

At 0630 the first strike took off to attack Ishigaki airfields. This attack, and a further one flown off at 1230, left all the runways unserviceable.

At 0930 the second strike took off to attack Miyako airfields, where previous craters were found to be filled in and every endeavour had been made to keep the airfields unserviceable. This attack, together with another flown off at 1533, left all Miyako airfields out of action.

CAPS were left over both islands throughout the day; the one over Miyako being called up by a Japanese who invited our aircraft to return to base. Rocket-carrying Fireflies straffed a radar station at Miyako, and ground installations, barracks, and grounded aircraft generally were straffed. There was no airborne opposition over the targets and flak was moderate.

At 1700 bad height estimation was the cause of failure to intercept a bogey which crossed ahead of the Fleet from east to west.

At 1441 two divisions of fighters staggered in height and range got close to an erratic and fast moving bogey but were unable to find any target.

At 1505 a bogey was detected, range 9 miles, and followed from 25,000 feet to sea level where it disappeared. At about this time a large cloud of smoke was seen on the horizon and an unidentified twin was reported as sighted over the Fleet.

At 1536 fighters failed to find a 320 knot bogey closing from the westward, the bogey fading at 25 miles.

A possible explanation for these mysterious bogeys is that they were piloted flying bombs launched too far away and which failed to reach the Fleet before exhausting their fuel.

At 1722 Hellcats shot down a Myrt* which was apparently stalking an American Privateer search plane.

In the evening false alarms were caused by some of our fighters returning from the islands and in one case ship fire was opened on them due to an improper approach by the aircraft and faulty recognition by the ship.

In the afternoon a Seafire landing on INDEFATIGABLE bounced, cleared the barriers and crashed. The pilot was unhurt, but the plane wrecked an Avenger, damaged a Firefly, and knocked two ratings over the side. QUIBERON picked up one, but the other man was unfortunately not recovered.

In spite of having received no replenishment aircraft since 9th April and the lack of fighters consequently felt, A.C.I informed me that he considered a sixth operation period, if confined to one day, would be possible. I was happy therefore, in view of the sustained heavy enemy air attacks on our Fleetmates at and around Okinawa, to inform Commander 5th Fleet as follows:—

Continuing operations Sakishima tomorrow. Own losses light. Little enemy activity except anti-aircraft fire. If light losses continue, can strike final blow 19th April. Same Dumbo and submarine services needed.

A further signal altering the final strike date from 19th to 20th April was made to Commander

5th Fleet as A.C.I informed me that maintenance of aircraft necessitated two days' work in the fuelling area..

At dusk the Fleet disengaged to the south eastward and CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 2110.

The score for the day was:—

Enemy:

Destroyed—airborne 1, on ground 1; total 2.

Own:

Destroyed in combat 2, operationally 3; total 5.

17th April.

A.C.I assumed tactical command at 0520.

CAP was flown off at 0600 from position 23° 34' N 125° 38' E.

In view of the apparent success of yesterday's neutralisation, the number of bombers in the main strikes was reduced; the first strike taking off at 0630. First reports showed that considerable effort had been made to fill in the runway craters at Miyako but none at Ishigaki. Consequently no bombing strike was sent to Ishigaki. Of the three strikes sent to Miyako, the first two left all airfields unserviceable and the third attacked municipal buildings and barracks.

In this last attack an Avenger was shot down and one of the crew succeeded in baling out and alighted on the water 1½ miles from Hirara town. A Walrus was quickly flown off and rescued the airman, whilst a fighter escort kept down fire which was opened from the town.

CAPS were maintained over both islands, but reported no activity on any airfields, all of which remained unserviceable at the end of the day. No operational aircraft could be found on the ground.

At 0609 a few bogeys were detected to the north west of the Fleet. Fighters sent to investigate splashed one Zeke.

At 1627 bogeys were detected 110 miles west of the Fleet. Fighters intercepted at 55 miles and two out of 6 Zekes were shot down, the others escaping in cloud.

During the afternoon a Privateer American aircraft flying at zero feet between Ishigaki and Iriomote was momentarily mistaken for a bandit* and given a short burst at extreme range by Corsairs. No damage resulted. This unfortunate incident has since been cleared up with the U.S. authorities and the question of periodical U.S. search planes approaching Task Force 57 fully discussed. It is hoped that the arrangements made will obviate such incidents in the future.

At 1750 close range weapons in KING GEORGE V suddenly opened fire on what appeared to be a blazing aircraft diving vertically on the ship. It turned out to be a dropped tank from a Corsair overhead—both parties missed.

The score for the day was:—

Enemy:

Aircraft destroyed—airborne 3. Several small ships damaged.

Own:

Aircraft lost in combat 1.

Admiralty footnote:—

* Myrt—Japanese naval reconnaissance aircraft.

Admiralty footnote:—

* Bandit—enemy aircraft.