B.R. 1736 (6)

NAVAL STAFF HISTORY
SECOND WORLD WAR

SELECTED OPERATIONS
(MEDITERRANEAN), 1940

BATTLE SUMMARIES
No. 2: Action off Cape Spada, Crete
No. 8: Operation M.A.5 and Action off Calabria
No. 9: Action off Cape Spartivento, Sardinia
No. 10: Operation M.B.8 and F.A.A. Attack on Taranto

CONDITIONS OF RELEASE
This information is disclosed only for official use by the recipient Government and such of its contractors, under seal of secrecy, as may be engaged on a defence project. Disclosure to any other Government or release to the Press or disclosure in any other way would be a breach of these conditions. The information should be safeguarded under rules designed to give the same standard of security as that maintained by Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. The recipient is warned that information contained in this book may be subject to privately-owned rights.

HISTORICAL SECTION
ADMIRALTY
Admiralty, S.W.1
5 March 1957

H.S./17/55

B.R. 1736 (6) Naval Staff History, Second World War, Selected Operations (Mediterranean), 1940-1957, having been approved by My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, is hereby promulgated.

The following Battle Summaries are hereby superseded:
- No. 2: Action off Cape Spada, Crete.
- No. 8: Operation M.A.5 and Action off Calabria.
- No. 9: Action off Cape Spartivento, Sardinia.
- No. 10: Operation M.B.8 and F.A.A. attack on Taranto.

B.R. 1736 (4), B.R. 1736 (6) and B.R. 1736 (6) (1) should be destroyed in accordance with instructions contained in B.R. 1.

By Command of Their Lordships,

[Signature]

Contents

FOREWORD ix
ABBREVIATIONS x

CHAPTER I
(Battle Summary No. 8)
Operation M.A.5 and Action off Calabria, July 1940

Section
1 Strategical situation, June—July 1940 1
2 Operation M.A.5: object and organisation 3
3 Italian plan of operations 4
4 Initial moves, Operation M.A.5, 7th—8th July 5
5 Movements of Italian Fleet, 8th—9th July 7
6 Action off Calabria: the approach 7
7 Action off Calabria: surface contact 11
8 Action off Calabria: Phase 1 12
9 Action off Calabria: Phase 2 13
10 Action off Calabria: Phase 3 15
11 Action off Calabria: Italian air attacks 17
12 Fleet movements after action 18
13 Movements and F.A.A. attack on Port Augusta, 10th July 19
14 Passage to Alexandria, 11th—15th July 19
15 Remarks on action off Calabria 22

Appendices
A Italian Naval Forces: Operations 7th—9th July 1940 73
B Action off Calabria: Comparison of British and Italian Forces 76
C Italian air bombing 77
P Details of British Naval Aircraft 96

Figures
1 Operation M.A.5 as planned 2
2 Italian disposition, 1500, as it appeared to the British 10
3 Italian disposition, 1500, from Italian records 10

iii
CONTENTS

CHAPTER I (cont.)

Plans*

1 Operation M.A.5, movements of British and Italian Fleets, 7th—9th July 1940
2 Action off Calabria: Surface contact
3 Action off Calabria: 1514— 1536
4 Action off Calabria: 1548— 1615
5 Operation M.A.5, movements of Convoys and Covering Forces, 10th—15th July 1940
Reference Chart, Mediterranean

Sources

M.01717/41. C.-in-C., Med.: War Diary.
War Diary, Admiralty Historical Section.
Naval Staff History, Mediterranean, Vol. I.
Logs of H.M. Ships Orion and Gloucester.
Ministry of Marine, Rome, Official Narrative.
The War at Sea, Admiral G. Bernotti.
Navy Lists

* All plans and Reference Chart will be found at the end of the book.

iv
# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER III

*Battle Summary No. 10*

**Operation M.B.8 and F.A.A. attack on Taranto, November 1940**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>General situation, Mediterranean, November 1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Operation M.B.8: objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Operation M.B.8: Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Convoy A.N.6 sails for the Aegean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>C.-in-G. and Convoy M.W.3 sail for Malta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Junction with reinforcements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Taranto: conditions and plan of F.A.A. attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Air attack on Taranto (Operation &quot;Judgment&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Results of F.A.A. attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Raid into Strait of Otranto, 11th/12th November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Conclusion of Operation M.B.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Comment and reflections, Operation M.B.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Message from H.M. The King</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Operation M.B.8: British forces employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Taranto: Italian defences and arrangements, 11th November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>F.A.A. attack on Taranto: Aircraft, H.M.S. Illustrious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>F.A.A. attack on Taranto: Narratives of aircraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>F.A.A. attack on Taranto: R.A.(A)'s Orders to Illustrious and escort force, 11th November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Report on Suda Bay, 11th November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Details of British Naval Aircraft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Operation M.B.8 as planned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Air attack on Italian Fleet at Taranto, 11th November 1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Strait of Otranto: Raid on Italian convoy, 12th November 1940</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.06480/41, G.-in-C. Med : Operation M.B.8 with enclosure.</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.029387/40, V.A., Malta: Report on photographs of Taranto.</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.0138/41, R.A.(A)’s Orders, H.M.S. Illustrious.</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.0238/41, C.-in-G., War Diary.</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.S.D. 5701/41, Ministry of Marine, Rome, Official Narrative.</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CONTENTS

## CHAPTER IV

*Battle Summary No. 9*

**Action off Cape Spartivento, Sardinia, 27th November 1940**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Introductory remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Plan of Operation &quot;Collar&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Preliminary considerations and enemy intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>British and Italian movements, 25th—27th November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Situation at 0800, 27th November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>reconnaissance aircraft report enemy forces at sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Measures to safeguard convoy and to join Force &quot;D&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>The approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Vice-Admiral Somerville’s appreciation, noon, 27th November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Admiral Campioni’s appreciation, noon, 27th November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Surface contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>The action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>First attack by H.M.S. Ark Royal’s T/B Striking Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Vice-Admiral Somerville’s appreciation, 1315, 27th November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Further attacks by H.M.S. Ark Royal’s aircraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Enemy air attacks on British forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Composition of and damage to Italian forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>The Vice-Admiral, Force &quot;H&quot;’s remarks on the action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Operation &quot;Collar&quot;: H.M. Ships, with Main Armament and Commanding Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Action off Cape Spartivento: Italian Naval Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Action off Cape Spartivento: Admiral Somerville’s reasons for decision to abandon chase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Details of British Naval Aircraft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Plan of Operation &quot;Collar&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Situation at 1035 from Renown’s plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Situation shortly before noon from Renown’s plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Situation at 1315 from Renown’s plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bombing attack on H.M.S. Ark Royal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS

CHAPTER IV (cont.)

Plans

9 Operation "Collar": movements of British and Italian Forces, 0800-1140, 27th November 1940
10 Action off Cape Spartivento, 27th November 1940: Approximate movements of opposing fleets

Sources

Appendices
I. Narrative, V.A.C. Force "H".
II. Chronology
III. Gunnery
IV. Communications
V. Narratives and reports of Senior Officers and C.O.S of ships:
   (i) Renown and Ramillies
   (ii) Ark Royal
   (iii) Berwick
   (iv) V.A.C. 18th C.S., Sheffield, Newcastle, Southampton, Manchester
   (v) Despatch
   (vi) Capts. (D) 8 and 13, Firedrake, Forster, Fury, Encounter, Jaguar, Kelvin

Enclosures. I. Orders for Operation "Collar".

Navy Lists. October-December, 1940.
The War at Sea, Official History, Captain S. W. Roskill, D.S.C., R.N.
The War at Sea, Admiral G. Bernotti.

INDEX

Page

FOREWORD

The FOUR Battle Summaries superseded by this volume were originally issued in 1942, and were contained in three separate books. In the present volume they have been largely re-written to include information from the opposing side and other sources not available at the time they were produced, and have been arranged each as a separate chapter. They have also been amended in matters of detail, where such have proved in error.

The most interesting additions which have been made are an account of the plan and movements of the Italian fleet prior to and during the indecisive action off Calabria (Chapter I), the state of Italian defence measures at Taranto at the time of the F.A.A. attack (Chapter III and App. H) and information derived from Italian sources on Sir James Somerville's action off Cape Spartivento, Sicily (Chapter IV).

It must be remembered that all these events took place in the early days of radar. Few ships were fitted with sets other than for the detection of high-flying aircraft. No ships as yet had fighter direction equipment.

Plans illustrating the events described have been completely re-drawn to include up to date information. As might be expected the composition and movements of the Italian forces in the actions off Calabria and Cape Spartivento differ somewhat from the contemporary estimates of the British. They will be found at the end of the volume, together with a reference chart of the Mediterranean Sea.

August, 1954
Abbreviations

A.A. Anti-aircraft
A.B.V. Armed boarding vessel
A/C Aircraft
ac Aircraft carrier
A.N. Aegean—North (convoy)
A.S. Aegean—South (convoy)
A/S Anti-Submarine
bc Battlecruiser
bs Battleship
C.-in-C. Commander-in-Chief
C.P.B.G. Common pointed ballistic capped shell
C.S. Cruiser Squadron
D.C. Depth Charge
D.C.T. Director Control Tower
D.F. Destroyer Flotilla
dr. Destroyer
F.A.A. Fleet Air Arm
F.B. Flying boat
F.O. Flag officer
F.O.(H) Flag officer Commanding Force “H”
G.R.T. Gross registered tons
H.A. High angle
H.E. High explosive
H.L.B. High level bombing
H.Q. Headquarters
M.A.S. Motor anti-submarine
M.E. Malta—East (convoy)
MF. Malta—Fast (convoy)
MS. Malta—Slow (convoy)
M/S Minesweeper
M.T. Mechanical transport
M.V. Merchant vessel
M.W. Malta—West (convoy)
N.A. Naval Attaché
R.A.(A) Rear-Admiral, Aircraft Carriers
R.A.1 Rear-Admiral 1st Battle Squadron
R.A.F. Royal Air Force
R/C Reconnaissance
R.D/F Radio direction finder (Radar)
S.A.P. Semi armour piercing
S/M Submarine
S.O. Senior Officer
T.O.O. Time of origin
T.S.R. Torpedo Spottter reconnaissance
T/B Torpedo Bomber
Tr. Trawler
V.A.(D) Vice-Admiral, Destroyer Flotillas
V.A.L.F. Vice-Admiral, Light Forces
W/T Wireless Telegraphy

CHAPTER I
(Battle Summary No. 8)

Operation M.A.5 and Action off Calabria,
July 1940

1. STRATEGICAL SITUATION, JUNE—JULY 1940

WITH THE declaration of war by Italy on 11th June 1940 and the
collapse of France on the 22nd, the strategic balance in the Mediter-
ranian underwent a radical change, much in favour of the Axis
Powers. Prompt decisions by H.M. Government restored the situation
remarkably quickly. Stern measures to ensure that no important units of
the French Fleet should fall intact into the hands of the enemy and the
formation of a powerful force at Gibraltar had largely neutralised the effect
of the French defection in the Western Mediterranean within a fortnight,
while in the Eastern basin Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham had speedily
induced the French Admiral Godfroy to demobilise his ships at Alexandria,
and as early as 25th June had decided to resume the running of convoys to
and from the Aegean and Egypt and also between Malta and Alexandria.1

Having settled the distressing question of the French Fleet, the British Naval
Forces in the Mediterranean could turn their undivided attention to the
Italians, and put Mussolini’s much vaunted pre-war claim to the control of
the Mediterranean to the test.

Possessing numerically superior forces and well-situated bases they had the
advantage of being able to concentrate quickly, but as the lines of communica-
tion to their African colonies intersected the important British route from
Gibraltar to the Suez Canal, neither side could control their communications
without anticipating constant attack. The initiative that the enemy would
display in attempting to interfere with the British communications was an
open question. He could employ his forces—air, surface or submarine—
singly or in combination. The first and third could yield only limited results,
but the second or a combination of all three might prove a very difficult problem
to tackle.

Early in July Sir Andrew Cunningham drew up plans for an operation
termed M.A.5. In this operation he proposed to employ practically the whole
strength of his Fleet in making an extensive sweep into the Central Mediter-
ranian almost as far as the Italian coast, while two convoys were passing from
Malta to Alexandria. It so chanced that Operation M.A.5 synchronised

1 See Naval Staff History, Battle Summary No. 1, and Mediterranean, Vol. I.
with the passage of an important Italian military convoy from Naples and Catania to Benghazi, covered by the bulk of the Italian Fleet. This led to the first surface action between the British and Italian Fleets, an encounter which took place off the Calabrian coast on 9th July 1940.

2. Operation M.A.5: Object and Organisation (Fig. I)

The primary object of Operation M.A.5 was to ensure the safe passage of two convoys from Malta to Alexandria. These consisted of a fast convoy (M.F.1) of three 13-knot ships\(^1\) carrying evacuees, and a slow convoy (M.S.1) of four 9-knot ships\(^2\) with stores. They were to sail from Malta at 1600,\(^3\) Di, and steer to pass through 34° 40' N., 21° 50' E. (Position "Q").

Governing the convoy movement was the determination to seize any opportunity of bringing the enemy to action, whenever or wherever he might be encountered; and it was also intended to attack ships in Augusta with aircraft from the Eagle, while the Fleet was in Central Mediterranean waters.

For the Operation, the Fleet was organised in three forces, viz.: Force "A", under Vice-Admiral (D) J. C. Tovey, consisting of five 6-inch cruisers of the 7th Cruiser Squadron and the destroyer Stuart; Force "B", the fast battleship Warspite,\(^5\) flying the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, and five destroyers; Force "C", under Rear-Admiral H. D. Pridham-Wippell, the battleships Royal Sovereign and Malaya, the carrier Eagle, and 11 destroyers.

An escort force of four or five destroyers, known as Force "D", was to be detached to Malta after the Fleet reached a position east of Cape Passero (Sicily). This force, augmented by the Jervis (Lieutenant-Commander A. M. McKillop) and Diamond (Lieutenant-Commander P. A. Cartwright) which were already at Malta, would form the convoy escorts.

The three forces were routed to arrive independently at about 1600, D3 (9th July), at which time the slow convoy was to sail from Malta, in the following positions:—

- Force "A" 36° 30' N., 16° 20' E. (60 miles 100° from Cape Passero),
- Force "B" 36° 00' N., 17° 00' E. (100 miles 115° from Cape Passero),
- Force "C" 35° 50' N., 18° 40' E. (180 miles 105° from Cape Passero).

From these positions they were to work to the eastward under their respective senior officers, keeping pace with the convoys to the northward of their route till D6, when Forces "B" and "C" were to return to Alexandria, followed by Force "A", which was to keep to the north-westward of Convoy M.S.1 till nightfall that day.\(^6\)

Arrangements were made for flying boat patrols of 201 Group to operate in conjunction with the Fleet on each day from 8th to 13th July. These patrols were to operate as follows:—

\(^1\) El Nil, Rodi, Knight of Malta.
\(^2\) Zeland, Kirkland, Marsheh, Norasli.
\(^3\) Zone minus 2 Time is used throughout.
\(^4\) Di being the date of commencement of the operation, i.e. when the covering force left Alexandria.
\(^5\) The Warspite had been modernised in 1937. Maximum range of her 15-inch guns was 32,200 yards, as against 23,400 for the Malaya and Royal Sovereign. The Warspite and Malaya could steam at 23 knots, the Royal Sovereign at only 20—a serious disadvantage compared with the 26-knot Italian battleships.
\(^6\) A relief force consisting of the battleship Ramilies and the 4th Cruiser Squadron and four destroyers was to leave Alexandria (as soon as the four destroyers which were to be drawn from Force "C" could be fuelled on arrival in the evening of D6) and cover the arrival of Convoy M.S.1.
D2 and D6 (8th and 12th July): flying boats on passage Alexandria-Zante-Malta.
D3, 4 and 5 (9th-10th July): continuous patrol on lines Malta-Cape Spartivento (Calabria) and Cape Colonne-Corfu.

D7 (12th July): to a depth 60 miles to westward of Convoy M.S.1.

During the operation a diversion by Force "H", under Vice-Admiral Sir James Somerville, which had arrived at Gibraltar on 6th July, was staged in the Western Mediterranean. The diversion was to take the form of an air attack by the Fleet Air Arm of the Ark Royal on Cagliari (Sardinia), at dawn, 10th July (D4)—the day following the convoys' first night out from Malta.

3. ITALIAN PLAN OF OPERATIONS (Plan I)²

While Admiral Cunningham was making the arrangements just described the enemy were planning to run an important troop and military stores convoy from Naples to Benghazi at about the same time. Leaving Naples on 6th July, the convoy was to pass through the Strait of Messina in the forenoon of the 7th (M.A.5, D1) and follow the Sicilian coast till off Syracuse when it was to steer a diversionary course for Tobruk, altering direct for Benghazi after dark.

At 0500, 8th (M.A.5, D2) when it was expected to be in 34° 54' N., 17° 58' E., the convoy was to split into a fast (18-knot) and a slow (14-knot) section, due to arrive at Benghazi 1600 and 1900 that evening respectively.

At 0500, 8th (M.A.5, D2) when it was expected to be in 34° 54' N., 17° 58' E., a submarine on the surface at 1,000 yards range in 32° 35' N., 28° 30' E. A full pattern of depth charges was dropped and it was considered that the evidence was soon forthcoming that the enemy was keeping watch on the approaches to Alexandria, when at 2339, 7th, the Hasty sighted and attacked a submarine on the surface at 1,000 yards range in 32° 35', 28° 30' E. A.

INITIAL MOVES

4. INITIAL MOVES, OPERATION M.A.5, 7th-8th July (Plan I)

Operation M.A.5 started in the afternoon of 7th July, when Rear-Admiral Pridham-Wippell sailed from Alexandria with Force "C." That same afternoon, some 900 miles to the north-westward, the Italian squadrons were putting to sea from Palermo, Augusta, Taranto and Messina.

After clearing the sweep channel, the Eagle embarked No. 813 Squadron from Dekheila, and course was then set for Kaso Strait. Forces "A" and "B" sailed that evening, and by midnight 7th/8th July all ships were clear of the harbour, and steering to pass through the following positions:

Force "A"—-35° 00' N., 21° 30' E.; Force "B"—34° 15' N., 24° 50' E.; Force "C"—-33° 20' N., 27° 50' E.

Special submarine dispositions between 6th and 11th July were ordered west of a line joining Cape Passero-Malta-Zuara (32° 50' N., 12° 32' E.) to cover the approaches from the Western Mediterranean, and in the Eastern basin east of a line joining Cape Matapan—Ras el Hilal (33° 3', 22° 10' E.), as shown in Plan I ¹.

1 Force "H" (Flag, V.A. (A) (eight 4-inch, eight 4-inch H.A.), (eight 15-inch) (Flag of C.-in-C.).
2 For this occasion, in addition to her normal complement of two T.S.R. Squadrons, the Eagle embarked three spare F.A.A. Gladiators (fighters) from Alexandria, which proved their value in the ensuing operations, by shooting down a shadower and two or three bombers. They were flown by Commander (Flying) Keighly-Peach, an old fighter pilot and another officer.
submarine was probably sunk. When proceeding to rejoin Force “C”, the 
Hast, at 0100, 8th, attacked a confirmed contact and possibly damaged a 
second submarine.1

A few hours later the Imperial burst a feed tank, and was ordered to return 
to Alexandria. Enemy submarines were reported by the Eagle’s aircraft on 
A/S patrol at 0658 and 0908; the latter was attacked with bombs.

During the night the Commander-in-Chief, with Force “B”, set a mean 
line of advance 305°, 20 knots. The original plan was modified, and a 
rendezvous appointed for all forces at 1400, 10th July, in 36° 30’ N., 17° 40’ E.

Meanwhile, unknown to the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Campioni’s forces 
were at sea, steering southerly courses in pursuance of their plan for 
covering their convoy to Benghazi.

The first intelligence of the Italian Fleet being at sea was received in the 
Warship at 0807, 8th, from the submarine Phoenix (Lieutenant-Commander 
G. H. Nowell), who reported that at 0515 she had made an unsuccessful 
attack at extreme range on two battleships and four destroyers steering 180° in 
35° 30’ N., 18° 28’ E. (about 185 miles to the eastward of Malta). This 
enemy activity might well be due to movements covering an important convoy, 
and the Commander-in-Chief ordered the Vice-Admiral, Malta2, to arrange 
for a flying boat to search for and shadow the enemy force. Pending further 
information, the Fleet maintained its course and speed.

During the day of 8th July, all three forces experienced heavy bombing 
attacks by formations of aircraft coming apparently from the Dodecanese 
bases. Between 1023 and 1837, five attacks were made on Force “A”, in the 
last of which the Gloucester, seemingly singled out as a special target, was 
hit by a bomb on the compass platform. This unhappily caused the following 
casualties:— officers, 7 killed (including Captain F. R. Garside), 3 wounded; 
ratings, 11 killed, 6 wounded. The damage to the Gloucester’s bridge and 
D.C.T. obliged her to steer from ast and use her after gun control.

Force “B” was attacked seven times between 1205 and 1812, some 120 
bombs being dropped without result. Six attacks were made on Force “C” 
between 0951 and 1749. No hits were made, though about 80 bombs were 
dropped, the Eagle being the chief target. In these attacks, which were all 
delivered from levels between 10,000 and 14,000 ft., there was a number of 
near misses.

Further information of the Italian fleet was received at 1557, 8th—a signal 
from Flying Boat L.5803, reporting two battleships, six cruisers and seven 
destroyers in 33° 08’ N., 19° 45’ E. (60 miles north of Benghazi) steering 340° at 
1500. Later, the flying boat reported that the enemy had altered 
course to starboard, and gave their course at 1630 as 070° to 20 knots: it was 
obliged to return to Malta at 1715 and no relief was then available to continue 
shadowing the enemy fleet.

Suspicious that the “battleships” reported by the flying boat were probably 
8-inch cruisers, the Commander-in-Chief was of opinion that the enemy had 
some special reason for wishing to keep the British Fleet away from the Central 
Mediterranean. The intensive bombing already experienced strengthened 

1 It is now known that neither of these submarines was sunk.

2 Vice-Admiral Sir Wilbraham T. R. Ford, K.B.E., C.B.

3 There are discrepancies in the reports of this position which cannot be reconciled. (a) In the C-in-C’s report on the operation it is stated to be 33° 35’ N., 19° 40’ E. at 1510. (b) In 
the C-in-C’s War Diary, 33° 18’ N., 19° 35’ E. at 1510. (c) The actual signal made by 
F/B L.5803 (quoted in an enclosure to the C-in-C’s report) puts it as 10 miles 18° from 33° 
30’ N., 19° 45’ E., i.e. 33° 08’ N., 19° 45’ E. at 1500. This latter position is within 20 miles 
of the actual position of the Italian 8-inch cruisers (to which it undoubtedly refers) at the time.

his impression that the Italians might be covering the movement of an important 
convoy—probably one to Benghazi. Acting on this conclusion, he decided to 
abandon temporarily the operation in progress and to proceed at best possible 
speed in the direction of Taranto, in order to get between the enemy and 
that base. He accordingly took the following steps. Forces “A”, “B” and 
“C” were ordered to concentrate to the southward of Zante (36° 55’ N., 
20° 30’ E.) at 0600, 9th July.1 Two flying boat searches were ordered to 
commence at dawn, one between 070° and 130° from Malta, the other westward 
of a line 180° from Cape Matapan between 35° N. and the African coast. At 
the same time, the Eagle was to fly off a search to a depth of 60 miles between 
180° and 300°. The submarines Rorqual and Phoenix were ordered to positions 
on a line 160° from Taranto—the Rorqual as far north as possible, the Phoenix 
south of 37° 30’ N.

During the night 8th/9th July the Commander-in-Chief maintained a mean 
line of advance of 310°, 20 knots, Forces “A” and “C” adjusting courses 
and speeds as necessary to make the rendezvous.

5. Movements of Italian Fleet, 8th-9th July (Plan I)

Meanwhile, the Italians had carried out their convoy movements almost 
exactly as planned. At 0150, 8th July, Admiral Campioni received a signal 
from the Italian Admiralty reporting that British forces from Alexandria were 
estimated to be in positions 34° 10’ N., 23° 00’ E. and 34° 5’ N., 24° 00’ E. at 
2000, 7th July.2

Steps were taken to concentrate the covering forces, and just before 0500 
the convoy’s course was altered to 180° till the situation should be clarified.

Air search at dawn to the eastward and south-eastward of the Cestus to a depth of 
100 miles having proved negative, the convoy resumed its course for 
Benghazi during the forenoon and arrived there without incident that evening.

Between 1430 and 1500, 8th the covering forces turned to the north-north 
westward to return to Italy, the battleships then being about 75 miles to the 
north-east of Benghazi and the 8-inch cruisers some 30 miles north-west of 
the battleships. It was shortly after the 8-inch cruisers had made this turn 
that they were sighted and reported by F.B. L.5803.3 Soon after this, on the 
strength of an air report of three enemy battleships and eight destroyers to 
the south of Crete, Admiral Campioni decided to steer to intercept them, and 
altered to a N.N.E.’ly course, the cruiser forces altering to close him; but at 
1830 the Italian Admiralty intervened and cancelled this movement, 
pending further orders. Course 330° was therefore resumed.

The Italian Admiralty had intercepted and deciphered enemy signals, 
which indicated that early next afternoon (9th) the British Fleet would be 
some 80 miles east of Sicily. This information seemed to offer a golden 
opportunity of engaging the main British naval force in their own waters with 
submarine bases and surface forces. They accordingly altered to a new 
line of advance of 305°, 20 knots, the cruiser forces altered to steer for this area 
(later amended to one further north, off Calabria), at the same time ordering 
five submarines to take up positions between 35° 50’ N. and 37° N. and 17° and 
17° 40’ E.

The plan was a good one, but it did not quite take into account Admiral 
Cunningham’s offensive spirit, which led him to change his aim as soon as he 
saw a chance of getting between the enemy fleet and its base, and to thrust 

1 Sunrise, 0520; Beginning of nautical twilight (sun 6° below horizon), 0450, Zone minus 2.

2 It is not known on what information these positions were based. Actually, no British 
forces from Alexandria were so far west till nearly 24 hours later.

3 See Section 4.
The commander-in-chief altered course to 270° to increase the rate of closing. Though the cruisers were well ahead, the Royal Sovereign's speed limited the rate of approach, and at 1430, in 38° 02' N., 17° 25' E., the Warspite increased speed to 22 knots, acting as a battle-cruiser to support the 7th C.S., which in comparison with the enemy cruiser force was very weak, being fewer in numbers and lacking 8-inch gun ships.

At 1434, the Eagle's striking force had landed on and an air reconnaissance report received at 1435 gave the enemy's course and speed as 360°, 15 knots. This was amplified four minutes later when the enemy's bearing and distance from the Warspite was signalled as 260°, 30 miles. Force "A", less the Stuart which had just been ordered to join the Royal Sovereign's screen, was then eight miles ahead of the Warspite while Force "C" was ten miles astern of her.

At this stage when the period of approach may be considered to end, there was a general impression that the enemy fleet was concentrating south-east of Calabria in the approximate position 37° 45' N., 17° 20' E.

Further air reports helped to establish its position and movements: thus, at 1430, Flying Boat 9020 reported three battleships and a large number of cruisers and destroyers in 37° 58' N., 17° 55' E., steering 360°, and at 1445 gave their course and speed as 020°, 18 knots.

Apparently the enemy had by that time completed his concentration, and turning to the north-eastward was maintaining a central position with the direction open for retreat. Whether he intended to stand and fight in an area of his own choosing was still a matter of conjecture. The British Fleet on its north-west course was rapidly closing and at 1400, having achieved his immediate object of cutting him off from Taranto, the Commander-in-Chief altered course to 270° to increase the rate of closing. Though the cruisers were well ahead, the Royal Sovereign's speed limited the rate of approach, and at 1430, in 38° 02' N., 17° 25' E., the Warspite increased speed to 22 knots, acting as a battle-cruiser to support the 7th C.S., which in comparison with the enemy cruiser force was very weak, being fewer in numbers and lacking 8-inch gun ships.

At 1434, the Eagle's striking force had landed on and an air reconnaissance report received at 1435 gave the enemy's course and speed as 360°, 15 knots. This was amplified four minutes later when the enemy's bearing and distance from the Warspite was signalled as 260°, 30 miles. Force "A", less the Stuart which had just been ordered to join the Royal Sovereign's screen, was then eight miles ahead of the Warspite while Force "C" was ten miles astern of her.

At this stage when the period of approach may be considered to end, there was a general impression that the enemy fleet was concentrating south-east of Calabria in the approximate position 37° 45' N., 17° 20' E.

Further air reports helped to establish its position and movements: thus, at 1430, Flying Boat 9020 reported three battleships and a large number of cruisers and destroyers in 37° 58' N., 17° 55' E., steering 360°, and at 1445 gave their course and speed as 020°, 18 knots.

Apparently the enemy had by that time completed his concentration, and turning to the north-eastward was maintaining a central position with the direction open for retreat. Whether he intended to stand and fight in an area of his own choosing was still a matter of conjecture. The British Fleet on its north-west course was rapidly closing and at 1400, having achieved his immediate object of cutting him off from Taranto, the Commander-in-Chief altered course to 270° to increase the rate of closing. Though the cruisers were well ahead, the Royal Sovereign's speed limited the rate of approach, and at 1430, in 38° 02' N., 17° 25' E., the Warspite increased speed to 22 knots, acting as a battle-cruiser to support the 7th C.S., which in comparison with the enemy cruiser force was very weak, being fewer in numbers and lacking 8-inch gun ships.

At 1434, the Eagle's striking force had landed on and an air reconnaissance report received at 1435 gave the enemy's course and speed as 360°, 15 knots. This was amplified four minutes later when the enemy's bearing and distance from the Warspite was signalled as 260°, 30 miles. Force "A", less the Stuart which had just been ordered to join the Royal Sovereign's screen, was then eight miles ahead of the Warspite while Force "C" was ten miles astern of her.

At this stage when the period of approach may be considered to end, there was a general impression that the enemy fleet was concentrating south-east of Calabria in the approximate position 37° 45' N., 17° 20' E.

Further air reports helped to establish its position and movements: thus, at 1430, Flying Boat 9020 reported three battleships and a large number of cruisers and destroyers in 37° 58' N., 17° 55' E., steering 360°, and at 1445 gave their course and speed as 020°, 18 knots.

Apparently the enemy had by that time completed his concentration, and turning to the north-eastward was maintaining a central position with the direction open for retreat. Whether he intended to stand and fight in an area of his own choosing was still a matter of conjecture. The British Fleet on its north-west course was rapidly closing and at 1400, having achieved his immediate object of cutting him off from Taranto, the Commander-in-Chief altered course to 270° to increase the rate of closing. Though the cruisers were well ahead, the Royal Sovereign's speed limited the rate of approach, and at 1430, in 38° 02' N., 17° 25' E., the Warspite increased speed to 22 knots, acting as a battle-cruiser to support the 7th C.S., which in comparison with the enemy cruiser force was very weak, being fewer in numbers and lacking 8-inch gun ships.

