

astern of VALIANT. These aircraft were engaged in good time by the close range weapons of the battlefleet, without effect.

29. At 1235 large formations of aircraft were sighted approaching from the north. These were identified as JU.87 and 88 aircraft with German markings.

A very heavy, determined and skilful dive bombing attack developed on the fleet, mainly directed on ILLUSTRIOUS, and lasting for some ten minutes.

ILLUSTRIOUS was hit by six heavy bombs, and hauled out of line heavily on fire and with her steering gear out of action, but with her armament still in lively action.

WARSPITE sustained slight damage to her starboard bower anchor and hawsepipe.

At least two enemy aircraft were seen to be shot down by gunfire.

30. ILLUSTRIOUS reported that she was "badly hit" and making for Malta; but it was not until 1530 that she was got under control and steering steadily for Malta at 17 knots. In the meantime she was turning circles while the battlefleet was manoeuvred to maintain supporting distance from her. HASPY and JAGUAR were detached to screen her.

31. ILLUSTRIOUS's aircraft in the air (8 Swordfish and 5 Fulmars) had in the meantime been ordered to Malta and all arrived with the exception of one Swordfish and one Fulmar, the crew of the Swordfish and pilot of the Fulmar being picked up. The air gunner of the Fulmar was killed.

32. Between 1600 and 1700, a second attack developed on ILLUSTRIOUS and the battlefleet by about 20 aircraft. ILLUSTRIOUS's Fulmars, who had been refuelled at Malta, were able to intervene and shot down 6 or 7 JU.87s, damaging others. The attack on the battlefleet was mostly concentrated on VALIANT who had one killed and two wounded from splinters.

33. ILLUSTRIOUS passed Filfla at 1730, making good 17 knots, though the fire was still burning at this time.

34. ILLUSTRIOUS was met in the swept channel by a tug from Malta and arrived safely at 2145.

35. In the meantime, GALLANT and escorting forces were making good $6\frac{1}{2}$ knots, their position at 1600 being $36^{\circ} 11' N.$, $12^{\circ} 56' E.$ The convoy movements proceeded according to plan, and ESSEX escorted by HERO arrived safely at Malta at 2045. Owing to the delays to the battlefleet, Vice-Admiral, Light Forces was ordered to remain to the northward of Convoy "Excess" in position $34^{\circ} 35' N.$, $14^{\circ} 52' E.$ Convoy M.E.6 was at this time making good $9\frac{1}{2}$ knots.

36. The Commander-in-Chief with Force A then proceeded to the eastward without further incident, passing through position $35^{\circ} 40' N.$, $14^{\circ} 10' E.$ at 1800, and $35^{\circ} 18' N.$, $13^{\circ} 35' E.$ at 2200, on a mean line of advance of 090° .

Saturday, 11th January, 1941.

37. The Commander-in-Chief's position at 0001 was $35^{\circ} 20' N.$, $15^{\circ} 26' E.$, steering 080° , and at 0800 was $35^{\circ} 52' N.$, $18^{\circ} 09' E.$ Convoy "Excess" was in position $35^{\circ} 28' N.$, $18^{\circ} 00' E.$ at 0800.

38. The fleet remained close to "Excess" for the remainder of the day, passing through position $36^{\circ} 06' N.$, $19^{\circ} 27' E.$ at noon.

39. At 1500, C.S. 3,* who had left GALLANT off Malta at 0500, reported that SOUTHAMPTON and GLOUCESTER had been attacked in position $34^{\circ} 54' N.$, $18^{\circ} 24' E.$ by 12 dive bombers who achieved a surprise attack down sun, and both ships had been hit. SOUTHAMPTON was making good a course of 105° at 22 knots.

At 1605, C.S.3 reported that SOUTHAMPTON was stopped in position $34^{\circ} 54' N.$, $18^{\circ} 24' E.$

40. Course was therefore altered to 210° at 1630 to close C.S.3, and at 1645 ORION, PERTH, JERVIS and JANUS were detached to his assistance. Owing to lack of fuel, JUNO and NUBIAN were detached to join the convoy and HERO joined the fleet screen. MOHAWK and GRIFFIN, who had seen GALLANT safely into Malta, were sailed by Vice-Admiral, Malta, at 1700, to close C.S.3 at high speed.

41. At 1819, however, C.S.3 reported that SOUTHAMPTON saw little prospect of getting the fires over the engine room and 'X' magazine under control, and at 1906 that he was forced to abandon ship and would sink her. The Commander-in-Chief approved this action and at 2100, when in position $35^{\circ} 12' N.$, $19^{\circ} 44' E.$, course was altered to 100° to reach rendezvous for all forces at sea in position $34^{\circ} 40' N.$, $23^{\circ} 10' E.$ at 0800/12.

42. At about 1800, when in position $36^{\circ} 08' N.$, $20^{\circ} 50' E.$, Convoy M.E.5 $\frac{1}{2}$ parted from Convoy "Excess" to pass south of Crete, "Excess" proceeding through the Elaphonisos Channel.

43. C.S.3 later reported that the first attack was carried out by 12 or more dive bombers and was a complete surprise from the sun in the clear blue sky. The speed of advance of the squadron at the time was 24 knots. The attack was well pressed home in spite of gunfire from both ships. High level bombing attacks continued intermittently until about 1630 and the squadron was shadowed until sunset.

GLOUCESTER's forward 6-inch director was damaged by an unexploded bomb through the roof of the director tower. One aircraft was unserviceable from machine-gun bullets; the other was in the air at the time and force-landed near DIAMOND. GLOUCESTER's casualties were 1 officer and 8 ratings killed and 1 officer and 13 ratings wounded.

SOUTHAMPTON survivors were embarked in GLOUCESTER and DIAMOND after abandoning ship, GLOUCESTER taking 33 officers and 678 ratings, of whom 4 officers and 58 ratings were wounded, and DIAMOND taking 16 wounded ratings.

Sunday, 12th January, 1941.

44. The Commander-in-Chief's position at 0001 was $35^{\circ} 05' N.$, $20^{\circ} 40' E.$, and at 0800 all forces, including Force X, made a rendezvous in position $34^{\circ} 40' N.$, $23^{\circ} 10' E.$

Admiralty footnote :

* C.S.3—Rear-Admiral Commanding, 3rd Cruiser Squadron