

at first accepted. Further interrogation of Swordfish crews revealed that visibility from the air at the time was poor and the vessel reported as LEINSTER was probably BROWN RANGER. Subsequently Vice-Admiral Commanding, North Atlantic corrected the position to read Carnero Point and added that military ranks had been disembarked.

16. I considered it impracticable to take any steps to transfer the personnel from LEINSTER. HERMIONE was a possibility, but her return to Gibraltar at this stage would have inevitably compromised secrecy. In any case, she could not have taken more than 500 men without seriously affecting her fighting efficiency and I considered her presence with Force H on D.4 most necessary in view of possible eventualities. A signal to this effect was passed to Vice-Admiral Commanding, North Atlantic, by means of a returning Sunderland.

17. Clocks were advanced one hour at 1000 to Zone -2*. By 1230 Group 4 was abeam and to the northward of Group 5 and the destroyer screens were readjusted leaving three Tribals, NESTOR, FOXHOUND and FIREDRAKE, all of whom were destined for and could refuel at Malta with Group 4, and the remainder with Group 5 so as to economise fuel.

18. At 1500 Group 4 altered course to 060° to open from Group 5 and at 1600 reduced speed to 18 knots. The two groups were then approximately 30 miles apart.

19. During the day ARK ROYAL kept a fighter section ranged on deck whilst Sunderlands operating from Gibraltar provided A/S patrols ahead of both groups to avoid the use of Swordfish which would have suggested the presence of ARK ROYAL. No hostile or unidentified aircraft were sighted or detected throughout the day but two merchant ships were sighted by Group 4. The first passed westbound at 1255 some 15 miles to the northward of RENOWN who was then 32 miles south-west of Almeria. The second was sighted at 1900 when 35 miles south of Cape Palos, this ship bore E.S.E., 10 miles, and appeared to be northbound from Oran.

Movements during Daylight Hours, 22nd July (D.2).

20. At 0400 Group 4 altered course to 070° when 36 miles S.E. of Formentera, and to 130° at 0700 when 75 miles east of Formentera with the object of covering Group 3 from air observation. Fighter and A/S patrols were flown off for Group 4 at 0715 and maintained during the day.

21. At 0810 aircraft reported a southbound ship 18 miles south-west of the group. It was estimated she would pass 13 miles ahead of Group 5 at 1230.

22. An unidentified floatplane was sighted at 0850 low down to the northward of Group 4 and about 10 miles away. Owing to low air to air visibility the fighters were unable to intercept and the aircraft disappeared to the eastward. A few minutes later an Italian signal was intercepted, timed 0850, which appeared to refer to Group 4.

23. At noon Group 4 reversed course to the westward for two hours to close the distance from Group 5 and turned east again at 1400. One or two aircraft were detected passing 25 miles north of RENOWN at 1430; ARK ROYAL flew off six fighters but these failed to intercept.

24. The Sunderland A/S aircraft was instructed by V/S* at 1453 to locate Group 5 and to inform Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron that Group 4 would remain 20 miles to the eastward of the convoy during the night and close at daylight. This Sunderland returned at 1732 reporting Group 5 bearing 240°, 25 miles from RENOWN. Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron reported via this aircraft that one French merchant ship had passed northbound 9 miles ahead of the convoy at 1300, that all destroyers had been fuelled during the day from BROWN RANGER and that Group 5 would pass through position 37° 40' N., 6° 25' E. at 0300/23.

25. During the day the sea was calm with fair surface visibility and a light easterly wind which enabled ARK ROYAL to operate independently for flying inside the screen.

26. Group 4 streamed paravanes at 1800 in position 37° 49' N., 05° 04' E., and at 2030 again turned west till 2200 to maintain a distance of about 20 miles to the eastward of the convoy during the night. As far as I am aware Group 5 had not yet been sighted by the enemy.

Submarine Attack on Force H on Night 22nd/23rd July.

27. At 2315 when in position 38° 03' N., 05° 45' E. proceeding at 15 knots on a course 085°, NESTOR, who was the starboard wing destroyer of the screen, reported a torpedo approaching from starboard. Immediate avoiding action was taken by means of a drastic turn to port. After a short period three heavy explosions were felt at regular intervals followed a little later by a fourth explosion about a cable ahead of RENOWN. Subsequent reports from NESTOR indicated that a submarine on the surface had fired a salvo of four torpedoes and that NESTOR had counter-attacked.

Movements, early a.m. 23rd July (D.3).

28. At 0648 ARK ROYAL flew off the first fighter patrol and Group 4 closed Group 5. At 0657 RENOWN reported a shadowing aircraft in sight ahead of Group 4. Fighters were sent out 10 miles but owing to the low sun and mist were unable to sight and the shadower made good her escape. A second shadowing aircraft was reported at 0729 ten miles to the northward but owing to low visibility and the fact that the aircraft was too low for R.D.F. reports, no contact was made by the fighters.

29. It became apparent that both groups had been sighted. At 0745 Group 4 was formed as a flexible port column of the convoy with the object of providing A.A. protection whilst still remaining free to manoeuvre for flying. This formation was maintained during the day. The sea was calm with a clear sky and good visibility but a very light and variable wind made

Admiralty footnote

* Zone -2—two hours ahead of G M T.

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* V/S—visual signal