At 1434, the Eagle's striking force had landed on and an air reconnaissance report received at 1435 gave the enemy's course and speed as 360°, 15 knots. This was amplified four minutes later when the enemy's bearing and distance from the Warspite was signalled as 260°, 30 miles. Force "A", less the Stuart which had just been ordered to join the Royal Sovereign's screen, was then eight miles ahead of the Warspite while Force "C" was ten miles astern of her.

At this stage when the period of approach may be considered to end, there was a general impression that the enemy fleet was concentrating south-east of Calabria in the approximate position 37° 45' N., 17° 20' E.

Further air reports helped to establish its position and movements: thus, at 1430, Flying Boat 9020 reported three battleships and a large number of cruisers and destroyers in 37° 58' N., 17° 55' E., steering 360°, and at 1445 gave their course and speed as 020°, 18 knots.

Apparently the enemy had by that time completed his concentration, and turning to the north-eastward was maintaining a central position with the direction open for retreat. Whether he intended to stand and fight in an area of his own choosing was still a matter of conjecture. The British Fleet on its north-west course was rapidly closing and at 1400, having achieved his immediate object of cutting him off from Taranto, the Commander-in-Chief altered course to 270° to increase the rate of closing. Though the cruisers were well ahead, the Royal Sovereign's speed limited the rate of approach, and at 1430, in 38° 02' N., 17° 25' E., the Warspite increased speed to 22 knots, acting as a battle-cruiser to support the 7th C.S., which in comparison with the enemy cruiser force was very weak, being fewer in numbers and lacking 8-inch gun ships.
interpose his fleet between the Italian coast and the enemy, and if possible to get between him and Taranto, accepting battle and relying on his superiority of speed to enable him to break off the action if the superior weight of gunfire of the British capital ships should prove too much for him.

He then had in company the two battleships, six 8-inch cruisers, eight 6-inch cruisers and 24 destroyers. The four light cruisers of the 7th Division were still some distance to the south-westward, but in view of the urgency to keep open the route to Taranto and the marked numerical superiority in cruisers and destroyers he already possessed, he decided to steer to the northward without waiting for them.

7. ACTION OFF CALABRIA: SURFACE CONTACT (Plan 2)

At 1447, 9th July, the Orion sighted white smoke bearing 230° and two minutes later black smoke, bearing 245°, being laid by a destroyer. Apparently the enemy was completing his concentration behind this cover of smoke. At 1452 the Neptune reported two enemy ships in sight bearing 236°. These reports were amplified by further details at 1453 and 1500 from the Orion.

On first sighting the enemy the damaged Gloucester was ordered to join the Eagle, which—screened by the Voyager and Vampire—was taking station ten miles to the eastward of the Warspite, while the air striking force was re-arming and re-fuelling in readiness to renew its attack. The remaining four cruisers, in order from north to south Neptune, Liverpool, Orion, Sydney (henceforth referred to as the 7th Cruiser Squadron) were formed on a line of bearing 320°, steering 270° at 22 knots, distant ten miles 260° from the Warspite.

At 1500 the enemy fleet appeared to be disposed in four columns or groups spread over a wide area, with intervals of about five miles between the columns, which were on a line of bearing 190°–310°. The direction of their advance was reported as 020°, speed 19 knots. Only a few of their ships were visible simultaneously to the British ships and then only for short periods (see Fig. 2). The difficulty of gauging their formation and what ships were present can be seen by a comparison with Fig. 3, which shews it from Italian records.

Taking the enemy columns in order, as they appeared to the British: the port wing column (marked A in Fig. 2) consisted of five or six cruisers, including some of the Bolzano class, the next column (B) was thought to consist of two or three cruisers, ahead of two Cavour class battleships. In the third column (C) four cruisers, probably 8-inch, and in the starboard wing column (D) four 6-inch cruisers. In the van were a number of destroyers, probably three flotillas (X, Y and Z) while some others formed the battleship A/S screen.

Actually, this was an overestimate of the number of cruisers present in this opening stage, according to the Italian records. Admiral Campioni had been proceeding on a mean course 010°, the six 8-inch cruisers under Admiral Paladini in the Pola (in the rear), disposed three miles on his port beam, and four 6-inch cruisers (two from the 8th Division and two from the 4th) five miles on his starboard beam. At 1500 the 8-inch cruisers were going ahead to take station in the van, a movement facilitated by a turn to port by the battleships. The four cruisers of the 7th Division (which it will be remembered had been on their way home) were some distance off, coming up from the south-westward.

It was a fine day, with the wind north, force 4, sea slight, 1/10th cloud and visibility ranging from 13 to 18 miles.

---

Footnote: The 8th, 15th and 16th Destroyer Flotillas (nine destroyers) had been sent into harbour to re-fuel at 0600, 9th, and did not rejoin the fleet till 1930 that evening. Three other destroyers and two light cruisers (the Cadorna and Diaz) had been detached with engine trouble or defects in the course of the day.
Vice-Admiral Tovey was getting a long way ahead of the *Warspite*, and at 1506, in order to avoid becoming heavily engaged before she was in a position to support, he altered course together to 000°. As he turned, the *Neptune* reported two battleships bearing 250°, 15 miles off. The 7th Cruiser Squadron was still closing the enemy and soon groups of enemy cruisers and destroyers were seen showing up between the bearings of 235° and 270° at distances of 12 to 18 miles. Course was again altered—to 045°—and at 1514 the squadron was formed on a line of bearing 350°.

The surface action which ensued falls into three phases:

1. **1514 to 1536.** Cruiser action, in which the *Warspite* intervened.
2. **1548 to 1615.** Battleships and cruisers in action, and F.A.A. attack by the Eagle's aircraft.
3. **1615 to 1649.** The Italian Fleet in full retreat; British cruisers and destroyers engaging enemy destroyers as opportunity offered.

From 1640 to 1925 the enemy shore-based aircraft carried out heavy but ineffective attacks on both fleets with complete impartiality.

### 8. Action off Calabria: Phase 1 (Plan 3)

At 1514 the enemy cruisers (C), bearing 250° opened fire at a range of 23,600 yards on the 7th Cruiser Squadron. Vice-Admiral Tovey increased speed to 25 knots at 1515 and a minute later altered course to 025° to open the “A” ares. With the advantage of the sun behind him, the enemy’s fire was good for range, but it fell off later. After a couple more alterations of course together to 355° and 030°, the 7th Cruiser Squadron was ordered at 1522 to engage an equal number of enemy ships.

The *Neptune* and *Liverpool* immediately opened fire, range 22,100 yards, followed by the *Sydney* at 1523 engaging the fourth cruiser from the right. The speed of the Squadron was increased to 28 knots and the *Orion*, at 1526, fired at a destroyer (Z) for three minutes, range 23,200 yards. When this destroyer altered course away, the *Orion* shifted target to the right-hand cruiser, then bearing 249°, range 23,700 yards. By this time the *Warspite* was intervening. It appeared urgently necessary to support the outnumbered cruisers, and at 1525 the Commander-in-Chief detached his destroyer screen, which formed single line ahead on the *Nebbia*, and altered course to starboard to pass on the *Warspite’s* disengaged side. A minute later (1526) the flagship opened fire on what was believed to be an 8-inch cruiser (C) bearing 350°, range 24,400 yards. Blast from the first salvo damaged the *Warspite’s* aircraft, which was subsequently jettisoned. Ten salvos were fired, and it was thought a hit was scored by the last.

The enemy cruisers turned away under smoke. A hit was scored by the last. The enemy cruisers turned away under smoke. A hit was scored by the last. The 7th Cruiser Squadron, whose orders were not to get too far ahead of the Commander-in-Chief, made a complete turn to conform with this movement.

Apart from this burst of fire, there was a lull in the action till 1548. The Commander-in-Chief could do nothing but wait for his battleships to come up. There is a smack of old world courtesy—almost of apology—in the signal he flashed to Vice-Admiral Tovey at this time:—"I am sorry for this delay, but we must call upon reinforcements."

The situation of the British Fleet was then as follows: the 7th Cruiser Squadron, steering 25°, 28 knots, to close the enemy was 314° to the northward of the *Warspite*, which was turning to 345°. The *Malaya* and *Royal Sovereign*—particularly the former—had gained considerably. The destroyers, all of which had been released from screening duties, were concentrating in their flotillas on the disengaged bow of the battlefleet.

A squadron of six enemy cruisers (presumably column A) was in sight ahead of their battlefleet.

### 9. Action off Calabria: Phase 2 (Plan 4)

Just at this moment (1548) the second phase or battlefleet action began, when the enemy battlefleet opened fire on the *Warspite* at extreme range. Reserving her fire till 1553, the *Warspite* then fired at the right-hand enemy battlefleet (Cesare), bearing 278°, range 26,000 yards. Just previously, the Eagle’s striking force of nine Swordfish of No. 824 Squadron, which had flown off at 1545, passed over her on their way to the attack.

The enemy’s shooting was moderately good, most of his salvos falling within 1,000 yards, some straddling, but nearly all having a wide spread. One closely bunched salvo fell about 400 yards off the *Warspite’s* port bow. The destroyers, then passing to the eastward of her, under orders to join Admiral Tovey, were narrowly missed by salvos of heavy shells falling one to two miles over the Fleet flagship.

At 1600 a salvo from the *Warspite* straddled the Cesare at a range of 26,200 yards and a hit was observed at the base of her foremost funnel. The effect was immediate; the enemy ships altered course away and began to make smoke. The shell had exploded on the upper deck casing, starting several fires and killing or wounding 58 men. Four boilers were put out of action and her speed dropped to 18 knots, causing the ship to drop back on the *Cavour*. This meant that Admiral Campioni had lost the margin of speed on which he was relying to counter-balance the superiority of the British gunfire, and he decided to break off the action without more ado. Accordingly he altered course to west and later to 230°, and ordered those destroyers suitably
placed to lay smoke and attack the enemy fleet, though he recognised that in broad daylight against practically untouched ships they were unlikely to achieve material success. All he hoped was that they might delay the enemy from closing during the critical stage of disengaging.

The Warspite at 1602 tried to close the range by altering course to 310°. The Malta, by then in station bearing 282° from her, fired four salvos at extreme range, but all fell short. Three more salvos, fired by her at 1608, had an equally disappointing result. The Royal Sovereign, unable to close the Warspite nearer than three miles, took no part in the action. At 1604 the enemy battleships became obscured by smoke, and the Warspite ceased fire, having got off 17 salvos.

Just as this engagement between the battleships was ending, the Eagle's striking force, Admiral Palafox's 8-inch cruisers. After passing over the Warspite, the Swordfish had a bird's-eye view of both fleets opening fire and noticed several salvos straddling the Warspite. When two-thirds of the way towards the enemy they came under A.A. fire at 6,000 feet. The enemy fleet, partially obscured by smoke, seemed to be in some confusion with 15-inch shell straddling their ships. Observing two large ships1 at a head of a line of cruisers, the squadron leader, Lieutenant-Commander A. J. Debenham, decided to attack the leading ship, which at the moment was turning in a circle. After the attack by sub-flights had commenced this ship became more distinct; though it then probably was a Bolzano class cruiser and not a battleship, he decided not to call off the attack. Anti-aircraft fire became general during the final approach, which was made at 1605 in three sub-flights from ahead. All the aircraft dropped their torpedoes successfully on the enemy ship's starboard side between her bow and beam bearings. Observers in the Neptune testified to the determined manner in which the attack was made. On account of smoke from the ships' guns the aircraft crews were unable to establish definite claims to results, but five members reported individually having seen columns of water, smoke, or an explosion. On the strength of this evidence it was assumed that at least one torpedo got home, but it is now known that this was not the case.2

Meanwhile, the cruisers had renewed their action. The 7th Cruiser Squadron, steering 310°, endeavoured to close the enemy, who at 1556 reopened an accurate fire. The Orion replied at 1559, her target being a Bolzano class cruiser (A) bearing 287°, range 25,000 yards. At 1600, the Neptune and Sydney opened fire respectively at the second and fourth enemy cruisers from the right, and the Liverpool followed suit two minutes later. The course of the Squadron was altered to 010° and then 070°, but as the enemy seemed to be turning away at 1606, course 010° was resumed.

About this time, too, the destroyer flotillas were coming into action. They had been ordered at 1545 to join the 7th Cruiser Squadron, and after their unpleasant experience among the "overs" while passing the Warspite, were reformed at 1555 by Captain P. J. Mack, the Senior Captain (D), on course 250° in the following order:—

14th D.F. Nabian, Mohawk, Juno, Janus.
2nd D.F. Hyperion, Hero, Hereward, Hostile, Hasty, Ilex (in single line ahead 27 knots on bearing 140° from Nabian).
10th D.F. Stuart, Dainty, Defender, Decoy (in single line ahead 27 knots on bearing 220° from Nabian).

From 1602 and 1605 the two leading flotillas (14th and 10th) came under heavy fire from the enemy cruisers but were not hit. The enemy destroyers were observed at this time by the Warspite moving across to starboard from the enemy's van, and at 1607 two destroyer salvos could be seen landing close to the Stuart.

At 1609 the Warspite fired six salvos at a cruiser bearing 313°, range 24,600 yards, which had drawn ahead of the enemy battleship.2 A minute later the tracks of three or more torpedoes were seen passing through the 14th Flotilla.

At 1611, the Orion shifted target to the right-hand cruiser bearing 308° range 20,300 yards,3 which was then the only ship within range. The Sydney fired a few salvos at this ship, her previous target having become very indistinct. The Neptune straddled her target which she claimed to have hit, and the Liverpool straddled with her fifth salvo, after which the enemy ships altered course away, lowering their salvos out for line. During this period of the action, a hot fire from the enemy destroyers, which were moving up to gain a position for attack, was a constant source of annoyance to the British cruisers. Their guns outranged the cruisers' 4-inch armament, but as soon as the enemy cruisers had disappeared in the smoke, the cruisers turned their 6-inch guns on to these hornets, which were quickly silenced and driven off. This ended the second phase of the action.

10. Action off Calabria: Phase 3

At the beginning of the third phase of the action (about 1615) the general position was thus roughly as follows:

The Italian Fleet was withdrawing to the westward, the damaged Cavour and Cauda were being cut out behind a smoke screen on a westerly course and the cruisers gradually conforming on north-westerly courses.2 Their destroyers were either laying smoke, or proceeding to positions suitable for attack on the British; one flotilla was already firing on Admiral Tovey's cruisers. Turning to the British, the battleships on a north-westerly course were endeavouring to close the enemy battlefleet, with the destroyer flotillas—bearing about 090° from the Warspite—steering to join Admiral Tovey, then some nine miles north of the Warspite; the 7th Cruiser Squadron had turned back to 010° to conform with the enemy's turn away, and was engaging the 8-inch cruisers.

At 1614 the signal for our destroyers to counter-attack the enemy destroyers was made. The Flotillas were then about four miles N.N.E. of the Warspite; speed was increased to 29 knots and course altered to 270° to close the enemy, each flotilla manoeuvring as necessary to clear the others and keep their lines of fire open. Speed was increased to 30 knots at 1617 and at the same time the 7th Cruiser Squadron altered course to 340° in support to avoid fouling our destroyers.

The 10th Destroyer Flotilla opened fire at 1619 on an enemy destroyer ahead, range 12,600 yards, and the Stuart's first salvo appeared to hit.4 The

1 It is difficult to reconcile this relative position with the Italian movements as shown on their plan.
2 If the impressions of the Eagle's striking force are correct, the fleet was in considerably greater disorder than the parade ground precision of their movements, shown in the plan subsequently produced by them, would imply (see Plan 4).
3 About this time the Orion thought she scored a hit on the bridge of a destroyer of the Maestrale class, bearing 305°, range 17,100 yards; but the Italians state that no such hit was obtained.
* This is not confirmed by Italian sources.

* This is not confirmed by Italian sources.
2nd D.F. opened fire at 1626 on a destroyer bearing 290°, range 14,000 yards, and the 14th D.F. at 1629 on one of two destroyers bearing 278°, range 12,400 yards.

Apparently at this time a number of enemy destroyers, after working across to starboard of their main fleet, were attempting in a half-hearted manner to make a torpedo attack. After firing their torpedoes at long range, they turned away to the westward making smoke, the second flotilla retiring through the smoke made by the leading flotilla. On account of these cautious tactics, our flotillas were only able spasmodically to engage targets when they presented themselves within range, unobserved by smoke. No hits on either side were seen by the Warspite's aircraft.

To return to the 7th Cruiser Squadron, after turning to the north-eastward to clear the flotillas, the enemy quickly disappeared and fire was checked at 1622; at the same time a submarine was reported, which, however, proved to be the wreckage of an aircraft. In order to place the cruisers in a better position to support the destroyers Admiral Tovey then altered course round through south to 280°. The Orion then opened fire again on her former target, and the Neptune managed to get off a couple of salvos at a cruiser, which showed up momentarily out of the smoke. The Sydney's target, a smoke-laying destroyer, was engaged till she became obscured; and the Liverpool at 1625 fired four salvos at a cruiser, range 19,000 yards, before she also disappeared into the smoke screen. At 1628, course was altered to 180°; the Orion, Neptune and Sydney fired occasional salvos whenever they caught fleeting glimpses of enemy destroyers, and four minutes later Admiral Tovey hauled round to 210° in the smoke. At 1634, with all their targets rapidly disappearing in the smoke, the 7th Cruiser Squadron ceased fire. This marked the end of the cruiser action, apart from a few salvoes fired by a ship invisible to our cruisers at 1641. The principal feature of its desultory character was the unanimous determination of the enemy cruisers to avoid close action. This they achieved with conspicuous success.

The Commander-in-Chief, meanwhile, in the Warspite, with the Malaya in company and the Royal Sovereign about three miles astern, had been steering a mean course 313° at 20 knots, and by 1630 was nearing the enemy's smoke screen. Several enemy signals had been intercepted, saying that he was "constrained to retire" at 20 knots and ordering his flotillas to make smoke, and to attack with torpedoes; there was also a warning that they were approaching the submarine line. "These signals,"—wrote Admiral Cunningham afterwards—"together with my own appreciation of the existing situation, made it appear unwise and playing the enemy's own game to plunge straight into the smoke screen." He therefore altered course to starboard to 340° at 1650, to work round to the northward and to windward of the smoke. A few minutes later enemy destroyers came in view and between 1641 and the Warspite fired five salvos of 6-inch and the Malaya one salvo at them and they disappeared into the smoke screen. The proceedings were enlivened by the first appearance that day of the Italian Air Force, which carried out an ineffective bombing attack on the Warspite at 1641.

The final engagement continued until 1649, our destroyers seizing every opportunity voluntarily offered by the enemy as he bolted in and out of the smoke cover. At 1640 two torpedoes were seen passing astern of the Warspite, and at 1647 she observed one of two enemy destroyers apparently hit and dropping astern. The 2nd Destroyer Flotilla passed through the smoke, while the 14th tried to work round it to the northward. All endeavours to get to close quarters were unsuccessful, and at 1654 orders were received from the Commander-in-Chief, who three minutes earlier had altered course to 270°, to rejoin the 7th Cruiser Squadron. When the destroyers finally cleared the smoke screen at 1700, the enemy was out of sight, having retired to the south-westward in the direction of his bases.

The flotillas then proceeded as necessary to join Vice-Admiral Tovey, who was to the north of the Warspite steering 280° at 27 knots, taking stations in accordance with Destroyer Cruising Order No. 3. 1

To the east, the striking force was just getting back to the Eagle: all the Swordfish landed on safely at 1705. Another striking force was being got ready, but it could not be despatched before the general recall of aircraft was made at 1750. During the engagement the Eagle had also maintained aircraft, as available, on reconnaissance, as well as one acting as spotter for the Royal Sovereign.

The surface action was over; its indecisive character at all stages was due to the "safety first" tactics of the Italians. Throughout its course, their cruisers had kept at extreme ranges, the battleships called for smoke protection as soon as one was hit, and the destroyers—dodging in and out of the smoke screen—fired a few torpedoes at long range and then withdrew at their best speed. With the British Fleet between them and their main base (Taranto), they were hurriedly seeking shelter in other bases to the south and west. It was now the turn of the Italian Air Force to see if it could do better against Admiral Cunningham's fleet.

11. Action off Calabria: Italian Air Attacks, 9th July

The first appearance of enemy aircraft on the scene, as already mentioned, was at 1640—just as the surface action was petering out—when the Warspite was attacked. From then till about 1930, the Fleet was subjected to a series of heavy bombing attacks by shore-based aircraft.

The Warspite and the Eagle were particularly singled out as targets, each being attacked five times; 2 but the 7th Cruiser Squadron received numerous attacks and many bombs fell near the destroyers. At 1654, the Orion fired on a formation of nine aircraft which attempted to bomb the flotillas. Vice-Admiral Tovey effectively disposed his cruisers in a diamond formation to resist these attacks, which were frequent till 1920. Most of the bombing was extremely wild, from heights of between 10,000 and 15,000 feet, carried out by formations of aircraft varying in numbers from nine to a single aircraft, but generally in formations of three. No ships were hit during any of the attacks, but there were numerous near misses and a few minor casualties from splinters. The Malaya claimed to have damaged two aircraft by A.A. fire, but none was seen to fall.

During this period of the action the coast of Italy was in sight, the high land of Calabria showing up prominently as the sun got lower in the West.

About 600 miles to the westward, Vice-Admiral Somerville with Force "H" who was then south of Minorca on his way to carry out the diversionary attack on Cagliari, which had been arranged for the next morning, was undergoing a similar experience at much the same time. Admiral Somerville, deeming that the risk of damage to the Ark Royal outweighed the importance of a secondary operation, cancelled the proposed attack and returned to

---

1 14th D.F. in the centre, 2nd D.F. on port, and 10th D.F. on starboard.

2 Warspite at 1641, 1715, 1735, 1825, 1911; Eagle at 1745, 1809, 1826, 1842, 1900. No records of times or numbers of attacks on other ships are available.
Gibraltar.\(^1\) No damage was suffered from the air attacks, but the destroyer Escort was torpedoed and sunk by a submarine on the return passage two days later.

12. Fleet Movements after Action (Plan I)

To return to the Italians.

The sudden retirement behind the smoke screens had naturally thrown the fleet into considerable disorder and the manoeuvre had not been helped by the F.A.A. attack on the Bolzano which had developed a few minutes later. The battleships steered a westerly course till about 1615 and then steadied on 290°, the other squadrons steering to the north-westward and gradually conforming.

By 1645 the Cesare's boilers had again been connected up, and Admiral Campioni considered the possibility of pushing towards Taranto and regaining contact with the British Fleet. Nothing could be seen of the enemy, owing to the smoke screens, and he had received no report of his movements since 1615, but he knew that their battleships were by that time concentrated and there would be danger of his being forced on to the Calabrian coast by their gunfire. He therefore decided to steer for the Sicilian ports. Shortage of fuel in his available destroyers prevented him from sending them to locate the enemy and subsequently attempt a night attack.

From this time onwards the various units of the fleet were repeatedly bombed by their own shore-based aircraft.\(^2\) "Signals were made with searchlights, wireless messages were sent, national flags were spread on the turrets and decks—but without results. Ships frequently replied with gunfire to the dropping of the bombs.\(^3\) " The marksmanship of the Italian pilots seems to have been no better on their own ships than on the British for none was hit due to the quickness of the ships' manoeuvring;\(^4\) but the attacks kept the fleet in disorder, and it was not till 1800 that it was reformed, the light cruiser squadrons and destroyers then taking station to the east and south-eastward and the heavy cruisers disposed to the north-westward of the battleships.

At 1930 the destroyers which had been fuelling rejoined his flag, and the various units of the fleet arrived at Augusta, Messina and Palermo in the course of the evening—the majority, by order of the Ministry of Marine, sailing for Naples early on 10th July.

The British Fleet, meanwhile, had continued steering 270° from 1700 to 1735, 9th July. As it was plainly evident that the enemy had no intention of renewing the action and that it was impossible to intercept him, the Commander-in-Chief, being then about 25 miles from the Calabrian coast, altered the course of the fleet to 200°. At 1830 the destroyers were ordered to resume their screening formations on the battleships and at 1910 the Gloucester was ordered to rejoin Vice-Admiral Tovey. A couple of alterations of course were made to open the land.

1 An interesting decision as illustrating the considerations which should govern the acceptance of risks. The Ark Royal, our only large modern carrier in the Mediterranean, was of unique importance. Already a major attack on Italian battleships (subsequently carried out at Taranto in November 1940) was under consideration. Under these circumstances, Admiral Somerville declined to accept the risk to her for the sake of a subsidiary operation. It is to be noted that he had no hesitation in accepting a greater risk to her in connection with the bombardment of Genoa the following February. In war, risks must often be accepted, but the object should always be adequate.

2 Between 1643 and 1720, 12 attacks were carried out by formations of varying strength, usually three at a time. After a pause of about an hour, the attacks recommenced and between 1844 and 1910 a further 11 attacks—the last in the Messina Strait—were carried out.

3 Italian Official History of the War at Sea.

An enemy destroyer was believed to have been severely damaged, but on account of shortage of fuel in his own destroyers, Sir Andrew Cunningham reluctantly decided not to detach a force to deal with her. The last information of the enemy fleet received from the Warden's aircraft reported it in 37° 54' N., 16° 21' E. (about 10 miles from Cape Spartivento) at 1905, steering 230° at 18 knots.

At 2115, 9th, Admiral Cunningham altered course to 220° for a position south of Malta. During the night, which passed without incident, eight destroyers (Stuart, Dainty, Defender, Hyperion, Hostile, Hasty, Ilex, Jula) were detached to arrive at Malta at 0500, 10th, to complete with fuel.

The Vice-Admiral, Malta, had been told to delay the sailing of the convoys for Alexandria. However, "on hearing that the fleets were engaged, he wisely decided that the Italians would be too busy to attend to convoys, so sailed the fast convoy—M.F.1—escorted by the Diamond, Jervis and Vendetta (Lieutenant R. Rhoades, R.A.N.) at 2300, 9th July.

13. Movements and F.A.A. Attack on Port Augusta, 10th July

At 0800, 10th July, the fleet was in 35° 24' N., 15° 27' E. (about 50 miles E.S.E. of Malta), steering west, and throughout the day cruised to the south of Malta, while the destroyers were fuelling. An air raid took place on Malta at 0855, but no destroyer was hit. Three or four enemy aircraft were shot down. The second group (Hero, Hereward, Decoy, Vampire, Voyager) proceeded to Malta at 1525, the last three being ordered to sail with Convoy M.F. 1. Shortly after noon, the Gloucester and later the Stuart were detached to join Convoy M.F. 1. A flying-boat reconnaissance of Port Augusta having reported three cruisers and eight destroyers in harbour there, the Eagle's striking force of nine Swordfish aircraft was flown off at 1850, 10th, to make a dusk attack. Unfortunately, the enemy force had left before it arrived, and the only ships found were a destroyer of the Navigatori class and an oil tanker of 6,000 tons in a small bay to the northward. The destroyer—the Leone Pancaldo—was hit by two torpedoes and sank after breaking in two; the tanker also was hit. All the aircraft returned safely, landing at Malta.

At 2000, 10th, the 9th Cruiser Squadron was ordered to search to the eastward in the wake of Convoy M.F.1; and half an hour later the Royal Sovereign, Nubian, Mohawk and Janus were sent in to Malta to refuel. As they neared the island, an air raid on the neighbourhood of Calafrana was seen to be in progress. The ships entered harbour at midnight and left at 0450, 11th to rejoin the Commander-in-Chief. The remainder of the fleet at 2100 steered 180° from position 35° 28' N., 14° 30' E., till 0130, 11th July, when course was altered to the north for a rendezvous at 0800.

In view of the bombing attacks experienced on the 8th and 9th July, the Air Officer, C-in-C, Middle East, was requested to do everything possible to occupy the Italian air forces while the fleet and convoys were on passage to Alexandria.

14. Passage to Alexandria, 11th-15th July (Plan 5)

At 0800, 11th July, the ships which had been fuelling rejoined the flag in

1 The Stuart had only 15 tons of oil remaining on arrival.

The slow convoy, M.S.1, escorted by the Decoy, Vampire and Voyager, had left Malta at 2140, 10th, and at 0900, 11th, the Commander-in-Chief in the Warspite, screened by the Navan, Mohawk, Jumo and Janus (Force "B") went on ahead at 25 knots for Alexandria, while Rear-Admiral Pridham-Wippell in the Royal Sovereign, with the Malaya, Eagle and remaining destroyers (Force "C") proceeded on a mean line of advance 040°, 12 knots, to cover the passage of the convoys. Vice-Admiral Tovey, who after being detached had kept to the southward of the track of convoy M.S.1, closing to about 20 miles from it at daylight, was then about 80 miles to the eastward of the Warspite, and had just opened fire on a shadowing aircraft which had appeared a few minutes before. Considering that the protection against air attack which cruiser's convoy could give to the slow steaming ships was of insufficient value to justify closing it, the Vice-Admiral decided to continue on a southeasterly course until he was 150 miles from Sicily, when he altered course to 045° and took up a covering position.

As expected, it was not long before air attacks commenced. Between 1248 and 1815, 11th, 66 bombs were aimed at the Warspite and her destroyers in five attacks. Force "B" which had already experienced a submarine alarm, when the Defender attacked a contact at 0955, without result—suffered 15 bombing attacks, mostly directed against the Eagle, between 1111 and 1804, about 120 bombs being dropped. The Malaya and the Royal Sovereign each claimed to have damaged an aircraft and one was shot down by a Gladiator in the course of these attacks. It was remarked that the attacks at lowest levels were made on destroyers, and that the seaplanes came in lower than other types of aircraft.

Convoy M.S.1, attacked four times. None of the ships was damaged, and there was only one casualty—Mr. J. H. Endicott, Commissioned Gunner of the Vampire, who died after transfusion to the Mohawk. Convoy M.S.1 wasouthern by the Warspite at 1500, and the Janus was then ordered to exchange stations with the Vampire in the convoy escort.

Further east, Admiral Tovey's cruisers also were bombed. Between 1445 and 1500, they were attacked by 15 aircraft in waves of three. No damage was done to either side, though one stick of bombs fell close to the Neptun. After the attack an attempt to evade further attacks was made by altering course to 225° for 75 minutes, after which course 090° was resumed but this proved unsuccessful, for another attack developed at 1812, when eight bombs—"all very bad shots"—fell ahead of the Orion. These aircraft, flying very high, were not engaged before they dropped their bombs. Another attack occurred at 1930, the bombs again falling wide. One aircraft hit in this attack made off to the north-west, then turned eastward losing height and, with smoke coming from one of its engines. It was thought unlikely that it reached its base 180 miles away.

