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THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE BRITISH PACIFIC FLEET TO THE ASSAULT ON OKINAWA, 1945.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 7th June, 1945, by Admiral Sir Bruce A. Fraser, G.C.B., K.B.E., Commander-in-Chief, British Pacific Fleet.

*Office of the Commander-in-Chief,
British Pacific Fleet.
7th June, 1945.*

"ICEBERG"—REPORT.

Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships a report on the actions fought by the British Pacific Fleet during the first phases of Operation "Iceberg."

2. It is impossible yet to judge the effect of these operations on the conquest of Okinawa, but I consider that we have successfully carried out our undertakings, employing a method of sea warfare with which we were previously unfamiliar.

3. It is not less than was expected, since all had turned their minds to it, but the credit must go to Vice-Admiral Sir Bernard Rawlings, K.C.B., O.B.E., whose inspiring leadership, resolution and fine judgment were responsible.

4. Doubt as to our ability to operate in the Pacific manner was somewhat naturally in American minds. This, however, was soon changed. The toll taken by the suicide bomber of the more lightly armoured American carriers led to an increase in the proportionate effort provided by our carriers, and the evidence of American eyes that we could support ourselves logistically, relieved their anxieties on that score. We have now, I am sure, become not only welcome but necessary in Central Pacific operations.

5. Despite their doubts, the Americans put their trust in us unstintedly, and the generosity

and help of all were invaluable to our success, a result which I know is most satisfactory to them.

6. We shall not, however, be able to play our full part until sufficient forces are available to form a second task group, since the effort of one, alternatively striking and re-fuelling, must necessarily be discontinuous and uneconomical of force.

7. The British Pacific Fleet have been making British naval history by operating off the enemy coast for periods up to 30 days each, but it is well to remember that similar American task groups are doing the same thing for twice as long. When we have mastered the technique of ammunitioning and storing at sea, we shall also be able to do this. These are matters receiving close attention.

8. In this connection, I wish to commend most whole-heartedly the work of Rear-Admiral D. B. Fisher, C.B., C.B.E., whose successful servicing of the Fleet at sea and in harbour has been the admiration of all.

(Signed) BRUCE FRASER,
Admiral.

*Office of the Vice-Admiral,
Second-in-Command,
British Pacific Fleet.
9th May, 1945.*

SIR,

I have the honour to forward for your information reports of proceedings from the ships of the British Pacific Fleet which participated in the initial stages of Operation "Iceberg" for the period from 26th March until 20th April, together with a general narrative of events for this period.* This latter duplicates inevitably

Admiralty footnote :-

* Reports of proceedings of individual ships are not being reproduced.

many of the events and remarks made in the enclosures but is designed to present an overall and brief picture.

2. The successful capture of Okinawa, as a stepping stone on the way to the overthrow of the Japanese Empire, was appreciated as of paramount importance, and it was in consequence a matter of great satisfaction to all in the two Forces, 57 and 112, that the former was able, in however small a degree, to draw a little of the enemy fire from those American Forces destined to bear the brunt of the attack in these initial stages of the operation. It is hoped that, by their efforts in this area, any major staging of Japanese aircraft to the critical scene of operations was impeded. The resources of the Rear-Admiral, Fleet Train Task Force 112 on which we depend for logistic support are in some matters still somewhat embryonic: I have reason to believe that he stretched them considerably to keep my Force operating.

3. Although the period under review was quiet and the enemy hard to find, those attacks which did develop gave us valuable experience and revealed several flaws in our organisation which diligence, time and additional resources will remedy. Accurate assessments of the damage inflicted by our strikes was often difficult to determine: this was in part due to the enemy's skilful use of dummy aircraft, camouflage and dispersal.

4. The difficulty of aircraft recognition when friendly and enemy planes are in the vicinity of the Fleet is an ever present problem: several proposals to obviate this confusion have been discussed, and, as remarked in the narrative, a solution to this appears of first importance. I trust we shall find one.

5. The attack by suicide aircraft on the Fleet demonstrates once again the importance of fighter interception being carried out at the maximum possible range.

6. It has been unusual, during my generation, for a British Fleet of this size to remain at sea for the length of time covered by this report and I had beforehand found myself wondering at times what shortcomings in personnel and material it would discover. Over the latter the necessary steps are in hand; as regards the former, whilst certain adjustments and additions to complement will be asked for, I am satisfied with the way in which the Fleet adapted itself to the new conditions.

