

14. 0830.—One JU.88 was badly damaged by Hurricanes who expended all ammunition.

15. 0930.—A BR.88 shadower was badly damaged in air combat with a Hurricane.

16. 1009.—A group of aircraft was detected by radar and it became apparent that the enemy were gathering for an attack. All ships assumed the first degree of air readiness.

The wind was still from the west causing me considerable anxiety over the carriers, particularly ARGUS with her small margin of speed.

17. 1020.—A column of white smoke was reported about 20 miles away and some reports suggest that this may have been a homing mark deliberately laid. It is thought more probable that this was from a bomber shot down by EAGLE's Hurricanes at about that time, though why the smoke should have been such an unusual colour cannot be explained.

18. 1028 to 1032.—Two and possibly three formations each of 5 or 6 high level bombers in V formation reached the convoy, the bombs falling astern of the convoy and in the neighbourhood of ARGUS. Gunfire was ineffective but ARGUS's Fulmars shot down 2 of the enemy while they were retiring.

19. 1108 to 1135.—Torpedo bombing aircraft were seen low over the horizon and the main attack developed. The timing was not very good and resulted in an attack being delivered at about 1112 by 15 torpedo bombers from the port beam and at 1116-1125 by three small groups of torpedo bombers totalling 13 torpedo bombers from the starboard side. An unknown number of formations of bombers attacked between 1115 and 1126, scoring no hits. The convoy lines, EAGLE, ARGUS and BADSWORTH appeared to be the target for bombing.

20. The port torpedo bomber attack was severely dealt with by gunfire and it is thought that not more than six aircraft got within 4,000 yards. A turn of 45° to port was made and no torpedo damage resulted.

21. On the starboard side it was difficult to see what was happening as the wind was holding the cordite smoke on the line of sight. It appears that the three groups forced their attack well home from the bow, beam and quarter obtaining hits on LIVERPOOL and TANIMBAR, setting on fire and sinking the latter.

22. It has been difficult to fix the total enemy losses accurately but it is certain that 6 aircraft were shot down during this period. Aircraft claimed 2 fighters and 3 torpedo bombers certainly and 2 torpedo bombers probably brought down, while one Fulmar was shot down by our own gunfire.

23. 1157 to 1202.—Several half-hearted attacks were carried out by ones and twos, presumably aircraft which had been turned away by gunfire earlier. None approached within 6,000 yards or endangered the convoy.

24. ANTELOPE followed by WESTCOTT were detached to stand by LIVERPOOL who was retiring on a course 270° at 3 knots*.

Admiralty footnote :

* LIVERPOOL in tow of the destroyer ANTELOPE reached Gibraltar safely p.m. 17th June, in spite of further air attacks on her

WELSHMAN took over guide of the starboard column.

25. 1215 to 1815.—Peace reigned during the afternoon, the radar screen showing snoopers and some formations which steered clear of us and, from subsequent information, attacked LIVERPOOL.

26. 1815 to 1835.—High level bombers and dive bombers attacked. As is usual in the Mediterranean it was very difficult to see these till they had reached the bombing position and gunfire was ineffective. At least two formations attacked. Our aircraft formed two JU.88s to jettison their bombs and severely damaged two more who also jettisoned bomb loads. The remainder failed to achieve more than near misses one of which was very near EAGLE, pitching on her port side but going under the ship and bursting on the starboard side.

27. 2000 to 2005.—WELSHMAN was detached to proceed to Malta, being herself attacked at about 2020. KUJAWIAK took her place leading the starboard column.

28. At the same time it was evident that further air attacks were imminent.

2006 to 2032.—About 17 torpedo bombers, 14 high level bombers and 20 single-engined fighters in addition to dive bombers were involved in attacks which began at 2006.

29. During this period no less than four of the screen were out of position either investigating or attacking submarine contacts.

30. During the attacks our fighters met considerable fighter opposition and were therefore unable to assist in breaking up the attacks.

However, in spite of a number of near misses, the attacks were unsuccessful. The majority of the bombs from high level bombers and some of those from dive bombers fell round destroyers on the screen, ICARUS being particularly lucky to escape.

31. A well-delivered attack was made by about 9 of the torpedo bombers who circled round astern out of range and then tried to come in from the starboard beam. Three emergency turns away were made to port to keep the sterns of the convoy towards the enemy, and the aircraft were forced to release their torpedoes at a very poor track angle, though from very close range, and failed to achieve any success.

The gunnery of the force failed to obtain any known kills, but did much in breaking up attacks. I regret that one Fulmar was shot down during these attacks, the crew being picked up by HYTHE. Our fighters claim 2 certain and 3 probables during these attacks.

32. 2055.—SPEEDY attacked with depth charges and claimed to have sunk a U-Boat*.

33. 2056.—Friendly aircraft appeared on the screen. These proved to be Beaufighters from Malta.

34. 2130.—The air being clear at 2037, I formed KENYA as escort to EAGLE and turned the convoy over to CAIRO, and at 2130 Force W turned to the westwards at 16 knots.

Admiralty footnote :

* The final assessment of sinking of enemy submarines does not allow this claim.