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THE CARRIER BORNE AIRCRAFT ATTACK ON KIRKENES AND PETSAMO.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 12th September, 1941, by Admiral Sir John C. Tovey, K.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet.

Home Fleet.

12th September, 1941.

Forwarded. The material results of this operation were small and the losses heavy. This had been expected. The heaviest losses occurred in the squadrons from the VICTORIOUS and there is no doubt that some of the survivors felt that an attack on such poor targets against heavy opposition was not justified and their morale was rather shaken until they appreciated the political necessity for the operation.

2. Attacks by low performance aircraft in broad daylight where fighter opposition is present can only hope to achieve results commensurate with their losses if complete surprise is obtained. On this occasion the force was extremely fortunate in the weather conditions which allowed it to make the long approach to the flying-off position without being seen; but the good fortune did not last quite long enough, and they were reported by an enemy aircraft just before the Striking Force left.

3. It would perhaps have been better to time the attack to take place during the night, even in this region of perpetual summer daylight, in the hope that the enemy reconnaissance and defences would then be less alert. This would also have avoided an approach directly into the sun.

4. The lack of enterprise on the part of the enemy which enabled the force to withdraw

without being attacked by aircraft is encouraging.

5. I concur in the remarks of the Rear Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, in paragraph 53 of his report. The lack of time for training and preparation was mainly responsible for such small errors in execution as took place. I concur also in paragraph 54. It was not possible for the force to provide its own reconnaissance without sacrificing the vital factor of surprise. I consider it essential that steps should be taken to remedy the present complete lack of air reconnaissance in Northern and Northwestern Norway.

6. With reference to paragraph 52 of the report of the Rear Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, the importance of the Command being in the carrier in purely air operations is appreciated; but, although the question did not arise on this occasion, it is considered preferable in the case of surface attack that the Senior Officer should be in a ship of the supporting force.

7. The gallantry of the aircraft crews, who knew before leaving that their chance of surprise had gone and that they were certain to face heavy odds, is beyond praise. The conduct of the operation by the Rear Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, the handling of ships by their Commanding Officers in most difficult conditions, the keenness and efficiency of all officers and men, especially of the deck handling parties in the carriers, are much to be commended. I trust that the encouragement to the morale of our Allies was proportionately great.

(Signed) JACK C. TOVEY,

Admiral,
Commander-in-Chief.

A

H.M.S. DEVONSHIRE.

15th August, 1941.

Operation "E.F." was carried out with the object of making attacks by carrier-borne aircraft on German shipping in the waters adjacent to Kirkenes (Norway) and Petsamo (Finland).

Forces Taking Part.

DEVONSHIRE	INGLEFIELD
(Flag of Rear Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron).	(Captain (D), 3rd Destroyer Flotilla).
SUFFOLK	INTREPID
	ICARUS
FURIOUS	ESCAPADE
VICTORIOUS	ECLIPSE
	ECHO
R.F.A. BLACK	ACTIVE
RANGER*	ANTHONY
	ANTELOPE
	ACHATES

2. ADVENTURE was placed under the orders of the Rear Admiral Commanding, First Cruiser Squadron, so that she might make her passage to North Russia under cover of the forces taking part in Operation "E.F."

Narrative.

22nd July.

3. Force "Q", consisting of ECLIPSE, ECHO, and BLACK RANGER, left Scapa at 0001 on 22nd July and proceeded to Seidisfiord†, where the destroyers fuelled from R.F.A. WAR SUDRA, and the Force then proceeded to the rendezvous at Position "X" (70 degs. 28 mins. N., 08 degs. 00 mins. E.).

23rd July.

4. ADVENTURE left Scapa at 0030 on 23rd July and arrived at Seidisfiord before Force "P".

5. Force "P", consisting of DEVONSHIRE, SUFFOLK, FURIOUS, VICTORIOUS, INTREPID, ESCAPADE, ANTHONY, ACHATES, ACTIVE and ANTELOPE, sailed from Scapa at 2300 on Wednesday, 23rd July, and proceeded at 20 knots to Seidisfiord. A/S† air escort was provided by the Commander-in-Chief, Rosyth.

24th July.

6. At 0856 on the 24th DEVONSHIRE detected an aircraft approaching. A fighter patrol was flown off from FURIOUS but it quickly became obvious that DEVONSHIRE had detected the A/S patrol. The incident was of value in that it brought out various small points of co-operation between R.D.F. ships** and the two aircraft carriers. One Fulmar landed on when FURIOUS was stern to wind and crashed.

7. The whole of this day was very overcast. In the afternoon visibility decreased and varied from one mile to five and it was not possible

Admiralty footnotes:—

* An Admiralty oil tanker.

† Seidisfiord—on the east coast of Iceland.

‡ A/S—Anti Submarine.

** R.D.F. ships—those ships fitted with radar equipment.

to operate an A/S patrol. I regarded this as rather a blessing as it reduced the possibility of our being sighted by enemy aircraft.

25th July.