7. This report, dealing as it does with an unfinished operation, is of an interim nature only. It will not, however, be out of place to remark on the helpfulness of the American authorities both at Manus and Ulithi; I trust we did not ask for their assistance until we were faced with problems which frankly seemed beyond us, but whenever we did so appeal it was responded to with the utmost vigour. I would further add that the Communication Liaison Teams in all ships have lived up to their name in its best sense, and I am very conscious both of the specialist help given me personally by the Senior Communication Officer in my Flagship, Lieutenant Commander R. F. Morris, U.S.N.R., as also in general by Captain E. C. Ewen, U.S.N. His knowledge and views have been most valuable. —

8. I have yet to find a more helpful and responsive attitude than that accorded to me by

these American authorities responsible for the provision and movements of Lifeguard Submarines* and aircraft: I know too that what their units have accomplished is no less a source of pleasure to them than it is to us. I am very grateful for their work.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient Servant,

(Signed) BERNARD RAWLINGS,

Vice-Admiral.

The Commander,
United States Fifth Fleet.

INTRODUCTION TO NARRATIVE.

Allied Object.

1. The first objective of Operation "Iceberg" was to capture Okinawa Gunto and, gaining control of the Nansei Shoto area, use them to attack the main islands of Japan with their sea and air approaches.

B.P.F. Object.

2. The particular object assigned to the British Pacific Fleet was to neutralise the airfields in the Sakishima Gunto as continuously, and for as long as possible.

Assignment of B.P.F.

3. On 14th March, 1945, the British Pacific Fleet was situated as follows:—

Most of Task Force 113 (consisting of the 1st Battle Squadron, 1st Aircraft Carrier Squadron, 4th Cruiser Squadron, 25th, 4th and 27th Destroyer Flotillas) was at sea exercising from Manus, Admiralty Islands.

Task Force 112 (ships of the Fleet Train and Escort Vessels) was in harbour at Manus.

4. On the forenoon of 15th March, whilst 1st Battle Squadron and 1st Aircraft Carrier Squadron were exercising, the following signals were received:—

CTF 113 (R) CTF 112

From C.-in-C., B.P.F.

COMINCH† directs you to report Task Force 113 for duty "Iceberg" operations together with Task Force 112 to C.-in-C., Pacific.‡

TF 113 (R) TF 112

From C.-in-C., B.P.F.

TF 113 and 112 must be employed in such manner that they can be reallocated on 7 days' notice from COMINCH.

5. On receipt of these signals all exercises were cancelled and Task Force 113 ordered into harbour to top up with fuel, ammunition, stores, and to embark the aircraft squadrons which had been landed for training ashore. After considering all factors the following signal was despatched:—

C IN C PAC CTF 112.C.-in-C., B.P.F.

From CTF 113

Have recalled ships and am embarking air squadrons from sea and shore training exercises.

TF 113 and 112, in accordance with orders from C.-in-C., British Pacific Fleet, are hereby reported for duty. TF 113 with units of

Admiralty footnotes:—

* Lifeguard Submarines—submarines employed for rescue of crews of aircraft.

† COMINCH—C.-in-C., U.S. Fleets (Admiral King, U.S.N.).

‡ C.-in-C., Pacific—Admiral Nimitz, U.S.N.

112 will be ready to sail from Manus at 1200, 17th March and will join the United States forces under your command with feelings of great pride and pleasure.

6. The factors referred to above were:—

(a) Fuelling, embarkation of aircraft, stores, etc. The timetable for these was in some measure dependent upon the lack of boats and the sport of the swell.

(b) Final preparation of operation orders and arrangements for replenishing in the forward areas over a period of up to three weeks' continuous operations.

(c) The speed (9 knots in fine weather) at which the tankers could move to the first fuelling area.

(d) Adjustment of aircraft between the Fleet Carriers, and UNICORN, SPEAKER and SLINGER, so that the Fleet might leave fully equipped.

16th March.

7. The Fleet continued making ready.

The following signal was received from C.-in-C., Pacific:—

The British Carrier Task Force and attached units will greatly increase our striking power and demonstrate our unity of purpose against Japan. The U.S. Pacific Fleet welcomes you.

17th March.

