

Force "F".—continued.

S.S. CLAN FORBES.
S.S. CLAN FRAZER.
S.S. NEW ZEALAND
STAR.
(M.T. ships carrying
mechanical transport,
etc., maximum speed
16 knots.)

Force "D". Battleship:—
RAMILLIES.

Cruisers:—
NEWCASTLE.
COVENTRY.
BERWICK.

Destroyers:—
DEFENDER.
GREYHOUND.
GRIFFIN.
HEREWARD.

Method of Execution.

4. Forces "B" and "F" to escort and cover the passage of the M.T. ships and corvettes through the Western Mediterranean, being met to the South of Sardinia at approximately noon on 27th November by Force "D" proceeding from the Eastern Mediterranean. Forces "B", "F" and "D" then to proceed in company to a position West of Skerki Bank, which would be reached at dusk. After dark, Force "F", the corvettes and COVENTRY with destroyers of Force "D" to part company and proceed through the Narrows to the Eastern Mediterranean, Force "B", with RAMILLIES, NEWCASTLE and BERWICK, proceeding to Gibraltar.

Condition of Ships taking part.

5. RENOWN, ARK ROYAL and SHEFFIELD were in good fighting condition with the exception that ARK ROYAL had an unduly high percentage of inexperienced pilots and observers, and the efficiency of her torpedo striking force was low, owing to lack of opportunity for exercise.

6. MANCHESTER and SOUTHAMPTON would each be carrying some 700 Royal Air Force and Military personnel.

7. BERWICK (so I had been informed by her Commanding Officer) was not capable of more than 27 knots owing to the removal of some rows of turbine blades and to the higher water temperature in the Mediterranean affecting her vacuum.

8. NEWCASTLE's boilers had developed defects, and judging from signals received, could not be considered entirely reliable.

9. The destroyers of the 8th and 13th Flotillas had been running very hard, but there was no reason to anticipate any definite defects developing during the operation. HOTSPUR was without asdics, had been temporarily repaired and her speed was limited, though in fine weather it was hoped she could reach 20 knots or possibly more.

10. The condition of RAMILLIES, COVENTRY and the Mediterranean Fleet destroyers was satisfactory so far as was known.

11. The corvettes were incapable of making a speed of advance of 14 knots except in fair weather.

12. With the exception of RENOWN, SHEFFIELD, ARK ROYAL and the destroyers of the 8th and 13th Flotillas, the ships taking part in this operation had not worked together as a squadron.

13. Doubts had been expressed by Vice Admiral L. E. Holland, C.B. (Vice Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron) concerning the advisability of MANCHESTER and SOUTHAMPTON being included in Force "F", for the following reasons:—

(i) Extreme importance was attached to the safe and timely arrival of the R.A.F. personnel at Alexandria. The best way to ensure this was for the cruisers to proceed independently and rely upon their high speed and mobility for the achievement of their object;

(ii) With so many additional on board, the ships were not in a fit condition to fight. If obliged to engage, casualties amongst the R.A.F. personnel might be heavy and the object of this part of the operation compromised.

14. I agreed that these ships would not be in a satisfactory state to fight an action and that the achievement of part of our object, namely, the safe arrival of the personnel, would be assured with greater certainty if the cruisers proceeded independently.

On the other hand, achievement of our complete object, which included the safe passage of the M.T. ships and corvettes, was more likely to be accomplished if we made a show of force, since this might deter the Italians from attempting to interfere with the operation.

15. At Admiral Holland's request I asked the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, whether the safe passage of personnel or the M.T. ships should receive priority, if circumstances arose which made a decision necessary after Force "F" had parted company for the passage of the Narrows. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, replied "Personnel," but subsequent instructions were received from the Admiralty that this must be subject to the overriding consideration that if Italian forces were in sight action taken by the cruisers must be the same as if personnel were not embarked.

ESTIMATE OF ENEMY FORCES LIKELY TO
BE ENCOUNTERED AND NEED FOR
REINFORCEMENT.

16. Prior to the commencement of Operation "Collar" I informed the Admiralty that I considered the inclusion of ROYAL SOVEREIGN (undergoing repairs in Gibraltar) in my force was desirable in view of a possible Italian concentration in the Western Mediterranean which I estimated could reach a total of

Three battleships,

Five to seven 8" cruisers,

Several 6" cruisers and other light forces.

The Admiralty reply indicated that some doubt was entertained concerning the necessity for this reinforcement, but approval was eventually given for the inclusion of ROYAL