

by the 7th Cr. Squadron. Ten salvos were fired and a hit possibly obtained with the last salvo. One of the WARSPITE's aircraft was on the catapult preparing to fly off but it became so urgent that fire should be opened in support of the heavily outnumbered cruisers that delay could not be accepted. The aircraft was damaged by the blast of "X" turret and subsequently jettisoned.

33. At 1530 the enemy turned away making smoke and fire was checked. WARSPITE turned through 360 degrees and made an "S" bend to enable MALAYA, who had been ordered by the Commander-in-Chief to press on at utmost speed, to catch up. The 7th Cruiser Squadron also made a 360 degree turn to starboard to conform. The enemy fire during this time was ineffective (1514 to 1530) but our cruisers were straddled several times and at 1524 splinters from a near miss damaged NEPTUNE's catapult and aircraft. The latter was jettisoned soon after as it was leaking petrol. No hits were obtained on the enemy.

34. Between 1533 and 1536 WARSPITE fired 4 salvos at each of two 6" cruisers. These cruisers were evidently of the starboard wing column which had been coming up from the Southward, but were now steering to the Eastward apparently trying to work round to get at EAGLE. At 1545 EAGLE again flew off her striking force.

35. At 1548 WARSPITE's second aircraft was catapulted for action observation, Duty Q.

36. At 1551 the 7th Cruiser Squadron was on a course of 310 degrees to close the enemy again and WARSPITE was steering 345 degrees. Six enemy cruisers were in sight ahead of the enemy battlefleet. This squadron is presumed to be the Port wing column "A" in diagram No 3.

37. At 1553 WARSPITE opened fire on the right hand of the two enemy battleships of the CAVOUR class, bearing 287 degrees, range 26,000 yards. WARSPITE was under fire from both enemy battleships and was shortly afterwards straddled. MALAYA was now in station on a bearing of 180 degrees from WARSPITE and fired 4 salvos at the enemy battleships at extreme range but these fell short. The enemy fired with moderate accuracy, the majority of the salvos falling within 1,000 yards but nearly all having a large spread. Only one closely bunched salvo was observed which fell about 2 cables on WARSPITE's port bow. At 1600 the enemy was straddled and one hit observed at the base of the foremost funnel. The enemy then started to alter course away making smoke and WARSPITE altered to 310 degrees, speed 17 knots.

38. WARSPITE ceased firing at 1604 after firing 17 salvos, the enemy being obscured in smoke. MALAYA fired 4 more salvos, all short and ceased fire at 1608.

At 1605 EAGLE's striking force attacked a cruiser of the BOLZANO class and it is believed that at least one hit was obtained. No report of this hit was received until 1715.

39. At 1609 WARSPITE opened fire on an enemy cruiser bearing 313 degrees, range 24,600 yards. This was presumably one of "A" squadron which had drawn ahead of the battleships and appeared to be working round to the

Northward. Fire was checked after 6 salvos as the enemy turned away making smoke.

40. In the meantime the destroyers, who had been released from WARSPITE at 1525, MALAYA at 1545 and ROYAL SOVEREIGN at 1552, had concentrated and at 1600 were on the disengaged bow of the battlefleet and steering a similar course at 25 to 27 knots. JUNO and JANUS joined the 14th Flotilla, HERO and HEReward the 2nd Flotilla and DECOY the 10th Flotilla. Some of these destroyers were narrowly missed by heavy shells when passing to the Eastward of WARSPITE at 1554. At 1602 the 10th and 14th Flotillas came under heavy fire from enemy cruisers but were not hit. ROYAL SOVEREIGN in the meantime was pressing on at the maximum speed her engines could give, but never got within range at all.

41. At 1605 enemy destroyers were observed from WARSPITE to be moving across to starboard from the van of the enemy fleet and at 1610 the tracks of three or more torpedoes were seen by the 14th Flotilla passing close to them. These were evidently fired at very long range.

42. Our destroyers were ordered at 1614 to counter attack enemy destroyers and at this time were 4 miles East-north-east of WARSPITE and turning to the North-west.

43. At 1619 the 10th Flotilla opened fire on the enemy destroyers at a range of 12,600 yards. STUART's first salvo appeared to hit. At this time the three flotillas were disposed with guides on a line of bearing 220 degrees, destroyers disposed 180 degrees from guides, course 300 degrees. The 7th Cruiser Squadron were also engaging the enemy destroyers.

44. Between 1615 and 1630 a number of enemy destroyers, probably two flotillas, having worked across to starboard of their main fleet, delivered a half-hearted attack. As soon as they had (presumably) fired torpedoes they turned away Westward making smoke. It was observed that the second flotilla to attack retired through the smoke made by the first flotilla. Spasmodic firing was opened by all forces during the short intervals in which the enemy was in range and not obscured by smoke. No hits were observed by WARSPITE's aircraft.

45. Between 1630 and 1640 enemy destroyers were dodging in and out of their smoke screens and spasmodic firing by our flotillas was opened. Two torpedoes were seen to cross NUBIAN's stern at 1640. WARSPITE fired a few salvos of 6" and MALAYA one salvo, at enemy destroyers between 1639 and 1641 when they disappeared in smoke.

46. During this period of the action (i.e. between the time CAVOUR was hit and the time our own fleet approached the smoke screen) P/L signals from the enemy were intercepted saying that he was "constrained to retire," ordering his flotillas to make smoke, to attack with torpedoes, and also a warning that they were approaching the submarine line.

These signals, together with my own appreciation of the existing situation, made it appear unwise and playing the enemy's own game to plunge straight into the smoke screen.

Course was therefore altered to work round to the Northward and windward of the smoke