8. In order to have the Tanker Group in position for the Fleet to top up with fuel at the last prudent moment, Task Unit 112.2.1 and Task Unit 112.2.5* were sailed on 17th March. The former consisted of H.M. Ships STRIKER (with replacement aircraft), CRANE, FINDHORN, WHIRLWIND and the Tankers SAN AMBROSIO, CEDARDALE and SAN ADOLPHO; the latter consisted of H.M. Ships PHEASANT, SPEAKER (for CAP† duties) and KEMPENFELT.

18th March.

9. Task Force 57 sailed from Manus a.m. on 18th March, and carrying out exercises on passage, arrived a.m. on 20th March at Ulithi where the Fleet fuelled from U.S. resources.

10. During the period 21st to 23rd March, final drafts of operation orders were completed and distributed, intelligence material streaming in continuously. The date of sailing to commence operations, as that of sailing from Manus, was dictated by the arrival of the tankers in the fuelling area.

11. (a) On 22nd March the following signal was despatched:—

COM 5th Fleet‡ From CTF 113

Intend assume designation TF 57 after clearing Ulithi at 0715, 23rd March at which time Force is ready for duty under your orders. Intend TF 57 follow directions of C IN C POA unless you direct otherwise.

(b) The following reply was received:—

CTF 57 From COM 5th Fleet

Welcome TF 57. Good hunting. Your message 22nd affirmative.

Admiralty footnotes:—

* Task Units 112.2.1 and 112.2.5—units of the Fleet Train.

† CAP—Combat Air Patrol.

‡ COM 5th Fleet—Admiral Spruance, U.S.N.

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12. The British Pacific Fleet, until then Task Force 113, sailed from Ulithi at 0630 on 23rd March, 1945, as Task Force 57.

Composition of TF 57 on sailing from Ulithi on 23rd March, 1945.

1st Battle Squadron TU* 1

KING GEORGE V (Flag of CTF 57),
HOWE;

1st Aircraft Carrier Squadron TU 2

INDOMITABLE (Flag of A.C.1 and
Second-in-Command TF 57),
VICTORIOUS,
ILLUSTRIOUS,
INDEFATIGABLE;

4th Cruiser Squadron TU 5

SWIFTSURE (Flag of C.S.4),
GAMBIA,
BLACK PRINCE,
ARGONAUT;

Destroyers—TU 8

25th Destroyer Flotilla
EURYALUS (Flag of R.A.(D)
temporarily),
GRENVILLE (Capt. D.25),
ULSTER,
UNDINE,
URANIA,
UNDAUNTED;

(Note:—URSA was docking at Manus.)

4th Destroyer Flotilla

QUICKMATCH (Capt. D.4),
QUIBERON,
QUEENBOROUGH,
QUALITY;

27th Destroyer Flotilla

WHELP,
WAGER.

(Note:—KEMPENFELT (Capt. D.27) was attached to TU 112.2.5, the group remaining in the replenishing area.)

WHIRLWIND and WESSEX were attached to TU 112.2.1 and TU 112.2.2 respectively, the Tanker Groups proceeding between Leyte and the replenishing area.)

NARRATIVE.

23rd March.

Task Force 57 sailed from Ulithi at 0715 and set course for position Ant (18° 30' N 129° 08' E), forming into cruising disposition 5D to carry out long range throw off and close range sleeve firings. Sleeve targets were towed by United States Utility Squadrons. Bombardment communication exercises were carried out by H.M. Ships KING GEORGE V, HOWE and SWIFTSURE. On completion, the Fleet formed up in Cruising Disposition 5A and proceeded at 18 knots. CAPS and ASPS† were flown during daylight hours.

25th March.

At 0310 with H.M. Ships EURYALUS, BLACK PRINCE and ARGONAUT spread 8 miles apart, 8 miles ahead of the Fleet, radar contact was made with Task Group 112.2.5 and Task Group 112.2.1. Rendezvous was made by 0600 and the above ships with

Admiralty footnotes:—

* TU—Task Unit.

† ASPS—anti-submarine patrols.

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

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

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

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

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

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

26th March.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Admiralty footnotes:—

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

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

‡ Jack—a patrol aircraft.

§ Bogey—unidentified aircraft.

27th March.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Admiralty footnotes:—

* ASV—radar equipment in aircraft.

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

cancelled, and the Fleet withdrew to the fuelling area after the second day's strikes had been landed on. The necessity to withdraw was accentuated by certain ships having been short of fuel at the commencement of the operation. CTF 57 assumed tactical command.

