

destroyers detached in turn to fuel. The Rear Admiral Commanding Destroyers, in H.M.S. EURYALUS, was made Senior Officer of the oiling force and oiling arrangements.

It had been hoped to complete this fuelling (from three tankers) by 1100, but a strong north easterly wind and swell and hose troubles soon ruled out that desire. To enable the Fleet to keep this, its first appointment, on time, both battleships and STRIKER were ordered to fuel destroyers. In spite of this, of leaving one destroyer to follow later, and accepting other destroyers up to 30 per cent. short, the operation had to be stopped at 1450.

CAPS were flown by SPEAKER and ASPs by the carriers while fuelling was in progress and aircraft carriers took on replenishment aircraft from H.M.S. STRIKER.

At 1530 the Fleet, formed in Cruising Disposition 5B, proceeded at 23½ knots, this speed being then necessary to reach the operating area by dawn the next day. A.C.I.* assumed tactical command.

H.M. Ships QUALITY and WHELP had to be left with the Tanker Group. H.M.S. WHELP, who had bearing trouble, was replaced by H.M.S. WHIRLWIND from Task Unit 112.2.1, H.M.S. QUALITY, also with defects, was replaced by H.M.S. KEMPENFELT from Task Unit 112.2.5, H.M.S. WAGER was left to continue fuelling but was able to rejoin the Fleet the following morning.

At 1820 H.M.S. INDEFATIGABLE was observed to be on fire on the starboard side under the island structure. The fire, which had originated in Carley floats, was soon extinguished and no damage to the ship occurred.

26th March.

At 0605 CAPS and one ASP were flown off, whilst H.M. Ships ARGONAUT and KEMPENFELT were detached to carry out picket duties.

At sunrise (0635) strong fighter sweeps were flown off from a position 100 miles 180° from Miyako Jima to attack the airfields at Ishigaki and Miyako; they reported little activity there.

At 0850 one aircraft was reported as having ditched 20 miles from Tarima Shima; a Walrus aircraft was flown off and subsequently rescued the pilot.

These sweeps were followed by two escorted bomber strikes and one fighter bomber strike with airfields and associated buildings as targets. Withdrawal was begun at dusk.

At 0940 a Dinah† was intercepted but not shot down by one of the Jacks‡ and it was apparent that the Fleet had been reported.

Throughout the day there were frequent air raid warnings but all bogeys§ were eventually identified as friendly except for the one Dinah.

After the last aircraft had flown on, the Fleet disengaged to the south eastward.

The night was fine and the moon bright and an enemy attack was considered likely.

Admiralty footnotes:—

* A.C.I.—Admiral Commanding 1st Aircraft Carrier Squadron (Admiral Vian)‡

† Dinah—Allied code name for a type of Japanese army reconnaissance aircraft.

‡ Jack—a patrol aircraft.

§ Bogey—unidentified aircraft.

27th March.

At 0245 a bogey to the eastward was contacted by radar. As it seemed that the Fleet was being shadowed course was altered in an attempt to shake off the aircraft. At 0307 H.M.S. EURYALUS was ordered to open out from the screen and fire on the enemy aircraft which then remained at a respectful distance for a time. A Hellcat was then flown off from H.M.S. INDOMITABLE to intercept, but the moon became obscured by a cloud when the pilot was about to open fire and the enemy made good his escape. At 0305 Japanese ASV* transmissions on 152 Mc/s were reported and the Fleet was ordered to commence jamming.

It is of interest to note that the fighter flown off was called by an aircraft which claimed itself to be a U.S. aircraft and warned the fighter of his approach from the south. Although there is no substantial evidence, this may have been a ruse by the Japanese aircraft to avoid inspection while closing the Fleet.

At sunrise a fighter sweep was sent in to Ishigaki only from a flying-off position 100 miles 180° from Miyako Jima. No increased activity was reported.

Two bomber strikes were directed against radio stations, barracks and airfields not covered the previous day. Coasters off the islands were also attacked. The final strike was a small fighter bomber strike. Withdrawal was begun at dusk.

At 1130 H.M.S. UNDINE escorted by fighters was despatched to the rescue of an aircraft which had ditched 56 miles from the flying-off position. At 1750 she rejoined the Fleet having picked up the Avenger crew and also a United States Corsair pilot who was discovered after having been adrift for 48 hours.

The American Rescue Submarine U.S.S. KINGFISH was requested to keep a good lookout for any of our ditched aircrews, but apparently she had not been fully instructed by the American authorities as she replied that "she would have to ask her boss first." The situation was soon clarified when the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific informed the submarine that Task Force 57 was operating in her vicinity and that she was to act as rescue submarine when required. At 1805 American Rescue Submarine U.S.S. KINGFISH reported that she had rescued the pilot of one of H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS's Avengers.

It had been intended that Task Force 57 should continue operating off Sakishima Gunto the day's programme to include a bombardment of Ishigaki, but Guam reported a typhoon to the southward whose position and estimated track appeared to threaten the fuelling area. The risk of bad weather completely dislocating fuelling for some time would have precluded Task Force 57 from returning to the operating area in time to continue the strikes from L-1 until L + 1 day† (31st March to 2nd April). As it was considered that the Commander 5th Fleet attached great importance to Task Force 57 maintaining the neutralisation of Sakishima airfields during this special period, the air and bombardment programme for the next day was

Admiralty footnotes:—

* ASV—radar equipment in aircraft.

† L day was the day of the initial sea-borne assault on Okinawa by the Americans.