8. At 0258 ACHATES, which was starboard ship of the screen, struck a mine. ANTHONY immediately went to her assistance, and ACHATES reported that she was badly damaged forward but that her engines would still work. The Squadron at the same time was turned away, and soon after, as it became thicker, it was obvious that with an uncertain position Seidisfiord could not be made in safety. I accordingly turned to the southward looking for clear weather, and after crossing the hundred fathom line turned to the westward at 0730.

9. The coast was sighted at 0833 but the exact position could not be ascertained as it was shrouded in shifting fog and only the mountain tops were occasionally visible. The Force was turned to the northward and later to the north-eastward on soundings. A destroyer was sent inshore at 0951 to try to identify the land, and about 1100 an aircraft was flown off. At about 1130 ANTHONY and ACHATES were sighted. The tow had just parted, and they were then about 40 miles from Seidisfiord.

10. It had been my original intention to send VICTORIOUS and SUFFOLK into Reydarfiord,* but I decided that it was unwise to leave them to make this difficult entrance under the prevailing conditions. At 1400 the Force was off Seidisfiord. The coast was still completely shrouded in fog, and INTREPID was sent in and told to proceed with great caution and endeavour to find the entrance, of which she was given the approximate bearing. At 1415 Glettinganes Light was sighted and it was possible to fix our position. The Force then proceeded into Seidisfiord, DEVONSHIRE and FURIOUS anchoring above the minefield, and VICTORIOUS and SUFFOLK joining ADVENTURE near the entrance to the fiord.

11. An A/S patrol was carried out by destroyers in the mouth of the fiord. On anchoring I was told by the Examination Officer, Lieut. R. P. B. Veal, R.N.R., that a U-boat had been operating in the neighbourhood during the preceding two or three days. I was surprised that I had no information of this from the Admiral Commanding, Iceland, but I supposed he thought it was a false report. My investigations, however, did not at all convince me that it was false and I ordered VICTORIOUS, SUFFOLK and ADVENTURE to move further up the fiord where they had to anchor in forty fathoms. In the fiord were two A/S trawlers, WASTWATER and SEALYHAM. I ordered these to carry out an A/S patrol off the entrance.

12. I had arrived at Seidisfiord eleven hours late on my programme and I decided that it would be better to hold over the whole operation for twenty-four hours and thus retain its original timing. This had been arranged so as

Admiralty footnote:—

* Reyðarfjörður—about 25 miles south of Seidisfiord

to pass the track of the Zenit Flight* at a time when it was least likely to be operating. ADVENTURE's departure was accordingly delayed to conform with the new programme. This also gave me time to oil SUFFOLK in addition to DEVONSHIRE, FURIOUS and the four destroyers, INTREPID, ESCAPADE, ANTELOPE and ACTIVE.

13. At midnight ACHATES, in tow of ANTHONY, arrived in harbour and berthed alongside DEVONSHIRE. Before sailing next day all possible assistance was given to her, arrangements were made for the accommodation of her ship's company, and such measures were taken as were necessary until the Salvage Officer arrived. In this the local military authorities gave great assistance.

26th July.

14. In addition to the destroyer patrol an A/S air patrol was arranged, using SUFFOLK's and DEVONSHIRE's Walruses.

15. ADVENTURE sailed at 1745 on the 26th July with ANTHONY in company. In view of the possible presence of an enemy submarine in the neighbourhood I considered it unsafe to send her unescorted, at 15 knots. ADVENTURE had orders to send ANTHONY back after 24 hours. An air A/S patrol from SUFFOLK was also told off to accompany her to the limit of its endurance.

16. Force "P" sailed from Seidisfiord at 2300 on the 26th July at 20 knots. An A/S air patrol had been asked for from the Admiral Commanding, Iceland, and on leaving Seidisfiord this was provided by a Northrop. The patrol was later to have been taken over by a Catalina, but as the weather closed down the Catalina was not seen.

27th July.

17. At 0345 the Force ran into fog. This continued, except for short intervals, until the afternoon, after which the visibility varied from two to ten miles with low cloud overhead.

28th July.

18. Position "B", where ADVENTURE should have been overtaken, was reached at 0200 on 28th July. Some time previously the Force had been spread five miles apart with the R.D.F. cruisers† on the flanks, thus covering a front of about 30 miles. Nothing was seen of ADVENTURE until 0550, and the Squadron proceeded at 15 knots towards Position "X". During the period of thick fog I had come to the conclusion that my orders for Force "Q" might produce an uncomfortable situation if there was fog at "X".

I had accordingly at 2012 on 27th signalled amended instructions to ECLIPSE regarding the use of D/F‡ procedure in such weather conditions.

Force "P" was a little ahead of its programme and I expected to meet Force "Q" about 1200. Up till this time no sights had been obtained, and not only was the position of Force "P" doubtful but I knew that Force "Q's" would also be very doubtful.

Admiralty footnotes:—

* The Zenit Flight—a routine German meteorological aircraft reconnaissance.