28th March.

At 0730 made contact with Task Unit 112.2.5 and Task Unit 112.2.1 in area Midge, a rectangle extending 50 miles to the south and 100 miles to the west of 19° 55' N 129° 40' E: fuelling and transfer of aircraft were continued throughout the day.

The Fleet was divided into two groups for this operation, the non-fuelling group proceeding so as to remain within touch of the fuelling group. The Fleet disengaged from the Tanker Group for the night.

29th March.

The Rear Admiral Commanding Destroyers transferred from H.M.S. EURYALUS to H.M.S. WHIRLWIND and proceeded in the afternoon with H.M. Ships STRIKER and CRANE for Leyte. H.M.S. EURYALUS then rejoined Task Unit 5 with the remainder of the cruisers.

During the day mails and correspondence brought out by the Tanker Group were distributed by destroyers around the Fleet. For the night the Fleet formed up into Cruising Disposition 5A. H.M. Ships QUALITY and WHELP rejoined Task Force 57, and H.M. Ships KEMPENFELT and WHIRLWIND rejoined the Tanker Groups.

30th March.

At 1430 fuelling was completed and the Fleet formed up in Cruising Disposition 5B. Departure was taken at 22 knots for the operating area and A.C.1 assumed tactical command.

31st March.

It may be assumed in this narrative henceforward that CAPS and ASPS were part of the normal daily flying programme. At 0530 H.M. Ships ARGONAUT and WAGER were detached to a position 300°, 30 miles from the Fleet centre to act as pickets to prevent enemy aircraft returning with our own strikes. H.M.S. ARGONAUT was chosen for this purpose as having the most suitable radar. At 0630 a fighter sweep was sent in from a flying-off position 23° 10' N 125° 23' E and thereafter fighter patrols were maintained over Ishigaki and Miyako. There appeared to be little activity in either island. Two bomber strikes were sent against Ishigaki airfield, installations and barracks.

U.S.S. KINGFISH again did useful service and rescued the crew of an Avenger which had ditched.

At dusk the Fleet disengaged to the south westward and CTF 57 assumed tactical command. Two fighters were kept at readiness from moonrise but the Fleet was not shadowed.

1st April.

A.C.1 assumed tactical command; H.M. Ships ARGONAUT and WAGER opened out to their picket positions before the fighter sweep was sent in at 0640 from a flying-off position 23° 26' N 125° 25' E.

At 0650 bogeys were detected by radar to the westward, height 8,000 feet, closing at 210 knots. The fighter sweep was recalled to intercept and additional fighters were flown off.

The raid split up more than 40 miles from the Fleet. The first interception was by Corsairs from H.M.S. VICTORIOUS which shot down one enemy. Seafires shot down two more close to the Fleet and a fourth was destroyed by Hellcats recalled from the fighter sweep. At 0705 the Fleet had been alerted to "Flash Red" and a few minutes later the enemy planes commenced their attacks.

One enemy single-engined aircraft machine-gunned H.M.S. INDOMITABLE in a low attack killing one rating and wounding two officers and four ratings. Still flying very low it made a similar attack on H.M.S. KING GEORGE V but without causing casualties. Considerable difficulty was experienced in identifying enemy from our own planes who were hard on the enemy heels.

At 0727 an enemy plane dived into the base of H.M.S. INDEFATIGABLE's island. Four officers and ten ratings were killed, and sixteen of her complement wounded. The flight deck was put temporarily out of action, but within a remarkably short time, and in a most creditable manner, aircraft were again being operated from this ship, although that day on a reduced scale.

At about 0755 H.M.S. ULSTER was near missed by what appeared to be a 500 lb. bomb from an aircraft then being chased by one of our fighters. She reported that the bulkhead between the engine-room and the after boiler-room had blown, flooding both compartments, but that the ship was floating well. Casualties were two killed and one seriously wounded. She was unable to steam but her armament remained effective. H.M.A.S. QUIBERON was ordered to stand by her and as soon as the raid was over H.M.N.Z.S. GAMBIA was ordered to tow her to Leyte.

At 1215 a bombing strike was sent in against Ishigaki to bomb airfields and runways. No activity was noted. At 1430 reports were received from combat patrols over the islands that more aircraft had been sighted at Hirara and Ishigaki airfields. These were attacked by the fighter patrols and were followed by a fighter sweep. It was estimated that about 14 enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground during this attack and others damaged.

