

at 2200 in position 34° 30' N., 14° 50' E., and the mean line of advance was altered to 320°.

Wednesday, 8th January, 1941.

12. The Commander-in-Chief's position at 0800 was 35° 30' N., 23° 12' E., and the Anti-Kithera Channel was entered at 0900. Force D and the corvettes were met leaving Suda Bay, which was entered at 1230. After fuelling destroyers Force A sailed again at 1400, passing through the Anti-Kithera Channel at 1800. The Commander-in-Chief's position at midnight was 35° 54' N., 21° 44' E., on a mean line of advance of 280°.

13. Force B arrived at Malta a.m., fuelled, and sailed again p.m. to rendezvous with Force H, JANUS remaining at Malta to dock. SYDNEY and STUART sailed from Malta p.m. to join Force A, routed south of the Medina Bank through position 34° 56' N., 17° 20' E.

14. Force C. BRAMBLELEAF arrived Suda a.m., the corvettes fuelling and proceeding to Malta independently.

15. Force D. AJAX and PERTH joined Vice-Admiral, Light Forces at Suda Bay at 0800, and the force then sailed to cover the passage of the corvettes.

16. *Air reconnaissance.*

Taranto—1 Cavour, 4 cruisers and 2 destroyers. (The dry dock was not visible.)

Naples—1 Littorio and 2 Cavours (indicating that the enemy again have 3 battleships in commission).

Messina—3 cruisers and 3 destroyers.

Cagliari—2 destroyers.

Trapani—4 destroyers.

17. At 1537 a flying-boat of 201 Group located a convoy of 4 merchant ships and 1 hospital ship in position 33° 06' N., 22° 04' E., steering 270°. These were unfortunately out of range of ILLUSTRIOUS's striking force.

18. There were no incidents during the night. Course was altered to 260° at 0300, and at 0730 aircraft were flown off to search a sector 280°-310°. The Commander-in-Chief's position at 0800/9th was 35° 51' N., 19° 05' E.

Thursday, 9th January, 1941

19. At 1030, Vice-Admiral, Light Forces, with Force D, and SYDNEY and STUART from Malta, joined the Commander-in-Chief. At about this time a reconnaissance aircraft was detected by R.D.F. and also sighted from the fleet. The Fulmars unfortunately failed to intercept owing to low cloud, and at 1140 the aircraft made a sighting report.

20. On the return of the first air search, which sighted nothing, an armed reconnaissance consisting of 6 Swordfish was flown off at 1130 to search the Tripoli-Benghazi route from a position 50 miles east of Tripoli to 60 miles east of Ras Misurata. The Commander-in-Chief's noon position was 35° 40' N., 17° 45' E., on a course of 230°. SYDNEY and STUART were detached to Alexandria at 1240 and Vice-Admiral, Light Forces with Force D at 1330 to cover the convoys and to provide A.A. support for Convoy M.E.6 on the 10th January.

Friday, 10th January, 1941.

21. At 0430, when in position 35° 56' N., 13° 20' E., course was altered to 290° to rendezvous with Convoy "Excess". At 0741 a report was received from BONAVENTURE, who was in position 36° 29' N., 12° 10' E., that she had sighted two enemy destroyers bearing 010°, 3 miles, and at 0756 the Rear-Admiral Commanding, 3rd Cruiser Squadron* reported that SOUTHAMPTON, BONAVENTURE, JAGUAR and HEReward were engaging.

22. The gun flashes at the commencement of this action were seen from WARSPITE, and Force A continued westward to close the scene of the action, passing close to the southward of Convoy "Excess" at 0800. By this time, BONAVENTURE and HEReward were in sight against Pantellaria, still firing heavily at close range into the crippled and burning Italian.

SOUTHAMPTON and JAGUAR were rejoining the convoy.

23. At 0810 one enemy destroyer blew up, having been torpedoed by HEReward, the second having escaped to the north-west at high speed. The destroyer sunk is believed to have been the VEGA.

24. In the meantime a rendezvous had been made with Convoy "Excess" in position 36° 28' N., 12° 11' E. A fighter patrol of 6 and an air search in sector 280°-310° was flown off at 0815, and the mean line of advance altered to 140° at 0820 in the wake of the convoy.

25. At 0834 when in position 36° 27' N., 12° 11' E., GALLANT was torpedoed or mined, her bows being blown off. She was taken in tow by MOHAWK, and BONAVENTURE and GRIFFIN were detached to stand by her, HEReward and JAGUAR joining the fleet screen. GLOUCESTER and SOUTHAMPTON were also detached to stand by GALLANT at 1000, the fleet remaining close to the convoy for the remainder of the forenoon.

26. One of the A/S† patrol aircraft sighted a Spica class destroyer about 5 miles from Pantellaria and attacked with A/S bombs, reporting a near miss. Two enemy aircraft unsuccessfully attacked BONAVENTURE with torpedoes.

27. The movements of Malta convoys were as follows:—

M.W.5 arrived Malta at 0800.

M.E.6 escorted by PEONY, SALVIA and HYACINTH, sailed at 0700.

M.E.5½ escorted by DIAMOND, sailed at 1130 to join Convoy "Excess".

JANUS left Malta at 1200 and joined the fleet screen, and CALCUTTA joined M.E.6.

28. In the meantime the fleet had been located by enemy aircraft at 0930 and reported at 1015, and at 1127 a shadower was shot down over Linosa Island by Fulmars. At 1223, two S.79s dropped two torpedoes which missed

Admiralty footnotes

* Rear-Admiral Commanding, 3rd Cruiser Squadron—Rear-Admiral E. de F. Renouf, C.V.O.

† A/S—anti-submarine.