† R.D.F. cruisers—those fitted with radar equipment.

‡ D/F—direction finding by W/T.

19. On arrival in the vicinity of Position "X" a search was commenced. While so doing the sun appeared and sights were obtained, and the search was re-arranged. The Squadron was spread to cover a front of about 40 miles, with aircraft patrolling on the wings and ahead. At 1515 Force "Q" was sighted some twenty miles ahead. With Force "Q" was Captain (D), 3rd Destroyer Flotilla, in INGLEFIELD and ICARUS, who had been sent to replace ACHATES and ANTHONY.

20. Oiling then took place as follows. DEVONSHIRE gave 60 tons each to ECHO and ECLIPSE who had been the escort for Force "Q" and had filled up recently from BLACK RANGER. SUFFOLK oiled ESCAPADE and INTREPID with 150 tons each, and BLACK RANGER was ordered to oil ADVENTURE. Oiling commenced at about 1820 but unfortunately the wind was from the south-west and the oiling course was therefore directly opposite to the future course. During oiling FURIOUS and VICTORIOUS acted independently and maintained an A/S patrol in the air.

29th July.

21. I estimated from the time taken to oil the first destroyer that SUFFOLK would complete oiling at 0130. ADVENTURE had only 310 tons to take, but at 0022 she reported she had received only 150 tons and that it would take another 16 hours at her present rate of oiling to complete. She put down the slow rate to the cooling of the oil. The temperature of the sea was 50 degs. I did not consider that I could afford this time and I therefore told her to discontinue oiling at 0130. At 0058 FURIOUS reported fog ahead and I immediately gave orders for ADVENTURE to cast off. She was then 130 tons short.

22. At that time the Force was spread about, DEVONSHIRE was close to BLACK RANGER and ADVENTURE, SUFFOLK seven or eight miles away to the south-westward, FURIOUS and VICTORIOUS with two aircraft up were five miles to the southward. Thick fog was met almost immediately. Previous to this the carriers and ADVENTURE had been told that the Force would be turned to 050 degs. at 15 knots at 0130. On entering the fog I made by syren "course 050 degs.", and turned to that course myself. I also made course and speed by low power W/T. As I was uncertain of the reception of this signal, which was broadcast, I also made a wireless signal to shore addressed Force "P" giving a rendezvous at 0300 on 30th July in Position "C", allowing a speed of 15 knots to that position.

23. Nothing more was seen of the Squadron until 0900 on the 29th when the aircraft carriers formed up, followed by SUFFOLK and 6 destroyers at 1047. At that time visibility was only about 1 mile but it shortly increased to about four or five miles. I was glad to learn that VICTORIOUS had succeeded in landing on her aircraft. The Force had been largely kept together by R.D.F.* and this showed of what immense value R.D.F. can be in such a situation. ADVENTURE was not sighted until 2150 that night by which time visibility had increased to ten miles. She was some distance astern.

Admiralty footnote:—

* R.D.F.—radar.

30th July.

The Force passed through Position "C" about 0300 on the 30th July and ADVENTURE was detached. As she was only one hour behind her programme I did not consider it necessary to make an amended time for her rendezvous.

24. The weather continued overcast and from the point of view of evasion it could hardly have been better; the conditions were such that it was extremely unlikely that the Force would be sighted by aircraft. My experience of the weather had made me realise the possibility that fog might come down in the middle of flying-off. I therefore made a plan by which one carrier operated on one side of a line parallel to the wind through the flying-off position and the other carrier on the other side, and I arranged that, so far as possible, DEVONSHIRE and VICTORIOUS should operate on the inshore side of this line, thus giving FURIOUS a clear run to seaward. After discussion with VICTORIOUS the original Position "M" was decided on for the flying-off position and a position 30 miles, 040 degs. from Position "M" was fixed for flying-on. I also made 1400 the zero hour, half an hour later than my original intention.

25. During the approach German destroyer wireless signals had been heard, and by the use of the HF/DF set* in INGLEFIELD it had been possible to place them as operating off Tana Fiord†. At one time I had an idea that they were escorting a convoy towards Kirkenes, but eventually came to the conclusion that they were probably hunting a Russian submarine off Tana Fiord. Considerable interference was also experienced on the R.D.F. This seemed to come from a station of sorts at Vardo. As we approached the coast R.D.F. transmission was stopped as I felt it was possible that it might lead to our detection.

26. The weather was at first favourable, overcast, low clouds and visibility not too good, but about 1200 the clouds thinned and finally cleared away with good visibility. Still, the Force had not been sighted and there appeared every reason to hope that the attack would be launched without it being detected. The wind was off shore and this facilitated the approach. These hopes, however, were doomed. At 1346, just as FURIOUS was flying off two Hurricanes, which had to be got off the deck before her T.S.Rs.‡ could fly off, an He.111 was sighted. An enemy report was made by this aircraft and from that moment the German destroyers operating off Tana Fiord ceased to transmit. I considered it was too late to call off the attack and it was accordingly launched as originally arranged.