At 1730 a low flying bogey was detected by radar to the north westward. Hellcats were sent to intercept this raid which developed into 2 plus but the enemy avoided them in cloud. Soon afterwards the Fleet sighted the enemy and opened fire, sometimes, it is regretted, at friendly fighters. One enemy aircraft dived on H.M.S. VICTORIOUS; her swing under full helm was successful and the plane touched its wing only on the flight deck edge spinning harmlessly into the sea where its bomb exploded clear of the ship. The manuscript instructions to the pilot were blown on board H.M.S. VICTORIOUS; this interesting document, denoting priority of targets for suicide planes, has been translated and the contents forwarded to intelligence centre. It seems certain that VICTORIOUS's guns hit this aircraft during its dive.

This matter of differentiating between our own aircraft and the enemy becomes daily of more importance. With the suicide attack and, as is inevitable, with our own fighters pursuing the enemy right on to the Fleet's guns there is only a matter of seconds in which to act. Presented at certain angles there is very little difference between the suicide-equipped Japanese single-engined aircraft and some of our own fighters. On the other hand the means of controlling, particularly of stopping, the fire of the innumerable small guns that are now scattered about ships, often with poor communications, makes the problem difficult.

At dusk the Fleet disengaged to the south eastward and CTF 57 assumed tactical command.

2nd April.

It was evident from experience the day before that the Japanese had started staging into the Sakishima airfields and it was therefore decided to cancel the planned bombardment in favour of air operations.

The absence of enemy activity noticed by the first fighter sweep the previous day made it appear likely that the enemy might be leaving the airfields at first light. In consequence two aircraft from H.M.S. *INDOMITABLE*, having been flown off by moonlight, were sent to Ishigaki at 0510. Two other aircraft flown off at the same time and destined for Miyako were unable to proceed owing to radio failures. No activity was reported from Ishigaki.

At 0630 from a flying-off position 23° 12' N 126° 02' E a fighter Ramrod left to attack all airfields before the Fleet withdrew. Little activity was noticed, but one airborne Zeke* was shot down over Ishigaki by Hellcats.

After landing on the fighter Ramrod at 1045 the Fleet withdrew to fuelling area Midge, maintaining a CAP of 12 aircraft until dark.

It was very disappointing to have to cancel the bombardment again, for although in so far as cratering, etc., is concerned, the large bombs of the aircraft are the more effective, I particularly wished to bombard for the sake of the personnel concerned: many of these are very young and untried.

Once however enemy aircraft begin staging through or operating from an aerodrome the most profitable means of destroying them is by air and not by guns.

At 1450 H.M.S. *ILLUSTRIOUS* reported man overboard. Fighters of the CAP and destroyers were sent to search and the Fleet was turned 360° for a period. Unfortunately the man was not recovered.

CTF 57 resumed tactical command.

During the period 23rd March to 2nd April inclusive our losses of aircraft were 25, compared to 47 enemy destroyed or probably destroyed and 38 damaged on the ground. Enemy vessels sunk and damaged were—1 lugger sunk, 13 other small vessels probably sunk, and over 40 small craft damaged.

3rd April

0630. There was no sign of the Tanker Group in rendezvous position Midge One 19° 12' N. 128° 00' E. Weather: heavy N.E. swell, wind

Admiralty footnote —

* Zeke—Japanese naval fighter.

north force 5.* Spread H.M. Ships *SWIFT-SURE*, *ARGONAUT* and *EURYALUS* to carry out search.

0900. Made W/T contact with Tanker Group.

1320. Met Task Units 112.2.5 and 112.2.2.

Weather and cross swell were too heavy to attempt fuelling. The Fleet remained in the area throughout the day, but towards the evening meteorological information suggesting more suitable weather to the westward, the Fleet with the tankers turned west to area Mosquito.

An American Task Group of TF 58 was ordered to cover Sakishima Gunto during 3rd April.

4th April.

0630. Task Unit 112.2.3 from Leyte joined the Tanker Group making 5 tankers from which to fuel.

0730. Commenced refuelling the Fleet and transferring stores and aircraft in a heavy N.N.E. swell in position Mosquito One 19° 37' N 124° 42' E.

1920. The Fleet disengaged from the Tanker Group for the night.

An American Task Group of TF 58 was ordered to cover Sakishima Gunto during the 4th April.