The night of 11th/12th July passed quietly. The Commander-in-Chief, who was in 34° 22' N., 19° 17' E. at 2100, 11th, continued to the eastward, steering 110°. Force "C", after operating aircraft, at 2000, 11th, steered to the north-west for an hour and a half, before turning to 150° at 2130, in order to keep to the westward of convoy M.S.1. At 0254, 12th July, the Hasty attacked a submarine contact. The 7th Cruiser Squadron, which had been ordered to join the Commander-in-Chief at 0800, 12th July, steered so as to approach the rendezvous from the northward. It sighted the Warspite at 0538, 12th; the Orion and Neptune were then detached to join Convoy M.F.1, the Liverpool and Sydney remaining in company with the Commander-in-Chief.

During this day, 12th July, the bombing attacks on the Warspite were intensified. Between 0850 and 1550, in seventeen attacks about 140 bombs1 were dropped. The Warspite was straddled three times2 and there were several near misses, splinters from one killing three ratings in the Liverpool, and wounding her executive officer and five ratings. As a result of these attacks course was altered to close the Egyptian coast and No. 253 Wing was asked to send out fighter aircraft, but when these arrived late in the afternoon the attacks had ceased. Force "C", after flying off A/S patrols at dawn, had sighted Convoy M.S.1 and the Defence was warned to find and attack the other British Union to Alexandria. As regards bombing, Force "C" got off lightly on this day, only three attacks being made between 1110 and 1804; 25 bombs were dropped, all of which fell wide. Haze overheard made sighting of aircraft difficult. The Dainty reported passing the body of an Italian airman at 1838.

Vice-Admiral Tovey with the Orion and Neptune, on parting company with the Commander-in-Chief at 0730, 12th, had set course 115°, 25 knots, in search of the forces and at 0900 the two cruisers were attacked by 50 aircraft without result, and again at 1732 by a solitary aircraft, which dropped four bombs near the Neptune. The effect of these attacks was to deflect the ships to the northward, so that they did not gain touch with Convoy M.F.1—then about 150 miles from Alexandria—till 1825. After passing the morning rendezvous to the Gloucester, the Orion and Neptune proceeded on course 060° to keep clear during the night and arrived at Alexandria at 0615 next morning (13th July). The Commander-in-Chief with the Neptune in the Force M.F.1, the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, and remaining destroyers had arrived three-quarters of an hour earlier, and Convoy M.F.1, with escort, arrived at 0900. The Ramillies (Captain H. T. Baillie-Grohman), screened by the Havock (Commander R. E. Courage), Imperial, Diamond and Vendetta, was then sailed to meet and cover Convoy M.S.1.

Meanwhile Rear-Admiral Pridham-Wippell with Force "C" had been slowly working to the eastward, adjusting his advance to keep to the westward of Convoy M.S.1. At nightfall 12th July, course was set to pass rather closer to Ras el Tin than to Gavdo, but as a result of instructions from the Commander-in-Chief, an alteration to 085°, in order to increase the distance from the Libyan coast, was made at 0215, 13th. Some three hours later (0524) the Capetown (Captain T. H. Back) flying the flag of Rear-Admiral, 3rd Cruiser Squadron (Rear-Admiral E. E. de F. Renouf) and the Caledon (Captain C. P. Clarke), which sailed from Alexandria the previous day to meet Convoy M.S.1 about 60 miles S.W. of Gavdo, in sight of it. These two cruisers then took over M.S.1 and Force "C" went on for Alexandria.

The first warning of trouble from the air came at 0802, when one of the Eagle's Gladiators reported a shadower, which it shot down a little later. Air attacks on Force "C" began at 0536 and continued till 1622. From 1110 to 1300 the attacks were too numerous to record precisely, the Eagle being the favourite target. The attackers found she could hit back, however, two of them being shot down by the Gladiators and a third so seriously damaged as to prevent its return home. A destroyer was sent to pick up the only airmen.

1 The Commander-in-Chief's report (in M.05369) puts this number as 300. The number 160 is taken from the Warspite's detailed return of the attack, enclosed in the C.-in.-C.'s report.
2 The Commander-in-Chief subsequently remarked that "the most unpleasant attack on Warspite at 1530, 12th July, resulted in 24 bombs along port side and 12 across starboard bow simultaneously, all within 1 cable but slightly out of line." (Mediterranean War Diary).
seen to come down, but no body was found. The average height of the attacking aircraft was about 12,000 feet; although there were several near misses and straddles, no damage was done to any of the ships.

At 1210, 13th, Force "C" steered to close the coast off Mersa Matruh, in compliance with orders from the Commander-in-Chief and at 1800 course was altered to the east-north-east to adjust the time of arrival at Alexandria next morning. Force "C" entered harbour at 0815, 14th July, and the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, Ramillies and Convoy M.S.1 on the morning of the 15th, thus bringing operation M.A.5 to a successful conclusion.

15. Remarks on Action off Calabria

Commenting on the action of 9th July, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, remarked:—

"... It is still not clear what brought the enemy fleet to sea on this occasion, but it seems probable that it was engaged on an operation designed to cover the movement of a convoy to Libya. When our fleet was reported south of Crete it seems that the enemy retired close to his bases, fuelled his destroyers by relays, and then waited hoping to draw us into an engagement in his own waters (under cover of his Air Force and possibly with a submarine concentration to the southward of him) whence he could use his superior speed to withdraw at his own time.

"If these were, in fact, the enemy’s intentions he was not altogether disappointed, but the submarines, if there were any in the vicinity of the action, did not materialise and, fortunately for us, his air attacks failed to synchronise with the gun action.

"It will be noted that the whole action took place at very long range and that the Warspite was the only capital ship which got within range of the enemy battleships, which fell short. The Sovereign, owing to her lack of speed, never got into action at all.

"Warspite’s hit on one of the enemy battleships at 26,000 yards range might perhaps be described as a lucky one. Its tactical effect was to induce the enemy to turn away and break off the action, which was unfortunate, but strategically it probably has had an important effect on Italian mentality.

"The torpedo attacks by the Fleet Air Arm were disappointing, one hit on a cruiser being all that can be claimed, but in fairness it must be recorded that the pilots had had very little practice, and none at high speed targets. Eagle having only recently joined the Fleet after having been employed on the Indian Ocean trade routes.

"The enemy’s gunnery seemed good at first and he straddled quickly, but accuracy soon fell off as his ships came under our fire.

"Our cruisers—there were only four in action—were badly outnumbered and at times came under a very heavy fire. They were superbly handled by Vice-Admiral J. C. Tovey, C.B., D.S.O., who by his skilful manoeuvring managed to maintain a position in the van and to hold the enemy cruiser squadrons, and at the same time avoid damage to his own force. Warspite was able to assist him with her fire in the early stages of the action.

"The enemy’s smoke tactics were impressive and the smoke screens laid by his destroyers were very effective in completely covering his high speed retirement. With his excess speed of at least five knots there was little hope of catching him once he had decided to break off the action. An aircraft torpedo hit on one of his battleships was the only chance and this unfortunately did not occur.

"A feature of the action was the value, and in some cases the amusement, derived from intercepted enemy signals. We were fortunate in having the Italian Fleet Code, and some of his signals were made in plain language. . . .

"My remarks on the bombing attacks experienced by the Fleet during the course of these operations are contained in my signal timed 1619 of 14th July 1940.2

1 C.-in-C.’s report, in M.05369/41.
2 See Appendix C.
the message from the Admiralty received by the Commander-in-Chief on 17th July:

"Their Lordships have read with great satisfaction your telegraphic report of operations carried out between 7th and 13th July, and wish to congratulate you and all concerned on the determined and efficient manner in which they were conducted."

CHAPTER II
(Battle Summary No. 2)
Action off Cape Spada, Crete
19th July 1940

16. PLAN FOR OPERATIONS IN AEGEAN

Within a week of the conclusion of Operation M.A.5, a fortuitous encounter between H.M.A.S. Sydney with five destroyers and two Italian 6-inch gun cruisers resulted in the sinking of one of the latter, and must have accentuated Italian doubts as to their control of the Mediterranean which may have been engendered by the brief engagement off Calabria ten days previously.

It was Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham's policy to use his light forces in periodic sweeps as a means of countering the activities of Italian submarines in areas through which British convoys had to pass, and at the same time attacking Italian shipping.

On 17th July 1940 orders were issued for such an operation which was to consist of a submarine hunt towards Kaso Strait and round the north coast of Crete by four destroyers, combined with a sweep by a cruiser and one destroyer into the Gulf of Athens for Italian shipping. The cruiser was to be prepared to support the destroyers in case of need. The forces for these operations were organised in two groups, viz.,—

1 The operation orders were contained in the two signals from Vice-Admiral Tovey (V.A.(D)) following:—


IMPORTANT. Carry out following operation. Object destruction of U-boats. Leave Alexandria 0001 tomorrow, Thursday, with Hyperion, Ilex, Hero, Hasty. Sweep to Kaso Strait to pass through about 2130, then along north coast Crete to pass through Antikithera Channel about 0600C, 19th July, then to Alexandria to arrive 0800C, 20th July. Sydney and Huxock will support as in my 1451/17. (T.O.O.1447/17.)


IMPORTANT. My 1447. Carry out following operation. Object support of force under D(2) and interception of Italian shipping in Gulf of Athens. Leave Alexandria with Huxock at 0450, tomorrow Thursday. Pass through Kaso Strait at about 0500C thence to Gulf of Athens to search for enemy shipping, then pass through Antikithera Channel to arrive Alexandria 1400C, 20th July. (T.O.O. 1451/17.)

The operations ordered in the above signals were preliminary to a further submarine hunt starting on 20th July between Crete and Cyrenaica by eight destroyers, which were afterwards to sweep into the Aegean to cover a convoy for Aegean ports sailing from Alexandria on the 19th.
FORCE "A" 3rd Division, 2nd D.F. under Commander (D2).

*Hyperion* (four 4-7-inch) Commander H. St. L. Nicolson, D.S.O. (D2).

*Ilex* (four 4-7-inch) Lieutenant-Commander P. L. Saumarez, D.S.C.

*Hero* (four 4-7-inch) Commander H. W. Biggs, D.S.O.

*Hasty* (four 4-7-inch) Lieutenant-Commander L. R. K. Tyrwhitt.

FORCE "B"

*Sydney* (eight 6-inch, eight 4-inch, H.A.) Captain J. A. Collins, R.A.N.

*Havock* (four 4-7-inch) Commander R. E. Courage, D.S.O., D.S.C.

17. Movements of Forces, 18th-19th July

Force "A" sailed from Alexandria at 0015, 18th, and swept towards Kaso Strait. After passing through the strait at 2130, keeping well over towards the Cretan shore to avoid being sighted from Kaso Island, the division steered westward at 18 knots between Ovo Island and the Cretan shore. Nothing was sighted, and at 0600, 19th, course was altered to 240° to pass through the Antikithera Channel, the destroyers spread in line abreast 14 miles apart, carrying out the anti-submarine sweep at 18 knots.

Force "B"—the *Sydney* with the *Havock* in company—sailed from Alexandria at 0430, 18th, and after passing through Kaso Strait at 2345, steered a mean course 295°, speed of advance, 18 knots, zig-zagging on account of full moon and improving visibility. Captain Collins seems to have found the double object given to him in the operation orders something of an embarrassment, for he subsequently wrote that in the morning of the 19th "I was . . . proceeding on a westerly course about 40 miles north of Crete in accordance with my instructions to afford support to (D)2 and destroyers . . . My instructions included the second object of the destruction of enemy shipping in the Gulf of Athens. I decided however that it was my duty to remain in support of [the] destroyers until 0800, by which time they should have cleared the Antikithera Strait, although this precluded the successful achievement of the second object."3

Meanwhile, unknown to the British, two Italian cruisers under Vice-Admiral F. Casardi, the *Giovanni delle Bande Nere* (flag) and *Bartolomeo Colleoni* had sailed from Tripoli at 2200, 17th July, for the Aegean. Throughout the 18th they steered to the eastward for a point 30 miles north of Derna, which they reached at 2307, 18th, and then turned to the northward. At 0700, 19th, they were steering to enter the Aegean through the Antikithera Channel, just as Commander Nicolson’s destroyers were approaching it from the E.N.E. (See Fig. 4).
Collins' decision to give precedence to supporting the destroyers, the Sydney was a good deal nearer, and when at 0733 she received Commander Nicolson's enemy sighting report (two enemy cruisers steering 180°, bearing 255°, distant ten miles) her position was 010° Cape Spada 40 miles. The Hyperion gave her own position as 340° Agria Grabusa 1 Light 3 miles. Acting on this information Captain Collins altered course at 0736 to 240° to close the destroyers but on receipt a minute later of an amplifying report giving the Hyperion's course as 060° and the enemy's as 360°, he hauled round to 190° and commenced to work up to full speed.

19. Destroyer Engagement with Italian Cruisers (Plan 6)

By this time (0737) Commander Nicolson's destroyers had been in action for 11 minutes. One of the enemy cruisers had opened fire at 0726 on the Hyperion and Ilex, and the latter returned the fire. With their engines working up fast, the speed of the destroyers reached 31 knots by 0735, and the Hyperion then opened fire with her after guns at maximum range, but ceased firing very soon as all her shots fell short. The enemy's shooting was erratic. His salvoes fell short, throwing up red, yellow and green splashes, possibly due to the use of identifiers. The Italian report stated that the destroyers were scarcely visible, either because of mist or the slanting rays of the sun, which was bearing about 070° at 11° elevation.

Although the range was opening rapidly, the enemy instead of heading in chase of the destroyers held on his course north, "manoeuvring so as to keep at the limit of enemy gun range and to avoid the chance of an effective torpedo attack". These tactics again lost him a favourable chance of utilising his superior gun power. At 0738 the enemy bore 270°, 11 miles, and the Hyperion at 0740 ordered her division to cease firing as the enemy was out of range. Five minutes later the enemy's fire also ceased.

At 0747 the enemy, then bearing 270°, 14 miles, was still steering north. With the object of gaining ground and of identifying the class of the enemy cruisers, the destroyers altered course to 360°. At 0753, when the enemy turned to close, course was altered back to 060°. A signal from the Commander-in-Chief to join the Sydney was received by the Hyperion at 0800, and four minutes later course was altered to 090°, with the enemy then bearing 285°, 7 miles away. These positions were signalled to the Sydney at 0805, and course was altered a minute later to 060°. At about this time there was sighted ahead eight miles off a Greek steamer, which turned away quickly to the northward.

Still trying to work to the northward, the destroyers' course was altered to 090° at 0814 and to 090° at 0821. The enemy reopened fire at 0825, but again his shooting was very short and erratic. He ceased fire after five minutes, and was then observed to be altering course to the southward.

This was due to the sudden arrival of the Sydney. Commander Nicolson had kept her informed of his movements and those of the enemy. Captain Collins on the other hand had been careful to preserve W/T silence to avoid disclosing the presence of the Sydney. In this he was entirely successful. He had altered course at 0800 to 150° and shortly afterwards signals arrived from the Hyperion stating that they were 20,000 yards distant, were by that time steaming fast to the south-eastward, and were making heavy black smoke, and at 0830 the Hyperion led round to 170°, in order to get to a position of torpedo advantage on their bow.

20. H.M.A.S. Sydney Engages Enemy Cruisers (Plan 6)

When the Sydney opened fire on the Bando Nere at 0829, she took the Italians completely by surprise. They were then engaged with the destroyers on their other side and the first intimation they had of her presence was the arrival of her salvos. Low-lying mist partially concealed the new enemy, which was thought to consist of two cruisers. Admiral Casardi at once altered course some 40° away steering on about 115°, and at 0832 the Italians returned the fire, concentrating on the Sydney's gun flashes, which were all they could see. Their salvos fell short at first, then over, with an occasional straddle.

The Sydney continued on a south-easterly course to meet the destroyer division and at the same time to close the enemy. At 0835 her fire appeared effective and the enemy was seen to turn away, making smoke.

Three minutes later (0838) Commander Nicolson's destroyers hove in sight on the port bow about six miles off, steering 170°; at that moment they opened fire in divisional concentration on the target, which was 170°, but ceased fire after five minutes as all their salvos were falling short. The Havock at one point thought she was dealing with a cruiser, but Captain Collins at 0841 ordered the destroyers to "Close and attack the enemy with torpedoes"; but by the time the signal got through (0844) a drastic alteration of course to the south-westward by the enemy at 0840 had rendered this impossible. Commander Nicolson therefore altered course together to 215° and forming the division on a line of bearing 350°, chased at his best speed. The Sydney also turned to 215° at 0845, a manoeuvre which brought her on the beam of the destroyers; from then onwards the action was a chase.

Three minutes later (0848) the enemy's fire was shifted to the rear cruiser (Colombia), which was engaged by the Sydney, and the cruiser division also ranged its fire in an extreme range for a couple of minutes. At 0851 the enemy altered course to port, and the Sydney signalled, which had the effect of opening her "A" arcs; but two minutes later the enemy, making vast
quantities of smoke, altered course to starboard, 16 points in succession, and the Sydney, observing them steaming on course 230° at 0856, resumed the chase in a south-westerly direction.

For a minute, at 0901, the Sydney checked fire while she shifted target again to the Bande Nere. When this ship, at 0906, again became obscured by smoke, fire was shifted back again to the Colleoni then bearing 219°, range 18,500 yards. At the range of 17,500 yards at 0915, the Sydney also came under an accurate fire, receiving her only hit at 0921. This projectile, bursting on the foremost funnel, blew a hole about three feet square in the casings, causing minor damage to three boats and some fittings, but only one slight casualty.

Throughout the chase the destroyers steaming at 32 knots had made every effort to reduce the range, but until 0918, when the range of the Colleoni was down to 17,000 yards and closing rapidly, they were unable to do so.

21. THE SINKING OF THE Bartolomeo Colleoni

At 0923 the Colleoni was seen to be stopped, apparently out of action in a position about five miles E.N.E. of Cape Spada. Survivors afterwards stated that she was brought to by a shell in the engine or boiler room. The electrical machinery failed, including the turret power hoists and steering gear. All her lights went out and ratings stationed in the magazines groped their way out by means of matches and cigarette lighters! The Bande Nere, after a tentative turn towards her wounded consort, left her to her fate, and made off at high speed to the southward, rounding Agria Grabusa Island at a distance of about a mile, with the Sydney in hot pursuit, leaving the destroyers to finish off the Colleoni.

Commander Nicolson altered course to 240° and opened fire in divisional concentration at a range of 14,500 yards. By 0930 the range was down to about 5,000 yards. The Colleoni was drifting and silent; for some minutes she had been hit repeatediy, chiefly below the bridge; her control had been put out of action and some H.A. ammunition set on fire. The whole bridge structure was soon in flames. But she was still afloat, and at 0933 the Sydney signalled the word "Torpedo." Ordering Commander Biggs of the Hero to take charge of the other destroyers and follow the Sydney, Commander Nicolson in the Hyperion with the Ilex approached his quarry. By then the Colleoni was on fire amidships, her colours on the mainmast had been shot away or, as some thought, struck, and a heavy explosion had occurred forward.

At 0935 the Hyperion fired four and the Ilex two torpedoes at a range of 1,400 yards. One torpedo from the Ilex hit the Colleoni forward, blowing away about 100 feet of her bows and her aircraft. The Hyperion's torpedoes, owing to too great a spread, passed two ahead and two astern, and ran on to explode ashore on Agria Grabusa Island. The Hyperion then closed in, and observing the Colleoni more or less abandoned, but not sinking or too heavily on fire, Commander Nicolson decided as he passed down her starboard side to go alongside and see if anything could be salvaged. Barely two minutes elapsed, however, before a large fire broke out in the forward superstructure which was followed by an explosion which blew the whole bridge away in a cloud of smoke. The Hyperion then fired another torpedo at short range, which hit the doomed ship amidships at 0952, and seven minutes later the Colleoni heeled over and sank bottom up in position 029° Agria Grabusa Light 4.5 miles.

The Hyperion and Ilex immediately began to rescue survivors, in which work they were joined by the Havock, which had been too far off to read Commander Biggs' signal to join him and had apparently missed a signal from Captain Collins at 0943 to Commander Nicolson to leave one destroyer to deal with the Colleoni, and follow him with the rest. According to survivors' accounts, the men of the Colleoni had started to jump overboard as soon as they saw they were in the sea before the Ilex's torpedo struck the ship. She had suffered many casualties forward, on the upper deck and round the bridge, among them her Captain seriously wounded. There seems to have been little or no attempt to launch any boats or rafts, but all the crew had life belts.

The Italians were much impressed by the rate and accuracy of the British gunfire, as well as the tactical superiority of the British Commanders. Some provocative shots had been insisted that the calibre of our guns must be more than 6-inch.

During the rescue work several signals were received from Captain Collins directing the destroyers to join him as soon as possible, but it was not till 1024 that the Hyperion and Ilex proceeded at high speed to do so, leaving the Havock to continue picking up survivors. The Ilex had some 230 prisoners on board. Most of them were naked and 58 wounded, 25 seriously, three of whom died that night.

At 1130 the Havock signalled to the Sydney that survivors stated that the Italian cruisers had expected to meet strong supporting forces that morning. At 1237, when she had picked up some 260 survivors, six Savoia bombers were sighted, approaching from the southward. Thus threatened with attack the Havock was forced to abandon her humane task and proceeded at full speed for Alexandria.

Altogether, 525 survivors out of a complement of 630 had been picked up by the three destroyers, and it was afterwards learned from the Naval Attaché, Athens, that seven others were rescued off Crete, after swimming for 26 to 46 hours.

22. CHASE OF THE BANDE NERE

Meanwhile the Bande Nere, after passing between the island of Pondiko Nisi and the Cretan mainland, at 0945 bore 192° at a range of 20,000 yards from the Sydney. At 0950 the Italian received a second hit; a shell penetrated the quarter deck and exploded on a bulkhead, killing four and wounding 12 ratings. But ammunition in "A" and "B" turrets was running low and the Sydney checked fire; the Bande Nere, however, continued firing her after guns, the shots from which fell consistently short of the Sydney's quarter. At 0955 Captain Collins repeated his signal to Commander Nicolson to finish off the Colleoni and rejoin him, and three minutes later reopened fire on the Bande Nere, still 20,000 yards distant, but checked fire again at 1011. By this time the range was increasing and the visibility of the target and the fall of shot becoming more indistinct. A final couple of salvoes at 1022, range of 21,000 yards, could not be observed; the Mediterranean haze combined with the enemy's smoke had rendered spotting impossible. The Sydney then had

1 The purpose of these manoeuvres gave rise to some speculation at the time, but Admiral Caswall's report states that they were merely "to lessen the effect of the enemy's fire."
remaining only four rounds per gun in “A” turret and in “B” turret one round per gun of C.P.B.C. shell. Shortly afterwards the *Bande Nere*, 11 miles off, disappeared in the haze, going 32 knots on course 200°.

The *Hasty* and *Sydney*, gradually drawing further ahead of the *Liverpool*, had continued the chase at 31 knots, firing ranging salvos at intervals in the hope that the enemy’s frequent alterations of course would bring him in range, but they all fell short. At 1020 the *Hero* signalled to the *Sydney* “Regret, I am not catching her”, and eight minutes later in compliance with a signal from Captain Collins she and the *Hasty* dropped back to form a close screen on the *Sydney*. At 1037 Captain Collins reluctantly abandoned the chase, and turned course to 150° for Alexandria, reducing speed to 25 knots to allow the *Hyperion* and *Ilex* to come up. The last seen of the *Bande Nere* was from the *Hero* at 1044—a smudge on the horizon bearing 177°, 15 miles away.

23. GENERAL SITUATION, 1100, 19TH JULY

While the *Sydney* and the destroyers had been fighting their eminently satisfactory action, the Commander-in-Chief at Alexandria, acting on their reports and in view of the possibility that there might be other enemy forces at sea had decided to take the Fleet to sea.1

The general situation at 1100, 19th July—shortly after the *Bande Nere* had been lost to view—was as follows. Vice-Admiral Tovey in the *Orion* with the *Neptune* had sailed at 0915 and was sweeping to the north-westward at 30 knots. The Commander-in-Chief in the *Warspite* with destroyer screen was just leaving harbour, to be followed at 1230 by the 1st Battle Squadron (less *Royal Sovereign*), *Eagle* and screen for a sweep to the westward. An air reconnaissance by flying boats of 201 Group R.A.F. was arranged to search for the *Bande Nere*, but as it was clear that she could not be intercepted before reaching Tobruk if making for that port, the *Eagle* was ordered to prepare a striking force to attack Tobruk harbour and 201 Group was requested to make a dusk reconnaissance.

Actually, the *Bande Nere* then (1100, 19th) some 40 miles due west of Gavdo Island, and steering for Tobruk, altered course for Benghazi about an hour after shaking off the pursuit, where she arrived that afternoon.

The *Sydney*, *Hero* and *Hasty* some five miles south of *Elaphonisi* Light (the south-west point of Crete) were steering 150°, 25 knots, and the *Hyperion* and *Ilex* had formed a screen ahead of the *Sydney* and were steering to overtake them at 30 knots. Off Agria Grabusa the *Havock* was still picking up the *Colleoni’s* survivors.

24. H.M.S. *Havock* DAMAGED BY AIR ATTACK

Commander Courage in the *Havock*, as already mentioned, continued rescue work till 1237, when on the appearance of enemy aircraft he steered at full speed for Alexandria. At 1245 and 1250 the bombers in formations of three attacked her without success, doing no more than deluge her with water from near misses. A couple of hours later (1455) nine more aircraft attacked her off Gavdo Island in flights of three, the second flight scoring a near miss, splinters from which penetrated and flooded No. 2 boiler room. Two ratings received minor injuries. These attacks, which were made from levels between 3,000 and 4,000 feet, were countered with effective gunfire, which in two instances broke up the formations. The bomb that caused the damage appeared to be one of 250 lb., which burst six feet under water about ten feet from the ship’s side. After losing way for five minutes the *Havock* picked up speed again and was able to proceed at 24 knots.

Captain Collins, on receiving the *Havock’s* signal reporting her damage at about 1500, and finding to his surprise that she was only 75 miles to the northward, turned back in the *Sydney* in support, after ordering the *Hero* and *Hasty* to continue on their course for Alexandria and informing the Commander-in-Chief, who detached the *Liverpool* to join the *Sydney*. Shortly after turning northward a heavy bombing attack was made on the *Sydney* without success. Realising as he proceeded north the danger of submarine or possibly surface attack, Captain Collins ordered the *Hyperion* and *Ilex* to join the *Havock* at sunset. The *Sydney* made contact with the *Havock* at about 1640 and took station a mile astern of her; as she did so Commander Courage signalled: “Thank you. I hope your H.A. is as good as your L.A.”—a happy allusion to the *Sydney*’s prowess in the surface action combined with a heartfelt desire in the present circumstances.

Meanwhile the *Hyperion* and *Ilex*, having been unable to rendezvous with the *Sydney* (they had been steering further to the eastward than the cruisers) were proceeding to Alexandria. When the *Havock’s* report of being damaged was received, Commander Nicolson turned back to her assistance, but later (1545) learning that the *Sydney* had also turned back, resumed his former course until 1608, when he received Captain Collins’ signal to join the *Havock* at sunset. After the junction was effected at 1840, the *Hyperion* and *Ilex* formed a screen ahead of the *Havock* on course 150°, speed 20 knots. The last bombing attacks of the day occurred between 1845 and 1848, doing no damage.

At 2100 the *Sydney* parted company to rendezvous with the 7th Cruiser Squadron the destroyers continuing for Alexandria.

25. RETURN TO ALEXANDRIA

Little remains to be told.

As no further information of the *Bande Nere* came in during the afternoon of the 19th July, the Commander-in-Chief decided that at 2100 all forces should return to Alexandria. The *Warspite’s* aircraft was catapulted at 1700 to search the Tobruk area, but was obliged to make a forced landing to the eastward of the port, and the *Jervis* was detached to search for it.

Tobruk spent a disturbed night. Aircraft of Nos. 55 and 211 Squadrons, R.A.F., carried out bombing attacks on the shipping there and claimed several hits. At 0240, twenty-six aircraft of No. 824 Squadron, F.A.A., from the *Eagle* made a successful moonlight torpedo attack, encountering heavy barrage fire from all sides of the harbour, which damaged three aircraft, wounded an observer seriously and slightly wounded a pilot. Hits were claimed on three ships, and a sheet of flame from an oiler indicated that she carried petrol. Reconnaissance of Tobruk after the night raids showed the following ships were absent: one large cruiser, one destroyer and two merchant vessels.

Search for the *Warspite’s* aircraft was continued by flying boats of 201 Group after dawn on 20th July without success.3

The Fleet entered harbour at Alexandria during the morning of the 20th, where all ships cheered the *Sydney* and Commander Nicolson’s destroyers on

---

1 The Commander-in-Chief also postponed the movements of convoy Aegean North 2, and the ships which had sailed from Port Said were ordered to return. An oiler convoy from Alexandria to Port Said was ordered to proceed unescorted.

2 An Italian report on 25th July, 1940 stated the crew was safe. They had swum ashore from their scuttled aircraft and been made prisoners.
REMARKS ON THE ACTION OFF CAPE SPADE

The superiority of the Sydney’s gunfire both for accuracy and rate was most marked throughout the action. The shooting of the Italians was poor. Though described as accurate for range at first, it was slow, erratic and spasmodic, and fell off under punishment. It is remarkable that between them the two enemy ships only succeeded in scoring a single hit. Any advantage they might have had from superior speed was discounted by their violent zig-zagging, which enabled the Sydney to keep the range steady, while opening her “A” arcs.

The destroyers also were ably handled and fought both in retirement and on turning back immediately after sighting the Sydney at right angles to the enemy’s course—a movement that possibly prevented the Italians from trying to escape to the eastward.

To sum up, this little action well illustrates the value and application of almost all the principles of war. The importance of having the aim clearly defined comes out in Captain Collins’ deliberate decision the night before the action as to his principal aim—which the operation orders issued to him had left a little ambiguous—and his adherence to it, viz., the support of the destroyer division. Thus, when the enemy cruisers were reported, he was in a position to fulfil his aim, and lost no time in steering to do so. As events developed the destruction of the enemy cruisers became the immediate object. Incidentally, this was the surest way of achieving the original aim. He had exceptional reason to be satisfied with the morale of his ship’s company; and—that he does not specifically state it in his report—he was probably equally satisfied from past experience that that of the enemy was not too good. 

The destroyers also were ably handled and fought both in retirement (which seems to have been rather lost sight of by the Italians) and in the actual action as to his principal aim—which the operation orders issued to him had left a little ambiguous—and his adherence to it, viz., the support of the destroyer division. Thus, when the enemy cruisers were reported, he was in a position to fulfil his aim, and lost no time in steering to do so. As events developed the destruction of the enemy cruisers became the immediate object. Incidentally, this was the surest way of achieving the original aim. He had exceptional reason to be satisfied with the morale of his ship’s company; and—that he does not specifically state it in his report—he was probably equally satisfied from past experience that that of the enemy was not too good.