27. Detailed reports of the attacks are given in FURIOUS's and VICTORIOUS's reports attached (Appendices I and II). VICTORIOUS

flew off twenty T.S.Rs. in one range, followed by twelve Fulmars eighteen minutes later. FURIOUS commenced ten minutes before VICTORIOUS by flying off four Hurricanes and nine T.S.Rs. These were followed by a second range of nine T.S.Rs. and finally by six Fulmars.

28. The Striking Force went into the attack as planned at 1429 (Z + 29), followed seven minutes later by the fighters. Three of the Fulmars from VICTORIOUS and the four Hurricanes were kept for the protection of the Force. During the attack the Hurricanes were refuelling in VICTORIOUS.

29. The Striking Force knew before leaving that the Force had been sighted and that they must meet fierce opposition. Nevertheless the attack was pressed home courageously and gallantly in face of great odds and VICTORIOUS's aircraft suffered heavy casualties.

30. The material results were disappointing. The attack by VICTORIOUS's aircraft was thought to have achieved results as follows:—

BREMSE.			Two torpedo hits.
2 Merchant Ships.			At least one torpedo hit each.
2 Merchant Ships.			Probably one torpedo hit each.
Aircraft.	Certain.	Probable.	Damaged.
ME. 109	1	1	—
ME. 110	2	1	—
JU. 87	1	—	1

It has since been learnt that BREMSE was not hit.

31. FURIOUS had the misfortune to find Petsamo empty of shipping and her torpedoes had to be expended on easily repairable wooden quays, but it is probable that her bombs did considerable damage to the oil tanks and ship yard.

32. Captain (D), 3rd Destroyer Flotilla in INGLEFIELD was sent shorewards to visibility distance to act as a guide to returning aircraft and remained there until completion of flying-on.

33. At 1612 aircraft were seen to be returning from the attack and it soon became apparent that many were missing from VICTORIOUS. At 1735 VICTORIOUS reported that she was still short of eleven Albacores and two Fulmars, who had petrol till about 1900. FURIOUS had completed landing on at 1657 and reported the loss of two Fulmars and one Albacore. I informed the Force that I should remain in the vicinity until 1900.

34. During the flying-off and flying-on operations, the two divisions of the Force had operated independently, the cruisers conforming to the carriers' movements. VICTORIOUS had orders to remain as near as possible to FURIOUS. These operations were very satisfactorily carried out and at no time were the carriers more than six or seven miles apart.

Admiralty footnotes:—

* HF/DF set—High Frequency Direction Finding equipment.

† Tana Fiord—northwest of Kirkenes and Petsamo and about 90 miles from the area in which the aircraft carriers were to operate.

‡ T.S.R.—Torpedo/Spotter/Reconnaissance aircraft

35. At 1900 the Force withdrew to the northward. No attempt was made by the enemy to locate the Force or to attack it. I had previously arranged for a Walrus aircraft from SUFFOLK to be available for picking up any survivors, but the only reports of aircraft down were from FURIOUS. Two of her crews were known to be in the water in position 260 degs. Heinasaari 6 miles, but as this was only five miles off the shore and a long way from my position it would have entailed fighter protection and remaining for several hours longer near the flying-off position. I did not therefore consider it justifiable to send the Walrus in.

31st July.

36. The activity of the destroyers off Tana Fiord had made me suspicious that they might be using Smalfjord as an anchorage for supply ships or other such vessels. As this might form a possible target for a second attack I arranged for a Fulmar with its distinguishing marks erased as far as possible to reconnoitre this fiord during the night. Accordingly at 0316 on the 31st July one Fulmar was flown off from VICTORIOUS. This Fulmar returned at 0455 and reported that she had found four twin-engined aircraft patrolling off the entrance and had not therefore been able to reconnoitre the fiord. Five minutes after this Fulmar returned the Squadron ran into thick fog.

37. FURIOUS's fuel situation at this time made it necessary for her to return immediately, as she would have little more than 500 tons on arrival at Seidisfjord and had no margin for possible loss of fuel due to damage. I accordingly arranged to complete VICTORIOUS as far as possible with aircraft from FURIOUS. Owing to the fog this could not be commenced until 1215 when it cleared sufficiently to enable the operation to proceed.

38. Whilst transfer was in progress the Force was sighted by a Dornier 18. At about 1300 FURIOUS flew off two Hurricanes which shot it down, but not before it had had time to make a report of our presence. As the whole Force was then steering west in company I was not unduly disturbed as I wanted the enemy to think that the Force was returning together.

39. Transfer of aircraft was completed at 1530 and course was then altered to 305 degs., i.e., to the northward, in order to get further away from the coast and avoid observation by the enemy. At 1633 a report of another aircraft was received, and fighters were again flown off, but saw nothing and returned. This report of aircraft, I am sure, was false, and due to an inoffensive skua gull.

1st August.