5th April.

0630. Re-commenced refuelling the Fleet in position Mosquito One, the weather conditions for fuelling having considerably improved. Transferred Captain E. C. Ewen, U.S.N., Senior U.S.N. Liaison Officer, from H.M.S. *INDOMITABLE* to H.M.S. *KING GEORGE V.*

1930. The Fleet having disengaged from the Tanker Group, set course at 20 knots for the operational area. Owing to the numerous delays in fuelling, the two battleships had to proceed nearly 50 per cent. short of their full stowage and aircraft carriers had been able to embark only sufficient Avgas for the forthcoming two days' operation.

I judged it essential to leave with these shortages in order to be back at the time promised. I do not like battleships steaming about short of fuel for although they should have enough oil for the operation as planned, it leaves little in hand to meet any change of programme, and if a ship short of fuel received underwater damage her position might become embarrassing.

A.C.1 assumed tactical command.

An American Task Group of TF 58 was ordered to cover Sakishima Gunto during 5th April, 1945.

6th April.

0450. Four fighters were flown off H.M.S. *INDOMITABLE*, two each to Miyako and Ishigaki airfields to attack any enemy aircraft taking off at dawn but early reports from these planes indicated little or no activity in the islands. Heavy low cloud over the islands impeded operations, but eight aircraft not previously noticed at Ishigaki were attacked with apparent result.

0530. H.M. Ships *ARGONAUT* and *URANIA* with a CAP were detached to act as picket to the north westward.

Admiralty footnote —

* Wind force 5—fresh breeze, 16–20 knots.

0625. CAP and ASP for the Fleet flown off.

0635. In position 23° 16' N 125° 36' E flew off CAPS to cover both islands. The craters in the runway at Miyako airfield were observed to be filled in. At 0650 the picket cruiser and destroyer not being required under the circumstances were ordered to rejoin the Fleet.

At 0850 the Fleet was detected by an enemy aircraft who escaped in cloud.

Hellcats returning from Miyako in the forenoon shot down a Frances* after a 30 mile chase.

Avengers bombed and hit Hirara runway and town, and bombed Nobara, Sukhama and Myara airstrips causing fires.

Fighters attacked radio and radar stations, sank two junks and blew up a bowser.

At about 1700 bogeys were detected on the screen. Fighters intercepted them and splashed one Judy.† One enemy aircraft out of an estimated raid of four broke through in cloud and later dived on H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS, who took radical avoiding action. The suicider's wingtip hit the island, spinning the aircraft into the sea where the bomb exploded. Only slight damage and no casualties were caused. Ship probably hit aircraft in dive.

One Judy and another unidentified enemy plane flying low were engaged by destroyers of 4th Destroyer Flotilla on the screen, one being hit by gunfire. Corsairs and Hellcats closed the Judy and shot it down in flames after it had jettisoned its bomb. The other plane was seen in flames on the horizon about five minutes later and is considered to have been destroyed by the 4th Destroyer Flotilla. A second Judy orbiting the Fleet at about 10 miles range was intercepted by Corsairs and Hellcats and splashed.

Most regrettably one Seafire was shot down by gunfire of the Fleet during the raid: the pilot was not recovered.

During the day our own losses were the one Seafire shot down by the Fleet, 2 Corsairs by bomb blast and one Avenger which crashed on taking off.

Total enemy losses for the day were:—

Destroyed—airborne 4, suicide 1, on ground 1; total 6.

Damaged—6.

Two junks were sunk.

Although it was judged some enemy aircraft had probably passed north of the area to join in the big attacks on the Americans at Okinawa, no use was being made of the Sakishima airfields.

After the dusk CAP had been flown on, the Fleet disengaged to the south eastward and CTF 57 assumed tactical command.

During the day the following signal was received:—

To:—COM 5th Fleet (R) CTF 58 CTF 57
CTF 51 CTF 56 CTF 17

From C IN C PAC

I share your hope we can bring enemy to decisive battle. Expect all out enemy reactions in prospect. Good luck.—Nimitz.

Admiralty footnotes:—

* Frances—Japanese torpedo-bomber.

† Judy—Japanese reconnaissance aircraft.

7th April.

In view of Admiral Nimitz's appreciation that an all out enemy air reaction against the land and sea forces in and around Okinawa was imminent, the bombardment of Ishigaki planned to take place p.m. was cancelled in favour of air operations only, clouds over the island also influencing this decision.

