

and three more Swordfish to carry out a search between 000° and 100° to a depth of 50 miles to locate any enemy surface forces that might be in a position to attack MANCHESTER. None was sighted. MANCHESTER was reported to be in position 37° 19' N., 3° 44' E. at 0710 leaving a large oil track, slightly down by the stern and with a slight list to port.

80. At 0816 a Cant was sighted 10 miles to the eastward and was shot down by the fighter patrol.

81. The situation at 1000 was as follows. Force H in position 37° 18' N., 04° 30' E. steering 290° at 18 knots. FIREDRAKE and ERIDGE south of Galita making 8 knots to the westward, having been reported by a shadower at 0710. Convoy M.G.1 in three groups ranging between 40 miles west to 20 miles east of Galita with one ship, the SVENOR, just outside Malta. MANCHESTER and AVON VALE about 65 miles to the westward of Force H proceeding at 11 knots and possibly reported by a reconnaissance aircraft at 0700.

82. I decided that Force H should continue to the westward till about 1330 by which time MANCHESTER would be reasonably clear of enemy air attack, and would have three destroyers in company, Vice-Admiral Commanding, North Atlantic having ordered VIMY and VIDETTE to rendezvous with her. About 1330 I intended to turn east in order to fly off 6 Swordfish for Malta during the night and then rendezvous with Force X in the vicinity of Galita Island about 0730.

83. During the day calls for help were intercepted from all three groups of the M.G. convoy. The first came at 1230 from ENCOUNTER, who was escorting Group 2. She reported a threatening aircraft in the vicinity and later reported an attack by four T/Bs, but all torpedoes missed. The attack was followed about 20 minutes later by high level bombing when some 30 bombs fell between AMERIKA and THERMOPYLAE. At 1345 ENCOUNTER reported 2 unknown ships bearing 283°, 12 miles from position 37° 18' N., 8° 35' E. These were later identified as FIRE-DRAKE and ERIDGE.

84. At 1342 Group 1 called for help in position 37° 19' N., 8° 00' E. A high level attack resulted in bombs dropping between TALABOT and BRECONSHIRE and half an hour later BRECONSHIRE was near missed by some small bombs from a Caproni. Group 3 called for help at 1711 when in the same position and again at 1815.

85. ENCOUNTER left Group 2 at 1430 and proceeded ahead at 28 knots to join and escort Group 1. At 1740 she was attacked unsuccessfully by 3 high level bombers. ENCOUNTER joined Group 1 at 2140 and thereafter had an uneventful passage. No further signals were received from any of these ships during the day. Their estimated E.T.A.* at Gibraltar as signalled by Vice-Admiral, Malta, was:—

Group 1 Dawn/26th.
Group 2 1800/26th.
Group 3 0100/27th.
Group 4 0100/28th.

Admiralty footnote

* E T A —expected time of arrival

86. Force H turned to the eastward at 1345 and an hour later a reconnaissance of 5 Swordfish was flown off from position 37° 45' N., 3° 47' E. to search for enemy forces between 000° and 100° to a depth of 90 miles. Nothing was sighted.

87. VIMY and AVON VALE, who with VIDETTE were escorting MANCHESTER, obtained an asdic contact at 1500 and carried out several attacks with depth charges but there was no evidence of success.

Despatch of 6 Swordfish to Malta.

88. At 0100 ARK ROYAL flew off 6 Swordfish fitted with long range tanks for Malta from position 37° 42' N., 7° 17' E. These all arrived safely.

Movements of Force H, early a.m. 25th July (D.5).

89. Force H turned back to the westward at 0130 for two hours and then proceeded east to meet Force X.

90. At 0512 a flashing light was seen to the north-east and ARK ROYAL was ordered to fly off a Swordfish armed with depth charges to investigate. It was thought this might possibly be a U-Boat homing aircraft. It turned out, however, to be the Italian Hospital Ship SORRENTO searching for survivors, presumably after the air attack on the fleet on the 23rd.

91. A reconnaissance of 3 Swordfish was flown off at 0556 in position 37° 37' N., 07° 32' E. to make certain there were no enemy forces between Force H and Force X. These aircraft found nothing. The visibility was 10-15 miles. A fighter patrol was flown off at 0615.

Departure of Force X from Malta, 24th July (D.4).

92. The cruisers of Force X left Grand Harbour at 1800/24 followed by the destroyers at 1845. All ships received a fine send-off from the Maltese and in particular from the crews of the M.T. ships and the troops who had taken passage. FARNDAL who had developed condenser trouble remained at Malta.

93. Force X had a few air alarms during the evening of the 24th but no attacks developed, probably due to better support from the Malta Beaufighters which, largely due to inexperience, had given me cause for anxiety by their performance on 23rd July during the approach to Malta.*

94. The force followed the same route as that taken the previous day by Convoy M.G.1 and had an uneventful passage. This route ran from 20 miles south of Pantellaria to Kilibia light and subsequently in French territorial waters round Cape Bon and south of Zembra Island, thence to a position 030°, ten miles from Cani Rocks.

Footnote

* On D 3 the Beaufighters sank an E-Boat and damaged an S 79, and on D 4 they shot down two JU.87s when covering the convoy

The disappointing initial performance of the Beaufighters from Malta was due to shortage of equipment and to inexperience in co-operation with the Royal Navy. The Beaufighters rendered an important contribution to the safety of the convoy by operating over Sardinia, where they destroyed 52 enemy twin-engined aircraft on the ground and damaged a further 34.