

bombers, dive bombers and minelaying aircraft attacked. An emergency turn was made to avoid the mines and torpedoes which had been dropped outside the starboard screen.

Very soon after this 40 torpedo bombers were reported ahead, followed immediately by a Stuka attack on *INDOMITABLE* who became obscured by splashes and smoke.

The net result of these series of severe attacks was *FORESIGHT* torpedoed aft, *INDOMITABLE* 3 hits by large bombs and several near misses, causing two large fires and putting the flight deck out of action. There were many near misses elsewhere in the force but no other ships suffered damage.

The casualties to enemy aircraft are uncertain but *INDOMITABLE*'s fighters shot down 9 certain, 2 probable and 1 damaged, for the loss of 2 fighters, 1 pilot being saved. One *JU.87* was probably shot down by ships' gunfire.

50. *TARTAR* proceeded to *FORESIGHT*'s assistance and subsequently took her in tow.

51. *INDOMITABLE* reduced speed and turned to the west away from the wind. *CHARYBDIS* closed her and some of Force Z destroyers were ordered to form a screen on her. As the time was now 1855 and the attack apparently over, Force Z was turned to the westward and Force X was detached.

52. At 1914 *LOOKOUT* was ordered to close *INDOMITABLE* to pump water on the fires but soon *INDOMITABLE* reported "situation in hand" and at 1927 that she could steam 17 knots. Shortly afterwards her steering gear became temporarily disabled, but by 2030 she was in all respects ready to proceed at 20 knots and shortly after reported able to make 28½ knots.

53. Force Z withdrew to the westward at 18 knots, speed being restricted to this by boiler tube defects reported by *RODNEY*.

## PART II.

### *Detaching of Force X until their rejoining Force Z.*

The following account of proceedings of Force X from the time of their detachment at 1900/D.3 until rejoining my flag at 1800/D.5 has been compiled from the reports of Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron and Commanding Officers of ships concerned. In the circumstances prevailing, discrepancies, differences and uncertainties are bound to arise in the recording of incidents.

#### *Wednesday, 12th August (D.3).*

2. At about 1956, as Cruising Disposition No. 21 was being taken up, H.M.S. *NIGERIA* leading the port column was hit, supposedly by a torpedo, and within a few minutes H.M.S. *CAIRO*, S.S. *OHIO* and another M.T. ship (probably S.S. *BRISBANE STAR*) were also hit.

3. Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron is of the opinion that all these casualties were from torpedoes fired by one or more U-Boats, though the possibility of the damage being caused by mines cannot be excluded.

4. No detection of U-Boats by visual, asdic or radar was made. The time intervals between the explosions were such as to make it improbable as being the work of one U-Boat.

5. Whatever the facts, however, H.M.S. *NIGERIA* at once assumed a list to port of 13° and circled to starboard. By 2010 the ship was under control and at 2015 was stopped to transfer Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron and his staff to H.M.S. *ASHANTI*. Very prompt damage control measures had by this time reduced the list to 5° and by 2030 the ship was able to proceed at 14 knots for Gibraltar, despite her being 11 feet down by the head. H.M. Ships *BICESTER* and *WILTON* proceeded as escort, later in the night to be joined by H.M.S. *DERWENT*.

6. S.S. *OHIO* and *BRISBANE STAR* were temporarily brought to a stop, but, soon after, gallantly proceeded on their way to the southward.

7. H.M.S. *CAIRO*, whose stern was blown off and engines disabled, was sunk by our own forces as soon as the survivors had been taken off.

8. The effect of this series of disasters was to cause the convoy to become scattered, though they continued on their course for Cape Bon.

9. Meanwhile, Rear-Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron in H.M.S. *ASHANTI* proceeded to close and direct the convoy. Whilst doing so, H.M.S. *ASHANTI* with H.M.S. *PENN* endeavoured to protect the convoy from an impending air attack by laying a smoke screen against the light westerly horizon.

10. At 2038, some 25 minutes after sunset, a severe dive bomber and torpedo bomber air attack developed and lasted until 2100. In this attack several M.T. ships were hit and two, S.S. *EMPIRE HOPE* and *GLENORCHY*, blew up or were later sunk.

11. At 2112, H.M.S. *KENYA* was hit on the fore foot by a torpedo fired by a U-Boat which she saw. One other torpedo passed under her and two more narrowly missed her stern. She was able to proceed, however, and soon after rejoined H.M.S. *MANCHESTER*.

12. After these attacks, 11 merchant ships were proceeding on their way, of which, however, only three or four were in visual touch with H.M. Ships *MANCHESTER*, *KENYA* and *ASHANTI* in the van.

The three T.S.D.S. destroyers were ahead; H.M.S. *PATHFINDER* rejoining from H.M.S. *CAIRO*, and H.M.S. *PENN* from her rescue work, were overtaking astern.

13. At 2130, S.S. *DEUCALION*, who had been proceeding separately with H.M.S. *BRAMHAM*, sank after having been torpedoed by a torpedo bomber aircraft near the Cani Rocks. Having picked up survivors, H.M.S. *BRAMHAM* proceeded to overtake Force X.

#### *Thursday, 14th August (D.4).*

14. At 2354 the leading ships of Force X passed Cape Bon, and 40 minutes later two E-Boats were detected by radar on the port beam and engaged by all ships. Further running fights with E-Boats occurred until near Kelibia Light and again at 0330 when some twenty miles from position "R", and during these attacks, H.M.S. *MANCHESTER* at 0120 and 3 M.T. ships, *SANTA ELIZA*, *ALMERIA LYKES* and *WAIRANGI*, were hit. H.M.S. *ASHANTI* reports that near Kelibia Light two horned mines, possibly cut by the