"The credit for this successful and gallant action belongs mainly to Captain J. A. Collins, C.B., R.A.N., who by his quick appreciation of the situation, offensive spirit and resolute handling of H.M.A.S. Sydney, achieved a victory over a superior force which has had important strategical effects. It is significant that, so far as is known, no Italian surface forces have returned into or near the Aegean since this action was fought."

26. REMARKS ON THE ACTION OFF CAPE SPADE

The action off Cape Spada was practically a duel between the Sydney and two adversaries, each of which was her equal in force, though the presence of the British destroyers undoubtedly influenced Admiral Casardi’s tactics. Several points of interest emerge from the narrative.

It will be noted that this was one of the few surface actions of the war in which aircraft—either for reconnaissance, spotting or attacking—played no part. Admiral Casardi had not catapulted any of his aircraft in the early morning because he considered it too rough, and he also thought it certain that reconnaissance by shore-based aircraft over the area of the Aegean he had to pass through would have been arranged by Headquarters at Rhodes. The Sydney had no aircraft embarked—a circumstance characterised by Captain Collins as “unfortunate”; she had lost her aircraft at the bombardment of Bardia on 21st June, and a replacement had been damaged by bomb splinters before being embarked.

The initial mistake of the Italian Admiral in steering north and engaging the destroyers at long range instead of immediately chasing them and trying to overwhelm them with his superior weight of metal has been remarked on. It is true that the formation of the destroyers may well have looked like a screen for heavier craft; but if a superior force were always to hold off until perfectly certain of what might be out of sight beyond the enemy few surface actions would ever take place. Per contra Captain Collins’ unhesitating attack on a force practically double his strength, after having duly gauged the risks and taken steps to minimise them by keeping wireless silence and skilfully exploiting the advantage of surprise, achieved the success it deserved. The effect of the surprise was helped by the presence of the HMAS, which, as he suspected, was mistaken by the enemy for a cruiser in the first shock of the attack. It is also of interest to note the encouragement Captain Collins derived from the Italians’ early use of smoke, which he immediately recognised as evidence that his enemy was fighting with one eye over his shoulder.

Perhaps the Italians were particularly unfortunate in meeting the Sydney, which had been in action twice during the preceding three weeks. “I was thus,” wrote Captain Collins, “in the happy position of taking a ship into action that had already experienced two successful encounters with the enemy.”

1 At a later date additional awards included: Officers, two D.S.O.s, two D.S.C.s, four Mentions in Despatches. Ratings, six D.S.M.s, eight Mentions.

2 Admiral Casardi was presumably well aware of the advantage of speed he possessed over the British heavy ships of the Mediterranean Fleet.

3 The manner in which Commander (D) brought his Division into action, after having heard nothing of me until I made my first enemy report at 0837, was most reassuring. The division appeared on my disengaged bow, steering a course to pass ahead of me and practically at right angles to the enemy’s course. It was evident that Commander Nicolson had on sighting me anticipated my order to close and attack the enemy with torpedoes. Report by C.O., HMAS Sydney (in M.020932/20).
CHAPTER III
(Battle Summary No. 10)
Operation M.B.8 and F.A.A. Attack on Taranto,
November 1940

27. General Situation, Mediterranean, November 1940

During the five months of war with Italy, the British Fleet, or portions of it, had made some 16 sweeps into the Central Mediterranean. Varying in length from three to seven days, these had produced little result, for only on three occasions was the Italian Fleet found to be at sea. Minor surface forces had been engaged on other occasions and losses had been inflicted on the enemy, but the only encounter between the battleships had been in the partial action of 9th July, off Calabria. It had been little more than a distant exchange of fire but had apparently been enough to reduce the Italian Fleet to a state of inactivity.

There remained, however, two areas of the Mediterranean, the Adriatic and Tyrrenian seas, where Mussolini might still expect to retain some degree of command, for in those waters he could rely on superior air power and numerous submarines. Safe in the seemingly secure shelter of Taranto, he doubtless hoped that the Italian Fleet would dominate the Greek campaign until the day when it could participate in his triumphal progress to Athens. At the beginning of November, 1940, the situation in the Mediterranean was governed by the new circumstances arising from Italy’s unwarranted attack on Greece on 28th October. In answer to the latter’s appeal for assistance, immediate steps were taken to concert measures of action with the Greek authorities, naval, military and air.

Foremost among these was the establishment of a fuelling base for the fleet and aircraft at Suda Bay and for the transport of troops and stores to Crete and supplies to the Piraeus. Preliminary movements had been completed between 29th October and 3rd November, the only enemy interference being a heavy air attack on Suda Bay and Canea on the 1st November, in which no damage was done to the ships and two aircraft were shot down. An attack on a force under Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell, who had succeeded Admiral Tovey as Vice-Admiral Light Forces, by four torpedo aircraft on 2nd November had proved equally fruitless.

Convoys were waiting, too, for passage to and from Malta; the Government considered it imperative to hold Crete, and reinforcements, stores, guns and fuel had to be carried to Suda Bay; personnel and fuel also to the Piraeus for the R.A.F. bombers in Greece. In view of these commitments, the Commander-in-Chief decided to take up a central position with the battleship so as to cover the various convoy movements and at the same time ensure a junction with the reinforcements coming to him.

This was the basis of Operation M.B.8 which included the passage of reinforcements from Gibraltar (Operation “Coat”) and ended with an air attack on Taranto (Operation “Judgment”) and a raid by light forces into the Strait of Otranto. Although preliminary movements began on 4th November, the 6th November was to be the starting day (Day one).

28. Operation M.B.8: Objects

The British Fleet in the Mediterranean consisted on 31st October of four battleships, two aircraft carriers, six cruisers, two A.A. ships, 22 destroyers and 15 submarines. It had been decided to reinforce it with the battleship Barham, the cruisers Glasgow and Berwick and three destroyers, all of which were to embark military reinforcements for the garrison at Malta. Their passage from Gibraltar was to be covered by Force “H” (Operation “Coat”) and operations in the Western Mediterranean were to be directed by the Flag Officer commanding that force (Vice-Admiral Sir James Somerville).

Convoys were waiting, too, for passage to and from Malta; the Government considered it imperative to hold Crete, and reinforcements, stores, guns and fuel had to be carried to Suda Bay; personnel and fuel also to the Piraeus for the R.A.F. bombers in Greece. In view of these commitments, the Commander-in-Chief decided to take up a central position with the battleship so as to cover the various convoy movements and at the same time ensure a junction with the reinforcements coming to him.

This was the basis of Operation M.B.8 which included the passage of reinforcements from Gibraltar (Operation “Coat”) and ended with an air attack on Taranto (Operation “Judgment”) and a raid by light forces into the Strait of Otranto. Although preliminary movements began on 4th November, the 6th November was to be the starting day (Day one).

29. Operation M.B.8: Forces

The fleet was organised for this operation in the following forces:—

**Force “A”** Battleships Warspite (flag, C-in-C.), Malaya (flag, Rear-Admiral Rawlings), Valiant; aircraft carrier Illustrious (flag, Rear-Admiral Lyster, R.A.N.); 3rd C.S. Gloucester (flag, Rear-Admiral Renouf), Tynk; destroyers Hyperion, Havock, Hero, Hereward, Hasty, Ilex (2nd D.F.) Decom, Defender (20th Div.), Nubian, Mohawk, Janus, Juno, Jervis (14th D.F.).

**Force “B”** Cruisers Ajax, Sydney. To take troops and equipment from Port Said to Suda Bay and there get the Bofors guns mounted. Sydney to join Force “A”; Ajax to be guardship at Suda Bay till relieved by Calcutta, then join Force “A”.

**Force “C”** Cruiser Orion (flag, Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell, V.A.L.F.) To take R.A.F. stores and personnel to the Piraeus, then to Suda Bay.

**Force “D”** (Convoy Escort Force) battleship Ramillies; A.A. ships, Coventry, Calcutta; destroyers Vampire, Voyager, Waterhen (10th D.F.), Dainty, Diamond, Wyneck (A.A. ship); trawlers Kingston Coral (A.N.6), Sindouc; minesweeper, Abingdon to escort Convoy A.N.6 to Suda Bay.

**Force “F”** Replacements for Mediterranean Fleet: battleship Barham (700); cruisers Berwick (750) Glasgow (400); destroyers Griffin (50), Greyhound (50), Galant (50). Attached from Force “H” to Force “F” to proceed as far as Malta, then to return to Gibraltar, destroyers Faulknor (50), Fortune (50), Fury (50).

**Force “H”** Aircraft carrier Ark Royal (flag, Vice-Admiral Sir James Somerville); cruiser Sheffield; destroyers Duncan, Isis, Foxhound, Forster, Firedrake.

1. Including one A.A. (Wyneck).
2. Figures in brackets give the number of military personnel on board.
The Eagle, aircraft carrier, was unable to accompany the fleet and remained at Alexandria.

The total British forces employed were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force</th>
<th>B.</th>
<th>A/C C.</th>
<th>Cr.</th>
<th>D.</th>
<th>M.S.</th>
<th>Tr.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;A&quot;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;B&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;C&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;D&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;E&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;F&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;H&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**30. CONVOYS AND AIR RECONNAISSANCE**

There were four convoys waiting to sail. Firstly, M.W.3 (Malta, West 3) to proceed from Alexandria to Malta. It consisted of five ships: the Waiwera (12,435 tons), Devis (6,054 tons), Plumleaf (5,916 tons), Volo (1,387 tons) and Rodi (3,333 tons), the last three carrying cased petrol. This convoy was to be joined by two ships for Suda Bay—the Brisbane Star (12,791 tons) carrying eight mobile 3.7-inch A.A. guns and motor transport, and the Bramble Leaf (5,917 tons) with fuel and petrol. The speed of the slowest ship was 11½ knots.

Secondly, there was Convoy A.N.6 (Aegean, North 6) consisting of three ships carrying petrol and fuel from Egypt to Greece. They were the Dutch s.s. Abinda (3,356 tons), the Pass of Balmaha (758 tons), the British Sergeant (5,868 tons). The speed was 8½ knots. Other ships were to be added as ordered by the Senior British Naval Officer, Canal Area, provided their speed was not less than 8½ knots.

Thirdly, there was Convoy M.E.3 (Malta, East 3) of four large ships, empty, from Malta to Alexandria—the Memnon (7,506 tons), the Lanarkshire (9,816 tons), the Clan Macaulay (10,492 tons) and the Clan Ferguson (7,347 tons). (All 15-knot ships.)

The monitor Terror and the destroyer Vendetta were also awaiting passage from Malta to Suda Bay where the Terror was to act as a harbour defence ship.

Fourthly, there was A.S.5 (Aegean, South 5) to be made up of ships of over 8 knots speed, proceeding from Greece or Turkey to Egypt. Arrangements were made with A.O.C. Mediterranean for air reconnaissance in the Ionian Sea and at Taranto on 6th and 7th November; for the same at daylight on the line Zante-Malta on 8th–12th November, when the Malta convoy would be between Crete and Malta; also in the Sicily-Tunis area and along the north coast of Sicily on 9th November when Force "F" with reinforcements would be approaching from the west. The A.O.C., 201 Group, was asked to supplement these arrangements by the provision of reconnaissance ahead of the convoys to Malta and the Piraeus.

**31. CONVOY A.N.6 SAILS FOR THE AEGEAN**

The operation commenced on 4th November with the sailing of three ships of A.N.6 from Port Said. It was escorted by a minesweeper and two trawlers, but, owing to the breakdown of the latter the Dainty and two other trawlers, the Kingston Coral and Sindonis, were sent off from Alexandria to take their place. They picked the convoy up on the Egyptian coast on the 5th; the next day the A.A. ship Calcutta and the Pass of Balmaha joined them and Convoy M.W.3
at 1500, 6th, passed them going some 2\frac{1}{2} knots faster. A.N.6, numbering by that time seven ships,\textsuperscript{2} went steadily on, delayed by its slow trawler escort which could go only 7 knots. A bright moon was shining as they made their way through Kaso Strait, east of Crete. The Calcutta went on ahead to act as S.N.O. at Suda Bay where there was much to be done—a boom to be laid, A.A. guns to be mounted and an airfield to be set up.\textsuperscript{3}

The convoy steamed on along the north coast of Crete and arrived safely at the Piraeus with its anxiously-awaited load of stores and petrol. It had seen nothing of enemy aircraft or submarines.

32. C-in-C. and Convoy M.W.3 for Malta

Convoy M.W.3 consisting of five ships for Malta and two for Suda Bay left Alexandria on 5th November with an escort of one A.A. ship (Coventry) and three destroyers. Making 11\frac{1}{2} knots it passed A.N.6 off Kaso Strait, detaching later the two ships, Brisbane Star and Bramble Leaf, for Suda Bay, where they arrived on 7th November with the important loading of 165 guns. The remainder passing north of Crete passed through Antikithera Channel and at 1800, 7th, were some 40 miles south of Cape Matapan (35° 44' N., 22° 41' E.) proceeding westward.

Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell was to examine the situation at the Piraeus and in Crete. Having embarked R.A.F. personnel and stores for Athens the Orion sailed from Alexandria at 0900, 6th, arriving at the Piraeus at 0930, 7th. There the Vice-Admiral had a long consultation with the Greek authorities before proceeding to Suda Bay to examine the defences there.

The Commander-in-Chief with the Warspite, Illustrious, Valiant, Malaya, Ramillies and destroyers had left Alexandria at 1300, 6th, steering to the westward. The Ajax and Sydney (Force "B") had sailed on 4th November for Port Said where they embarked the H.Q., 14th Infantry Brigade, a light and a heavy A.A. battery and administrative troops for Crete. After disembarking them at Suda Bay on the 6th, they joined the Commander-in-Chief.\textsuperscript{4} At 1200, 7th, the fleet was half-way between Crete and Malta (in 35° 27' N., 18° 36' E.) when Convoy M.W.3 was sighted ten miles to the south-west and the fleet took up a covering position to the north of it. At 1340, 7th, an enemy reconnaissance aircraft reported the convoy and was chased out by Gladiators. The fleet was then some 180 miles from Sicily and at 1520 another reconnaissance aircraft appeared and was driven off. An hour later seven bombers, S.79s, appeared on the scene: they were attacked by three Fulmars which shot down two and forced the remainder to jetison their bombs and make off. At 0920, 9th, the Ramillies and three destroyers were detached to take the convoy on to Malta, while the Commander-in-Chief remained some 100 miles to the south-eastward of the island and the 3rd C.S. (Gloucester and Tork) and 7th C.S. (Ajax and Sydney) proceeded to carry out sweeps to the northward. No air searches were carried out at this time as the weather was overcast and squally. Between 1048 and 1550, 6th, enemy aircraft were reported four times and continued to shadow throughout the day, one of them (a Cant. 501) being shot down at 1640 by a Fulmar. At 1219, a Swordfish, just taking off on A/S patrol, made a forced landing near the Warspite, the crew being rescued by the Jericho.

33. Junction with Reinforcements

At 2100, 9th November, the fleet shaped course for the rendezvous 40 miles west of Gozo (36° 8' N., 15° 26' E.) where it had been arranged to meet the reinforcements from Gibraltar (Force "F"). There seemed to have been submarines following it, for at 0010, 10th, in 22° 13' N., 15° 25' E., two heavy explosions were heard in the Warspite, thought later, on the evidence of Italian broadcasts, to have been torpedoes fired at the fleet. Aircraft were flown off at 0700, 10th, to search a sector between 31° 5' and 05° 15'; one of them crashed into the sea slightly after flying off, the crew being picked up by the destroyer Nubian. The 3rd C.S. (Gloucester and Tork) and the 7th C.S. (Ajax and Sydney) rejoined the flag at 0715. Three hours later the Barham and Force "B" were met at the appointed rendezvous. Force "H" (the Ark Royal, Sheffield, Glasgow and six destroyers) after carrying out Operation "Crack"—the bombing of Cagliari on 8th November—had accompanied it as far as Sardinia and had parted from it at 1915, 9th, in 37° 55' N., 9° 8' E., 165 miles west of Sicily.

The Berwick, carrying some 750 troops and ten Bofors guns for Malta, and the Glasgow, 400 troops, with the Griffin, Greyhound, Galliant and Faulknor went on with all despatch to Malta to disembark the troops from their crowded decks.

At 1700, 12th, the Commander-in-Chief was in 35° 55' N., 13° 30' E., some 40 miles west of Malta. Dangers lurked in the air; shadowers were sighted and at 1230 one of them (a Cant. 501) was shot down. The approach of an enemy formation was detected; about an hour later ten bombers appeared and at 1330 attacked in two formations from about 14,000 ft. Intercepted and engaged by Fulmar fighters who disabled one, they dropped about 25 bombs at random without doing any damage to the battlefleet which was awaiting them in a loose formation.

At 1500, Convoy M.E.3 (four ships) which had left Malta at 1330 for Alexandria escorted by the Ramillies, Coventry, Decoy and Defender, was sighted away to the eastward. The Terror and Vendetta which left Malta the same day were on their way independently to Suda Bay. The convoy was probably attacked that night by a submarine, for at 0310, 11th, the Ramillies felt three explosions and an Italian broadcast reported a successful attack by a submarine. Actually no ship was hit. The Ramillies' convoy made the passage at 14\frac{1}{2} knots and reached Alexandria safely.

The Commander-in-Chief and the fleet went on to the eastward. At noon on 14th November, he was half-way between Malta and Crete (in 36° 10' N., 18° 30' E.). He had returned the Orion (Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell) rejoined the flag. After visiting the Piraeus Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell had proceeded to Suda Bay to examine the situation on the spot. He arrived at 0700, 9th. Much—very much—remained to be done. Guns, net defence, A.A. guns, ammunition dumps, coal, water, security, medical arrangements, all were called for, labour and transport, and the Navy and Royal Marines were right in the forefront. Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell left at 1630, 10th, to rejoin the flag.

The convoy operations were over; the two other tasks remained—the air attack on Taranto and the raid on Otranto Strait. The raid was to be carried out by a force (temporarily termed Force "X") consisting of the

\textsuperscript{1} Zone minus 2 Time is used throughout.

\textsuperscript{2} Mandalay, British Sergeant, Abinda, Hannah Molter, Odysseus, Pass of Balmaha, and a Turkish gunboat.

\textsuperscript{3} Calcutta submitted that trawlers with such limited speed as 7 knots should not be sent on convoy. Also British Sergeant and Pass of Balmaha which were to pass independently to Suda Bay had not been informed of the swept channel and did not know that nets had been laid. This entailed a lot of complicated signals to ships without a signal staff.

\textsuperscript{4} Sydney at 1700, 7th November and Ajax at 1700, 6th.
cruisers Orion (flag), Sydney and Ajax with the destroyers Nabian and Mohawk. At 1310, 11th, Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippel proceeded with it towards Otranto Strait. Later in the day, at 1800 the carrier force under Rear-Admiral Lyster in the Illustrious with the 3rd C.S. (Gloucester, Berwick, Glasgow and York) and four destroyers4 was also detached and made for a position 40 miles west of Cephalonia, while the Commander-in-Chief with the remainder of the fleet took up a position to cover the two operations.

34. Taranto: Conditions and Plan of F.A.A. Attack (Plan 7)

Taranto, lying in the gulf of that name, some 920 miles from Malta, is the finest naval port in Italy. The inner harbour, entered by a narrow channel, called “the canal”, is completely landlocked and immune from surface torpedo attack; the large outer harbour, open to the westward, is protected by long breakwaters from surface attack. The Italians were fully alive to the danger of air attack and had taken every precaution that occurred to them to guard against this menace. These included numerous A.A. batteries, with reporting stations and searchlights, balloon barrages, anti-torpedo nets round the ships, and a carefully worked out plan for co-ordinating A.A. fire on the ship with that of the ships. Details of the defences will be found in Appendix H: suffice it to note that it was a first-class modern defended port and that its defenders were kept fully on the alert.

The possibility of attacking it with torpedo bombers had been carefully studied, but it was not till the arrival of the Illustrious that the project became practicable. Initiated originally on instructions from the Admiralty it was intended to be subsidiary to the passage of reinforcements to the Mediterranean Fleet (Operation “Coat”). Its success depended chiefly on three factors—first, an accurate and timely reconnaissance, giving the exact location of the enemy ships, which did not become possible till the arrival of Glenn Martin aircraft at Malta; second, an undetected approach necessitating in the case of Swordfish the use of long range tanks, which were not available till the arrival of the Illustrious early in September; third, a sufficient standard of efficiency in night flying which was not reached till mid-October. An attack planned for the night of 21st October had to be deferred on account of a fire in the Illustrious’ hangar which destroyed or damaged a number of aircraft. It was hoped to carry it out on the night of 30th–31st October, when the fleet was off the coast of Greece, but again it had to be deferred as there was no moon and the crews had had very little practice in the use of flares. These successive postponements were not, however, without their compensations, for the latest photographs by the R.A.F. revealed the existence of balloons and nets, a knowledge of which was of the greatest value in planning the actual attack. A plan had been drawn up by Rear-Admiral Lyster (28th October 1940, amended 6th November 1940) embodying the following proposals for an attack on the Italian main fleet in Taranto, numbering four to six battleships, five cruisers and 20 destroyers:

(a) A moonlight torpedo attack against battleships and cruisers in the outer harbour (Mar Grande) simultaneously with dive-bombing attacks on ships in the inner harbour (Mar Piccolo).

1 Hyperion, Ilex, Hasty, Hanack.

2 This plan was substantially the same as a plan worked out by Rear-Admiral Lyster when captain of the Glorious by direction of Admiral Sir Dudley Pound (then C.-in-C., Mediterranean) at the time of the Munich crisis in September 1938, when it appeared quite probable that war would break out at any moment with Italy on the side of Germany. Admiral Lyster subsequently remarked that he was “fortunate in having planned an attack in detail in peace time and carried it out in war time”.

3 Heavily bombed on 11th July 1940.

4 The crews were all saved. Investigation proved the loss to be due to contaminated petrol from the tanker Tonoline.

(b) The torpedo attack to be made from the west and towards the moon, the date depending on a suitable direction of the moon.

(c) The carrier force not to be far north of the line Malta–Kithera before dark; the run to the north to be made before moonrise; aircraft to fly off as soon as possible after 2100; not to fly more than 400 miles; to fly off and land on in moonlight.

Any night from the 11th to the 19th November was suitable for these conditions.

The carrier force should be detached after dark to reach a flying-off position about 60 miles west-south-west of Cephalonia and aircraft should fly on in a position 20 miles west of Cephalonia. A maximum striking force should be employed consisting of 30 Swordfish in two ranges of 15 each; in each range nine to be armed with torpedoes (to attack battleships), five with bombs to dive-bomb cruisers and destroyers and one with bombs to attack as a diversion from the east.

Enemy action might take the form of air, surface or submarine attack against the carrier force and of A.A. fire against the aircraft. The distance of the carrier force—240 miles by day and 150 miles at night—should in itself prove a sufficient protection against air attack. Surface attack could be countered by a strong cruiser escort or by patrol of the area or by keeping well to the eastward if the enemy was out. The A.A. fire likely to be encountered at Taranto was not considered a serious deterrent. As searchlights at a low angle might dazzle the torpedo droppers, a distraction should be provided to keep them up. Photographic reconnaissance would be required on each day prior to the attack and it would be necessary to have a clearance search of the Ionian Sea during the day and patrols of the Strait of Otranto, the Gulf of Taranto, and Messina, up to midnight.

Some modifications had to be introduced into this plan arising from lack of aircraft, a revised date of attack and the discovery by photographic reconnaissance of balloons and net obstructions in the enemy defences. First, there were not 30 aircraft available. The Eagle was to have co-operated in the attack but was unable to take part owing to serious defects in her petrol system caused by heavy losses earlier in the war.3 Five of her T.S.R.s had unfortunately been lost during preliminary operations on 9th–11th November. The attack had therefore to be made by the Illustrious alone. The number of aircraft taking part had to be reduced to 21 in two flights, one of 12 and the other of nine.

Further it was considered unnecessary for the purpose of “surprise” to keep to the southward until after dark, and it was decided to carry out the operation earlier in order to lessen the risk of attack by surface craft. It was decided, too, to use flares and, on account of the number of suitable dropping places being restricted by balloon and net obstructions, only six torpedo aircraft were to be used in each attack.

In the final dispositions for attack it was decided that the Illustrious and her escort were to be in a position 270°, 40 miles4 from Kabbo point, Cephalonia, by 0000 on the 12th November, when the first range of 12 aircraft would fly off followed by a second range of nine at 0100. Aircraft were to land on commencing about 0100 12th in a position 270°, 20 miles from Kabbo Point

1 i.e., in about 37° 43’ N., 19° 10’ E., about 200 miles south-east of Taranto. (See Appendix B.)
2 The crews were all saved. Investigation proved the loss to be due to contaminated petrol from the tanker Tonoline.
3 i.e. 38° 12’ N., 19° 30’ E.
Air Attack on Taranto (Operation "Judgment") (Plan 7)

It was 1800, 11th November, when Rear-Admiral Lyster in the Illustrious with four cruisers and four destroyers parted company, while the Commander-in-Chief took up a covering position to the southward. The latest photographs had arrived from Malta, and confirmed the fact that no important changes had taken place at Taranto, except the arrival of another battleship during the afternoon. The Illustrious reached the flying off position and the first range of 12 aircraft were all away by 2040, heading for Taranto 170 miles away. The second range of nine aircraft got away an hour later (2134); one of them (LF5) damaged its wing fabric and had to be struck below for repairs, but so keen was the crew to take part that it got away only 24 minutes later.

The surface wind was light and variable, the upper winds westerly, about 10 knots, with 8/10 thin cloud at 8,000 feet. The moon was three-quarters full, bearing nearly south.

The first flight entered a cloud at 2115, and four aircraft got separated. The Squadron Commander (Lieutenant-Commander Williamson) continued his way with eight (five torpedo, two flare droppers and one bomber). At 2252 they sighted the flash of guns and four minutes later the flare droppers were detached to lay their flares along the east side of the harbour.

On the eastern side of Mar Grande, behind the breakwater (Diga di Tarrantola) and a zareba of nets were lying six Italian battleships—two Littorio (35,620 tons) and four Caio Duilio (23,620 tons). They were moored three-quarters of a mile from the eastern shore, which was encircled with barrage balloons. To seaward of them were three 8-inch gun cruisers and eight destroyers.

About 2300 the flares of the first aircraft began to illuminate the harbour. The Italians were on the alert, and barrage fire from the fortress batteries opened at once, in which some of the battleships joined with their machine guns. Five minutes later the torpedo attacks were developed, and at about 2315 three aircraft coming in from the west over San Pietro Island made for the battleships on the south side and fired at the Caio Duilio. One torpedo hit and a great explosion flamed up alongside her. The other two passed close ahead and ran on towards the Doria. Heavy A.A. fire was soaking up from the batteries on San Pietro, the cruisers and destroyers, and one aircraft (L4A) was brought down, crashing into the sea near the floating dock. Three other aircraft, coming in from the north fired their torpedoes at the Littorio, one of which hit her starboard bow and another her port quarter. Within five minutes the torpedo attacks were over and all the aircraft except the one shot down had made get-away. The two flare droppers bombed the oil storage depot, and the remaining four aircraft attacked cruisers and destroyers in Mar Piccolo, which seaplane base, where a large fire began to blaze.

By 2335 the last aircraft of the first flight had withdrawn; but barrage fire in all four quadrants continued, for by this time the second flight was approaching. They were only eight, as one had been obliged to return owing to a defect. At 2355 a second range of nine aircraft got away, and five minutes later the torpedo attack led by Lieutenant-Commander Hale came in from the north-west. Four aircraft dropped torpedoes, two at the Littorio, one at the Veneto and one at the Duilio; one (E4F) which was shot down in the middle of Mar Grande, may have fired at the Gorizia. In these attacks, two torpedoes found their mark, one on the already twice hit Littorio and one on the Duilio. Of the remaining aircraft, the two flare droppers bombed the oil storage depot and the last bombed cruisers and destroyers in Mar Piccolo, obtaining a hit on the Trento with a bomb that failed to explode.

The torpedo bomber had justified its existence in no uncertain terms. In a first-class defended port, half the Italian battlefleet had been put out of action for six months or more, for the loss of two Swordfish and four officers, two of whom happily survived as prisoners of war. The bombers were not so successful; direct hits were scored on the Trento and destroyer Libeccio, but in each case the bomb failed to explode, as did several others—according to the Italians—which narrowly missed other ships in Mar Piccolo. In a flight of two aircraft which were missing, all the Swordfish had landed on by 0250, 12th November, and the Illustrious shaped course to rejoin the Commander-in-Chief at 0700. She was greeted by the flag signal: "Illustrious manoeuvre well executed". The operation was a masterpiece of understatement.

1 The crew of this aircraft (L4A), Lieut.-Commander Williamson and Lieutenant Scarlett, were quickly picked up by a boat from the dock. According to the destroyer Pal locals, which was well placed to witness the incident, it was this aircraft which obtained the hit on the Caio Duilio.

2 It lost its external overload tank at 2205, and the loose strap began to give trouble.

3 Neither of the crew of this aircraft, Lieutenants Bayley and Slaughter, survived.

4 These remarkably light losses are the more impressive when viewed in the light of the opposition encountered. From Italian sources, the ammunition expenditure from shore batteries was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cannon</th>
<th>4-05-inch</th>
<th>4-02-inch</th>
<th>3-05-inch</th>
<th>3-02-inch</th>
<th>2-05-inch</th>
<th>2-02-inch</th>
<th>1-32-inch</th>
<th>1-25-inch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rounds</td>
<td>1,430</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>6,854</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>2,655</td>
<td>1,231</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13,489 rounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ships' gunfire was confined to machine-guns; expenditure is unknown.

5 It is pleasant to record that these two officers were well treated by the Italian Navy, "in fact," to quote Lieut.-Commander Williamson, "we were almost popular heroes. Two nights after our raid the R.A.F. came over and we were put in an air raid shelter full of seamen. They all pressed cigarettes on us and towards the end of the raid about 20 of them sang "Tipperary" for our benefit."
36. Results of F.A.A. Attack

A full appreciation of the results of the attack was not possible for some days. The extent of the damage could not be known to the pilots at the time, though enough had been observed to be able to pronounce the operation a success.

Photographs taken by reconnaissance aircraft from Malta in the course of the next few days showed clearly that three battleships had been hit. The Littorio had been badly put out of action by the first attack, which blew a hole 49 by 32 feet in the bulge abreast of the 5-inch mountings, at a depth of 29 feet 6 inches. Repairs were not completed till mid-May 1941.

The Cavour had been hit by a torpedo, and was attended by small craft and encouned by nets; later removed for docking and repairs to Genoa, she was narrowly missed when that port was bombarded by Force 'H' the following February.