40. The course of 305 degs. was held until 0001 on the 1st August, when FURIOUS* was detached in a position 40 miles north-east of Bear Island. This was to be followed by another signal in naval cypher to Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, on H/F from such a position as to give the impression that she was proceeding towards the Faeroes. This second signal would be made using a naval general call sign, requesting that my delivery group

be included in certain signals on H.D. broadcast. The object of these signals was to deceive the enemy into thinking that the whole Force was on its way back and thus to disguise my continued presence in the area. The making of these signals was governed by the proviso that they were only to be made in conditions of low visibility, since they were liable to lead to FURIOUS being found by aircraft in which case the whole ruse would have been exposed. This in fact occurred and she was sighted four hours after making the first signal. It is probable therefore that the enemy had a shrewd suspicion that I was still about.

41. On parting with FURIOUS I remained to the north-north-east of Bear Island and oiled destroyers during the course of the 1st August. I did not consider in any case that an attack was possible on this day as the chance of surprise did not arise until sufficient time had elapsed for us to have left the area.

42. I had asked VICTORIOUS to prepare plans for possible operations against Tromsø, Hammerfest, Tana Fiord, Honningsvåg or shipping along the coast and I wished very much that I was in VICTORIOUS at this time so as to be able to discuss the project at first hand. The Captain of the VICTORIOUS informed me that he had an urgent letter to send over and I decided to visit him instead. I accordingly transferred to INGLEFIELD by DEVONSHIRE's crane, and intended to board VICTORIOUS in a similar manner. Unfortunately INGLEFIELD appeared to be sucked in towards VICTORIOUS and fouled one of her gantries, which smashed INGLEFIELD's .5 machine gun. I therefore abandoned the project and exchanged letters with the Captain of the VICTORIOUS.

2nd August.

43. DEVONSHIRE oiled the three destroyers, giving them 200 tons each, and the whole operation took 13 hours. The Force then proceeded to a suitable position from which the attack on Tromsø might be made, passing 40 miles north of Bear Island at 0342 on the 2nd August. Visibility was good and Bear Island was clearly visible.

44. At 1033 on 2nd August a signal was received from Force "A" addressed to TARTAR reporting that they were being shadowed by aircraft. At that time Force "A" was 138 degs., 148 miles distant from Force "P" and on a similar course. VICTORIOUS stated that fighter support could be given from a distance of 50 miles, and I accordingly informed Force "A" of this fact and of my position, course and speed, by W/T using low power.

45. Force "A", which had previously been steering to the south, altered course to the north at 1245, on receipt of my signal and reported that they were still being shadowed. I followed suit with Force "P" and turned in towards Force "A" so that at 1352 I was 50 miles away. Force "A" were also informed of the fighter wave so that they could direct them. Two Fulmars were flown off at 1335 just as Force "A" reported that they were not wanted, and almost at the same time VICTORIOUS reported aircraft two miles away by R.D.F. and a doubtful sighting. Two more aircraft were flown off for the protection

Admiralty footnote:—

* FURIOUS with SUFFOLK and Destroyers returned to base in advance of the remainder, reaching Seidisfjord at 0830 on 3rd August.

of Force "P." The first pair of fighters located Force "A" and then returned. Nothing further was seen of any shadower. In the interchange of signals, Force "A" used C.S.I.'s call-sign on one occasion and it seems probable that owing to the use of power necessary for reception at over 100 miles, both forces were detected by D/F at this time. I am not certain that Force "P" was actually sighted but it seems likely that the aircraft shadowing Force "A" took a further look to seaward before returning to its base, and visibility at this time was such that it may well have sighted Force "P." During this period homing signals from shore stations were heard and detected by D/F, and I think the aircraft must have been at the limit of its endurance.

3rd August.

46. Force "A" having reported that it was proceeding to the northward and then towards Bear Island, I turned Force "P" to the south-west again to get towards a position approximately 300 miles off Tromsø in readiness for an attack on that place. Several signals had passed between me and VICTORIOUS on the subject of the attack and I came to the conclusion that the only satisfactory thing was to shift my flag. On the morning of the 3rd I informed VICTORIOUS that I intended to do so, and made arrangements to board her with certain of my staff in DEVONSHIRE's cutter. Unfortunately it blew up very hard and I did not consider the weather suitable for a cutter in view of the inexperienced crews that are nowadays available. I accordingly flew over in the Walrus with my Flag-Lieutenant at 1415.

4th August.

47. In the course of the day the Force closed in towards the flying-off position, which had been fixed as 100 miles from Tromsø. During the last two hours a speed of 25 knots was maintained. Three Fulmars were flown off at 0106 on the 4th August with orders to attack Tromsø, the sea-plane station and any shipping being given as their objective. After flying-off, the Force moved to the westward at 20 knots for two hours to the flying-on position.

