

6. At 1600, as an intercept had shown that the force might have been reported by enemy aircraft, course was altered to 320 degs. and at 1700 back to 290 degs.

7. At 1705, the force was sighted by 6 JU.52s escorted by one ME.110 on passage from Libya to Crete, by whom the force was reported. At 1745 course was altered to 270 degs. and at 1900 to 320 degs. and at 2000 to 285 degs. and thence by evasive steering, which avoided crossing the last reported mean line of advance to position "N".

8. At 1900 BEAUFORT closed the convoy from astern having arrived from Tobruk.

9. A speed of 12 knots was made good during the period 0930 on 21st March to 0800 on 22nd March.

10. Fighters were present from 0740 to 1715.

11. The force passed 3 miles south of position "N" at 0600 on 23rd March, steering 290 degs. to make contact with H.M. Ships PENELOPE and LEGION.

12. H.M. Ships PENELOPE (Captain A. D. Nicholl, D.S.O., R.N.) and LEGION were sighted at 0742 bearing 343 degs., and at 0750 course was altered to 250 degs. in view of P.36's report of 3 destroyers and heavy ships south of Taranto.

13. Shadowing by enemy aircraft commenced at 0935 at which time the first torpedo-bombing attack commenced. Raids continued from this time.

14. Own fighters were present from 0810 to 0900.

15. Two groups of enemy aircraft failed to locate the convoy and were searching for it 30 or 40 miles astern.

16. No zig-zag was carried out by the convoy after 0650 as it was considered essential to make the best speed. The escort carried out independent zig-zags.

17. At 0920 course was altered to 270 degs. to make more westing, and at 1220 to 250 degs. to make the probable enemy surface contact as late as possible.

18. At 1332 a JU.88 dropped 4 red flares ahead of the convoy—a probable indication that enemy surface forces were in the vicinity—though it was not thought that they should make contact before 1630 or 1700.

19. At 1410 EURYALUS reported smoke bearing 353 degs. This was not seen from CLEOPATRA. A further signal at 1417 said report was uncertain.

20. At 1230 Organisation No. 4* was assumed as it was decided that the convoy would not turn back but proceed to Malta even if enemy surface forces made contact. Destroyers had been ordered to raise steam for

Full Speed at 1400 (they had been at $\frac{1}{2}$ hour's notice for Full Speed).

A signal was made ordering Divisions to form up on a northerly course in the event of a contact being made.

PHASE I.

21. Reports

1427 "4 suspicious vessels bearing 040 degs." received from EURYALUS.

1427 "1 unknown bearing 010 degs. 12 miles" received from LEGION.

1429 Signal "ZLG" transmitted from CLEOPATRA (C.S.15).

1432 "4 unknown bearing 015 degs. 15 miles" received from LEGION.

1434 "3 battleships bearing 010 degs. 12 miles" transmitted from CLEOPATRA (C.S.15).

1506 "Enemy previously reported as battleships now believed to be cruisers" transmitted from C.S.15.

22. As soon as the enemy were reported the signal "ZLG" was made and carried out exactly as detailed in the operation orders.

The convoy turned away from the enemy to 210 degs. while all Divisional Leaders led out to the northward to concentrate by divisions.

During this phase of the action, LEGION joined the Fourteenth Destroyer Flotilla with the First Division at 1507 and remained with them for the rest of the day.

23. As soon as divisions were clear of the convoy to the northward, an easterly smoke-laying course was shaped—about 1435. The enemy opened fire at this time and the first splashes were seen well short about 1436.

Enemy disposition

24. The enemy are believed to have consisted of one eight-inch and three six-inch cruisers disposed abeam about 2 miles apart on a course of 200 degrees.

They turned beam on on a southeasterly course about 1436 and away about 1442 and then to the northwest, finally retiring on approximate course 010 degs. about 1501.

25. CLEOPATRA led the Fourth Division towards the enemy at 1444 and the Rear Admiral Commanding, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron's signal "Turn towards the enemy" was made at 1445.

26. CLEOPATRA and EURYALUS engaged one cruiser from 1456 to 1509 when the enemy passed out of range. The remaining divisions were fouled by smoke which was made continuously by all ships from 1433 until 1516. At 1507 a signal was made to Mediterranean Fleet in company "Enemy's course 010 degs."

27. One enemy cruiser turned to the west-northwestward about 1509 and engaged the Fourth Division from 1511 to 1515, straddling several times even after the division had retired into smoke. This was probably due to aircraft spotting. A few salvos were fired at this ship from 1511 to 1513 and she turned away at the same time as CLEOPATRA at 1515.

At 1535 the Rear Admiral Commanding, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron, reported to the Commander-in-Chief: "Enemy driven off".

28. Course was then shaped 235 degs. and Guides of Divisions disposed on a line of bearing 310 degs.—130 degs. $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles apart

* Admiralty footnote: Organisation No. 4 was as follows:—

1st Div.—JERVIS, KIPLING, KELVIN, KINGSTON (Destroyers).

2nd Div.—DIDO, PENELOPE (Cruisers), LEGION (Destroyer).

3rd Div.—ZULU, HASTY (Destroyers).

4th Div.—CLEOPATRA (flag of C.S.15), EURYALUS (Cruisers).

5th Div.—SIKH, LIVELY, HERO, HAVOCK (Destroyers).

6th Div.—CARLISLE (Cruiser), AVON VALE (Destroyer).

* The 6th Div. to be employed on smoke laying.