A report was received that an enemy surface force had been sighted in the early hours leaving the Inland Sea and steering to the southward.

0530. A.C.1 assumed tactical command.

The plan for the day was to maintain a constant CAP over the enemy airfields during daylight bombing, strafing when targets offered. The weather at dawn was good and the clouds higher than yesterday.

0530. H.M. Ships ARGONAUT and URANIA were detached to the north westward to act as picket, with orders to rejoin at 0810.

At 0610 CAPS for the Fleet and islands and ASP were flown off from position 23° 16' N 125° 36' E. The island CAPS reported little activity on the islands, but noticed that bomb craters on Ishigaki had been filled in, and that Hirara and Nobara airfields appeared serviceable. It was therefore decided to send in three bomber strikes during the day to re-crater these fields. This was successfully carried out without loss.

In the afternoon H.M.S. URANIA escorted by 2 fighters was despatched to the rescue of a Corsair pilot who had lost his way and landed in the sea about 70 miles from the Fleet. An American Privateer, having reported him, dropped dinghies and remained in the vicinity until relieved by Fireflies. H.M.S. URANIA recovered the pilot, but he was unfortunately found to be dead. The afternoon strike destroyed one and damaged other aircraft found on the ground at Nobara.

Enemy search planes were again active early in the day; making intelligent use of the 9/10 cloud cover they were not sighted by fighters sent to intercept.

By the end of the day all runways in the island were left well cratered and unserviceable. All visible aircraft had been attacked and there was no activity on any airfield.

During the day the enemy lost 3 aircraft destroyed on the ground and 4 were damaged. 4 fishing vessels and 3 luggers were damaged.

Our own losses were 2 aircraft (by flak) and 4 from other causes.

CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1930, and the Fleet set course to refuel in area Cootie, an American area closer to our operating area than areas Midge or Mosquito and which C IN C PAC had approved our using.

In the evening it was learned that aircraft of TF 58 had dealt severely with a Japanese surface force which had sallied forth from the Inland Sea. Reports, which indicated that the enemy lost 1 battleship, 1 cruiser, 4 destroyers sunk, with 2 destroyers burning, filled us with admiration and at the same time, it must be admitted, with envy.

8th April.

American Task Group 52 was instructed to cover Sakishima during the day in the absence of Task Force 57.

0600. Met Task Unit 112.2.5 and Task Unit 112.2.1 in position Cootie One 21° 12' N 128° 44' E and commenced to refuel the Fleet in excellent weather conditions. By dusk all ships except one battleship and one carrier had fuelled from the 5 tankers. H.M.C.S. UGANDA, H.M. Ships URCHIN and URSA, reinforcements together with H.M.N.Z.S. GAMBIA re-joining after towing the damaged H.M.S. ULSTER to Leyte, joined TF 57.

9th April.

0630. Recommended fuelling, which was completed by 1500. H.M.S. UNDAUNTED from Leyte rejoined TU 112.2.5. H.M.S. WHIRLWIND joined Task Force 57 from TU 112.2.5. H.M.S. WHELP with A/S defects was despatched to Leyte.

1315. SWIFTSURE, UGANDA and GAMBIA carried out independent exercises until 1615. American Task Group 52 was instructed to cover Sakishima during the day.

At 1530 Task Force 57 proceeded, setting course to carry out final strikes on Sakishima on 10th and 11th April: the programme envisaged their returning to Leyte thereafter.

At 1650 the following signal was received:—

C IN C PAC (R) CTF 57

From COM 5th Fleet

On 11-12 April propose Task Force 57 strike Shinchiku and Matsuyama airfields. Request you arrange SOWESPAC AIR hit Southern Formosa fields same days. COMSUBPAC assign lifeguards to stations 9, 10 and, if possible, 11 on these days. TG 52.1 will maintain neutralisation Sakishima Gunto.

Shortly after, the following signal was also received:—

CTF 57 and 51. From COM 5th Fleet

CTF 57 cancel 10th April Sakishima operations. TG 52.1 continue neutralisation that day. CTF 57 advise if following not within capabilities. If approved by C IN C PAC, CTF 57 strike Shinchiku and Matsuyama airfields Formosa 11-12 April.

These were the first intimation that a change of plan was contemplated for TF 57; it looked an attractive change.

