

7th May.

At 0615 Cruising Disposition was formed on the tankers, and fuelling recommenced.

Fuelling and exchange of stores, mail and correspondence were completed by 1400, when the Fleet disengaged from the tankers.

H.M.A.S. NORMAN was ordered to escort R.F.A.s WAVE KING and WAVE MONARCH to Leyte, and H.M. Ships WHIMBREL and AVON similarly escorted R.F.A.s SAN AMBROSIO, SAN ADOLPHO and CEDARDALE.

During this day and yesterday H.M.S. FORMIDABLE was busy making good bomb damage, and became fully operational.

At 1400 the Fleet in Cruising Disposition took departure for the operations area.

Late this night the very satisfactory and gratifying news of the unconditional surrender of the German Armed Forces to the Allies was received. Active operations were ordered to cease at 0001B on 9th May, 1945.

U.S. Task Group 52.1 covered Sakishima.

8th May

The plan for the day was to bomb Miyako and Ishigaki, to maintain the usual island CAPS, and also to bombard Ishigaki runways and A.A. positions with the battleships and 6 in. cruisers. The Carrier Squadron, supported by both 5.25 in. cruisers and 8 destroyers were to close Ishigaki behind the bombarding force until such time as land echoes would just not interfere with air warning.

The weather deteriorated during the night, and at 0400 as the forecast gave no hope of improvement, the plan to bombard was cancelled in favour of one to carry out four bomber strikes following previous patterns.

At 0515 A.C.1 assumed tactical command, and at 0600 CAPS for the islands and Fleet were flown off in position 22° 53' N 125° 40' E. The weather was overcast and raining at the time, and the island CAPS soon reported similar conditions with the islands difficult to locate. The first strike was therefore cancelled. It was decided to remain in the operating area to await better weather, but at 1015 the island CAPS reported no improvement and the meteorological chart showed Formosa to be shut down by similar weather.

Since it was thus evident that Sakishima could be of no use to the enemy in such conditions, at 1050 the Fleet withdrew to the south eastward, maintaining a reduced CAP.

Although the weather forecast for the following day promised deterioration rather than improvement I informed Commander 5th Fleet of the withdrawal due to weather, and of my intention to strike on 9th and 10th May. Plans for bombardment on 9th May were abandoned. At 1805, just after the last CAP for the day had been flown off, visibility shut down completely with continuous heavy rain. There were indications of clearer weather to the westward and course was shaped towards it. It was with difficulty that fighters were vectored back to the Fleet and searchlights were burned to aid them. At 1905 the fighters at sea level, having sighted the searchlights, reached the Fleet and were flown on.

CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1920.

9th May

At 0510 A.C.1 assumed tactical command. The weather although showery was much improved and continued to do so during the day.

At 0545 the CAPS were flown off in position 23° 06' N 126° 00' E. Weather over the targets was reported as satisfactory. All runways at Hirara were reported as serviceable.

Four bomber strikes were flown off during the day, two to each island, the first being launched at 0830 in position 23° 40' N 125° 34' E. All runways were re-cratered, a direct hit was scored on one aircraft on the ground at Miyako. A motor transport park at Ishigaki was attacked, three vehicles being destroyed for certain.

Low flying fighters discovered a Val hidden in a cave. Firing through the entrance to the cave they destroyed the enemy in flames.

At 1145 the Fleet was sighted by a bogey which approached within 30 miles. Fighters drove it off but were unable to catch it.

At 1645 bogeys were detected very low 22 miles to the westward, coming in fast. Four Seafires intercepted at 15 miles, but allowed themselves to be all decoyed away by one aircraft which they shot down. Meanwhile four other enemy planes evaded another division of Seafires, and after climbing to about 3,000 feet penetrated to the Fleet.

From 1650 onwards the Fleet was radically manoeuvred by emergency turns at 22 knots. One minute after such a turn of 60° to starboard was executed, a suicider made a 10° angle dive onto H.M.S. VICTORIOUS from her starboard quarter. The enemy was well hit by close range weapons but crashed onto the flight deck near the forward lift. The resulting fire was quickly brought under control, but the bomb explosion holed the flight deck, put the accelerator out of action, rendered one 4.5 in. gun unserviceable, and damaged one lift hoisting motor.

At 1656 another Kamikaze made a shallow power glide from astern on H.M.S. VICTORIOUS. Though hit hard by gunfire, and well on fire, it hit the flight deck aft a glancing blow, and burning furiously passed over the side. Damage to the ship was confined to one arrester unit out of action, a 40 mm. gun director destroyed, and four Corsairs on deck damaged beyond repair.

Casualties from both these attacks were three killed, four seriously injured, and 15 wounded.

At 1657 a third suicider made a pass at H.M.S. VICTORIOUS but then shifted target to H.M.S. HOWE further ahead, and approached her from the starboard quarter in a long shallow dive. This time the attacker was hit at a more reasonable range, and continued to be so until he crashed in flames 100 yards from H.M.S. HOWE after passing over the quarterdeck.

At 1705 a fourth Kamikaze approached H.M.S. FORMIDABLE and then H.M.S. INDOMITABLE, being engaged by both ships without apparent result. It then turned and dived into the after deck park of H.M.S. FORMIDABLE.

There was a large explosion and fire and a great deal of smoke. Speed was reduced to 15 knots to aid control of the fire which was