

APPENDIX

H.M.S. CAIRO,

21st June, 1942.

OPERATION "HARPOON"

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF PASSAGE OF
FORCE X AND CONVOY TO MALTA ON 14TH
AND 15TH JUNE, 1942.*Sunday, 14th June.*

At 2115 Force X was detached from Force T in position $37^{\circ} 38' \text{ N.}$, $10^{\circ} 13' \text{ E.}$. Merchant ships in convoy formed single line, escort took up screening positions and course was set for Zembra thence to follow the coastal route detailed in the Senior Officer, Force T's orders for Operation "Harpoon".

2. At 2205 a medium dive bombing attack was carried out by about 8 JU.88s. The attack developed during dusk coming from the dark sector ahead of the convoy. One enemy machine was destroyed by gunfire, another was seen to be going away on fire, and a third is known to have been destroyed by a Beaufighter of the escort from Malta.

Monday, 15th June.

3. Dispositions for the coastal passage were formed as detailed in my signal timed 1644 on 11th June.

4. During the night a number of parachute flares were observed to be dropped to seaward and it appeared that the enemy was attempting to locate the convoy thinking it had passed to the north of Zembra Island.

Alternatively, his object may have been to indicate to surface forces the relative position of the convoy.

5. While rounding Cape Bon, BLANKNEY reports that he observed signals made from the shore which may have been intended for the enemy. These signals had the appearance of tracer bullets fired into the sky.

6. At 0212, in the vicinity of Ras-el-Mirh, about two miles north-east of Kelibia Road Light ($36^{\circ} 50' \text{ N.}$, $11^{\circ} 08' \text{ E.}$), the 11th Division of destroyers (Fleets) engaged an object to starboard close inshore. BEDOUIN ordered "Cease fire" and it is thought that the object may possibly have been the wreck of H.M.S. HAVOCK which is understood to be in this approximate position. MARNE, however, reports having seen fall of shot ahead of his ship at this time.

7. At 0620 an R/T report was received from a Beaufighter that two Italian cruisers and four Italian destroyers were in a position 15 miles on the port beam of the convoy. Almost immediately these ships were sighted by CAIRO and destroyers on the port wing of the screen, silhouetted against the eastern sky. The position of the convoy then was $36^{\circ} 25' \text{ N.}$, $11^{\circ} 43' \text{ E.}$, course 130° , speed 12 knots. The enemy bore 075° , distance 10 miles, approximate course 150° . CAIRO's first sighting report at 0631 described the enemy as consisting of two cruisers and four destroyers but I am now satisfied that there were two cruisers and five destroyers. The cruisers are believed to

have been of the Condottieri class,* "C" type, but it is not certain whether they were "C" or "B" type. The class of the destroyers is not known. The distance of the enemy given in CAIRO's first sighting report was given as 6 miles and this was considerably in error.

8. On sighting the enemy, BEDOUIN was ordered to act independently with the fleet destroyers. I had previously discussed with the Commanding Officer, BEDOUIN, the action to be taken in such an eventuality which was for BEDOUIN's division to attack while CAIRO and the Hunt destroyers screened the convoy with smoke. BEDOUIN led his division towards the enemy while CAIRO turned to port to cover the left flank of the convoy with smoke, at the same time ordering BLANKNEY's division to make smoke and close.

9. The enemy opened fire at 0640, his first salvo falling short, and the second straddling CAIRO. A number of salvos fell near the convoy until smoke had been laid.

10. CAIRO opened fire at 0650 and fired intermittently throughout the subsequent action but largely for moral effect as the enemy was never within effective range of the four-inch guns.

11. At 0645, anticipating that the enemy would immediately press home his attack with the full force at his command, my immediate intention was to gain time and to fight a delaying action in the hope that an air striking force could be sent from Malta. I therefore ordered the Commodore to turn away and make for territorial waters and later at 0650 ordered him to steer 240° .

12. Meanwhile, having covered the port flank of the convoy with smoke, CAIRO turned 16 points and then steered on an approximately parallel course to the enemy, making smoke to cover the convoy from the southward as the enemy cruisers appeared to be working round in that direction.

13. Meanwhile, BLANKNEY's division of destroyers, on emerging from the smoke, observed two enemy destroyers working round to the northward; these were engaged and driven off turning away under smoke.

14. By 0700 BEDOUIN's division was hotly engaged with the enemy cruisers and destroyers and about this time BEDOUIN and PART-RIDGE in the van were observed to have been hit and to have had their speed reduced. MARNE, MATCHLESS and ITHURIEL pressed on the attack past these two disabled destroyers engaging the enemy cruisers and destroyers. The Commanding Officer, MARNE reports that fire from MARNE and MATCHLESS was observed to take effect on two enemy destroyers who turned away under smoke. ITHURIEL was at this time engaging the near enemy cruiser. There is little doubt that fire from the 11th Division of destroyers was effective and caused the enemy to keep the range open and continually alter course.

15. Shortly after 0700 the two Italian destroyers originally engaged by BLANKNEY's

Admiralty footnote :

* Condottieri class were 6-inch gun cruisers.