

of Force "P." The first pair of fighters located Force "A" and then returned. Nothing further was seen of any shadower. In the interchange of signals, Force "A" used C.S.I.'s call-sign on one occasion and it seems probable that owing to the use of power necessary for reception at over 100 miles, both forces were detected by D/F at this time. I am not certain that Force "P" was actually sighted but it seems likely that the aircraft shadowing Force "A" took a further look to seaward before returning to its base, and visibility at this time was such that it may well have sighted Force "P." During this period homing signals from shore stations were heard and detected by D/F, and I think the aircraft must have been at the limit of its endurance.

3rd August.

46. Force "A" having reported that it was proceeding to the northward and then towards Bear Island, I turned Force "P" to the southwest again to get towards a position approximately 300 miles off Tromsø in readiness for an attack on that place. Several signals had passed between me and VICTORIOUS on the subject of the attack and I came to the conclusion that the only satisfactory thing was to shift my flag. On the morning of the 3rd I informed VICTORIOUS that I intended to do so, and made arrangements to board her with certain of my staff in DEVONSHIRE's cutter. Unfortunately it blew up very hard and I did not consider the weather suitable for a cutter in view of the inexperienced crews that are nowadays available. I accordingly flew over in the Walrus with my Flag-Lieutenant at 1415.

4th August.

47. In the course of the day the Force closed in towards the flying-off position, which had been fixed as 100 miles from Tromsø. During the last two hours a speed of 25 knots was maintained. Three Fulmars were flown off at 0106 on the 4th August with orders to attack Tromsø, the sea-plane station and any shipping being given as their objective. After flying-off, the Force moved to the westward at 20 knots for two hours to the flying-on position.

48. At 0303 the first Fulmar returned, followed by the second at 0325. Both these machines reported that they had seen someone bale out of the remaining machine and there seemed little doubt that it had been brought down. The Flight had found two armed trawlers just short of Tromsø and had attacked them. It was the Flight Leader who had been lost, and he appears to have continued the attack too long. As the attack was made out of sight of Tromsø no information of shipping in the harbour was obtained.

49. The Force withdrew at 25 knots for two hours, and reducing to 20 knots at 0600 set course for Seidisfjord. I was unable to pass the report of the attack until 1700 on the 4th August. At the same time I informed the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, that I did not require Force "Q" and requested that they should be ordered to return unless required for ADVENTURE.

5th August.

50. During 5th August various exercises were carried out by DEVONSHIRE and

VICTORIOUS and her aircraft. The Force arrived at Seidisfjord at 1800 on the 5th August, and I transferred my flag to DEVONSHIRE. The Force completed with oil from the oilers ALDERSDALE and WAR SUDRA.

6th-7th August.

51. At 1500 on the 6th August the Force sailed for Scapa. An A/S patrol was maintained by VICTORIOUS during passage and air exercises were carried out on the forenoon of the 7th August. The Force arrived at Scapa late on the 7th August.

Command.

52. The experience of this operation brought out very clearly the importance of the Command being in the carrier when air operations are under consideration. For the conduct of an operation already planned and discussed it is not so necessary, though even then there is much to be said for it as otherwise a large degree of discretion may have to be given to the carrier Captains at the last moment. Captain Bovell* was in this case put in a difficult position and in my opinion acted very properly on the knowledge at his disposal in putting forward the view he did.

Planning and Preparations.

53. By force of circumstances this operation was carried out in a hurry. Neither VICTORIOUS nor FURIOUS was really ready for such an operation, and some of the pilots had never deck-landed before. During the six days in which the operation had to be planned VICTORIOUS was frequently at sea exercising, as also was DEVONSHIRE for some days. FURIOUS was only in company for two days and was at sea exercising most of that time. This made it very difficult for any consultations to be held as to details of the plan. The capabilities of the two carriers were so different that the scheme of fly-off presented considerable difficulties and was only decided at the last minute.

Intelligence.

54. For operations in this area to be effective in doing material damage, far better intelligence than was available in this case is necessary. The presence of such a force must always be an embarrassment to the enemy, but without intelligence it is like looking for a needle in a haystack to try to locate the small amount of shipping that may be strung out along the inner leads and open sea between say, Narvik and Kirkenes. That much can be done in this way I am certain, if the appropriate force is employed and routine reconnaissance can be made.

Conclusion.

55. The brunt of the operation fell upon the personnel of the naval aircraft and the carriers. The way in which the attack was pressed deserves high praise and I do not doubt that amongst those lost are many who deserve recognition.

56. The ships engaged in the operation were ably handled by their Captains and their ready co-operation called for a minimum of signalling. Sudden fog several times produced conditions when timely orders were impossible, but

Admiralty footnote :—

* Commanding H.M.S. VICTORIOUS.