

extinguished at 1720. Six Corsairs and one Avenger were destroyed by fire on deck. The explosion blew out a flight deck rivet and thus allowed burning petrol to fall into the hangar which had to be sprayed. As a result a further three Avengers and eight Corsairs were damaged. The total replacements required were therefore four Avengers and 14 Corsairs, of which three Avengers and seven Corsairs were flyable duds.

Casualties were fortunately light—one killed and a few injured.

At 1755 H.M.S. FORMIDABLE reported being fit to land on aircraft and that during the engagement she had definitely shot down one enemy by gunfire.

The state of the Carrier Squadron was as follows. H.M. Ships FORMIDABLE and VICTORIOUS could operate, but the former had only four bombers and 11 fighters serviceable, and also had two pom-pom mountings out of action. H.M.S. VICTORIOUS could operate a few aircraft at a time, but the damage to her lift seriously reduced her speed of handling. In the circumstances I concurred with a recommendation from A.C.1 that the Fleet should withdraw to fuel, sort out and make good the damage, etc. and return to strike on 12th/13th May. I informed Commander 5th Fleet of this intention, and at 1950 course was set for area Cootie.

As TG 52.1 had been ordered to cover Sakishima on days when TF 57 was not striking, I am afraid that the two alterations to programme, dictated first by weather and then by damage consideration, must have caused inconvenience to CTG 52.1; this is regretted.

CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 2000.

During the day 8 enemy aircraft were destroyed, 2 on the ground, 3 by suicide, 2 by gunfire and 1 by fighters. Also on the ground 1 was probably destroyed and 1 probably damaged. Our losses were:—in combat 1 Corsair; by bomb damage 10 Corsairs destroyed, 7 Corsairs, 1 Avenger damaged probably beyond repair.

Total tonnage of bombs dropped on targets was 71 tons plus 64 R/P. Several small craft near Ishigaki suicide boat base were damaged, and one was sunk.

#### 10th May

At 0610 in position Cootie (1) met and formed on Tanker Group consisting of H.M. Ships SPEAKER, RULER, NEPAL, CRANE, PHEASANT, WHYALLA, BALLARAT, WOODCOCK, WEASEL (Tug) and R.F.A.s ARNDALE, AASE MAERSK, DINGLEDALE, SAN AMADO. The usual fuelling, exchange of mail correspondence and stores, and the replenishment of aircraft continued throughout the day.

A.C.1 visited H.M. Ships VICTORIOUS and FORMIDABLE to inspect damage, and found that temporary repairs being carried out showed that both ships would be sufficiently operational to continue the programme of strikes.

A.C.1 and C.S.4 then visited me to discuss measures to give better protection to the carriers, and in the light of the enemy's apparent change of tactics in attacks on this

Force. The enemy appeared to have abandoned his previous practice of a high approach in favour of a low one, thereby greatly reducing the length of warning and making interception by fighters much more difficult.

To combat this, it was decided:—

(a) To station two radar pickets, each consisting of a 6 in. cruiser and a destroyer, 12 miles to the north west and south westward of the Fleet so as to increase the range of detection. Two fighters would be allocated to each picket, and at first contact with the enemy, other fighters would be sent to the threatened sector.

(b) To bring in the 5.25 in. cruisers from the screen and to station them with the main body of the Fleet to increase A.A. protection for the carriers whenever in the operation area.

(c) To station a destroyer astern of each carrier to afford more gun protection in what appears to be the enemy's favourite position for attacking carriers.

(d) To increase mutual gun support when attack threatened by bringing in the carriers to the 2,000 yards circle, and the battleships and cruisers of the main body until their distance from adjacent carriers is 2,000 yards. This new disposition was to be given a trial during the next strike period.

The question of reducing the distance between ships had been under review for some time: there are many factors to take into consideration, not least of these being the interference caused to flying in and off and forming up. Its adoption for trial now is a measure of the improvement of the pilots' skill, etc., during the present operations.

The Fleet was also instructed that in future attacks enemy aircraft must be brought under fire much earlier than has been the case recently. Commanding Officers of ships were ordered to give this matter their personal attention. At 1915 the Fleet disengaged from the Tanker Group for the night.

#### 11th May

At 0640 Cruising Disposition was again formed on the Tanker Group, and all fuelling and transfer of stores, aircraft, correspondence, and personnel was completed in time for the Fleet to disengage at 1640 and take departure for the operations area.

H.M.S. KEMPENFELT, having made good defects at Leyte, was met at 0630 and rejoined TF 57.

H.M.A.S. NEPAL, released from escort duty, joined TF 57. In the afternoon H.M.S. SPEAKER escorted by H.M.S. QUEENBOROUGH, who had developed shaft vibration, was sent back to Leyte, as were the R.F.A.s AASE MAERSK, SAN AMADO, escorted by H.M. Ships BALLARAT and WHYALLA.

American Task Unit 52.1.3 covered Sakishima during 10th and 11th May and reported the result of their neutralising operations there.

#### 12th May

A.C.1 assumed tactical command at 0510, and at 0520 the four counter-Kamikaze destroyers took station one close astern of each carrier.