accuracy of their fire.

22. In their daylight attacks, the enemy employed every form of air attack, including minelaying ahead of the fleet, which, so far as I know, has not been used before by the enemy.

23. Despite the great numbers of aircraft employed in the four heavy attacks on the fleet up to 1900 on D.3, it is gratifying to record that the only casualties were one M.T. ship with her speed reduced by a near miss, one destroyer torpedoed but afloat (though later sunk by own forces), and the INDOMITABLE put out of flying action but capable of steaming at 28½ knots.

24. I had intended that Force Z should turn to the westward on reaching the entrance to the Skerki Channel at 1915 and had warned the fleet accordingly. The damaged INDOMITABLE, on fire forward and aft, caused me, however, to advance this time by twenty minutes, and at 1855 I ordered Force Z to turn and Force X to proceed to Malta. The withdrawal of Force Z was apparently unnoticed by the enemy and its separation from Force X not discovered by him until about 2030.

25. In view of the magnitude of the enemy's air attack at 1830 to 1850 it seemed improbable that a further attack on Force X on any great

scale would be forthcoming before dark, and having reached the Skerki Banks, it was hoped that the submarine menace was mostly over. The dangers ahead of Force X seemed to lie principally in attacks by E-Boats during the night and by aircraft the following morning.

26. Thus the enemy's successful submarine attack at 2000 when NIGERIA, CAIRO and OHIO were torpedoed was unexpected and its effect far reaching. The time was a critical one, for the change from four columns to two columns was being made and for this manoeuvre the cruisers were much needed as leaders of columns. The torpedoing of H.M. Ships NIGERIA and CAIRO, the temporary non-effectiveness of H.M.S. ASHANTI (Captain (D), 6th Destroyer Flotilla) while embarking Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron, and the detachment of 4 Hunt destroyers to stand by the damaged cruisers, deprived (a) Force X temporarily of its Commander, (b) two columns of their leaders, (c) the convoy of nearly half its escort, and (d) the force of its two Fighter Direction ships. On hearing that NIGERIA and CAIRO had been torpedoed I ordered CHARYBDIS, ESKIMO and SOMALI to reinforce Force X. From about 2035 to 2100, the convoy was subjected to a very severe dusk air attack by dive bombers and torpedo bombers. ASHANTI and PENN laid a smoke screen to cover the light western horizon, but this did not prevent the attack being effective. EMPIRE HOPE and GLENORCHY were both bombed and sunk, the latter blowing up with no survivors.

A separate torpedo bomber attack sank DEUCALION at 2130 near the Cani Rocks when under escort of BRAMHAM.

The Commanding Officer, H.M.S. KENYA describes the state of the convoy subsequent to these misfortunes as chaotic. I think this may be an exaggeration for though necessarily the convoy was in a confused state there is no evidence to show that any ship of the convoy was steaming other than in the correct direction. Furthermore we know that 11 of the convoy got safely, though some not undamaged, as far as Kelibia,* by early morning.

D.4 (13th August).

27. The attenuated line of merchant ships and the reduced number of escort ships provided easy opportunities for attacks by the E-Boats which were lying in wait off Kelibia. Here three of the merchant ships which failed to reach Malta were torpedoed. Of these the WAIRANGI, it is believed, was hit in the engine room and was permanently disabled, but the ALMERIA LYKES was hit before the bulkhead of No. 1 hold and could well have continued steaming to Malta.

28. In the early morning MANCHESTER was torpedoed, supposedly by an E-Boat or possibly mined, and after the ship's company had abandoned her in the ship's boats and Carley rafts she was scuttled by order of her Commanding Officer.

29. The E-Boat attacks during the night added further to the disorganisation of the convoy and at daylight the scattered ships were

Admiralty footnote

* This was the Italian submarine COBALTO. Her destruction on this occasion has been confirmed.

Admiralty footnote

* Kelibia—some 20 miles south of Cape Bon in Tunis.