

30th July.

The Force passed through Position "C" about 0300 on the 30th July and ADVENTURE was detached. As she was only one hour behind her programme I did not consider it necessary to make an amended time for her rendezvous.

24. The weather continued overcast and from the point of view of evasion it could hardly have been better; the conditions were such that it was extremely unlikely that the Force would be sighted by aircraft. My experience of the weather had made me realise the possibility that fog might come down in the middle of flying-off. I therefore made a plan by which one carrier operated on one side of a line parallel to the wind through the flying-off position and the other carrier on the other side, and I arranged that, so far as possible, DEVONSHIRE and VICTORIOUS should operate on the inshore side of this line, thus giving FURIOUS a clear run to seaward. After discussion with VICTORIOUS the original Position "M" was decided on for the flying-off position and a position 30 miles, 040 degs. from Position "M" was fixed for flying-on. I also made 1400 the zero hour, half an hour later than my original intention.

25. During the approach German destroyer wireless signals had been heard, and by the use of the HF/DF set* in INGLEDIELD it had been possible to place them as operating off Tana Fiord†. At one time I had an idea that they were escorting a convoy towards Kirkenes, but eventually came to the conclusion that they were probably hunting a Russian submarine off Tana Fiord. Considerable interference was also experienced on the R.D.F. This seemed to come from a station of sorts at Vardo. As we approached the coast R.D.F. transmission was stopped as I felt it was possible that it might lead to our detection.

26. The weather was at first favourable, overcast, low clouds and visibility not too good, but about 1200 the clouds thinned and finally cleared away with good visibility. Still, the Force had not been sighted and there appeared every reason to hope that the attack would be launched without it being detected. The wind was off shore and this facilitated the approach. These hopes, however, were doomed. At 1346, just as FURIOUS was flying off two Hurricanes, which had to be got off the deck before her T.S.Rs.‡ could fly off, an He.111 was sighted. An enemy report was made by this aircraft and from that moment the German destroyers operating off Tana Fiord ceased to transmit. I considered it was too late to call off the attack and it was accordingly launched as originally arranged.

27. Detailed reports of the attacks are given in FURIOUS's and VICTORIOUS's reports attached (Appendices I and II). VICTORIOUS

flew off twenty T.S.Rs. in one range, followed by twelve Fulmars eighteen minutes later. FURIOUS commenced ten minutes before VICTORIOUS by flying off four Hurricanes and nine T.S.Rs. These were followed by a second range of nine T.S.Rs. and finally by six Fulmars.

28. The Striking Force went into the attack as planned at 1429 (Z + 29), followed seven minutes later by the fighters. Three of the Fulmars from VICTORIOUS and the four Hurricanes were kept for the protection of the Force. During the attack the Hurricanes were refuelling in VICTORIOUS.

29. The Striking Force knew before leaving that the Force had been sighted and that they must meet fierce opposition. Nevertheless the attack was pressed home courageously and gallantly in face of great odds and VICTORIOUS's aircraft suffered heavy casualties.

30. The material results were disappointing. The attack by VICTORIOUS's aircraft was thought to have achieved results as follows:—

BREMSE.	Two torpedo hits.		
2 Merchant Ships.	At least one torpedo hit each.		
2 Merchant Ships.	Probably one torpedo hit each.		
<i>Aircraft.</i>	<i>Certain.</i>	<i>Probable.</i>	<i>Damaged.</i>
ME. 109	1	1	—
ME. 110	2	1	—
JU. 87	1	—	1

It has since been learnt that BREMSE was not hit.

31. FURIOUS had the misfortune to find Petsamo empty of shipping and her torpedoes had to be expended on easily repairable wooden quays, but it is probable that her bombs did considerable damage to the oil tanks and ship yard.

32. Captain (D), 3rd Destroyer Flotilla in INGLEDIELD was sent shorewards to visibility distance to act as a guide to returning aircraft and remained there until completion of flying-on.

33. At 1612 aircraft were seen to be returning from the attack and it soon became apparent that many were missing from VICTORIOUS. At 1735 VICTORIOUS reported that she was still short of eleven Albacores and two Fulmars, who had petrol till about 1900. FURIOUS had completed landing on at 1657 and reported the loss of two Fulmars and one Albacore. I informed the Force that I should remain in the vicinity until 1900.

34. During the flying-off and flying-on operations, the two divisions of the Force had operated independently, the cruisers conforming to the carriers' movements. VICTORIOUS had orders to remain as near as possible to FURIOUS. These operations were very satisfactorily carried out and at no time were the carriers more than six or seven miles apart.

Admiralty footnotes:—

* HF/DF set—High Frequency Direction Finding equipment.

† Tana Fiord—northwest of Kirkenes and Petsamo and about 90 miles from the area in which the aircraft carriers were to operate.

‡ T.S.R.—Torpedo/Spotter/Reconnaissance aircraft