The total number of torpedoes fired was eleven and the ships attacked as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>FIRST FORCE</th>
<th>SECOND FORCE</th>
<th>TOTAL FIRED</th>
<th>HITS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Littorio</td>
<td>1 (400 yd.)</td>
<td>1 (700 yd.)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vento</td>
<td>1 (1,300 yd.)</td>
<td>1 (500 yd.)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duitto</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>1 (900 yd.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavour</td>
<td>3 (700 yd.)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorizia</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the bombing attacks were not noticeable at the time. It is now known as already mentioned that the Trento and Libeccio received direct hits from bombs which failed to explode, and other ships were narrowly missed; according to the Italians few of these bombs exploded.

1 Two in the first attack, one on the starboard bow which blew a hole 49 by 32 feet in the bulge abreast No. 1 6-inch turret and the other on the port quarter, abreast the tiller flat (hole 23 by 5 feet). In the second attack a torpedo exploded at a very low level in the bulge on the starboard side, forward of the previous hit, blowing hole 40 by 32 feet. Repairs were not completed till mid-May 1941.

8 Hit on port bow under the foremost turret and seriously damaged by a torpedo in the first attack. It was not repaired in time to take any further part in the war.

9 Hit on starboard side abreast of No. 1 5·25-inch mounting, at a depth of 29 feet 6 inches. Blew a hole 96 by 28 feet between Nos. 1 and 2 magazines, which were completely flooded. Repairs were not completed till mid-May 1941.
The Sydney, the last ship in the line, sighting five darkened ships as early as 0121 opened fire at 7,000 yards on the leading ship which was hit and set ablaze. Fire was shifted to the second ship from the right which was seen by the light of star shell (0132) to be turning away with shots falling all round her; then the destroyer, which was making smoke, came under fire. She drew ahead and fire was shifted to the original targets now bunched together, which were hit and lost to sight in the night. A torpedo track passed under the Sydney (0140). Fire was shifted to a vessel lying stopped which was under fire from the other ships and being badly hit. Course was altered to the southeast and at 0148 two torpedoes were fired at a ship to the right of the one on fire. At 0150 when the guns ceased fire, there were two ships in sight bearing 026° and 225° and one on fire bearing 346°, which was seen to sink at 0153.

The two destroyers had been equally busy. The Nubian at 0119 saw four merchant ships on the port bow, bearing 110° and opened fire (0131) at 8,000 yards on a light grey ship; then when she was on fire shifted to the one on her right.

The Mohawk, after her engagement with the torpedo boat, had fired on the second merchant ship from the left. The escorting ships had been lost to sight and the convoy was beginning to scatter. At 0145 land could be seen looking to the southwestward. The Nubian was then forming up astern, and the Mohawk shifted target to the fourth ship from the left. The last ship, hit by a salvo aft, was lying stopped, emitting clouds of steam. The Nubian took over the target and the Mohawk was about to turn to starboard in order to form astern of her and attack the disabled ships with torpedoes, when at 0153 there came an order from the Vice-Admiral to steer 166°, 28 knots. The ships turned accordingly and the action was broken off.

Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell had received a signal from the Naval Attache, Ankara, conveying a report that the Italian Fleet intended to sail that night to bombard Corfu. The report was incorrect, but at the time suggested the unpleasant possibility of a strong force of cruisers in the Strait, waiting to cut them off. The convoy had been virtually destroyed and there was nothing more in view. Though smoke screens laid by the enemy and the blinding flash of our own gunfire made it very difficult to assess results, one merchant ship—hit by a torpedo and gunfire—had been seen to sink, while two others were on fire, completely disabled and in a sinking condition. The fourth was last seen making for Valona, apparently on fire.

At 0315 the Ajax reported a shadowing aircraft, which hung on to them till 0915, half an hour after the moon had set. Speed was maintained at 28 knots in order to get as far as possible before daylight from the enemy bases which had been stirred up during the night. It was 1100, 12th November, when in compliance with a signal passed by flying boat, the 7th Cruiser Squadron, having satisfactorily performed its task, rejoined the Commander-in-Chief.

The supporting force of cruisers should remain outside the Straits and should retire ahead of the raiding force so as to be in close support at daylight without risk of contact between these forces at night. As this raid will probably cause the enemy to establish patrols at the entrances to the Adriatic and to support them with striking forces, as was done in the last war, though not by the Italians, the raiding forces should be instructed to withdraw as soon as they have reason to suppose their presence has been detected."

1 T.O. O. 1956/11.
2 Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell in his report referred to the immense advantage that would be conferred by the provision of flashless cordite for use at night. He also recommended that in future raids should be confined to nights of little or no moon and should be carried out by two sub-divisions of destroyers, each working in its own area with a dividing line up the middle of the Strait.
3 The supporting force of cruisers should remain outside the Straits and should retire ahead of the raiding force so as to be in close support at daylight without risk of contact between these forces at night. As this raid will probably cause the enemy to establish patrols at the entrances to the Adriatic and to support them with striking forces, as was done in the last war, though not by the Italians, the raiding forces should be instructed to withdraw as soon as they have reason to suppose their presence has been detected."
4 Catalani (4,249 tons), Capuano (4,391), Premuda (4,447), Antonio Locatielli (5,691). All were sunk. Total 18,938 G.R.T.
53. CONCLUSION OF OPERATION M.B.8

At noon, 12th November, the Commander-in-Chief was in 36° 40' N., 20° 8' E., between Greece and Sicily. He had been joined by Rear-Admiral Lyster with the Carrier Force and by Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell with Force "X". It was intended to repeat the air attack on Taranto, and the fleet remained in this area during the day, escaping detection from the air through the skilful action of three Fulmars, who shot down three Cants, before they could make reports. A striking force of 15 aircraft, consisting of six torpedo aircraft, seven dive-bombers and two flare droppers, was got ready for the purpose of a new attack but the weather deteriorated and after consulting the R.A. (A) by signal the Commander-in-Chief decided to cancel the operation.

At 1800, 12th, the Commander-in-Chief shaped course for Alexandria. Rear-Admiral Rawlings (1st Battle Squadron), with the 2nd Division, Malaya and Barbary, together with the Ajax, Dainty, Diamond, Greyhound, Griffin and Gallant, was detached to fuel at Suda Bay. The York and Bereaved proceeded at best speed for Alexandria, on their way, at 0920, 13th, sighting a submarine which did not attack, in 32° 40' N., 26° 45' E. On arriving off Alexandria at 1745, 13th, their entry was delayed for half an hour by an air raid. Convoy M.E.3, which was being escorted by the Ramillies, arrived safely at Alexandria at 0945, 13th. Convoy A.S.5, which had left the Piraeus for Port Said, escorted by the destroyers Wryneck and the trawlers Victorian and Sindon, was joined by the Fions and Chakla at 0210, 12th, in 34° 48' N., 23° 46' E. After parting company with the Wryneck at 1100, 13th, the convoy was attacked at 1330 in 32° 53' N., 28° 17' E., by two S.79 aircraft with torpedoes, both of which missed. It arrived safely at Port Said on 17th November.

Meanwhile at noon, 13th, the Commander-in-Chief was south-west of Crete (34° 23' N., 23° 43' E.). The fleet was located during the afternoon by aircraft, and one shadower was possibly shot down; course was accordingly altered to 050° at 1600 and to 090° at 1800. An enemy air force was detected to the southward by radar but failed to find the fleet. During the whole course of Operation M.B.8 only one air attack—by high level bombing—was made on the fleet (see Section 33). This immunity was attributed by the Commander-in-Chief to the effective fighter interception which underlined the importance of the inclusion of an aircraft carrier in the fleet.

The fleet arrived at Alexandria without further incident at 0700, 14th November.

1 The story goes that an Observer on being warned to stand by for this second attack remarked that after all they had only asked the Light Brigade to do it once.
2 On 8th November one reconnaissance aircraft was shot down and a formation of seven S.79 bombers was subsequently intercepted and turned back 35 miles from the fleet, one S.79 being shot down and one damaged. On the 9th a reconnaissance aircraft was shot down. On the 10th a shadower was shot down and a bomber formation broken up; on the 12th three reconnaissance aircraft were shot down before they could make reports. On the 15th a Cant. 501 was engaged and apparently shot down and two aircraft made an abortive attack on Convoy A.S.5.
Commenting on Operation M.B.8, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham remarked:—

"The operation (M.B.8) was originally initiated in the instructions of the Admiralty for the passage of the Birmigham, Berwick and Glasgow to reinforce the Mediterranean Fleet (Operation "Coat"). The period of the moon was also favourable for the execution of the oft-postponed Operation 'Judgment' (the attack on Taranto).

Coming as it did shortly after the entry of Greece into the war there were also outstanding commitments in the way of passing supplies to Greece and the establishment of naval and military base forces and equipment at Suda Bay. These were in addition to the passage of convoys to and from Malta, which have always to be made when operations in the Central Mediterranean provide suitable cover.

In addition, it was necessary to get H.M.S. Terror away from Malta, to provide temporary defence at Suda Bay while the coast defence guns were being installed, and with a view to her ultimate employment on the flank of the army in Libya. Finally, it was decided to carry out a raid into the Straits of Otranto while the opportunity offered, with the object of enheartening the Greeks and of dealing an additional blow to the enemy in his own waters.

'It can therefore be seen that the operation became one of considerable complexity, covering a large area with a wide succession of subsidiary movements. Apart from the excellent results obtained in offensive action, perhaps the most surprising feature of the operation was the almost clockwise regularity with which the convoys ran, ships unloaded guns and material, and with which the rendezvous of widely dispersed units were reached at the appointed time.

These results were only rendered possible by the good co-operation of the Naval, Army and Air Force authorities concerned at Suda Bay in the establishment of the base, whereby ships were released punctually to their duties; and not least by the good performance of merchant ships in convoys whose punctual arrivals contributed much to the success of the operation. The work of Malta in the rapid unloading of stores and troops and in the refuelling of destroyers was excellent."

The Commander-in-Chief might well be satisfied with every part of the operations, but the palm must go to the F.A.A. Squadrone of the Illustrious and Eagle, operating from the Illustrious. The potentiality of the carrier, not merely as an indispensable component of a modern fleet, but as a mobile airfield capable of operating aircraft against objectives otherwise immune to air attack was—perhaps for the first time—fully demonstrated to the world. It is not too much to claim that the Illustrious on this occasion reflected as radical a change in the naval strategical conditions in the Mediterranean as the Japanese carriers at Pearl Harbour and the American carriers at Midway Island were to do in the Pacific in the not too distant future. Commenting on this, the first occasion on which the F.A.A. attacked an enemy base in the Mediterranean, Captain Boyd of the Illustrious made the following remarks:—

"The excellent photographic reconnaissance promoted by the Royal Air Force was a most important factor in the success of this operation. The accurate meteorological forecast from Malta was also most useful.

"There was considerable debate as to the wisdom of using Duplex pistols in such constricted waters. It was decided to run off 100 yards of the safety range and the battery resistance was removed to ensure that the torpedoes would remain dangerous on completion of their run. The decision to use them was indeed fortunate as the results could not have been obtained by any other weapon. To those three scores hits this weapon has retained the greatest honour is due and their faith has been amply justified by three battleships being either sunk or crippled by nine, or possibly eleven, 18-inch torpedoes.

"The attack was carried out under somewhat difficult conditions. Owing to the heavy Fleet programme no rehearsal had been possible. Aircraft from H.M.S. Eagle were put on the alert the day before leaving the harbour and had no previous experience of landing on H.M.S. Illustrious's deck, or of our controlled landings and the use of the barrier. A third obstacle was presented by the discovery that our petrol was contaminated, three Swordfish being lost on the preceding days from this cause. In spite of this, the zeal and enthusiasm of everyone to carry out this great enterprise was unabated and it is impossible to praise too highly those who in these comparatively slow machines made studied and accurate attacks in the midst of intense anti-aircraft fire.

"Although the proper function of the Fleet Air Arm may perhaps be the operation of aircraft against an enemy in the open sea it has been demonstrated before and repeated in no uncertain fashion by this success that the ability to strike unexpectedly is conferred by the Fleet Air Arm. It is often felt that this arm which has had a long struggle with adverse opinions, and its unspectacular aircraft is underestimated in its power. It is hoped that this victory will be considered a suitable reward to those whose work and faith in the Fleet Air Arm has made it possible."

The Commander-in-Chief in his report remarked that the attack was

"admirably planned and the determined and gallant manner in which it was carried out is a most credit to all concerned."

"This was the first occasion on which Duplex pistols were used in the Mediterranean. It is considered that the results achieved have proved the value of this weapon and that the many years of research and experiment devoted to its development have been well repaid.

"There can be little doubt that the crippling of half the Italian battlefleet is having and will continue to have, a marked effect on the course of the war. Without indulging in speculation as to the political repercussions, it is already evident that this successful attack has greatly increased our freedom of movement in the Mediterranean and has thus strengthened our control over the central area of this sea. It has enabled two battleships to be released for operations elsewhere while the effect on the morale of the Italians must be considerable."

40. MESSAGE FROM H.M. THE KING

These operations marked the culminating point of the successes achieved in 1940 by the Mediterranean Fleet against an enemy superior in strength operating from his home bases.

Foremost amongst its achievements was the Fleet Air Arm attack on the Italian Fleet. A brilliantly conceived operation executed with skill and daring against a powerful fleet in a strongly defended anchorage, it merits a classic place in naval annals as an outstanding example of the strength of air power exercised by a fleet at sea.

The following message from H.M. The King was received by the Commander-in-Chief on the 18th November:—

"The recent successful operations of the Fleet under your command have been a source of pride and gratification to all at home. Please convey my warm congratulations to the Mediterranean Fleet, and in particular to the Fleet Air Arm on their brilliant exploit against the Italian warships at Taranto."
CHAPTER IV
(Battle Summary No. 9)

Action off Cape Spartivento, Sardinia,
27th November 1940

41. Introductory Remarks

WITHIN A FORTNIGHT of the events described in the last chapter, there occurred an action in the Western Mediterranean, off Cape Spartivento, Sardinia, between British forces under Vice-Admiral Sir James Somerville and units of the Italian Navy under Admiral I. Campioni. The encounter took place during operations to ensure the passage of very important military stores and personnel through the Mediterranean to the Middle East. The safe passage of these reinforcements was Sir James Somerville's paramount consideration throughout and it is in the light of this liability that the action must be studied.1

Once again the Italians, availing themselves of their superior speed, withdrew almost before action was joined, and little material damage was suffered by either side. But the British were thereby left free to pass the convoy through according to plan, and the operations contributed another nail in the coffin of Italian supremacy in the Mediterranean.

42. Plan of Operation "Collar"

The British units taking part in the operation, which was known as "Collar", were organised in three groups2 as follows:

1 See Appendix M.

Force "B" consisting of the battle-cruiser Renown (Flag Officer Commanding Force "H"), Vice-Admiral Sir James F. Somerville, the aircraft carrier Ark Royal, cruisers, Sheffield and Despatch, and nine destroyers of the 8th and 13th Flotillas.

Force "F" composed of the cruisers Manchester (Flag, Vice-Admiral L. E. Holland) and Southampton, each carrying about 700 R.A.F. and military personnel, the destroyer Hotspur, four corvettes on passage to the Eastern Mediterranean, and three merchant vessels carrying mechanical transport.

Force "D" from the eastern Mediterranean, consisted of the battleship Ramillies, the cruisers Newcastle, Berwick and Coventry (A.A.) and five destroyers.

The general plan of the operation was that Forces "B" and "F" should escort and cover the passage of the transports and corvettes from Gibraltar through the Western Mediterranean, and should be met by Force "D" to the south of Sardinia at approximately noon,2 27th November. All three forces were then to make for a position between Sicily and Cape Bon (latitude 37° 40' N., longitude 10° 50' E.) which they would reach at dusk. After dark, Vice-Admiral Holland with Force "F", reinforced by the Coventry and destroyers of Force "D" was to pass through the Narrows to the Eastern Mediterranean, where he would be met the next day by the Mediterranean Fleet. Force "B" with the Ramillies, Newcastle and Berwick would then return to Gibraltar.

43. Preliminary Considerations and Enemy Intelligence

The condition of the ships taking part in the operation was not wholly satisfactory. The Renown, Ark Royal and Sheffield were in good fighting condition, but the Ark Royal had recently been damaged, and was late in returning to service. Her mobility was limited to about 20 knots; she was also without asdic. The corvettes could not steam more than 27 knots, owing to the removal of some rows of turbine blades, and Newcastles boilers were not entirely reliable.

The Hotspur had just undergone temporary repairs and her speed was limited to about 20 knots; she was also without asdic. The corvettes could not be relied upon for a speed of advance of more than 14 knots.

The Manchester and Southampton were each to carry some 700 R.A.F. and military personnel, to the detriment of their fighting efficiency, and doubts were expressed by Vice-Admiral Holland as to the advisability of including them in Force "F". As extreme importance was attached to the safe and timely arrival of these reinforcements at Alexandria, he represented that the destroyers of the 8th and 13th Flotillas had been running very hard, though there was no reason to anticipate the development of any definite defects. These ships comprising the permanent nucleus of Force "H", were the only vessels in the whole force which had ever worked together as a squadron. Of the cruisers, the Berwick could not steam more than 27 knots, owing to the removal of some rows of turbine blades, and Newcastles boilers were not entirely reliable.

Some of the cruisers were handicapped by defects. The Berwick could not steam more than 27 knots, owing to the removal of some rows of turbine blades, and Newcastles boilers were not entirely reliable.

1 For measures and movements in the Eastern Mediterranean, see Naval Staff History, Mediterranean, Vol. II, Chapter I.

2 In connection with this it is interesting to note the constant changes which circumstances had imposed on the composition of Force "H". Between 1st July and 27th November 1940, the following different ships were at one time or another included in the Force:

7 capital ships, 9 aircraft carriers, 13 cruisers, 33 destroyers.
opinion that the complete object of the operation, which included the safe passage of the transports and corvettes, was more likely to be achieved by a show of force sufficiently powerful to deter the Italians from attempting to interfere.

No very definite intelligence with regard to the Italian Naval Forces seems to have been available, but Vice-Admiral Somerville considered it very probable, in view of the Taranto episode, that the enemy would attempt some operation in the Western basin of the Mediterranean. There they could achieve a considerable superiority over Forces “B” and “F” (1 bc., 1 ac., 4 cr., 10 dr.) which would be forced to stand and fight owing to the presence of the slow transports (16 knots). He estimated that a concentration of three battleships, five to seven 8-inch cruisers, and several 6-inch cruisers with other light forces could be effected by the enemy for this purpose. For this reason, he asked for the battleship Royal Sovereign, then undergoing repairs at Gibraltar, to be included in the operation; this was approved by the Admiralty, but her defects could not be completed in time.

The transports passed through the Strait of Gibraltar during the night of 24th/25th November, and were joined by the four corvettes to the eastward of Gibraltar a.m., 25th. The remainder of Forces “B” and “F” sailed at 0800 that morning, and the operation proceeded according to plan without any particular incident until the morning of 27th November.

These movements and the departure of Force “D” from Alexandria did not escape the notice of the Italians and at 1200, 26th November, strong forces under Admiral Campioni, the Commander-in-Chief Afloat, left Naples and Messina and steered to pass to the southward of Cape Spartivento, Sardinia (a distance of about 350 miles) with the intention of intercepting Force “H”.

The Italians were organised in two Squadrons, viz:—

**First Squadron**, consisting of the battleships, *Vittorio Veneto* (flag, Commander-in-Chief), *Cesare*, and eight destroyers.

**Second Squadron**, under Vice-Admiral Iachino, six 8-inch gun cruisers, *Pola* (flag, Vice-Admiral Iachino), *Fiume*, *Gorizia* (1st

1 At Vice-Admiral Holland’s request, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, was asked whether the safe passage of personnel or M.T. ships should receive priority if circumstances were to arise which made a decision necessary, after Force “F” had parted company for the passage of the Narrows. The Commander-in-Chief replied, “Personnel” but subsequent instructions were received from the Admiralty that this must be subject to the overriding consideration that if Italian forces were in sight, the action taken by the cruisers must be the same as if personnel were not embarked.

2 Air reconnaissance from Malta, on 24th November, gave the following disposition of Italian forces—

- **Taranto**: Outer harbour, two battleships, five cruisers, nine merchant vessels.
- **Messina**: Three cruisers, five destroyers, six submarines.
- **Catania**: Nil.
- **Augusta**: A few small vessels.
- **Syracuse**: Possibly one destroyer and a few smaller vessels.

3 Attack by torpedo bombers on Italian Fleet, 11th November 1940 (see Chapter III).

4 Reliance was apparently placed entirely on reconnaissance by shore-based aircraft to locate enemy units in the Western Mediterranean during the days immediately preceding the battle (24th/27th November), a task for which Vice-Admiral Somerville subsequently stated they proved entirely inadequate.

No information was received from any special sources, and the first report received by the Admiral of enemy ships being at sea in the Western Mediterranean was provided by carrier reconnaissance a few hours before the action commenced.
Throughout the afternoon of 26th November and the night 26th/27th, the fleet made to the westward without incident. No further news of the British came in, except a report shortly after midnight from the torpedo boat Sirio, which had sighted seven warships (types unspecified) on a north-westerly course off Cape Bon; to these ships (Force "D"), Admiral Campioni correctly assigned the intention of joining the group coming from Gibraltar.

45. Situation at 0800, 27th November (Plan 9)

At 0800, 27th November, about half an hour before sunrise, the situation was as follows. The Italian battlefleet was about 30 miles east-south-east of Cape Spartivento steering 260° 16 knots with the 1st Cruiser Division some 11 miles ahead and the 3rd Division disposed 180° five miles from the 1st Division.

Vice-Admiral Somerville in the Renown, with the Ark Royal, Sheffield and four destroyers, was about 90 miles south-west of Cape Spartivento, steering 083°, 16 knots.

Some 30 miles to the west-south-west of him, the Vice-Admiral, 18th Cruiser Squadron, in the Manchester, with the Southampton, Despatch, and five destroyers was in company with the convoy. The four corvettes had been unable to keep up with it and were about 10 miles to the westward.

The visibility was excellent, the wind south-easterly, force 3 to 4, and the sea calm. Neither British nor Italian forces were aware of the presence of each other.

At this time the Ark Royal flew off a section of fighters, one A/S Patrol, one meteorological aircraft and seven T.S.R.s designed to cover the area to the west of Sardinia, and between Sardinia and Africa. The depth of this reconnaissance to the eastward was sufficient to cover Force "D" (1 bs., 3 cr., 5 dr.) which was approaching from Skerki Bank.

Vice-Admiral Somerville continued on an easterly course, in order to concentrate with Force "D" should the air reconnaissance reveal the presence of important enemy units in the vicinity of that force. At 0900, having received no such report, he altered course to the south-westward to join the convoy and give it additional A.A. defence against the earliest bombing attacks from the Sardinian airfields.

46. Reconnaissance Aircraft Report Enemy Forces at Sea

Just about this time, at 0852, one of the Ark Royal's reconnaissance aircraft had sighted a group of warships about 25 miles to the southward of Cape Spartivento, and closing to investigate, at 0906 sent an alarm report of four cruisers and six destroyers, which, however, was not received by any ship of the British Forces. Sighting the convoy at 0920, the Renown manoeuvred to pass astern of it and take station to the southward and up sun, in the probable direction of air attack. At 0956, while still on the port quarter of the convoy, Vice-Admiral Somerville received from the Ark Royal an aircraft report, timed 0920, of five cruisers and five destroyers some 65 miles to the north-eastward of him.1

Though it seemed possible that this report referred to Force "D" steam was at once ordered for full speed, and screens of two destroyers each were detailed for both the Ark Royal and the convoy. Further reports from aircraft, confirmed by the Ark Royal, established by 1015 the presence of enemy battleships and cruisers, and the Renown altered course to 075° to join the Ramillies, increasing speed as rapidly as possible to 28 knots.

47. Measures to Safeguard Convoy and to Join Force "D" (Plan 9)

Twenty minutes later, though the plot at 1035 clearly showed enemy forces

---

1 Owing to faults in the receiver the Renown failed to receive the first 11 aircraft reports made on the reconnaissance wave.
to the north-east, their composition and relative position was still in doubt. In these circumstances, the Vice-Admiral decided that the convoy should continue towards its destination, steering a south-easterly course (120°) in order to keep clear of any action which might develop. It was given an escort of two cruisers, the *Despatch* (Commodore C. Douglas-Pennant) and *Covington* (2 cr.), and two destroyers.1 The remainder of the cruisers and destroyers of Force “E” (2 cr., 3 dr.) were ordered to join Force “B” (1 bc., 1 ac., 1 cr., 4 dr.), which steered to concentrate with Force “D” (1 bc., 3 cr., 5 dr.) prior to attacking the enemy. At the same time, Malta was told the position of two enemy battleships, and the *Ramillies* was told the position of the *Renown*. The *Ark Royal* was ordered to prepare and to fly off a T/B striking force, acting independently under cover of the battlefleet. At 1058 a Sunderland flying-boat closed the *Renown* and reported Force “D” bearing 070° 34 miles. As the junction of the two forces seemed to be assured, the speed of the *Renown* was reduced to 24 knots, in order to maintain a position between the convoy and the enemy force. Its estimated position was 025° 50 miles distant and the flying-boat was ordered to shadow and report its composition.

The cruisers *Manchester*, *Sheffield* and *Southampton* had meanwhile concentrated with the destroyers in the van, bearing five miles from the *Renown* in the direction of the enemy.

Reports from the reconnaissance aircraft of the *Ark Royal* contained a number of discrepancies which made it impossible to obtain a clear picture of the situation. Two groups of cruisers had been reported, as well as two battleships; it seemed certain that five or six cruisers were present, but the number of battleships remained in doubt; it might be one, or two or three. "But whatever the composition of the enemy force," it was clear to Vice-Admiral Somerville that "in order to achieve his object—the safe and timely arrival of the convoy at its destination—it was essential to show a bold front and attack the enemy as soon as possible."

At 1115, the enemy originally steering to the westward, were reported to be altering course to the eastward.2 All this time Force “D” had been coming westward, and at 11203 was sighted in the *Renown*, approximately 24 miles distant. The *Ramillies* sighted Force “D”2 at 1058, a Sunderland flying-boat returned, and reported six cruisers and eight destroyers, bearing 390°, 36 miles from the *Renown*. Her report unfortunately gave no course or speed of the enemy, and she disappeared from sight before this could be obtained. This information—the first visual link received—indicated that one group of the enemy forces was considerably further to the west than those previously reported, and moreover that it was in a position to work round astern and attack the *Ark Royal* and the convoy. Vice-Admiral Somerville accordingly altered course to north in order to avoid getting too far to the eastward.3

49. Vice-Admiral Somerville’s Appreciation, Noon, 27th November

The situation as it appeared from the *Renown’s* plot just before noon is shown in Fig. 8 overleaf. The prospects of bringing the enemy to action appeared favourable. The composition of the Italian forces was not definitely established, but there did not appear to be more than two battleships with them.

The British forces had effectuated their concentration, of which the enemy seemed to be unaware, since no shadowers had been sighted, or detected by radar. His speed was reported as between 14 and 18 knots, which suggested that his reconnaissance was not completed. The sun was immediately astern of the British forces, giving them the advantage of light, and, if the nearest reported position of the enemy was correct, there seemed every possibility of bringing off a simultaneous surface and T/B attack, providing he did not retire immediately at high speed.

Vice-Admiral Somerville’s intentions were:

(i) To drive off the enemy from any position from which he could attack the convoy.

(ii) To accept some risk to the convoy, providing there was reasonable prospect of sinking one or more of the enemy battleships.

To achieve the second of them he considered that the speed of the enemy would have to be reduced by T/B attacks to 20 knots, or less, and that the enemy battleships must be engaged by the *Renown* and *Ramillies* in concert.

1 Exclusive of the *Hotspur*. The *Country* and destroyers *Wishart* and *Duncan* did not make contact till 1300.

2 An observer who witnessed this alteration of course reported that the eastern group of cruisers appeared to be thrown into confusion. The leading ship turned 130°, while the following ships turned only 90°. Collisions appeared to have been narrowly averted, and at one time all three ships seemed to be stopped with their bows nearly touching each other.

3 In Admiral Somerville’s report, time of sighting is given as 1128, but in the Chronological Appendix to the report it is given as 1130. From other evidence, this latter time appears to be the correct one.

4 See Section 53.
50. Admiral Campioni's Appreciation, Noon, 27th November (Plans 9, 10)

It was not till 1015, 27th November, that the Italian Commander-in-Chief received any further news of the British. This came from an aircraft catapulted from the Bolzano—a report of one battleship, two light cruisers and four destroyers in position 20 miles north of Cape de Fer (135 miles S.W. of Spartivento) steering 090° at 0945. Admiral Campioni for a time thought this was the Cap Bon force (Force "D"). As the numbers coincided with the group reported during the night, though the position was further to the west than was to be expected, even if the ships had only just reversed course.

A second sighting report, received from the Gorizia’s aircraft at 1144, confirmed the position given in the 1015 report, but did not mention "two cruisers," an omission possibly explained by the fact that the cruisers of Force "B" had by then moved on ahead of the Renown to join the cruisers of Force "D". (See Plan 9.)

Acting on the Bolzano’s report Admiral Campioni led the First Squadron round to course 135° at 1128. Both divisions of cruisers of the Second Squadron conformed to his turn to the S.E. He then envisaged an encounter between the whole of his forces and the Renown with possibly two cruisers and some destroyers, and this view was upheld by the Gorizia’s aircraft report at 1144. He had not, at that time, appreciated that Forces "B" and "D" had joined, nor that the Ark Royal was in the offing, although he knew the aircraft-carrier had left Gibraltar with the other ships. His report reads as follows:

"The sighting report (at 1015) persuaded me to alter course to 135° in order to close the English forces, and if possible intercept them. This appeared possible at the time, also I had in mind that the English forces were inferior to the Italian. Furthermore, the encounter would be brought about in waters closer to Sicily then Sardinia, that is in conditions favourable to us.

"But whilst our forces were taking up station on the new course I received at 1155 a signal, originally made at 1110 by an aircraft from Armera, giving the position of the Renown’s group. This position was 20 miles nearer to the Vittorio Veneto than the one shown by the plot based on previous sighting reports, and was near enough to the other British forces to render their meeting very easy.

"A state of affairs was thus created which on the best hypothesis was unfavourable to us numerically and qualitatively. Particularly important was the presence of an aircraft-carrier, which with well-directed action properly synchronized with action of their ships, that were certainly not inferior to ours, would have brought about a situation of the utmost gravity.

"It was a situation not only at variance with the directive given to me by the Ministry of Marine, but with that imposed by military necessity." The Admiral then explains that in this latter term he was referring to the effect on the Italian navy of the F.A.A. attack on Taranto on 11th November, and the fact that the battleship Andrea Doria was not yet ready.