48. At 0303 the first Fulmar returned, followed by the second at 0325. Both these machines reported that they had seen someone bale out of the remaining machine and there seemed little doubt that it had been brought down. The Flight had found two armed trawlers just short of Tromsø and had attacked them. It was the Flight Leader who had been lost, and he appears to have continued the attack too long. As the attack was made out of sight of Tromsø no information of shipping in the harbour was obtained.

49. The Force withdrew at 25 knots for two hours, and reducing to 20 knots at 0600 set course for Seidisfjord. I was unable to pass the report of the attack until 1700 on the 4th August. At the same time I informed the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, that I did not require Force "Q" and requested that they should be ordered to return unless required for ADVENTURE.

5th August.

50. During 5th August various exercises were carried out by - DEVONSHIRE and

VICTORIOUS and her aircraft. The Force arrived at Seidisfjord at 1800 on the 5th August, and I transferred my flag to DEVONSHIRE. The Force completed with oil from the oilers ALDERSDALE and WAR SUDRA.

6th-7th August.

51. At 1500 on the 6th August the Force sailed for Scapa. An A/S patrol was maintained by VICTORIOUS during passage and air exercises were carried out on the forenoon of the 7th August. The Force arrived at Scapa late on the 7th August.

Command.

52. The experience of this operation brought out very clearly the importance of the Command being in the carrier when air operations are under consideration. For the conduct of an operation already planned and discussed it is not so necessary, though even then there is much to be said for it as otherwise a large degree of discretion may have to be given to the carrier Captains at the last moment. Captain Bovell* was in this case put in a difficult position and in my opinion acted very properly on the knowledge at his disposal in putting forward the view he did.

Planning and Preparations.

53. By force of circumstances this operation was carried out in a hurry. Neither VICTORIOUS nor FURIOUS was really ready for such an operation, and some of the pilots had never deck-landed before. During the six days in which the operation had to be planned VICTORIOUS was frequently at sea exercising, as also was DEVONSHIRE for some days. FURIOUS was only in company for two days and was at sea exercising most of that time. This made it very difficult for any consultations to be held as to details of the plan. The capabilities of the two carriers were so different that the scheme of fly-off presented considerable difficulties and was only decided at the last minute.

Intelligence.

54. For operations in this area to be effective in doing material damage, far better intelligence than was available in this case is necessary. The presence of such a force must always be an embarrassment to the enemy, but without intelligence it is like looking for a needle in a haystack to try to locate the small amount of shipping that may be strung out along the inner leads and open sea between say, Narvik and Kirkenes. That much can be done in this way I am certain, if the appropriate force is employed and routine reconnaissance can be made.

Conclusion.

55. The brunt of the operation fell upon the personnel of the naval aircraft and the carriers. The way in which the attack was pressed deserves high praise and I do not doubt that amongst those lost are many who deserve recognition.

56. The ships engaged in the operation were ably handled by their Captains and their ready co-operation called for a minimum of signalling. Sudden fog several times produced conditions when timely orders were impossible, but

Admiralty footnote:—

* Commanding H.M.S. VICTORIOUS.

I was always able to feel complete confidence in their actions. During flying on and off the divisions were operated independently by the carriers with great efficiency. The destroyers under Captain Todd* as usual carried out their duties with great efficiency and particularly the oiling from cruisers and BLACK RANGER.

(Signed) W. F. WAKE-WALKER,
Rear Admiral Commanding,
First Cruiser Squadron.

APPENDIX I.

H.M.S. FURIOUS.

5th August, 1941.

OPERATION "E.F."

Attack by FURIOUS' Aircraft on Petsamo on Wednesday, 30th July, 1941.

I have the honour to forward herewith a report of Operation "E.F."

NARRATIVE.

Flying Off.

2. Zero hour for the Operation was 1400B/30.

The T.S.R. striking forces from both carriers were due to leave Force "P" for their objectives at 1429B.

3. At 1349 one enemy aircraft was sighted right ahead. The Hurricanes of the first range, which was at that time being flown off, endeavoured to locate it but without success.

4. The aircraft were flown off in three ranges, the last aircraft leaving the deck at 1436. The total time taken to fly off all aircraft was one minute inside a programme based on the best times for ranging, etc., which had been noted in rehearsals.

Passage to the Objective.

5. 812 Squadron left at 1425B, 817 Squadron at 1432B, and 800 Squadron at 1442B, the ship then being in approximate position 70 degs. 42 mins. N., 33 degs. 00 mins. E.

6. On passage, FURIOUS Squadrons passed, as planned, twelve miles West of Majakkaniemi, flying low on the water in an effort to avoid visual and R.D.F. detection. They climbed whilst proceeding to the entrance to the Gulf of Petsamo. The Squadrons had concentrated, 812 Squadron leading and followed by 817 Squadron, both at about 2,000 feet, with 800 Squadron above and astern of them.

7. At approximately 1450B, single engined monoplane aircraft were observed by FURIOUS Squadrons flying over Majakkaniemi at a height of 1,500-2,000 feet. It is thought, but not yet confirmed, that these were Fulmars of 809 Squadron from VICTORIOUS; if this was the case, presumably they had lost their way. By flying above the agreed height and over the land, they frustrated all efforts to evade detection.

