

Strait. After being engaged by JUNO, KANDAHAR and NAIAD, the M.A.S. boats retired, four of them having been damaged. Force E bombarded Scarpanto aerodrome. Results could not be observed but intelligence reports later indicated that two D.O.17 aircraft had been damaged.

21st May, 1941.

18. At daylight on the 21st May the position of our forces was:—

(a) C.S.7 with Force A1 was 60 miles west of the Anti Kithera Strait steering to the south east to meet Force D which was returning from the Aegean patrol.

(b) R.A.D. with Force D had sighted nothing during his patrol in the Maleme-Canea-Kissamo Bay areas and was now on his way to join Force A1.

(c) C.S.15 with Force C had encountered M.A.S. boats during the night, but apart from that had nothing to report. He was now withdrawing through the Kaso Strait to the southward, having been joined by CALCUTTA at 0600.

(d) D.14 with Force E, after bombarding Scarpanto, was on his way to join Force C.

(e) Force B had sighted nothing during their patrol up to Cape Matapan and were now joining Force A1.

(f) CARLISLE was on her way from Alexandria with orders to join Force C.

(g) ABDIEL was returning to Alexandria from her minelaying operation.

It was intended that forces should remain to the south of Crete by day. After dark the night sweeps were to be repeated.

19. During daylight on the 21st May our naval forces were subjected to heavy air attacks. Force A1 was attacked once during the forenoon and for two and a half hours during the afternoon. Force C was bombed continuously from 0950 to 1350. At 1249 JUNO was hit by bombs and sank in two minutes. CARLISLE joined Force C at 1400. Force D was heavily attacked during the forenoon, AJAX being damaged by near misses. After two and a half hours of bombing during the afternoon, when in company with Force A1, they were again attacked in the evening. During these attacks on Forces A and D at least three aircraft were certainly, and two more probably, shot down. The attacks on Force C were so incessant that no reliable estimate can be made of the casualties inflicted on aircraft; at least two were seen to be damaged and in difficulties, and one shot down.

20. During the day Force A1 remained to the south west of Kithera where it was joined by Forces B and D.

21. The airborne attacks on Crete on 21st May continued with great intensity and Maleme was captured by the enemy.

22. No seaborne landing had yet taken place but air reconnaissance reported groups of small craft, escorted by destroyers, steering towards Crete from Milo. Forces B, C and D accordingly closed in through Kithera and Kaso Straits in order to prevent a seaborne landing during the night 21st/22nd May. If there were no developments during the night Forces C and D were to commence working northwards at 0530/22nd on a wide zigzag to locate convoys.

23. At 2330/21st, Force D (now consisting of R.A.D. in DIDO, with ORION, AJAX, JANUS, KIMBERLEY, HASTY and HEReward) encountered an enemy troop convoy of caiques escorted by one or two torpedo boats 18 miles north of Canea. The caiques, which were crowded with German soldiers, were engaged for two and a half hours. R.D.F. and A.S.V.* proved invaluable in leading our forces on to fresh targets. In all, one or two steamers, at least a dozen caiques, a small pleasure steamer and a steam yacht were either sunk or left burning. One of the escorting torpedo boats, after firing torpedoes at our cruisers, was damaged by gunfire from DIDO and finally blown up by a broadside from AJAX. It is estimated that the vessels sunk carried about 4,000 German troops.

24. After taking a further sweep to the east and north, R.A.D. turned west at 0330/22nd giving his force a rendezvous for 0600/22nd about 30 miles west of Crete. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's intentions had been for Forces C and D to work to the northward, commencing 0530/22nd, if there were no developments during the night (the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's signal timed 1843 of 21st May). The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean later amplified this by ordering Forces C and D to join company and sweep to within 25 miles of Milo to locate convoys (the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's signal timed 0402/22nd May). The latter message did not reach R.A.D. until after he had withdrawn outside the Aegean. R.A.D. only took the decision to withdraw after careful consideration. DIDO had expended 70 per cent. of her A.A. ammunition (22 per cent. having been used up between 0600 and 0930 on the 21st May). ORION had expended 62 per cent. and AJAX 58 per cent. R.A.D. felt that his force might well find itself unable to deal with the further expected scale of air attack. He reported the result of his attack on the convoy to the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, adding that in view of the serious shortage of A.A. ammunition he was joining Force A1 (the Rear Admiral (D), Mediterranean's signal timed 0405 of 22nd May).

25. On receipt of R.A.D.'s 0405 of 22nd May, reporting the A.A. ammunition shortage, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, ordered Force D to return to Alexandria with all despatch (the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's signal timed 0716/22nd May).

22nd May, 1941.

26. At daylight on the 22nd May the position was as follows:—

(a) Force A1 was about 45 miles south west of the Kithera Channel steering towards the north west.

(b) Force B was joining Force A1.

(c) Force C, having reached a position off Heraklion at 0400 was now sweeping to the north westward in search of convoys of caiques.

(d) Force D was about 30 miles west of the Kithera Channel steering to join Force A1, but were shortly to receive orders from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, to return to Alexandria with all despatch.

* Footnote: R.D.F.—Radio Direction Finding.
A.S.V.—Radar equipment in aircraft.