

19. At 1201 the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, reported that his position at 1100 was 51° 33' N. 20° 43' W., course 150°, altering to 130° at 1155, speed 26 knots.

20. It was evident at this stage that unless aircraft from ARK ROYAL could reduce the enemy's speed he could not be overhauled by our battleships till well within range of bombing aircraft from the French coast the following day. It was also doubtful whether the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, would have sufficient fuel to enable him to continue the chase until the following day.

21. At 1315 I detached SHEFFIELD with orders to close and shadow the enemy, who was then some 40 miles south-west of RENOWN who was in position 49° 39' N. 18° 58' W. at 1330. The V/S\* signal ordering this movement was not repeated to ARK ROYAL, and as will be seen later this omission had serious consequences.

22. ARK ROYAL informed me that after the interrogation of observers who had sighted the enemy ship, considerable doubt arose, whether the ship was in fact BISMARCK or PRINZ EUGEN. In consequence the torpedoes of the striking force, which was then being ranged, were set to 30 feet instead of 34 as originally intended. The torpedoes were fitted with Duplex pistols. The striking force of 15 Swordfish took off at 1450 in position 49° 35' N. 18° 30' W. One aircraft had to return and made a successful emergency landing with the torpedo in place just after the last of the striking force had left the deck. It had been intended to carry out a synchronised diversion by Fulmars, but this had to be abandoned owing to sea and cloud conditions.

23. Weather and cloud conditions were particularly bad over the target area when the striking force took off. Reliance was therefore placed on the A.S.V. set carried in one of the aircraft of the striking force. This aircraft located a ship 20 miles from the position given to the leader on taking off. This ship was SHEFFIELD, of whose presence near BISMARCK the striking force were not aware. A situation report made to Admiralty at 1345 containing the information that SHEFFIELD had been detached to shadow had been received by ARK ROYAL, but had not been decoded before the striking force left.

24. At 1550 on reaching a position over the supposed target an attack through the cloud was ordered, and eleven torpedoes were dropped at SHEFFIELD. The latter increased to full speed and took successful avoiding action. Of the eleven torpedoes dropped, two were observed by SHEFFIELD to explode on hitting the water and three more exploded when crossing her wake. During this unfortunate incident it is satisfactory to record that not a single round was fired at the attacking aircraft by any gun in SHEFFIELD, where the mistake had been immediately appreciated.

25. At 1525 the Catalina reported having lost touch with the enemy in position 47° 30' N. 19° 00' W. Both this report and the preceding one at 1330 placed the enemy 60 miles south of the position reported by aircraft from ARK

ROYAL. It was assumed that the discrepancy was probably caused by navigational errors in the Catalina. The latter made infrequent reports and, as H/F was employed, could not be D/Fd. The need for frequent reports on a D/F-able wave was strongly felt throughout the operation.

26. At 1551, the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, reported his position, course and speed as 50° 18' N. 18° 45' W., 128°, 26 knots, and that RODNEY bore 100° eleven miles from him. This was the first definite information that had been received of RODNEY since her signal timed 0900/25. Course was altered to 140° at 1650 to maintain position on BISMARCK, who had been reported steering that course at 1340.

27. At 1632 the Catalina signalled that she was being attacked by enemy aircraft, type unknown. She had previously made this signal at 1345 but on each occasion the alarm was caused by the ARK ROYAL's shadowing Swordfish.

28. The striking force returned to ARK ROYAL at 1720. Owing to the motion on the ship the three aircraft who had realised that the target was friendly and who had not fired their torpedoes, were ordered to drop them before landing on. Meanwhile the relief shadowers had reported that the enemy ship was definitely BISMARCK.

29. On completion of landing on speed was increased to 29 knots to regain lost ground, and by reducing the distance from the enemy to assist the next striking force in gaining contact.

30. At 1747 SHEFFIELD gained touch with BISMARCK and made her first enemy report. Being in some doubt regarding the Commander-in-Chief's intentions, I requested his position, course and speed and asked whether he wished me to leave the carrier and join him. I added that should no reply be received I would remain with the carrier. A second striking force of 15 aircraft was prepared with all possible speed. Owing to the limited number of serviceable aircraft to provide this number, it was necessary to refuel and rearm most of the aircraft that had just returned.

31. At 1900 the Polish destroyer PIORUN was sighted 9 miles to the southward and the bearing and distance of the enemy passed to her. The latter portion of the signal, instructing destroyers to shadow and attack as opportunity offered, was not passed owing to visibility closing down. Having sighted PIORUN, it appeared evident that the four destroyers which had been reported by the Catalina at 1208 as 4 UN and had also been sighted by first striking force, were Captain (D), 4th Destroyer Flotilla in COSSACK, with ZULU, MAORI and SIKH in company. To assist these destroyers and the striking force in making contact, SHEFFIELD was ordered to make her call sign for D/F-ing purposes.

32. The second striking force took off at 1915 in position 48° 35' N. 16° 54' W., when the enemy bore 167°, 38 miles. In view of the failures with Duplex pistols in the preceding attack, contact pistols were employed on this occasion, torpedoes being set to run at 22 feet. The striking force had orders to make contact with SHEFFIELD before launching the attack,

Admiralty footnote —

\* V/S—visual signal.