8. One Fulmar of 80 Squadron forced landed in position 260 degrees, six miles from Heinasaari Island Light with smoke pouring from its engine. The crew were seen to get into their dinghy.

The Approach.

9. At the entrance to the Gulf of Petsamo, the bomber sub-flights were detached and proceeded independently.

10. The Torpedo Striking Force proceeded to Huutoniemi Point in sub-flights in line astern and then headed South, using the hills on the East side of the Gulf as cover until they were approximately due East of their targets. They then crossed the sky-line and came down on to the water as quickly as possible, using the background of the hills as cover during the attack.

11. It was the intention for 812 Squadron to proceed to the Trifona anchorage, had there been targets there, and for 817 Squadron to attack targets at Liinahamari. It was thus hoped that the torpedo attacks of these two Squadrons, developing from the East would be synchronised with that of the bomber force from the West.

In the event of there being no targets at Trifona, it was planned that both Squadrons should attack Liinahamari from the East, there being insufficient manoeuvring space for attacks on the harbour to be carried out from more than the one general direction.

12. The leader of 812 Squadron saw that Trifona anchorage was empty of shipping and led his Squadron to attack the jetties at Liinahamari, as no shipping was seen to be present. Thus all torpedo aircraft attacked from approximately the same direction, with the exception of three aircraft of 817 Squadron which approached from the South of Ristmiemi, one attacking the Swedish Quay and the other two a small ship which was a doubtful target of about five hundred tons. lying off Paksuniemi.

13. The bomber sub-flights, after being detached, proceeded to the West of Nurmensatti and approached over the lakes and behind the hills to the West of Liinahamari, whence they made their final approach along the line of targets from the ship repair yard to the oil tanks.

14. The fighter escort proceeded South, keeping to the West of the torpedo aircraft and climbing above them.

They patrolled to the Southward of the target area, keeping between it and the nearest aerodrome some fifteen miles to the South. They then acted in accordance with the general plan, in which, if no enemy aircraft were encountered, they were to assist the striking force by attacking ground targets with bombs and machine-gun fire, with the restriction that not more than half their ammunition was to be expended on ground targets.

The Attack.

15. There were no suitable ship targets for torpedoes at either Trifona or Liinahamari. One small ship off Paksuniemi was unsuccessfully attacked and a photograph reveals that another small ship, unseen by aircraft, was actually berthed alongside Number 1 pier. One torpedo was fired at this pier and seen to run. A second observer saw an explosion at this pier, but he also failed to see this ship.

Other than the above, there were only small harbour craft present at Liinahamari, and three motor-boats, possibly E-Boats.

Admiralty footnote:—

* Captain (D), 3rd Destroyer Flotilla.

The quays which formed the only alternative torpedo targets were mainly pile jetties, and it was problematical whether torpedoes fired at them would explode, but in all the cases observed, it appears that they did so.

16. The attack was carried out by all aircraft according to plan.

In only one case, where the pilot of an aircraft was grazed by a shell splinter at the time of releasing his torpedo, was the accuracy of the attack affected.

17. One Albacore was shot down by enemy fighters after making his attack, and one Fulmar which is missing is thought to have met the same fate.

One other Fulmar engaged an M.E.109 without definite result, and was in turn attacked by another M.E.109 which was driven off by means of a "Tommy" gun from the back seat.

Return to Ship.

18. On making their getaway out of the Fjord, several aircraft machine-gunned a small vessel near the entrance, gun positions, huts, etc.

19. Returning aircraft were landed on from 1615 to 1658. The time taken in landing on twenty-one aircraft, some of them in damaged condition, in forty-three minutes without any mishap was the result of good backing up by pilots and of good drill by the handling parties on deck and in the hangars.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS.

20. (a) *Attacking Force*:—

Twelve torpedo bombers.
Six bombers.
Six fighters.

(b) *Results obtained*:—

(i) *Torpedo*.—Two certain hits on New Quay (Number 2 Jetty). Two probable hits on other quays. Further possible hits on quays. Two small craft probably destroyed.

(ii) *Bomb*.—Damage to oil installation. At least one tank destroyed. Minor damage to ship repair yard. Fires started.

(c) *Casualties*:—

(i) *Aircraft*.—Three missing. Four damaged.

(ii) *Personnel*.—Three pilots missing. Two observers missing. Two air gunners missing.

General.

21. For the last nine months, *FURIOUS* has been employed as a Transport Carrier, and it was a tonic to all concerned to learn that once more she was to be used operationally.

22. A full scale rehearsal, as carried out by *VICTORIOUS* had to be abandoned as far as *FURIOUS* was concerned. No flying, except for action purposes, could be carried out on passage, owing to the necessity of conserving fuel.

23. On the day, the work of the Flight Deck Party and Squadron personnel, coupled with the close backing up by pilots when landing on, was excellent, and this alone enabled a most exacting programme, which allowed no latitude, to be adhered to in every detail.