"Under these conditions," continued Admiral Campioni, "in conformity with the spirit and letter of the orders received and with what at that moment I deemed to be my duty I decided not to become involved in a battle. In theory I should have been able to take into calculation an effective intervention by our shore-based aircraft, but my previous experience discouraged me from putting too much faith on such intervention, having learnt from experience what to expect."

At 1215, 27th November, the Italian admiral’s appreciation and decision amounted briefly to this:

"The British aircraft will damage our ships, the Italian aircraft will not damage theirs, the enemy are not inferior in numbers or quality to us, and at present we cannot afford any further reduction in capital ship strength."

He therefore hoisted the signal not to become involved in action, "course 090°; increase speed of engines."

51. Surface Contact (Plan 10)

Meanwhile, Admiral Somerville was steering to the northward at his best speed to close the enemy.

---

1 In the matter of actual numbers and strength the Admiral’s statement about the "English being numerically superior" was incorrect, for there were two capital ships on each side, seven Italian 8-inch cruisers compared with one 8-inch and four 6-inch on our side, and 16 Italian destroyers to our ten (i.e. not counting the two destroyers with the Ark Royal).

2 Presumably Admiral Campioni had in mind the action off Calabria, 9th July 1940, when the Italian Air Force, although well within range, failed to inflict any damage on the British Fleet, and, in addition, bombed their own.
At 1207, the Renown developed a hot bearing on one shaft, which limited her speed to 27½ knots. At the same time, puffs of smoke were observed on the horizon bearing 006°, and the cruisers in the van sighted masts and ships between the bearings of 006° and 345°. Six minutes later (1213, 27th), a signal (timed 1147) came in from the Ark Royal, reporting the composition of the enemy as two battleships and six cruisers, accompanied by destroyers. This report did not nullify that of the Sunderland. There still remained the possibility that the Sunderland’s reported group of six cruisers and destroyers was a separate force further to the westward. The British cruisers by this time were concentrated in the van, and had formed a line of bearing 075°-255° in the sequence from west to east, Sheffield, Southampton, Newcastle, Manchester, Berwick.1

The situation as seen by the cruisers immediately before the action commenced was as follows. Between the bearings of 340° and 350° three enemy cruisers and some destroyers were visible at a range of about 11 miles, steering a northerly course.2 This force will be referred to as the “Western Group.” A second group of cruisers, also accompanied by destroyers, which will be referred to as the “Eastern Group” bore between 003° and 013°. This group was further away and was steering approximately 100°.

52. The Action (Plan 10)

At 1220, 27th the enemy in the western group4 opened fire, and the British advanced forces immediately replied. The enemy’s first salvo fell close to the Manchester, exact for range, but 100 yards out for deflection. As soon as fire was opened by the British cruisers, the Italians made smoke and retired on courses varying between north-west and north-east. Behind their smoke screen they seemed to be making large and frequent alterations of course, judging from glimpses which were obtained.

Actually, the cruisers had just received the Commander-in-Chief’s orders to steer to the eastward, followed at 1224 by a signal “Do not join action.” At 1222 the eastern group5 had altered to 050°, 28 knots, increasing to 30 knots at 1230. At the same time Vice-Admiral Iachino ordered the western group to steer to the eastward, followed at 1224 by a signal “Do not join action.” At 1222 the eastern group5 had altered to 050°, 28 knots, increasing to 30 knots at 1230. At the same time Vice-Admiral Iachino ordered the western group to

1 The Newcastle could not maintain the speed of the remainder and never quite reached her station.

2 The Berwick had signalled at 1138 that as her speed was limited to 27 knots she proposed to join the Renown. This she turned to do, thereby losing ground. She subsequently took station on the starboard bow of the Manchester, but owing to her lack of speed, dropped back during the action.

3 The destroyers maintained a distance of five cables apart throughout the action. Vice-Admiral Somerville remarks that when the number of destroyers present or on a flank is limited to approximately one flotilla, this is a very suitable distance. It relieves the commanding officers of the necessity to maintain accurate station, and reduces the damage likely to be caused by gunfire.

4 Evidence as to the movements of the western group immediately prior to the action was conflicting. It appeared probable that this group was in line ahead on a southerly course until 1210, when course was altered towards the northward. Between 1210 and 1220 further alterations might have been made. When first observed from the Renown the ships appeared to have a fairly broad inclination to the eastward. Actually, this group—the 3rd Division (Trieste, Trento, Bolzano)—was making two 180° turns to starboard, in order to take station 270° from the 1st Division. (See Plan 10).

5 First Division, Pola (flag Vice-Admiral Iachino), Fiume, Gorizia.

keep further away from the enemy. “The Third Division,” he subsequently wrote, “being the target of the English fire and realising that at any moment a salvo of 15-inch shells might hit them, increased to their maximum speed and presented their sterns to the enemy.”

It was at 1224 that the Renown opened fire at the right-hand ship of the western group (identified as an 8-inch cruiser of the Zara class) at a mean range of 26,500 yards. After six salvoes, the target was lost in smoke. The Ramillies also fired two salvoes at maximum elevation to test the range, but both fell short; she then dropped astern following in the wake of the Renown at her best speed, 20-7 knots, throughout the action.

Just before opening fire, the Renown had sighted two ships which were not making smoke, bearing 000° at extreme visibility. They were thought at the time to be the Italian battleships though they proved later to be cruisers of the eastern group. On losing her first target the Renown altered course to starboard to close these supposed battleships and to bring the cruisers of the western group broader on the bow. She had hardly done so when the centre ship of the latter group appeared momentarily through the smoke, and was given two salvoes. Again course was altered to open “A” arcs on the left-hand ship, at which eight salvoes were fired at a range of about 30,000 yards before she too disappeared in the smoke at 1245. At this moment, two large ships steaming to the westward emerged from the smoke cloud; the Renown’s turrets were trained on this new target, but before fire could be opened, they were fortunately identified as French liners.

The enemy were by this time on the run, and had passed outside the range of our capital ships, though at 1231 the Renown fired two ranging salvoes, which fell short, at two ships of the eastern group.

Meanwhile the Italian cruisers had been hotly engaged at ranges varying between 23,000 and 16,000 yards. Many straddles were obtained, but smoke rendered spotting and observation exceedingly difficult. No concentration of fire was ordered, owing to the rapidly changing situation, and the large number of ships.

The Manchester, Sheffield and Newcastle all opened fire at first on the right-hand ship of the western group; the Berwick engaged the left-hand ship of the same group, whilst the Southampton chose the left-hand ship of the eastern group. The Manchester and Sheffield continued firing at the same ships for about 20 minutes (until 1236 and 1240 respectively), but the Newcastle after firing 18 broadsides shifted to the Berwick’s target. The Southampton, after five salvoes at her original target, engaged a destroyer which was seen to be hit. At least one other destroyer was believed to have been hit during this phase and the Faulknor at 1227 and Newcastle at 1233 thought they saw hits on a cruiser by large calibre shell.

The enemy’s fire was accurate during the early stages but, when fully engaged, it deteriorated rapidly, and the spread became ragged. Their rate of fire is described as “extremely slow.” The only casualties on the British side occurred in the Berwick, which received a hit from an 8-inch shell at 1222, which put the “Y” turret out of action.2 The Manchester was straddled several
times, but though under continuous fire from 1221 till about 1300, escaped unscathed.1

By 1234, 27th, the ships in the western group were almost lost in smoke. At this time the course of the British cruisers was 020, and the eastern group of the enemy was passing across their front from left to right. Vice-Admiral Holland therefore altered course to 360, with the intention of separating the two enemy groups, and then concentrating on one or other of them. This manoeuvre was successful, and he selected the eastern group as his target,2 the Manchester shifting her fire to the left-hand ship of this group, then 30° on her starboard bow, at a range of 21,000 yards. This ship she engaged for between three and four minutes, and then shifted her fire to a destroyer making a smoke screen 17,000 yards on the port bow, which after being straddled several times, turned away behind her own smoke.3 By 1240, all ships of the 18th Cruiser Squadron were firing at this group. The Berswick received another hit at 1235, which wrecked some cabins without causing any casualties. She had just started to engage a ship thought to be an 8-inch cruiser of the Pula class at which she fired 47 salvos during the next 20 minutes.4

At 1245 the cruisers altered course to 090° to prevent the enemy working round ahead and attacking the convoy. This brought the relative bearing of the eastern group to Red 40, and the Manchester once more engaged the left-hand ship. Five minutes later a further alteration to the southward was made to counter what appeared to be an attempt to "cross the T"5 of the 18th Cruiser Squadron. The enemy, however, at once resumed their north-easterly course, and Vice-Admiral Holland led back to 070° at 1256 and 090° at 1258. The rear ship of the enemy line was heavily on fire aft6; between 1252 and 1259, she appeared to lose speed, but picked up again and drew away with her consorts.

At 1301, the masts of a fresh enemy unit steering to the south-west were sighted at extreme visibility range ahead of the Manchester. It bore 045° and two minutes later, two battleships were identified in it; their presence was quickly corroborated by large splashes which commenced to fall near the Manchester and Berswick, and an enemy report was made to the Admiral. The

1 The 55 officers and 629 other ranks of the Army and R.A.F. taking passage in the Manchester were dispersed between decks throughout the ship. All bathrooms were filled with troops. A number of officers and men were formed into willing parties to transfer ammunition from the "X" and "Y" turrets to "A" and "B" turrets. To carry a shipload of passengers into battle", wrote Vice-Admiral Holland, "is an unenviable lot, but their presence had perforce to be dismissed from my mind. They themselves were exhilarated at having been in a sea battle."

2 On this decision Admiral Holland wrote:— "It was reasonable to suppose that the smoke screen enveloping Group A (the western group) was hiding some damage, and this group was believed to be the weaker of the two. By closing Group A it seemed that some immediate tactical achievement might result. Against this, however, it has to be appreciated that the object of the whole enterprise was to pass a convoy through the Narrows, and that if our cruisers steered off to the westward the field would be left clear for Group B (the eastern group), to turn to the southward and attack the convoy. I therefore decided that Group B should be our future target."

3 The destroyer Lanciere was hit at 1235 by a 6-inch shell in the after boiler-room. She continued to steam at 25 knots, but at 1240 a second shell struck her amidships, port side, penetration without explosion. A third shell struck her under the water line, starboard side, without exploding. About 1300 she came to a stop, and at 1440 was taken in tow by the Assai at 7 knots for Cagliari.

4 Vice-Admiral Iachino was not impressed by the British gunnery. "The English", he wrote, "were as usual, fired rapid salvos with a limited spread, making frequent turns to disturb our fire and so as to bring all their guns to bear. The general result was ineffective and not well directed. The fire from our cruisers was appreciably better and more efficacious, since two enemy cruisers were certainly hit."

5 This was observed by the Manchester, Newcastle and Southampton, but no report of it reached Vice-Admiral Somerville until after the action.

64 ACTION OFF CAPE SPARIVENTO, SARDINIA, 27TH NOV. 1940

FIRST ATTACK BY H.M.S. ARK ROYAL'S T/B STRIKING FORCE 65

end on approach resulted in the range decreasing very rapidly, and at 1305 Vice-Admiral Holland turned the cruisers to 120°, with the dual purpose of working round the flank of the battleships, and closing the gap to the Renown. The enemy battleships were not prepared to close and altering course to the north-east, they joined their 8-inch cruisers. Vice-Admiral Holland therefore altered back to 090° at 1308, and steadied on a course of 090°. The enemy were by now rapidly running out of range, and ten minutes later the action came to an end.

53. FIRST ATTACK BY H.M.S. Ark Royal's T/B Striking Force (Plan 10)

Meanwhile, a T/B striking force consisting of 11 aircraft of No 810 Squadron had been flown off from the Ark Royal at 1130, with orders to attack the Italian battleships reported by reconnaissance aircraft. At 1215 they sighted two battleships between 25 and 30 miles to the eastward, and altered course so as to approach from the direction of the sun. The ships were identified as one of the Cerchio (Vittorio Veneto) and one of the Cesare (Casauri) class; they were screened by seven destroyers, one ahead, and three in line ahead about 1,000 yards on either side of the heavy ships. The enemy's course was easterly, and their speed about 18 knots; this course was altered in succession to the westward some five minutes before the attack developed and almost immediately afterwards back again to the eastward together.

The aircraft were unobserved by the battleships until the leader was about 1,500 ft., although the cruisers to the westward had opened fire on them, evidently only as a warning to the battleships, for the bursts were very short. The leading battleship Veneto was selected as the target, but all torpedoes were dropped below the smoke screen at about 700 to 800 yards range. One hit was claimed just abaft the after funnel,1 and an explosion also occurred just astern of her; another explosion was seen ahead of the Cesare. No other hits were seen. A very heavy concentration of light A.A. fire from both heavy ships and screening destroyers was opened on the aircraft; during the getaway, heavier weapons were used, and the cruisers which by then were about five miles to the west also joined in. The aircraft in passing made machine-gunned the bridges of the battleships and destroyers; all returned safely to the Ark Royal.2

The Italian views on this attack are now available, and are of interest. After remarking that the attack was carried out with resolution, Admiral Campioni stated that it was successfully staved off by the manoeuvring and gunfire of our ships, and through the presence of a close escort of destroyers.

"The fact that the battleship group had, as it happened, inverted their course just previous to the attack developing,3 must have had a marked effect as well. The aircraft could not pass over the destroyer lines except with extreme difficulty and suffering a loss of control; which confirms the great usefulness of a close escort in the special case of air-torpedo attacks. It is essential that the close escort should be left in position up to the last moment, and removed only when the gun action renders their presence no longer possible. Furthermore, I wish to confirm the great advantage of distant A.A. escort, although the tasks of our smaller naval units does not usually permit of such employment."

In this connexion Vice-Admiral Iachino, in his summing-up, recommended that in future 6-inch cruisers of the Di Giussano class should accompany the Squadrons to act as A.A. cruisers.

1 According to Italian sources this hit did not occur.
2 The Italians claimed to have shot down two aircraft, but this was not the case.
3 Course was altered in order to close Vice-Admiral Iachino's cruisers.
FURTHER ATTACKS BY H.M.S. ARK ROYAL'S AIRCRAFT

54. Vice-Admiral Somerville's Appreciation, 1315, 27th November

The relative positions of the opposing forces at 1315 are shown in Fig. 9. Firing had practically ceased, owing to the enemy drawing out of range. The heavy smoke made by the Italians during the chase had prevented accurate fire, and so far as was known, no serious damage had been inflicted on them. The British striking force had attacked, but no report of the results had been received. It seemed evident that the speed of the enemy had not been materially reduced.1

The British forces, meanwhile, were rapidly approaching the enemy coast, and it was a question whether a continuance of the chase was justified, and likely to be profitable.

The main object of the whole operation was still the safe passage of the convoy. The enemy's principal units had been driven off far enough to ensure that they could no longer interfere with it, even if the cruisers reported to the north-westward by the Sunderland had been working towards it round the western flank of the British forces. It was also important to provide the fullest possible scale of defence for the transports against attacks by torpedo bombers and light surface forces at dusk,1 and in order to reach the convoy in time to do this, it would be necessary for the British main forces to shape course for it before 1400. In any case, the enemy's superiority of speed rendered it most improbable that he could be brought to action by the Renown and the Ramillies. Under these circumstances, Vice-Admiral Somerville decided to abandon the chase and rejoin the convoy as soon as possible.2

At 1312 Vice-Admiral Somerville accordingly ordered his forces to retire, course 130°. Half an hour later, he received a report of an enemy damaged cruiser stopped in a position 30 miles from the Renown and ten miles from the coast of Sardinia. The question of detaching the Berwick and Newcastle3 to search for and attack this ship was carefully considered. It would, however, have involved the main British forces remaining in a position to support these cruisers, which would cause unacceptable delay in rejoining the convoy. There was the further possibility of isolated ships in such close proximity to the enemy coast being singled out for air attack; the Berwick was most vulnerable to this form of attack, and her disablement would have involved the whole British force in the task of effecting her extrication. There was nothing to indicate that the damaged enemy would remain stopped, and she might well effect her escape before she could be overtaken.4

Instructions were therefore sent to the Ark Royal to attack the damaged cruiser with aircraft if it was considered feasible; all the rest of the force continued to the southward, the Vice-Admiral, 18th Cruiser Squadron, being ordered to join the convoy with the Manchester and Southampton.

55. Further Attacks by H.M.S. Ark Royal’s Aircraft

The signal directing an attack to be made on the damaged cruiser was received in the Ark Royal at 1351. The Second Torpedo Bomber striking force was just ready to fly off. Captain Holland considering that the signal which he had sent at 1339 reporting the hit believed to have been scored on the Veneto by the First striking force had not reached Vice-Admiral Somerville, and that, if the Admiral received it, he would have ordered the second attack to be made on the battleships,5 decided to send the torpedo bombers against them, and to dive-bomb the damaged cruiser with seven Skuas, which were then arming with 500-lb bombs.

1 At 1308 Vice-Admiral Somerville had signalled to Vice-Admiral Holland: “ Is there any hope of catching cruisers? ” to which the latter had replied “ No. ” A later message from Vice-Admiral Holland estimated that the enemy had three knots excess of speed.

2 See Appendix O.

3 It was obviously undesirable to use the Manchester and Southampton for this purpose on account of the R.A.F. personnel embarked in these two ships for passage. The Sheffield's radar was required to deal with the bombing attacks which would inevitably develop.

4 A subsequent air search failed to locate the damaged ship, so the stoppage was apparently only temporary.

5 The signal ran “ Striking Force report that Italian battleship, Cavour class, damaged and speed reduced. ” The groups for “ damaged and speed reduced ” were received in corrupt form in Renown. The first part of the signal gave no indication that it was a report of damage inflicted by the striking force.
The T/B striking force consisting of nine Swordfish was flown off at 1410. The Squadron Leader was given the enemy battleships as his objective, but with full liberty to change direction if he thought fit. He made good a course of 090°, and at 1430 the Italian R.O.43 was sighted some 1.5 miles off the south-east coast of Sardinia, steering to the eastward at high speed. These were the Pola, Fiume and Gorizia. Some eight miles ahead of the cruisers were two battleships, heavily screened by ten destroyers. There was a total absence of cloud cover, and it was considered essential to attack from the direction of the sun, if any degree of surprise were to be achieved. As any attempt, however, to gain such a position with regard to the battleships would inevitably have led to the striking force being sighted by the cruisers, it was decided to attack the latter.

The attack was carried out at 1520 and was not sighted till very late, only two salvos being fired before the first torpedo was dropped. As the first Swordfish reached the dropping position, the cruisers turned together to starboard; this caused several of the following aircraft, who were already committed to their 'drop', to miss their targets, but one hit was claimed on the rear cruiser, and another possible hit on the leading cruiser.

The enemy gunfire then became intense, apparently quite regardless of direction, or of danger to their own ships. One large projectile was seen to hit the water close to the rear cruiser, and shells from close-range weapons were seen to burst close alongside all ships. Two of the British aircraft were struck by shrapnel, but all returned safely to the Ark Royal.

Describing the attack, Vice-Admiral Iachino reported that it was carried out by eight or nine aircraft, who 'launched three torpedoes at the Pola, and five or six against the Fiume and Gorizia. One torpedo was seen to break up on reaching the water, and some of the others may not have run since their tracks were not seen. The Fiume, however, observed four or five tracks which passed rather close, and one torpedo exploded at the end of its run. One of the aircraft was definitely brought down; and another when passing over the bridge of the Libeccio machine-gunned her with negative results.

"The ships manoeuvred repeatedly to prevent the attacks and to avoid the torpedoes, which were dropped at an inclination of between 30° and 50° and at a distance of 1,700 to 2,200 yards, coming in by groups always from the same side, i.e., 'down sun' . . . It remains to be said that our A.A. fire was not brilliantly controlled".

Meanwhile, the striking force of seven Skuas had flown off at 1500. They failed to locate the damaged cruiser but carried out an unobserved attack on three cruisers identified as Condottieri class, steering north off the south-west corner of Sardinia. These were actually the Trieste, Trento and Bolzano, which had been sent by Vice-Admiral Iachino to cover the retirement of the damaged Lanciere; no hits were obtained, but according to the Italian report five bombs fell very close to the Trento.

On the way back to the Ark Royal the Skuas encountered and shot down an Italian R.O.43.

56. ENEMY AIR ATTACKS ON BRITISH FORCES

While these British flying operations had been taking place Vice-Admiral Somerville had been steering to the southward in accordance with his decision to close the convoy. The Ark Royal had lost sight of the Renown to the north-eastward at about 1250, but since the receipt of the signal ordering the retirement of British forces, Captain Holland had been making good a course of 090°, so far as his flying operations permitted, in order to rejoin the Flag. The first radar indications of the presence of enemy aircraft were received in the Renown at 1407, and the line was staggered. Shortly afterwards bomb splashes were observed on the horizon—the result of an attack by the Ark Royal's Fulmars, which caused several of the Italians to jettison their bombs.

As soon as the enemy aircraft, consisting of ten S.975 in 'V' formation, were sighted by the Renown a turn by blue pendant was made by the British ships, in order to bring all guns to bear.

The enemy maintained a steady course, and their bombs fell well clear of the heavy ships, but close to the screening destroyers.

Two further attacks were made at about 1645, each by squadrons of five aircraft. These attacks were concentrated on the Ark Royal, which by this time was in company with the fleet, but owing to flying operations, not actually in the line. Apart from a few bombs which were jettisoned as the result of interception by our fighters, the high level bombing performed from a height of about 13,000 ft. was most accurate. Some 30 bombs fell in her vicinity—two at least, within ten yards of the ship—and she was completely obscured from view by the splashes.

About 15 minutes after this attack, a stick of bombs fell unexpectedly just ahead of the ship. These were dropped by four Caproni bombers, which had succeeded in approaching unobserved under cover of the first attack, and missed by a very narrow margin.

---

**Fig. 10. Bombing Attack on H.M.S. Ark Royal**

- **a.** Just below corner of Flight Deck (2)
- **b.** Failed to explode
- **c.** 20 to 30 yards off
- **d.** Immediately below "V" director, (10 yards)
The Ark Royal fortunately suffered no damage, nor so far as is known, did the enemy bombers. Vice-Admiral Somerville remarked that the complete failure of either fighter attack or gunfire to break up the formation of the Italian Squadrions was most noteworthy.

No further bombing attacks took place; the convoy was sighted at 1700, and the operation proceeded subsequently according to plan.

57. Composition of and Damage to Italian Forces

Owing to the long ranges at which the action was fought, the use of smoke by the Italians, and also to somewhat confusing air reconnaissance reports, there was considerable speculation after the action as to what enemy forces had actually been present. The composition of the battlefleet and the Eastern Group of cruisers was correctly assessed. These cruisers had closed to about eight miles from the battleships by 1240, and were thought to have followed astern of them. Immediately after the surface action ceased, the battlefleet steered for Cagliari at about 25 knots; at about 1500 it turned to the eastward and when last seen was steering north up the east coast of Sardinia. The composition of the Western Group was doubtful; the Newcastle considered that all these cruisers were 6-inch gun ships, but other ships were of the opinion that one or more 8-inch cruisers were included in it. After the action their movements were very uncertain; it was thought probable that they rejoined the battlefleet, but it was recognised that they might have been the cruisers attacked by the Skuas at 1530 (as was actually the case). Whether a third group of cruisers was operating, as suggested by the report of the Sunderland at 1154, was still more doubtful. After analysing the available evidence, Admiral Somerville considered that it was not possible to state definitely whether the enemy forces included six or nine cruisers.

With regard to the damage inflicted on the Italians, the estimate was considerably in excess of that actually suffered. It was thought that the rear cruiser of the Eastern Group and two destroyers in the Western Group were certainly hit; some observers in the Southampton considered that one of the latter was sinking, and Vice-Admiral Holland suggested that it was not unlikely that the Western Group received other damage which prompted the dense smoke screen into which it retired. Actually, according to the Italian Official History, the only ships hit in the gun action were the destroyer Lancia and the cruiser Fiume; in this case the shell failed to explode and the damage was negligible. One battleship, and one cruiser or possibly two were believed to have been hit by torpedoes in the F.A.A. attacks, and one cruiser might have been damaged by the Skuas' bombs; but in fact none of these approaches achieved success. Despite this meagre material damage, however, the resolute attitude of Vice-Admiral Somerville's force was sufficient to deter the enemy from any serious attempt on the convoy.

1 Vice-Admiral Holland remarked that he was in a good position to observe the British A.A. fire at the formation, which attacked at 1645. The gunfire was intense, but he estimated the bombs to have been 1,000 feet low and about 1,000 yards short.

8 When it had become clear that an action was in progress south of Sardinia, Commodore Douglas-Pennant had decided to take the convoy south of Malta and keep in the narrow deep water channel to minimise the risk from mines. Several French aircraft sighted the convoy in the course of the day. A submarine contact—afterwards believed to have been non-sub—from the Sunderland caused the alteration to 120° in the narrow channel; this caused a delay of some 45 minutes. Apart from this the passage was uneventful.

58. The Vice-Admiral, Force "H"'s Remarks on the Action

In commenting on the action Vice-Admiral Somerville remarked that the fact that ships carried out their action duties correctly with the minimum of signalled instructions, and despite the fact that many of them were working together for the first time, is a tribute to the soundness of our tactical training in peace and to the Fighting Instructions. On the other hand, in many important respects the standard of fighting efficiency obtained in peace considerably exceeded that reached in war; this he attributed to lack of systematic practice and exercises, and instanced the reluctance of Vice-Admiral Holland to attempt a concentration of fire by the recently re-united cruisers of his squadron.

This lack of opportunities for training during war made itself felt in several directions in this action. Many of the young observers of the Ark Royal had little or no experience of reporting enemy formations, and owing to the necessity of maintaining wireless silence, except in the immediate neighbourhood of Gibraltar, had had but little opportunity of exercising communications in the air.

The results of the torpedo attacks by the air striking force were disappointing as compared with peace-time practices. In each case the approaches were skillful and unobserved and the attacks were pressed home with courage and resolution, but the results fell far short of what might have been hoped for. This was attributed entirely to lack of initial training and subsequent "runner" practices.

Spotting aircraft did not give much assistance. This was partly due to the fact that in almost every case they were flown off too late, owing to wrong estimates of the probable time of contact with the enemy. In the Berwick the aircraft was damaged by the blast of the first salvo, which was fired just as it was about to be launched, and it had to be jettisoned.

The Admiral pointed out that it was better to fly off spotting aircraft too soon rather than too late, especially when an aircraft carrier on which they can land in an emergency is present. Difficulties were experienced by them in obtaining communication and in observing the fall of shot owing to the dense smoke surrounding the targets. Most ships commented on the difficulty in obtaining communication and in observing the fall of shot owing to the dense smoke surrounding the targets. Most ships commented on the difficulty of target identification and observation due to this smoke. Apart from this, difficulties were experienced in maintaining line, due in part to "canted trunnion" error, and in part to evasive action of the enemy coupled with a long time of flight.

The initial accuracy of the Italian fire and its rapid deterioration when replied to has already been mentioned. Vice-Admiral Holland suggested that on this account it might be worth while in future to open fire before the Italian ships are hard on our wake.

This initial accuracy was attributed to the stereoscopic range-finders in use in the enemy ships, and both Vice-Admiral Holland and Vice-Admiral Somerville expressed the opinion that further experiment with this type of range-finder was desirable in the British Fleet.

From the tactical point of view, Vice-Admiral Somerville pointed out that on this occasion the first consideration was to force the enemy away from the direction of the convoy as soon as possible, and to make immediate attack by the cruisers proceeding at their maximum speed, and, with the Renown in as close

1 Both Vice-Admiral Somerville and the Captain of the Ark Royal suspected that the original enemy reports by aircraft referred in actual fact to Force "D." Taking all things into consideration, the Admiral considered that the crews of the reconnaissance aircraft acquitted themselves with credit.

2 On this occasion the Manchester did not open fire at extreme range.
support as her speed permitted, appeared to offer the best prospects of achieving this object.

He suggested, however, that when dealing with enemy forces which have superior speed, ineffective air reconnaissance, and a pronounced inclination to retire as soon as engaged, it might prove advantageous for our heavy and light forces to remain concentrated until contact is made, provided our Air reconnaissance is accurate and reliable. This might enable a heavy long range fire concentration to be brought on the whole or part of the enemy forces before he could retire out of range.

With regard to the operation of carrier-borne aircraft, Vice-Admiral Somerville remarked that it is most desirable that the carrier should act independently, provided her commanding officer is fully aware of the Admiral's view as to how his aircraft are to be employed. Not only do signalled instructions concerning striking forces, reconnaissances and so forth add to wireless congestion, but they may be impracticable to carry out precisely, without disconnecting the intricate flying on and off programme. Special circumstances may arise which call for special instructions, but the policy should be for the commanding officer of the carrier to act in accordance with the general situation, and with what he knows to be the Admiral's views.

59. Epilogue

Vice-Admiral Somerville arrived back at Gibraltar with Force "H" in the afternoon of 29th November. Ships in harbour paraded bands and received him with cheers. Though naturally disappointed that the speed of the Italian ships had robbed him of the opportunity of forcing them to a close action, he could congratulate himself on the complete success of the operation in passing the reinforcements unscathed through to their destination.

Early next morning there arrived a signal from the Admiralty informing him that a Board of Enquiry, consisting of Admiral-of-the Fleet Lord Cork and Orrery (President), Vice-Admiral Sir G. H. D'Oyly Lyon and Captain R. G. Duke had been ordered to Gibraltar to enquire into his conduct in breaking off the action and the reasons why the second flight of the Ark Royal's Swordfish had not attacked the enemy's battleships.

No report from him (except a signal containing a brief, general account of the action, made before arrival in harbour) had reached the Admiralty, and he was consequently surprised that his conduct and that of officers serving under him "should be called to account before any information could have been received on which to base a considered opinion of our actions." Though he realised that the summoning of a Board of Enquiry did not necessarily imply criticism, he felt that it might in some measure compromise his prestige with Force "H". The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, agreed with this view and refers to the matter in his book.²

The Board of Enquiry sat from 3rd to 7th December, and upheld Sir James Somerville's actions throughout.

