

were ordered to enter harbour in the order motor launches, minesweepers, CAIRO, merchant ships, and destroyers and at 2006 I ordered the Senior Officer, Minesweepers (SPEEDY) to take the minesweepers and motor launches under his orders and to proceed ahead.

50. By the time CAIRO reached the entrance to the swept channel it was dark and minesweepers except for one of the Hythe class were out of sight. This minesweeper proceeded ahead of CAIRO and appeared to be steering somewhat to starboard of the proper course. On sighting the first mark boat flashing "V", CAIRO hauled round and led the merchant ships up the marked channel until reaching the last mark.

51. TROILUS was then ordered to proceed ahead to comply with the Vice-Admiral, Malta's berthing signal and CAIRO stopped off the entrance. ORARI following closely behind TROILUS also proceeded into harbour ahead of me and was mined about 2 cables from the breakwater. She was able to proceed up harbour.

Air Co-operation.

52. From 0930 on 15th June, long-range fighters from Malta gave continuous cover to the convoy, except for two short periods when fighters had been heavily engaged and had used up their petrol and ammunition and had had to return to base early. To have maintained this escort at such a considerable distance from base, must have entailed a very heavy strain on the resources at Malta. The timing of the relieving flights was excellent. The pilots showed great dash in attacking the enemy, never hesitating to follow through anti-aircraft fire to prevent deliberate attacks being delivered.

Remarks on the Passage of a Convoy to Malta from the Westward.

53. The passage entails a period of two days and one night when the convoy is within range of heavy scale air attacks. I do not propose to remark on the problem as it affects the protection from surface forces.

54. During Operation "Harpoon" Force T and the convoy were subjected to a series of heavy air attacks on the 14th June. Fighters from the carriers and gunfire from the fleet prevented the enemy scoring more than one success against the convoy (TANIMBAR) but it is emphasised that during this period the force of the enemy attacks was directed more against the carriers than the merchant ships.

55. The most critical period of the passage is likely to be from daylight on the final day until the convoy has reached a position where short-range fighters based on Malta can give it cover. It is important therefore that as many long-range fighters as possible should be provided to protect the convoy during this time.

56. With the heavy scale of air attack which the enemy is capable of launching in this area I do not consider we can rely on fighters, however numerous, being able to prevent a proportion of the enemy's dive bombers delivering attacks. The enemy tactics appear to be to break his formations some distance away and for individual aircraft or small groups to attack from different sectors.

57. It is apparent therefore that merchant ships in convoy must rely on their own close range armament for protection against dive bombing. The enemy evidently has a healthy respect for our fire for he seldom appeared to press home his attacks to a close enough range to ensure hitting, but the danger from near misses is very considerable.

58. During the final day of "Harpoon" three merchant ships in convoy were lost due to enemy air action. Of these, CHANT received three direct hits, but BURDWAN and KENTUCKY were, I believe, not touched but disabled by near misses. But for the enemy surface force, both of these ships might have been brought in.

(Signed) C. C. HARDY,

Captain, R.N.,
Senior Officer, Force X.

OPERATION "PEDESTAL"

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 25th August, 1942 by Vice-Admiral E. N. Syfret, C.B., Flag Officer Commanding, Force F.

H.M.S. NELSON,

25th August, 1942.

REPORT ON OPERATION "PEDESTAL"

Be pleased to lay before the Board the following report on Operation "Pedestal" which included Operations "Berserk," "Bellows" and "Ascendant."*

2. In compliance with Admiralty instructions I disembarked from H.M.S. CANTON at Takoradi on 7th July, and accompanied by my Staff Officer (Operations), Commander A. H. Thorold, O.B.E., R.N., proceeded by air to the United Kingdom, arriving on 13th July.

3. On arrival at the Admiralty, discussions regarding the planning of the Operations "Pedestal," "Berserk" and "Ascendant" were held with Rear-Admiral A. L. St. G. Lyster, C.B., C.V.O., D.S.O., Rear-Admiral H. M. Burrough, C.B., D.S.O., and the Naval Staff.

4. On the return of NELSON and RODNEY from Freetown my flag was transferred to NELSON and I joined that ship at Scapa on 27th July. This enabled me to convene a conference on 29th July of Flag and Commanding Officers of those naval forces† destined for "Pedestal" which were then assembled at Scapa, at which the orders for the operation were gone through in detail.

5. On 31st July the Rear-Admiral, Aircraft Carriers, Home Fleet sailed from Scapa in VICTORIOUS with ARGUS, SIRIUS and destroyers to rendezvous with EAGLE and

Admiralty footnotes:

* Operation "Berserk"—an aircraft carrier co-operation exercise (*vide* paragraph 5).

Operation "Bellows"—a reinforcement of R A F. at Malta by Spitfires (*vide* paragraph 9)

Operation "Ascendant"—the sailing of a small convoy from Malta to Gibraltar under the cover of Operation "Pedestal" (*vide* paragraph 43)

† For composition of these forces see Appendix 'A'.