24. The Squadrons carried out their plan without a hitch; their navigation was accurate and their timing was exact. Their air discipline was of a very high standard.

(Signed) A. G. TALBOT,
Captain, R.N.
Commanding Officer.

APPENDIX II.

H.M.S. VICTORIOUS.

30th July, 1941.

The following brief report of the part taken by aircraft from *H.M.S. VICTORIOUS* in Operation "E.F." is submitted.

2. A striking force consisting of 12 Albacores of No. 827 Squadron and 8 Albacores of No. 828 Squadron was flown off in one range at 1400 on 30th July. All aircraft were armed with torpedoes fitted with duplex pistols set to non-contact at 14 feet. At 1430 a fighter escort of 9 Fulmars of No. 809 Squadron, and a fighter patrol of 3 Fulmars of 809 Squadron was flown off, the former having been ordered to overtake the striking force en route for the objective and the latter to patrol over the Fleet.

3. The fighter escort on making a landfall proceeded at a height of 4,000 feet to a position between Renoy and Prestoy Islands where heavy anti-aircraft fire was encountered. It was therefore decided to circle this area in the hope of drawing the fire from the striking force.

4. Approximately ten minutes later at least three M.E.109s and six M.E.110s were seen approaching from the direction of Vadso and Kirkenes aerodromes.

5. During the ensuing combats two M.E.110s and one M.E.109 were shot down for certain and confirmed, and a further M.E.110 was possibly shot down. Two of this Squadron are missing, but the pilot of one was seen to escape by parachute.

6. 827 Squadron, on making a landfall at Rabachi peninsula, formed sub-flights astern, proceeded at low altitude down Jarfjord, climbed the intervening hills, and then attacked shipping in Bokfjord.

7. Five aircraft fired at the *BREMSE* and two hits were reported. The remaining aircraft fired at shipping anchored N.E. and N.W. of Prestoy. Torpedoes were observed running correctly towards two targets but owing to heavy fighter opposition encountered at this time it was impossible to observe the results. During the retirement heavy fighter opposition continued and one JU.87 was shot down for certain by a front gun, and a probable M.E.109 with a rear gun. Six Albacores were lost. The air gunner for whom the probable M.E.109 is claimed, died in the aircraft and was buried at sea after the aircraft had returned to the ship.

8. 828 Squadron which approached Rabachi peninsula about half a mile astern of the leading squadron, formed sub-flights in line astern and led away through the hills to attack shipping at the northern end of Bokfjord.

9. Two ships (of about 2,000 tons each) under way, were attacked by, it is thought five aircraft. Both ships were on fire when last seen. nothing was seen of the attacks made by the last three aircraft. Five out of the eight aircraft of this squadron were lost.

10. It is hoped that further damage was done by the aircraft which did not return, but observation was most difficult for all aircraft on account of the fighter interference.

General remarks.

11. The enemy reconnaissance aircraft sighted Force "P" at the most unfortunate moment, as it was too late to call off the attack and yet gave the enemy plenty of time to prepare for the arrival of the striking force. With all chance of surprise gone, and with a cloudless sky, heavy casualties were inevitable, yet the attack was pressed home with great determination and gallantry and I consider that the conduct of all who took part is deserving of the highest praise.

12. From a military point of view the attack was a failure as we lost eleven Albacores and two Fulmars and had eight Albacores damaged, while we shot down two M.E.110s, one M.E.109, one JU.87, probably one M.E.110 and one M.E.109 and damaged one JU.87. We also obtained hits with two torpedoes on BREMSE and at least one each on two Merchant Ships and probably one each on two more Merchant Ships. It is a pity that there were not more torpedo targets.

13. The fact that the Fighter Squadron climbed to 1,000 feet before reaching the

Ribachi peninsula might have led to their being detected by the enemy's R.D.F. and so giving away surprise. In the event, due to Force "P" having already been sighted, I do not think it mattered. It was none the less a mistake.

14. It is interesting to note that the Germans used all types of aircraft to engage our attacking force. It is reported by our aircraft crews that the JU.87s were armed with extra machine guns and possibly with cannon as well. It is much to the credit of the crews of our Fulmars that they shot down three enemy aircraft of superior types for the loss of only two Fulmars.

15. Should it be found necessary on a future occasion to carry out a similar attack, i.e. one where complete surprise is unlikely and where lack of reconnaissance leaves both the strength of the defence and the number of targets in doubt, it is suggested that there would be better chances of success by using a smaller force of T.S.R.s and a large force of fighters.

16. It was arranged to refuel the Hurricanes in VICTORIOUS while the striking force was away. Two of them would not start after refuelling and had to be kept on deck. The resulting congestion caused a delay in the landing-on programme just at the time when (but for lack of initiative) the German bombing attack should have developed. Thus this delay might have had serious consequences.

(Signed) H. C. BOVELL,

Captain, R.N.

Commanding Officer.

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