---

1 Force "H", 215/12 of 19th December 1940.
### APPENDIX A

**NAME OF SHIP** | **MAIN ARMAMENT** | **SPEED** | **REMARKS**
--- | --- | --- | ---
**FIRST SQUADRON—(Cont.)**
**16th Destroyer Flotilla**
*Da Recco* | six 4.7-inch, four 21-inch torp. tubes | 38 | With 4th and 8th Divisions (6-in. Crs.)
*Uledimare* | six 4.7-inch, four 21-inch torp. tubes | 38 |
*Pessagno* | six 4.7-inch, four 21-inch torp. tubes | 38 |
**SECOND SQUADRON**
(six 8-inch Cruisers, six 6-inch Cruisers, 20 Destroyers)
Admiral R. Paladini (flag in *Polia*)
*Pola* | eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A. | 33 |
**1st Division (8-inch Cruisers)**
Vice-Admiral Matteuchi
*Zara* | eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A. | 33 |
*Gorizia* | eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A. | 33 |
*Fiume* | eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A. | 33 |
**3rd Division (8-inch Cruisers)**
Vice-Admiral Cattaneo
*Trento* | eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A. | 36 |
*Bolzano* | eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A. | 36 |
**7th Division (6-inch, Cruisers)**
Vice-Admiral Sansonetti
*Eugenio di Savoia* | eight 6-inch, six 4-inch A.A. | 37 |
*Duca d’Aosta* | eight 6-inch, six 4-inch A.A. | 37 |
*Attendolo* | eight 6-inch, six 4-inch A.A. | 37 |
*Montecuccoli* | eight 6-inch, six 4-inch A.A. | 37 |
**2nd Division (6-inch, Cruisers)**
Vice-Admiral Casardi
*Bande Mere* | eight 6-inch, six 4-inch A.A. | 34 |
*Colleoni* | eight 6-inch, six 4-inch A.A. | 34 |
**12th Destroyer Flotilla**
*Lanciere* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |
*Carabiniere* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |
*Corazziere* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |
*Ascari* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |

**SECOND SQUADRON—(Cont.)**
**9th Destroyer Flotilla**
*Artigliere* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |
*Camicia Nera* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |
*Aiace* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |
*Geniere* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |
**11th Destroyer Flotilla**
*Granatiere* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |
*Fucilieri* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |
*Bersagliere* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |
*Alpino* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 39 |
**10th Destroyer Flotilla**
*Maestrale* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 38 |
*Libeccio* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 38 |
*Grande* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 38 |
*Norico* | four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes | 38 |
**4th Torpedo Boat Flotilla**
*Procione* | two 4-inch, four 17.7-inch torp. tubes | 28 |
*Orsa* | two 4-inch, four 17.7-inch torp. tubes | 28 |
*Pegaso* | two 4-inch, four 17.7-inch torp. tubes | 28 |
*Orione* | two 4-inch, four 17.7-inch torp. tubes | 28 |
**2nd Division (Torp. Boats)**
*Pilo* | two 4-inch, four 17.7-inch torp. tubes | 28 |
*Abba* | two 4-inch, four 17.7-inch torp. tubes | 28 |

*Not present at action of 9th July.*
APPENDIX B

Action off Calabria:
Comparison of British and Italian Forces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRITISH</th>
<th>ITALIAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 battleships mounting twenty-four 15-inch, thirty-two 6-inch</td>
<td>2 battleships mounting twenty 12-6-inch, twenty-four 4-7-inch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 aircraft carrier mounting nine 6-inch, 17 T.S.R., 3 fighters</td>
<td>6 heavy cruisers mounting forty-eight 8-inch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 light cruisers mounting forty-eight 6-inch</td>
<td>8 light cruisers mounting sixty-eight 6-inch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 destroyers mounting sixty-nine 4-7-inch, eight 4-inch</td>
<td>24 destroyers mounting one hundred 4-7-inch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In speed the Italian battleships had an advantage of 2-3 knots over the Warspite and Malaya, and 5-6 knots over the Royal Sovereign. With the exception of the four Zara class 8-inch cruisers, the Italian cruisers were from two to four knots faster than the British. The destroyers were practically equally matched for speed and armaments.

While the British Fleet had an advantage in having present an obsolescent aircraft carrier, the Italians had, at short range, numerous shore air bases affording a potentially vast aerial superiority.

Within easy distance, too, were the naval bases of Taranto, Messina, Port Augusta, Syracuse, Palermo and Naples, any one of which offered secure shelter to damaged ships. All these ports were submarine bases, from which a strong concentration of submarines could operate at short notice.

APPENDIX C

Italian Air Bombing

The Commander-in-Chief made the following report to the Admiralty:—

"Following is my summary of Italian air bombing threat as seen before detailed reports from units have been scrutinised.

(1) All units of the Fleet have been bombed several times a day for five days. As an example force with Warspite on 12th July was attacked 22 times, 260 to 300 bombs being dropped. Only period of immunity was when Fleet was unlocated South of Malta on 10th July and during hours of darkness.

(2) Attacks have all been high level bombing in daylight, average height 12,000 feet by formations varying from nine to single aircraft but generally in sub flights of three. Bombs have been dropped in sticks varying from six heavy bombs to 18 or 27 light bombs per formation. Majority of bombs appear to be light case H.E.

(3) Single aircraft have generally shied off when fired at, but formations have generally flown steadily on with surprising determination.

(4) Most unpleasant attack on Warspite at 1550 12th July resulted in 24 bombs along port side and 12 across starboard bow simultaneously, all within one cable but slightly out for line.

(5) A.A. fire with exception of one or two ships has been below pre-war standard but is improving under stress. It has been disappointing that I have not seen any enemy aircraft directly hit and fall into the sea. I am however satisfied that an appreciable number of Italians have failed to return. Naval Attaché, Athens reports one forced landed in Crete. Intercepted Italian reports show one forced landed off Cephalonia and one off Benghazi. Italians admit loss of two in Fleet engagement on 9th July. Three aircraft have been seen to leave formation after close burst by A.A. gunfire. Warspite has seen airmen getting out by parachute on two occasions.

(6) Ammunition expenditure has been very heavy and Fleet has returned to harbour with less than half long range outfit remaining.

(7) My summing up is:—

(i) Intensive high level bombing is to be expected on each occasion of a Fleet operation in the Central Mediterranean.

(ii) The accuracy of Italian bombing entitled them to one per cent of hits and the Fleet were extremely lucky that this number was not obtained.

(iii) This probable percentage of hits rising to two per cent as the Italians get more practice must be carefully weighed in considering the employment of valuable ships in the Central Mediterranean.

(iv) That provided proper antidotes are supplied this scale of bombing attack can be accepted as a reasonable war risk like mines or submarines.

(v) Prolonged bombing is very wearing to personnel and system started by my predecessor of having at least two complete reliefs for whole A.A. armament in battleships and cruisers has been shown to be essential for prolonged operations."

(Med. War Diary
15th July 1940).
APPENDIX D

Action off Cape Spada:
Comparison of the Opposing Forces, 19th July

The comparative force of the ships engaged in the action of 19th July off Cape Spada was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TONS</th>
<th>KNOTS</th>
<th>GUNS</th>
<th>GUNS</th>
<th>GUNS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>6,980</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>8—6-inch</td>
<td>8—4-inch</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperion</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4—4.7-inch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasty</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4—4.7-inch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havock</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4—4.7-inch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4—4.7-inch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilex</td>
<td>1,370</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4—4.7-inch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TONS</th>
<th>KNOTS</th>
<th>GUNS</th>
<th>GUNS</th>
<th>GUNS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovanni delle Bande Nere</td>
<td>5,069</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8—6-inch</td>
<td>6—4-inch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartolomeo Colleoni</td>
<td>5,069</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8—6-inch</td>
<td>6—4-inch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX E

Action off Cape Spada:
Expenditure of Ammunition by the British Ships, 19th July

The expenditure of ammunition by the Sydney was 935 rounds C.P.B.C. and 21 rounds H.E., in 181 salvoes. The destroyers expended:

- Hyperion 150 rounds
- Hero 170 rounds
- Havock 55 rounds
- Ilex 213 rounds
- Hasty 150 rounds

APPENDIX F

Commander-in-Chief's Memorandum:
Rescue of Survivors from Enemy Ships

As a result of the bombing attack on the Havock while engaged in picking up survivors, the Commander-in-Chief on 22nd July issued the following memorandum:

1. "Whilst the instincts of the British race and the traditions of the sea produce in us all a powerful urge to rescue survivors of sinking ships, it must be remembered that there are other considerations to be weighed against this humane work.

2. We are waging a relentless war against odds, and here in the Mediterranean not only are we competing against numerically naval superior forces, but we have also against us very considerable air forces which our own Air Force is not yet in a position to attack, except in eastern Libya.

3. It follows that no favourable opportunity must be lost of destroying enemy forces, and the rescue of survivors must never be allowed to interfere with the relentless pursuit of enemy ships.

4. It must also be borne well in mind that practically the whole of the area of our operations is subject to enemy bombing. Therefore ships cannot usually afford to hang about picking up survivors, for not only do they thus expose themselves to bombing attack under very disadvantageous conditions, but also subsequent operations are liable to be delayed. Moreover a destroyer with a large number of prisoners on board is bound to be considerably reduced in fighting efficiency.

5. Difficult and distasteful as it is to leave survivors to their fate, Commanding Officers must be prepared to harden their hearts, for, after all, the operations in hand and the security of their ships and ships' companies must take precedence in war."
APPENDIX G

Operation M.B.8: British Forces Employed

**FORCE “A”**

1st B.S.

**Warspite** (eight 15-inch, eight 6-inch) (Flag of C.-in-C. Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, K.C.B., D.S.O.)
Captain D. B. Fisher, C.B.E.

**Malaya** (eight 15-inch, twelve 6-inch) (Flag of Rear-Admiral H. B. Rawlings, O.B.E.)
Captain A. F. E. Palliser, D.S.C.

**Valiant** (eight 15-inch, thirty 4.5-inch)
Captain C. E. Morgan, D.S.O.

**Illustrious** (24 Swordfish, 15 Fighters)
Captain D. B. Fisher, C.B.E.

3rd C.S.

**Gloucester** (twelve 6-inch)
Captain D. W. Boyd, D.S.C.

**York** (six 8-inch)
Captain H. A. Rowley

2nd D.F.

**Hyperion** (four 4.7-inch)
Commander H. St. L. Nicolson, D.S.O.

**Havock** (four 4.7-inch)
Commander R. E. Courage, D.S.O., D.S.C.

**Hero** (four 4.7-inch)
Commander H. W. Biggs, D.S.O.

**Hermes** (four 4.7-inch)
Lieut.-Cdr. C. W. Greening

**Hasty** (four 4.7-inch)
Lieut.-Cdr. L. R. K. Tyrwhitt

**Ilex** (four 4.7-inch)
Lieut.-Cdr. P. L. Saumarez, D.S.C.

20th D.F.

**Decoy** (four 4.7-inch)
Commander E. G. McGregor, D.S.O.

**Defender** (four 4.7-inch)
Lieutenant G. L. Farnfield

14th D.F.

**Jervis** (six 4.7-inch)
Captain P. J. Mack, D.S.O. (Capt. (D) 14)

**Nubian** (eight 4.7-inch)
Commander R. W. Ravenhill

**Mohawk** (eight 4.7-inch)
Commander J. W. Eaton

**Finn** (six 4.7-inch)
Commander J. A. W. Tethill

**Juno** (six 4.7-inch)
Commander St. J. R. J. Tyrwhitt

**Ajax** (eight 6-inch)
Captain E. D. B. McCarthy

**Sydney** (eight 6-inch)
Captain J. A. Collins, C.B.

**FORCE “B”**

**Orion** (eight 6-inch)
Captain G. R. B. Back

**FORCE “C”**

**Ramillies** (eight 15-inch, twelve 6-inch) Captain A. D. Read (when detached from Force “A”)

**Coventry** (eight 4-inch H.A./L.A.)
Captain D. Gilmour

**Calcutta** (eight 4-inch H.A./L.A.)
Captain D. M. Lees, D.S.O.

**10th D.F.**

**Vampire** (four 4-inch)
Lieutenant J. A. Walsh

**Voyager** (four 4-inch)
Commander J. C. Morrow, D.S.O.

**Waterhen** (four 4-inch)
Lieut.-Cdr. J. H. Swain

**20th D.F.**

**Dainty** (four 4.7-inch)
Commander M. S. Thomas, D.S.O.

**Diamond** (four 4.7-inch)
Lieut.-Cdr. P. A. Cartwright

**Wynne** (four 4-inch) H.A./L.A. (A.A. ship)
Lieut.-Cdr. A. F. Burnell-Nugent, D.S.C.

**1Kingston Coral** (Tr.)
Skr. W. Kirman, R.N.R.

**1Sindonis** (Tr.)
Ch. Skr. G. Rawding, R.N.R.

**1Abingdon** (M/S)
Lieutenant G. A. Simmers, R.N.R.

**FORCE “F”**

**Barham** (eight 15-inch, twelve 6-inch) Captain G. C. Cooke (700)

**Berwick** (S.O.) (eight 8-inch) Captain G. L. Warren (750)

**Glasgow** (twelve 6-inch) Captain H. Hickling (400)

**Griffin** (four 4.7-inch) Lieutenant K. R. C. Letts (50)

**Greyhound** (four 4.7-inch) Commander W. R. Marshall-A’Deane, D.S.C. (50)

**Gallant** (four 4.7-inch) Lieut.-Cdr. C. P. F. Brown (50)

1 With Convoy A.N.6 to Suda Bay.

2 Reinforcements for Mediterranean Fleet.
APPENDIX G

1Faulknor (five 4·7-inch)  
1Fortune (four 4·7-inch)  
1Fury (four 4·7-inch)

Captain A. F. De Salis (50)  
Lieut.-Cdr. E. N. Sinclair (50)  
Lieut.-Cdr. T. C. Robinson (50)

FORCE “H”

Ark Royal  
(Aircraft Carrier)  
(Flag of Vice-Admiral Sir J. Somerville, K.C.B., D.S.O. (F.O., Force H))  
Captain C. S. Holland

Sheffield (twelve 6-inch)  
Duncan (four 4·7-inch)  
Isis (four 4·7-inch)  
Foxhound (four 4·7-inch)  
Forester (four 4·7-inch)  
Firedrake (four 4·7-inch)

Captain C. A. A. Larcom  
Captain A. D. B. James (act.)  
Commander C. S. B. Swinley, D.S.C.  
Commander G. H. Peters  
Lieut.-Cdr. E. B. Tancock, D.S.C.  
Lieut.-Cdr. S. H. Norris, D.S.C.

The Eagle (Captain A. R. M. Bridge) was unable to accompany the Fleet on account of defective petrol tanks.

Note: The names of the Commanding Officers are taken from contemporary Navy Lists.

APPENDIX H

Taranto: Italian Defences and Arrangements, 11th November

Note. The following information is based on extracts from the report of the Italian Commander-in-Chief Afloat to the Chief of the Naval Staff, after the F.A.A. attack.

1. STATE OF BASE ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENCES

(a) A.A. artillery. All in working order in accordance with plans which had been prepared for some time, with the addition of numerous machine guns recently arranged to deal with torpedo aircraft.

21 batteries armed with 4-inch guns.

68 machine gun mountings with total of 84 guns in stations ashore and afloat.

109 light machine guns ashore and afloat.

(b) Reporting Stations

13 Airphonic stations, two linked with searchlights.

22 searchlights, mostly modern type long range, placed on shore and on pontoons.

2 searchlights from each ship were also to be used.

(c) Anti-torpedo net obstructions

About 12,800 metres of nets were required for protection of ships moored in the Mar Grande, but only 4,200 metres were in position.1

(d) Aerial obstructions

In position, 272 balloons of which 16 were moored to the westward of ships inside the Diga di Tarantola and northward of it, the other 11 being along the eastern shore of the anchorage.

2. SITUATION OF SHIPS, ETC.

(a) Position of 1st Squadron at 2000, 11th November. As shown in Plan 7. The anchor berths were as previously arranged, except that the Doria had been unable to recover her stern moorings on her last return from sea. All ships in accordance with Admiralty instructions were at three hours notice.

(b) Weather conditions. Good; sky clear except for occasional slight mist; wind, north-east.

(c) Defence of anchorage. Defence of outer anchorage from air attack was arranged as follows:—

Shore batteries (4·09-inch, 4·02-inch, and 3·05-inch).

Stations, ashore and afloat, of machine guns (0·8-inch, and 1·6-inch), were specially detailed to engage torpedo aircraft.

Photo-electrics, ashore and on pontoons, could intercept on moonlight nights either bombers or torpedo aircraft, according to arrangements made by the Central Control.

Balloon and net obstructions.

1 A further 2,900 metres were in store at the base, shortly to be placed in position; the remainder was still being woven. A monthly output of 3,600 metres had been reached by September, with which requirements of several bases had to be met.

2 The persistent bad weather in the few days preceding the attack destroyed 60 balloons. It had not been possible to replace them, because the local production of hydrogen was insufficient to cope with such a large demand at short notice.
The part to be played by ships at anchor was as follows:—
No barrage fire at the same time as that of shore batteries.
Machine guns to be manned and fired with the main armament
against aircraft visible to the naked eye or illuminated by search-
light.
On moonlight nights, two searchlights a ship to work with those
of the shore batteries in previously defined sectors, for defence
against torpedo aircraft. These had to be integrated with the
searchlights worked by the base.

(d) Readiness of Ships. All ships were in a state of complete readiness.
Since the possibility of the Italian attack on Greece, watchfulness during
the night and at dawn had been intensified. Passive defence on board
ship was at the maximum efficiency that circumstances permitted. At
the “Alarm” all men on watch went to positions of safety; those not
on duty went to shelter. Ships’ main armaments were half-manned;
A.A. guns fully so. The berths occupied by ships were considered
the best protected for all particular alarms and circumstances—moon­
light nights etc.

(c) Warnings. For some considerable time Taranto had been the object of
visits, both by day and by night, of enemy aircraft. This persistence,
as well as special activity of the enemy, served as a warning of heavy
air attacks. To meet this contingency no steps other than those
described could be taken, except to remove the ships from the port (as
was done on 12th November 1940), which of course suffered from the
grave drawback of taking them from the most important centre of the
theatre of operations.

(a) In Mar Grande. Battleships, 15-inch, Vittorio Veneto, Littorio; twelve
6-inch, Cavour, Cesare, Dusio, Doria.
Cruisers, 8-inch, Zara, Piume, Gorizia.
Destroyers, Folgore, Baleone, Fulmine, Lampo, Alfieri, Gioberti, Carducci,
Oriani.
(b) In Mar Piccolo. Cruisers, 8-inch, (at buoys) Trieste, Bolzano, (at wharf)
Pola, Trento; 6-inch (at wharf) Garibaldi, Abruzzi.
Destroyers (at buoys) Granatieri, Alpino, Bersaglieri, Fucilieri, (at wharf)
Frecce, Strolo, Dardo, Saetta, Maestrale, Libeccio, Grocse Scirroco, Camicia
Nera, Geniere, Lanciere, Carabinieri, Ascari, Da Rocco, Usadimari,
Pessagno. Five torpedo boats, 16 submarines, supply and hospital ships;
four minesweepers, one minelayer, nine tankers with a number of tugs
and merchant ships.
APPENDIX I

AIRCRAFT SQUADRON | PILOT, OBSERVER | LOAD | TARGET AND DROPPING POSITION, PLAN 7
--- | --- | --- | ---
L.4L (815) | S/Lt. (A) W. C. Sarra, R.N. Mid (A) J. Bowker, R.N. | 6 B | Seaplane base in Mar Piccolo (15)
L.4H (815) | S/Lt. (A) A. J. Forde, R.N. S/Lt. (A) A. Mardel-Ferreira, R.N.V.R. | 6 B | Cruisers and destroyers in Mar Piccolo (16)
E.5Q (824) | Lt. (A) J. B. Murray, R.N. S/Lt. (A) S. M. Paine, R.N. | 6 B | Cruisers and destroyers in Mar Piccolo (17)

2ND STRIKING FORCE

L.5A (819) | Lt.-Cdr. J. W. Hale, R.N. Lt. G. A. Carline, R.N. | 1 T | Littorio (7)
E.4H (813) | Lt. G. W. Bayley, R.N. Lt. H. J. Slaughter, R.N. (did not return) | 1 T | Gorizia (8)
L.5H (819) | Lt. (A) C. S. C. Lea, R.N. S/Lt. (A) P. D. Jones, R.N. | 1 T | Duilio (9)
L.5K (819) | Lt. F. M. A. Torrens-Spence, R.N. Lt. A. W. F. Sutton, R.N. | 1 T | Littorio (10)
E.5H (824) | Lt. (A) J. W. G. Welham, R.N. Lt. P. Humphreys, E. G. M., R.N. | 1 T | Veneto (11)
L.5B (819) | Lt. R. W. V. Hamilton, R.N. S/Lt. (A) J. R. Weeks, R.N. | 2 B | Oil storage tanks (17)
L.4F (815) | Lt. (A) R. G. Skelton, R.N. S/Lt. (A) E. A. Perkins, R.N.V.R. | 2 B | Oil storage tanks (18)
L.5Q (819) | Lt. (A) W. D. Morford, R.N. S/Lt. (A) R. A. F. Green, R.N. | 1 T | External tank fell off. Returned to carrier

APPENDIX J

F.A.A. Attack on Taranto:
Narratives of Aircraft

Note. (1) These narratives have been supplemented, and where necessary amended, by information received from Italian sources since the war.

(2) Numbers in brackets after torpedoes or bombs refer to dropping positions on Plan 7.

FIRST FLIGHT

No. 1 L4A (Lieut.-Cdr. Williamson, Lieut. Scarlett)
Arrived over island of San Pietro with L.4C and L.4R at 4,000 feet and flew to centre of Mar Grande. This was the last seen of L4A by the British. The aircraft was sighted in the path of the moon diving at high speed with the engine cut out at 2314 by the destroyer Fulmine, which at once opened fire at about 1,000 yards range. L4A’s torpedo (1), dropped from a height of about 30 feet, narrowly missed the Fulmine and hit the Cavour. The aircraft then crashed near the floating dock. Both officers were rescued by the Italians and made prisoners of war.

No. 2 L4C (Sub-Lieutenants Sparke and Neale)
Dived from the centre of Mar Grande and crossed the breakwater on Tarantola shoal about two-thirds of its length from the shore at a height of 30 feet. Had intended to attack the Vittorio Veneto but she could not be identified; sighted the Cavour and dropped his torpedo (2) at about 700 yards.1 An explosion was seen near the ship a minute later. L4C then turned 180° sharply to port and got away south of San Pietro. Intense A.A. fire from the batteries at the harbour entrance was experienced during both the approach and the withdrawal. L4C landed on the carrier at 0120, 12th November.

No. 3 L4R (Sub-Lieutenants Macaulay and Wray)
L4R’s story closely follows that of L4C. Torpedo (3) was also fired at the Cavour at almost the same time as L4C.1 During the get-away the observer noted a line of balloons at 1,000 feet outside Tarantola breakwater. A.A. fire was noticed from the batteries east and south of the harbour. L4R landed on the carrier at 0125.

No. 4 L4K (Lieut. Kemp, Sub-Lieut. Bailey)
Approached from the west over western breakwater at 4,000 feet, experiencing heavy A.A. fire from batteries on San Pietro Island and near Cape Rondinella. Fire was continued from shore batteries as the aircraft dived between Taranto and the cruisers, who opened an intense fire as sea level was reached. Several shells

1 The Doria reported two bombs exploding ahead of her at 2315. No bombs were dropped in this vicinity. It seems probable that these explosions were the torpedoes launched by L4C, and L4R, which had missed the Cavour and run on towards her. The Doria was undamaged.
from the cruisers were seen to hit merchant ships at anchor. Fired 
torpedo at about 1,000 yards (4) from the *Littorio*, which was hit on 
the starboard bow. L4K then turned to starboard and passing 
over the end of Tarantola breakwater gained the open sea to the 
southward. A fire was observed in the vicinity of the seaplane 
base. The carrier was then reached without incident.

No. 5  
**L4M (Lieut. Swayne, Sub-Lieut. Buscall)**  
Became detached from leader and waited a quarter of an hour off 
the harbour for the other aircraft. Having sighted flares, came 
down to 1,000 feet over western breakwater, meeting violent A.A. 
fire from ships and batteries. Lost height while crossing Mar 
Grande and at end of Tarantola breakwater made a sharp turn 
to port and dropped torpedo (5) about 400 yards from the *Littorio* 
at 2315. The torpedo hit the *Littorio* on the port quarter a few 
seconds after L4K’s hit on the starboard bow. L4M then passed 
directly over the *Littorio*, and got away over San Pietro under 
heavy fire from the cruisers and shore batteries, eventually landing on the *Illustrious* at 0150.

No. 6  
**E4F (Lieut. Maund, Sub-Lieut. Bull)**  
Arriving over the land north of Cape Rondinella, E4F met with A.A. 
fire from shore batteries and cruisers while planing down to 
dropping position S.W. of the Canal. Torpedo (6) was fired at the 
*Veneto* at a distance of about 1,900 yards. The torpedo probably 
grounded and exploded off the starboard quarter of the *Littorio* about 2315.1  E4F then turned sharply to starboard and got away 
over San Pietro, meeting violent A.A. fire on the way.

No. 7  
**L4P (Lieux. Kiggell and Janvrin)**  
Was detached to seaward of Cape San Vito, and with L5B proceeded 
at a height of 7,500 feet, experiencing A.A. fire while crossing the 
coast. Beginning at 2302 dropped a line of flares east of the harbour, to burn at 4,500 feet at intervals of half a mile. L4P 
then turned to starboard and cruised for 15 to 20 minutes, when a 
dive-bombing attack (12) was made on the oil fuel depot to the 
southward, after which it returned to the *Illustrious*, landing on at 0120.

No. 8  
**L5B (Lieux. Lamb and Grieve)**  
Followed astern of L4P, but did not drop flares as those already 
dropped were functioning efficiently. The A.A. fire encountered 
and course followed were the same as for L4P, and the same oil 
fuel depot was dive-bombed (13).

No. 9  
**E5A (Captain Patch, R.M., Lieut. Goodwin)**  
Arrived over San Pietro at 2306 at height of 8,500 feet and was fired 
on by shore batteries there and at Cape Rondinella. Proceeded to 
western part of Mar Piccolo. After some difficulty in identifying 
target, carried out a dive-bombing attack on two 8-inch cruisers 
(14), crossing Mar Piccolo from N.W. to S.E. Machine gun fire 
was opened from many places and the cruisers. E5A then turned 
east and about five minutes later noticed a large fire in the vicinity of the seaplane 
base. A.A. fire from a new position was avoided 
by sheltering behind a range of hills. E5A eventually crossed the 

1 The *Duilio* observed an explosion in this position at the time.
L5K (Liesuts. Torrens-Spence and Sutton)
Followed L5A and dived over Cape Rondinella to about five cables south of the Canal entrance, under A.A. fire from battleships, cruisers and shore batteries. Torpedo fired from about 700 yards at the Littorio (10), and L5K then broke away to the southward of San Paolo, eventually landing on the Illustrious at 0215.

L5F (Lieuts. Clifford and Going)
This aircraft left the Illustrious 24 minutes late, arriving at Taranto while the attack was in progress. It reached land about five miles east of the harbour entrance and steered for the dockyard at the edge of Mar Piccolo. Turning to port, a bombing attack (20) was carried out at 2,500 feet from west to east along the line of cruisers and destroyers. The Trento was hit and other ships narrowly missed, but none of the bombs exploded. L5F then turned north, crossing Mar Piccolo before altering to starboard to cross the coast five miles east of the harbour entrance. A.A. fire was experienced the whole time the aircraft was overhead, being particularly intense from pom-poms during the bombing run. L5F landed on at 0250.

L5Q (Lieut. Morford, Sub-Lieut. Green)
The external overload petrol tank fell off at 2205 and the fittings banging against the fuselage necessitated a return to the carrier. Fired red Very Light on approaching the Illustrious, but not being expected, the Illustrious and Berwick opened fire. Fired a two star identification light and firing ceased.

APPENDIX J

depth 29·5 feet). L5H then turned to starboard and got away between the Zara and Fiume and then over the north of San Pietro under violent A.A. fire from cruisers, destroyers and shore batteries.

No. 16

No. 17

E5H (Lieuts. Welham and Humphreys)
After passing over Cape Rondinella astern of L5A flew over the Mar Piccolo and the town of Taranto; then turned to starboard towards the centre of Mar Grande, passing very close to the northern balloon on the Eastern shore. E5H then dived to the attack under heavy machine gun fire; the outer aileron rod was hit, temporarily putting the aircraft out of control. When control was regained, torpedo was launched 900 yards from port quarter of the Veneto (11). The aircraft then turned sharply to starboard and got away through intense A.A. fire north of San Pietro, after receiving a hit on the port wing. The Illustrious was reached at 0205.

APPENDIX K

F.A.A. Attack on Taranto:
R.A.(A)'s Orders to Illustrious and Escort Force, 11th November

When detached, Illustrious will adjust course and speed to pass through position “X”, 270° Kabbo Point 40, at 2000, when course will be altered into wind and speed adjusted to give speed of 30 knots. On completion of flying off first range, course will be altered 180° to starboard, speed 17 knots and a second alteration of 180° to starboard will be made to pass again through position “X” at 2100 when course and speed will be adjusted as before. On completion of flying off second range, Illustrious will alter course to 150°, 17 knots and subsequently to pass through position “Y”, 270° Kabbo Point 20°, at 0100. When course will be altered into wind and speed adjusted to wind and speed of 25 knots to be maintained till both ranges have landed on. If there is an easterly wind it may be necessary to reverse the course between flying on first and second ranges, in which case both turns will be to starboard and speed of ship down wind 25 knots. On completion of landings, course will be altered to return to C-in-C., speed 18 knots. All the above and any other alterations of course necessary without signal.

Normal night zigzag will be maintained, except during flying operations. If enemy surface forces are encountered during the night Illustrious is to withdraw, remainder are to engage under C.S. Particulars are to be detailed to withdraw with Illustrious.

2 i.e. 270° 20 miles from Kabbo Point, Cephalonia.
APPENDIX L

Report on Suda Bay, 11th November

The defence of Crete was a matter of primary importance at this time and the C.-in-C. had, on 26th October, issued orders for the establishment of a fuelling base at Suda Bay. Net defence was to be laid by the Protector and A.A. cruisers were to defend the anchorage. "Although the need for an advanced base in the Eastern Mediterranean had been appreciated for many years and was fully provided for in 1932, in 1939 owing to more urgent requirements in Home Waters it had not been possible to allocate any personnel or special material to the Mediterranean." (C.-in-C., 19/3/41). A "commission" of naval, army and air officers left Alexandria by air on 29th October. A conference was held with the Governor-General and the Greek General Officer Commanding, General Alexakis. The Protector arrived on 31st October and started laying nets. A Base Defence party from H.M.S. Liverpool of 11 officers and 147 men under Lieut.-Commander J. N. Hicks, with four 4-inch guns, two machine guns, four pom-poms and four 3-pdr.s, also arrived in the Fiona and Chakla. Air raids commenced on 1st November. Major P. W. Phibbs, R.M., had four 6-inch guns mounted by 24th November. Lack of labour and transport were the principal difficulties. On 16th November, 13,500 Greek troops left, taking 215 of the 382 lorries in the island. The 4-inch guns were mounted on baulks but only one of the mountings fitted accurately. In the remainder the holes were not in line with those of the base plate and had to be laboriously burnt out as there were no large augurs available. Major Phibbs had difficulties in mounting and setting up the base plates in the concrete. The Naval Officer-in-Charge (Suda) was Lieut.-Commander H. R. M. Nicholl, and though there were many difficulties they were wonderfully surmounted by the Navy and Marines.

Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell visited the Base on 8th November. Work was progressing satisfactorily. The laying of the net defences was proceeding satisfactorily but there was an "urgent need" for an A/S patrol. The question of who was Fortress Commander required to be settled at an early date. The Naval Officer-in-Charge needed secretarial assistance and Paymaster Sub-Lieutenant E. P. G. Kealey, R.N.V.R., was landed from the Vice-Admiral's staff for this duty. 1


APPENDIX M

Operation "Collar": H.M. Ships, with Main Armament and Commanding Officers

**FORCE "B"**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ship</th>
<th>Main Armament</th>
<th>Commanding Officer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ark Royal</td>
<td>(sixteen 4.5-inch guns)</td>
<td>Captain C. E. B. Simeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield</td>
<td>(six 6-inch guns)</td>
<td>Captain C. S. Holland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despatch</td>
<td>(six 6-inch guns)</td>
<td>Captain C. A. A. Larcom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firedrake</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>(D.8) Captain A. F. De Salis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forerier</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Commander S. H. Norris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fury</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Commander E. B. Tancock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wishart</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Commander T. C. Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Commander E. T. Cooper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelvin</td>
<td>(six 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Commander E. V. St. J. Morgan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaguar</td>
<td>(six 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Commander J. H. Allison, D.S.O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protector</td>
<td>(six 6-inch guns)</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Commander J. F. W. Hine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FORCE "F"**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ship</th>
<th>Main Armament</th>
<th>Commanding Officer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>(twelve 6-inch guns)</td>
<td>Flag, Vice-Admiral L. E. Holland, C.B. (C.S.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southampton</td>
<td>(twelve 6-inch guns)</td>
<td>Captain H. A. Packer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duncan</td>
<td>(D.13) (four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Captain B. C. Brooke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotspur</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Captain A. D. B. James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidette</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Commander H. F. H. Layman, D.S.O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peony</td>
<td>(one 4-inch gun)</td>
<td>Lieutenant E. N. Walmsley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvia</td>
<td>(one 4-inch gun)</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Commander M. B. Sherwood, D.S.O. (retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloxinia</td>
<td>(one 4-inch gun)</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Commander J. I. Miller, D.S.O., R.N.R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyacinth</td>
<td>(one 4-inch gun)</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Commander A. J. G. Pomeroy, R.N.V.R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javelin</td>
<td>(one 4-inch gun)</td>
<td>Lieutenant J. I. Jones, R.N.R.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FORCE "D"**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ship</th>
<th>Main Armament</th>
<th>Commanding Officer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ramillies</td>
<td>(eight 15-inch guns)</td>
<td>Captain A. D. Read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>(twelve 6-inch guns)</td>
<td>Captain E. A. Aylmer, D.S.G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coventry</td>
<td>(ten 4-inch A/A guns)</td>
<td>Captain D. Gilmour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berwick</td>
<td>(eight 8-inch guns)</td>
<td>Captain G. L. Warren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defender</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Commander G. L. Farnfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greystone</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Commander W. R. Marshall-A'Deane, D.S.G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallant</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Commander C. P. F. Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hereward</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Commander C. W. Greening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diamond</td>
<td>(four 4.7-inch guns)</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Commander P.A. Cartwright</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX N

**Italian Naval Forces:**

**Action off Cape Spartivento**

**Commander-in-Chief, and Commanding First Squadron, Admiral I. Campioni**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF SHIP</th>
<th>MAIN ARMAMENT</th>
<th>SPEED</th>
<th>REMARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIRST SQUADRON</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vittorio Veneto</td>
<td>nine 15-inch, twelve 6-inch</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Flag, C.-in-C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giusto Cesare</td>
<td>ten 12-6-inch, twelve 4.7-inch</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7TH DESTROYER FLOTILLA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freccia</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dardo</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sietta</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strale</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13TH DESTROYER FLOTILLA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granatieri</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fucilieri</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bersaglieri</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpino</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SECOND SQUADRON</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pola</td>
<td>eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Flag, Vice-Admiral A. Iachino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorizia</td>
<td>eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiume</td>
<td>eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9TH DESTROYER FLOTILLA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alferi</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oroni</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garducci</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gioberti</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3RD CRUISER DIVISION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trieste</td>
<td>eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Flag, Vice-Admiral Sansonetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trento</td>
<td>eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolzano</td>
<td>eight 8-inch, twelve 4-inch A.A.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12TH DESTROYER FLOTILLA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanciere</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Damaged in action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goraziere</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascari</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libeccio</td>
<td>four 4.7-inch, six 21-inch torp. tubes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### APPENDIX O

**Action off Cape Spartivento:**

**Admiral Somerville’s Reasons for Decision to Abandon Chase**

Vice-Admiral Somerville summarised the reasons for and against continuing the chase as follows:

**For continuing the chase—**

(i) The possibility that the speed of the enemy might be reduced by some unforeseen eventuality.

(ii) He might appreciate that his force was superior to mine and decide to turn and fight.

**Against continuing the chase—**

(i) There was no sign that any of the enemy ships, and especially his battleships, had suffered damage, nor was there reasonable prospect of inflicting damage by gunfire, in view of their superior speed. Unless the speed of the enemy battleships was reduced very materially he could enter Cagliari before I could bring him to action with Renown and Ramillies.

(ii) I was being led towards the enemy air and submarine base at Cagliari, and this might well prove a trap. His appearance in this area appeared to be premeditated, since it was unlikely that this was occasioned solely by the information he had received the previous night of Force “D”’s presence in the Narrows.

(iii) The extrication of one of my ships damaged by air or submarine attack from my present position would certainly require the whole of my force and must involve leaving the convoy uncovered and insufficiently escorted during the passage of the Narrows.

(iv) The enemy main units had been driven off sufficiently far to ensure they could no longer interfere with the passage of the convoy.

(v) A second T/B attack could not take place until 1530 to 1600, by which time the convoy would be entirely uncovered and the enemy fleet could be under the cover of the A.A. batteries and fighters at Cagliari. I entertained little hope that the attack would prove effective, as I knew that the second flight was even less experienced than the first.

(vi) I had no assurance that the cruisers reported to the north-west might not be working round towards the convoy and the Ark Royal.

(vii) It was necessary for contact to be made with the convoy before dark, to ensure the cruisers and destroyers required for escort through the Narrows should be properly formed up. It was also necessary to provide the fullest possible scale of defence against T/B and light surface force attack at dusk. To effect this a retirement between 1300 and 1400 was necessary.
### APPENDIX P

**Details of British Naval Aircraft**

#### I. Fighter Aircraft Capable of Deck Landing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SEA GLADIATOR</th>
<th>SKUA</th>
<th>FULMAR</th>
<th>REMARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armament</td>
<td>4-303 F*</td>
<td>4-303 F</td>
<td>8-303 F</td>
<td>The climb of these aircraft varied; for Gladiator and Fulmar it was 3½ to 4½ minutes to 10,000 feet; for the Skua 12½ minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t-303 R†</td>
<td>1-303 R</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-500 lb.</td>
<td>1-500 lb.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or 1-250 lb. bomb</td>
<td>or 1-250 lb. bomb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether dive bomber</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitted for observer navigation, W/T, and folding</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum speed, Knots</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>230</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endurance at maximum (approx.)</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
<td>6 hours‡</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum endurance at economical speed</td>
<td>2½ hours</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
<td>6 hours‡</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### II. Reconnaissance and Strike Aircraft

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SWORDFISH</th>
<th>ALBACORE</th>
<th>WALRUS$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>3 recon: 3 recon: 3 recon:</td>
<td>3 strike: 2 strike: 3 recon:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armament</td>
<td>t-303 (or '3) Front, t-303 (or '3) Rear Gun</td>
<td>Torpedo or bombs, 1,500 lbs.</td>
<td>Torpedo or bombs, 1,500 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capability of dive bombing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capability of torpedo attack</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum speed, Knots</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum endurance and range without extra tankage:</td>
<td>5½ hours</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
<td>3½ hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnaissance Strike Force</td>
<td>450 miles</td>
<td>630 miles</td>
<td>500 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether extra tankage</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- *F* — Fixed Front Gun. † R — Rear Free Gun. ‡ With extra tank. § Catapult ship aircraft.

---

**Index**

Only those names of individuals that are specifically mentioned in the text of the narrative are included in the index: for other names of Commanding Officers the appropriate footnote, or Appendix (G, I, and M), must be consulted.

- **Abienes, M.V., Convoy A.N.6, 39, 40 (note)**
- **Abinger, H.M.S., minesweeper, 37**
- **Admiralty, congratulated C-in-C., Med., on Opp. M.A.5, 24, ruling as to function of cruisers when carrying military passengers, 35 (note), order Board of Enquiry on action off C. Spartivento, 79**
- **Adriatic Sea, Italian command of, 36; 47**
- **Aegaean Sea, 25 (note), 26, 34**
- **Agrigio, Island off N.W. Crete, 26, 30, Colloni sinks off, 30, 32**
- **Aim, (object), Opp. M.A.5, 3, temporarily changed, 7; sweep into Aegaean, 25 (note), Capt., Collins' decision as to main object, 26, 35; Opp. M.B.5, 57; raid on Strait of Otranto, 47, 50; Opp. "Collar", 52 (and note), 55, 56 (note), 59, 67**
- **Air, Aircraft, see FLEET AIR ARM Royal Air Force**
- **Air attacks, British, on Italian cruisers off Calabria, 9, 14, 15 (note), 17; on Port Augusta, 19; on Tobruk, 33; on Italian Fleet, Taranto, 42-46, 50 (and note), 51, Apps. H, I, J, K, P; on Italian Fleet off Cape Spartivento, 63 (and note), 67 (and note), 68, 71. Bombing attacks, 33, 41, 42-46, 68; Fighter attacks, 5 (note), 20, 21, 23, 40, 41, 49 (and note) 69, 70; Torpedo attacks, 9, 14, 19, 22 (and note), 23, 33, 42-46, 50, 51, Apps. H, I, J, K, P, Italian, on Med. Fleet, 6, 12, 17 (and note), 20, 21 (and notes), 22, 23, 40, 41, 49 (and note); on own fleet, 18 (and note), 61 (and note); on Force "H", 17, 18 (and note), 69; on Convoy M.S.I, 20, A.S.5, 49; on Malta, 19; on Havock and Sydney, 33, 33; remarks by C-in-C., Med., App. C; effect on rescue of survivors, App. F**
- **Air cooperation, R.N. with R.A.F., 3, 19, 32, 33, 39, 42, 44, 50**
- **Aircraft, British, details of F.A.A. aircraft, Opp. P. Fulmars, 40, 41, 49, 69; Gladiators, 5 (note), 21, 40; Skuas, 67, 68; Swordfish, 8, 13, 14, 17, 19-23, 33, 34, 42, 43, 44-45, 51, 56, 65, 68, 71; Wellingtons (R.A.F. bomber) 44; Italian, Cant. 506, 49; Cant. 501, 41, 49 (and note); R.O. 45, 68; S. 79, 40, 49 (and note)**
- **Aircraft Carriers, see ARK ROYAL, EAGLE, ILLUSTRIOUS**
- **Value of 17, 18 (and note), 23, 49, 50, 18, 51; V. Adj. note; villet's remarks on operation of, 72**
- **Air losses, British, 33; Opp. M.B.5, 41, 43; F.A.A. attack, Taranto, 45 (and notes), Apps. I, J, Italian, Opp. M.A.5, 20, 21; Opp. M.B.5, 40, 41, 49 (note); 68**
- **Air patrols, Opp. M.A.5, 4, Opp. M.B.5, 39**
- **Air photographs, of Taranto, 42, 43, 45, 50**
- **Air reconnaissance, Beverst, F.A.A., 7, 8, shortage of aircraft 8, 9; 21, 23, 41, 56, 57, 58, 71 (and note); R.A.F., 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 19, 32, 39, of Taranto, 42, 46, 50, 55 (notes); 58, 59; photographic, 42, 43, 44, 45, 50; Italian, 7, 9, 23, 34, 40, 41, 48, 49 (and note), 60, 61**
- **Ajax, H.M.S., cruiser, 37, 40, 41-42, raid in Otranto Strait 82, 83, 84; 85, 86**
- **Alexandria, Greek G.O.C., Crete, App. L**
- **Alexandria, M.d., Fleet main base, 1, 3, 4, 5, Italian S/M off, 5; 7, 19, 21, 22, 25 (note), 26, 31, 32 (and note), 33, 39, 40, 41, 49, 55**
- **Ammunitions expenditure, by Sydney and destroyers, 15th July, App. E; by Italians at Taranto, 45 (note)**
- **Andros, Italian battleship, at Taranto, F.A.A. attack, 44; 61**
- **Annesley, Captain J. C., D.S.O., C.O. Enterprise, 4 (note)**
- **Anti-aircraft defences, at Taranto, 42, App. H**
- **Anti-aircraft fire, at F.A.A., Taranto, 44, 45 (note), App. J**
- **Antikithera Channel, N.W. of Crete, 25 (note), 26, 40**

97
Antonio Locatelli, Italian M.V., sunk, (note) 48
Appreciations, C-in-C., Med., 6, 7, action off Calabria, 16; Adm. Somerville, 16, 18 (and note), 59, 67, App. O; C.O., Sydney, 28 (and note); Adm. Campioni, 11, 18, 61
Arethusa, H.M.S., cruiser, 4 (note)
Aberdour, Italian destroyer, towed damaged Lancastre, 64 (note)
Athenes, Gulf of, sweep for British shipping, 25 (and note), 26; 36
Attindine, Italian Cruiser, 4 (note)
Augusta, Sicily, 5, F.A.A. attack, 19; 55 (note)
Back, Captain G. R. B., C.O., Orion, 5 (note)
Back, Captain T. H. O., C.O., Capetown, 21
Baillie-Groham, Commander H. T. Y., C.O., Ramilies, 21
Bande Nere, Italian cruiser, see Giovanni della Bande Nere.
Barham, H.M.S., battleship, 37, joins C-in-C., Med., 41; 49, 50
Bari, N.W. of Brindisi, 47
Batteliose Collozzi, Italian Cruiser, 4 (note), sails for Aegean, 26, engaged by Sydney, 29, damaged and sunk, 30, 31; Apps. A, D
Bayley, Lieutenant G. W., killed, Taranto, 45 (note), App. I, J
Benghazi, Cyrenaica, Italian base, 3, 4, Italian fleet reported north of, 6 (and note); 7, Bande Nere escapes to, 32
Bervick, H.M.S., cruiser, 37, lands troops, Malta, 41; 42, 49, 50, Opn. "Collar", 52 (note), 53, joins V. Adm. Holland, 58, 59, in action off Cape Spartivento, 62 (and note), damaged, 63, (and note), 64; 67
Bevir, Captain O., C.O., Resolution, 4 (note)
Bombs, F.A.A. attack, Taranto, failure to explode, 45, 46
Bon, Cape, Tunisia, Force "D" reported to Italians, 56
Bridge, Captain A. R. M., C.O., Eagle, 5 (note), 23
Biggs, Commander H. W., D.S.O., C.O., Hero, 5 (note), 26, chases Bande Nere, 30, 31
Bolzano, Italian cruiser, 4 (note), attacked by F.A.A., 14 (and note), 18; 56, 60, 61, 62 (note), bombed by F.A.A., 68; Apps. A, H, N
Boyd, Captain D. W., D.S.C., C.O., Illustrous, remarks on F.A.A. attack, Taranto, 50, 51
Bromle Leaf, M.V., Convoy M.W.3, 39, arrives Suda Bay, 40
Brindisi, N.W. of Strait of Otranto, 47
Brisbane Star, M.V., Convoy M.W.3, 39, arrives Suda Bay, 40
British Sergeant, M.V., Convoy A.N.6, 39, 40 (note)
British Union, oiler, 21
Busa, Cape, north-west extremity, Crete, 28 (note)
Cadorina, Italian cruiser, 4 (note), engine trouble, 11 (note), 13 (note); App. A
Cagliari, Sardinia, diverminous air attack planned, 4, cancelled, 17, 18 (and note) bombed by F.A.A., 41; 64 (note), 70
Calabria, Southern Italy, 3, 4, 7, action off, 9th July, approach, 8-11, surface contact, 11, 12, phase 1, 12, 13, phase 2, 13-15, phase 3, 15-17, air attacks off, 17, 18; 53, 25, 36
Calafarrana, Malta, air attack, 19
Calcutta, H.M.S., A.A. cruiser, 37, 39 (and note)
Caldon, H.M.S., A.A. cruiser, 21
Campioni, Admiral L., Italian C-in-C. Allo, 4, receives report of British forces and movements, 7, 8, 9, intentions, 15th July, and dispositions, 11, decides to break off action, 19, and to withdraw to Sicily, 18, decisions approved by Ministry of Marine, 23, remarks on value of aircraft carriers, 23; 52, sails to intercept Force "H", 55, appreciation and intentions, 27th November, 60, 61, decides to decline action, 61 (and note), remarks on F.A.A. attacks, 31, report on conditions at Taranto, F.A.A. destroyer, App. H
Caneca Bay, Crete, north coast, 27 (note)
Cape Town, H.M.S., A.A. cruiser, flag R. Adl. Remouf, 21
Capital ships, Barham, limitations, 3 (note)
Capo Vado, Italian M.V., sunk, 48 (note)
INDEX

104

Radar, 67 (note)
Ramillies, H.M.S., battleship, 3 (note), covers M.S.1, 21, 22 ; 37, escorts M.W.3, 40, and M.E.S.3, 41, 49, Opn. "Collar", 52 (note), 53, 59, joins Revenge, 59 ; 62, in action off Cape Spartivento, 59 ; 67 ; App. M
Range-finding, stereoscopic in Italian ships, 71
Ras el Hilal, Cyrenaica, Italian S/Ms off, 4
Ras el Tin, Cyrenaica, 21
Read, Captain A. D., C.O., Liverpool, 5 (note)
Reconnaissance, see Air Reconnaissance
Renouf, Rear-Admiral E. de F., C.V.O., R.A., 3rd C.S., flag in Cactofexpert, 21, flag in Gloucester, 37
Renown, H.M.S., battleship, 3 (and note), 59, 59, develops hot bearings, 62, engages enemy off Cape Spartivento, 63 ; 67, 69 ; App. M
Resolution, H.M.S., battleship, 4 (note)
Results of F.A.A. attack, Taranto, 46 (and note), 61
Rhoades, Lieutenant R., R.N., C.O., Vendetta, 19
Risks, V. Adl. Somerville's assessment, Ark Royal, 17, 18 (and note) ; Capt. Collins accepts risks, 28, 34 ; V. Adl. Somerville accepts risk to convoy, 59
Rodii, M.V., Convoy M.F.1, 3 (note), M.W.3, 39
Rompi, H.M.S., submarine, 7
Royal Air Force, patrols Opn. M.A.5, 3, 4, report enemy ships, 6 (and note), 7, 8, 9, re-
connaissance, Port Augustua, 19, Tobruk, 32, and attack on shipping, 33 ; bombers in Greece, 37 ; reconnaissance, Opn. M.B.8, 39, Taranto, 42, 43, 46, 46 ; value of, 50, Opn. "Collar", passage of personnel in cruisers, 53, 55 (and note), 64 (note), reconnaissance, 55 (note), 59, 63 (and note)
Royal Sovereign, H.M.S., battleship, 3 (and note), flag, R. Adl. Pridham-Wippell, 5 (note), speed limits approach of fleet, 9 ; 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 24
Russell, Captain A. S., C.O., Delhi, 4 (note)
Savina, H.M.S., corvette, 52 (note) ; App. M
Sansonetti, Vice-Admiral, commanding 3rd Division, flag in Trieste, 56
Santa Maria di Leuca, Cape, S.E. point of Italy, hydrophone reported, 47 (note)
Scarlett, Lieut., N. J., Observer, F.A.A. attack, Taranto, 45 (note) ; Apps. I, J
Scheffield, H.M.S., cruiser, 37, 41, 52 (note), 53, 56, 58, 59, 62, action off Cape Spartivento, engages enemy, 63 ; 67 (note) ; App. M
Sicily-Sicilian, 4, 7, Italian fleet withdraws to, 10, air patrols, Opn. M.B.8, 39, 49
Sindonis, H.M.S., battleship, 5 (note), at action off Calabria, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, enemy air attacks, 17 ; 18, Covers Convoy M.S.1, 20, 21 ; 37, 39, 41, Aircraft, 49
Soontor, Commander J. A. W., C.O., Tanus, 5 (note)
Stuart, Captain M. S., C.O.
Strategic situation, Mediterranean, June-July, 1940, 1 ; 34, November, 36, effect of F.A.A. attack, Taranto, 45
Stuart, H.M.A.S., destroyer, 3, 5 (note), 14, 15, 19 (and note), joins M.F.1, 19
Submarines, British, Phoenix attacks and reports battleships, 6 ; 7, Italian dispositions, 6th
11th July, 4, 9th July, 7 ; 6, 16, sink Escort, 18, countermeasures, 25, 36, attack Med. Fleet, and M.E., 2, 4, 5, 7
Suda Bay, Cretan, advance base, Med., Fleet 37, 39, 40 (and note), 41, 49, 50, App. L
Surprise, effected by Sydney, 28 (and note), 29, value of 34, 35, F.A.A. attack, Taranto, 43
Sydney, H.M.S., cruiser, 5 (note), 11, engages enemy 12, 14, 15, 16, 21, 25, sweep in Aegean, 26, engages Bande Nere and Collione, 29, 30, chases Bande Nere, 51, 54, joins Hanover, 33 ; 34, 35 (and note), 37, 40, 42, raid in Otranto Strait, 47, 48 ; Apps. D, E, G
Syracuse, Sicily, 45 (note)
Taranto, Italian main base, 5, 7, 8, Med., Fleet cuts Italian fleet off from, 9, 13, 17, 18 ; 18 (note), 36, 39, 41, F.A.A. attack, 42, 45, 44, 45, 46, defences, App. H ; 49, 50, 51, 55 (and note)
Terror, H.M.S., monitor, 39, 41, 59
Thomas, Commodore M. S., C.O., Daunt, 5 (note)
Tothill, Commander J. A. W., C.O., Tanus, 5 (note)
Tovey, Vice-Admiral J. C., G.B., D.S.O., V.A.(D), 3, flag in Orion, 5 (note), at action off Calabria, 12 (and note), 13, 15, 16, 17, enemy air attacks, 17 ; 18, Covers Convoy M.S.1, 20, 21, handling of cruisers, 22, issues orders for A/S sweep, Aegean, 25 (note) ; 31 (note), 32, succeeded by V. Adl. Pridham-Wippell, 59
Trento, Italian cruiser, 4 (note), 14 (note), hit by bomb, Taranto, 45, 46, 56, 62 (note), bombed by F.A.A., 68 ; Apps. A, H, N
Trieste, Italian cruiser, flag V. Adl. Sansonetti, 56 ; 62 (note), bombed by F.A.A., 68 ; Apps. H, N
Tyrrenian Sea, west of Italy, 96
Tyrrhennian Sea, West, 96
U-boats, see Submarines
Valliant, H.M.S., battleship, 4 (note), 37, 40 ; App. G
Valkona, Albania, 47, 48
Vampires, H.M.A.S. destroyer 5 (note), screens Eagle, 11, 19, escorts M.S.1, 30, 37, App. G
Vendetta, H.M.A.S., destroyer, escorts M.F. 1, 19, 21, 39, 41
Victoria, H.M. Trawler, 49
Vittorio Veneto, Italian battleship, at Taranto, F.A.A. attack, 45, 46, flag C-in-C., 55, 61, attacked by F.A.A., 65 ; Apps. H, J, N
Vista, M.V., Convoy M.W. 3, 39
Voyager, H.M.A.S., destroyer, 5 (note), screens Eagle, 11, 19, escorts M.S.1, 20, 37 ; App. G
Waiwera, M.V. Convoy M.W. 3, 39
Waller, Commander H. M. L., R.A.N., D.(10), Stuart, 5 (note)
Wessex, H.M.S., battleship, flag C-in-C., Med., 3 (and note), 5 (note), Opn. M.A.5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, engages enemy off Calabria, 15, 16, 16, attacked from air, 17 (and note), 21 (and note) ; 18, 20, 22, 32, aircraft lost, 33, Opn. M.B.8, 37, 40, 41, App. G
INDEX

Waterhen, H.M.A.S., destroyer, 37 ; App. G
Weather, 9th July, 11 ; mist obscures Sydney, 29 ; F.A.A. attack, Taranto, 44, App. H ; raid in Otranto Strait, 47 ; prevents second attack on Taranto, 49 ; action off C. Spartivento, 56
Wells, Vice-Admiral L. V., C.B., D.S.O., V.A.(A), flag in Ark Royal, 4 (note)
Wildman, Surgeon-Lieut., W. W., R.N.V.R., killed in action (Berwick), 63 (note)
Williamson, Lieut.-Com., K., leads first flight, torpedo attack, Taranto, 44, 45 (note) ; Apps. I, J
Wilson, Commander W. E., C.O., June, 5 (note)
Wireless telegraphy, interception, 23 ; silence preserved by Sydney, 28 (and note), 34
Wright, Commander, J. P., C.O., Hostile, 5 (note)
Wynne, H.M.A.S., A.A. destroyer, 37, 49 ; App. G

York, H.M.S., cruiser, 37, 49, 41, 42, 49 ; App. G
Zante, island west of Morea, air patrols off, Opn. M.A.5, 4 ; Med. Fleet concentrates, 7, 8 ; air patrols, Opn. M.B.8, 39
Zara, Italian cruiser, 4 (note) ; Apps. A, H
Zeeland, M.V., Convoy M.S. 1, 3 (note)
Zone time, 3 (note), 26 (note), 40 (note), 53 (note)
Zuara, Tripolitania, Italian S/Ms off, 4

RESTRICTED
"The relative disposition and numbers of enemy forces as 1500 and later is subject to some uncertainty because -
(a) the enemy fleet was spread over a considerable area and few ships were simultaneously in sight.
(b) aircraft reports on enemy ships do not cover this period.
(c) records of enemy bearings, ranges and inclination are not complete in many cases. - (C-in-C's report)"
ACTION OFF CALABRIA, 9th JULY 1940
PHASE I : 1514 - 1536

Time, Zone minus 2: Movements approximate

British movements are based on
reports and plans in M 05369/41
Italian movements based on plan
in Italian official history.

Symbols closed □ show posns. at 1514
" open ○ " " 1536

PLAN 3
OPERATION “M.A.S.”
MOVEMENTS OF CONVOYS M.F.I, M.S.I, AND COVERING FORCES,
10th -15th JULY 1940

Time, Zone Minus 2 : All positions and movements are approximate

Key
Movements of Covering Forces shown in Red • Convoys in Black
Ship symbols, open + Convoys at 1200, 11th July
Ship symbols, closed − Convoys at 1200, 13th July
Cruisers (Vice Adm. Tovey) while detached from C.-in-C. ————
Force B, (C.-in-C.) ————
Force C (Rear Adm. Pridham-Wippell) ————
Convoy M.S.I ————
Convoy M.F.I ————
Tracks of 3rd C.S and Ramillies not shown

Italian Air Attacks

Convoy M.S.I sailed 2300/9
Convoy M.F.I sailed 2100/10
Fleet Cruising 10th July

Antikithera

Times of arrival:
C.-in-C. in Warspite, 7th C.S. 0600, 13/7
Convoy M.F.I 0900, 13/7
Convoy M.S.I 0530, 14/7
Convoy M.S.I, 3rd C.S., Ramillies 0900, 15/7
ACTION OFF CAPE SPADA,
19th JULY 1940

Compiled from plans by H.M. Ships Sydney and Hyperion (M. 020932/40)
Time, Zone minus 2 : Movements are approximate

KEY
British movements, Black and Red : Italian, Blue
Ship symbols closed (—) posns., 0829 (Sydney open fire
" " open (○) " 1000
Track of 2nd D.F. run to N.E. (0715 — 0833)
" " " " S.W. (0833 — 1000)
Sydney
Bande Nere and Colleoni
H.M.S. Sydney's estimated posn. of sinking of Colleoni (Z)
O.F. Open fire C.F. Cease fire

0815 Sydney, Havock
0820 Sydney, Havock
0820 Sights enemy
0829 Open fire
0840 Havock joined Flotilla
0840 Smoke
0845 Smoke
0850 Ilex, Havock rescuing Survivors
0910 Colleoni sank 0959
0915 1000, Ilex, Hasty, Colleoni rescuing Survivors
0920 Ilex
0930 Hasty
0935, Hyperion, Ilex fire torpedoes
Agría Grabusa
C. Busa
C. Spada
Canea Bay
Giovanni della Bande Nere,
Bartolomeo Colleoni

Antikithera
AIR ATTACK ON ITALIAN FLEET AT TARANTO, 11TH NOVEMBER 1940
BY T.S.R. AIRCRAFT OF 813, 815, 819 AND 824 SQUADRONS,
FLEET AIR ARM OF H.M. SHIPS "ILLUSTRIOUS" AND "EAGLE"
STRAIT OF OTRANTO
RAID ON ITALIAN CONVOY, 12th NOVEMBER 1940
(From Plan in M06680/41)

Time, Zone minus 2
Movements approximate: British-Red, Italians-Blue
Ship symbols shown posns. at time of sighting (0115)

0115
- Sydney Axal Orion sighted convoy
- Nubian
- Mohawk sighted convoy
- 0120
- 0125
- 0133
- 0131
- 0143
- 0142
- 0144
- 0145
- 0150

Wind, Force 1
Sea Calm
Sky 7/10 Cloud

Scale: Sea miles

0 1 2 3 4 5

Moon

18° E.
OPERATION "COLLAR"
MOVEMENTS OF BRITISH AND ITALIAN FORCES
0800 - 1140, 27TH NOVEMBER 1940

Times, zones minus 2: Movements and positions approximate

KEY
Ship symbols (open) D - atch, shew posta, at 0800
- - (closed) • - - - - - - 1140
Ark Royal's 0800 reconnaissance

NOTE
British movements (red) are from ship logs and reports in W.W.S.S., 7415 Vol. B; Italian movements (blue) from Italian Official History.
Positions have been adjusted for errors in dead reckoning.
The Renown's position at 1140, which closely agrees with that on the contemporary track chart rendered after the action, is about 12 miles to the eastward of the geographical position shown on her plot (see figures in text).
ACTION OFF CAPE SPARTIVENTO, SARDINIA
27th NOVEMBER 1940

Times, Zone minus 2: Movements are approximate

Note.—British movements (Red) are based on plan in M/24148/40
Italian movements (Blue) from plan in Italian Official History

Key

Ship symbols closed — shew positions at 1220 (open fire)
Ship symbols open O — shew positions at 1320

Track of H.M.S. Renown

1140 Manchester
1140 Sheffield
1140 Southampton
1140 Encounter
1140 Renown
1150 Fury
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
(rand)
.rand