It had already been decided that, although both pilots and aircraft were beginning to feel a strain, the possibility of carrying out a fifth operational period against Sakishima Gunto was acceptable, provided it could be on a light scale. The Formosa operation, involving our maximum strength and flying 50 miles over enemy land, would, I judged, probably preclude further operations before the return of the Fleet to Leyte. These extended operational periods bring considerable strain on to the maintenance and handling crews on the carriers which, together with the operational fatigue factor of pilots, are of considerable importance. There is a great deal to be studied in respect of the personnel in this matter under conditions out here, and after further experience a comprehensive report will be forwarded.

I informed A.C.I that should we undertake the Formosa operation I would inform COM

5th Fleet that the fifth operation period would not take place. The Fleet would then arrive back at Leyte on the date as arranged between C-in-C., B.P.F. and C IN C PAC. After receiving A.C.I's reply at 1817 I made a signal to inform COM 5th Fleet that we were ready to attack Formosa.

Assuming that we should act in accordance with the above, the Fleet remained to the south during the night instead of proceeding back to its flying-off position from the Nansei Shoto operation, maintaining a moderate speed, the extra maintenance time being welcome.

A signal received from C IN C POA confirmed that above assumption had been correct, and approval was finally received from C IN C PAC in the early hours of the 10th April.

10th April.

The Fleet continued patrolling in the southern area during most of the day. I received an appreciation and air plan from A.C.I at an early hour; at 0845 his Chief Staff Officer was transferred to KING GEORGE V by destroyer and the various details discussed. After this discussion the following signals were made to inform all concerned of my intentions:—

COM 5th Fleet (R) C IN C POA Both H.Q., CT 50.5, C-in-C., B.P.F., CTG 52.1, CTF 112 COMAAFSWPA, CINCSWPA.

From approximate position Samson 196 deg. 30 min. from western tip Yonakuni Jima will strike Matsuyama and Shinchiku airfields 11-12 April forenoons. CTF 57 originator. Will replenish Cootie area 13th April. On 16th will arrive Leyte.

COM 5th Fleet (R) C IN C PAC both H.Q.s. CTG 50.5. From CTF 57

Request Dumbo* aircraft from 0830 to 1130, 11 and 12 April so TF 57 can leave vicinity Formosa after strikes. Advise and indicate call signs. Fighter escort by TF 57. Rendezvous western point Yonakuni Jima 0830 for Dumbo and fighters both days.

The plan as finally evolved was to strike Matsuyama airfield from a dawn flying-off position 23° 58.5' N 122° 46' E, retiring to the south east after strike returned. A similar strike was planned for the morning of the 12th on Shinchiku after which the Fleet would return to the oiling area. Both the above strikes were to be with the maximum available aircraft. In view of the fact that the Fleet would be operating some 50 miles from Formosa, a CAP of twenty with Jacks seemed desirable.

During these operations it would at times have been preferable to divide the Fleet in two, so that, whilst one half was sustaining air superiority over our target, the other could be away refuelling; this was however precluded *inter alia* by the fact that two carriers provide insufficient aircraft to maintain the Fleet CAP even on a lessened scale as well as to provide the strike. The position is analogous to a Fleet which, although it has enough destroyers to form a A/S screen and a striking force, cannot reasonably operate in two halves because there would then only be enough destroyers left to provide one or the other.

Admiralty footnote:—

* Dumbo—air-sea rescue aircraft.

While the normal practice of the American air-sea rescue aircraft is to remain at call, it was felt that should aircraft ditch late in the proceedings, so much time would be required to get the aircraft from its base 265 miles away that it might entail the Fleet being delayed unnecessarily whilst destroyers were searching somewhat blindly in unhealthy waters for the casualties. This request was at once agreed to and although Dumbo was only asked to be in attendance from 0830 to 1130 the reply was received that he was at our disposal until 1430.

It should be noted that air-sea rescue arrangements whether carried out by an aircraft or surface ship, again reduce the fighter strength of the Fleet since a small CAP must be provided for the ship or aircraft.

At 1203 in position 20° 35' N 125° 55' E the final signals were transmitted to Guam W/T for various authorities giving final details. At 1700 with the Fleet steering for its flying-off position I handed over tactical command to A.C.I. The operation was named "Iceberg Oolong."

11th April.

The Fleet arrived in flying-off position 30 miles 202 degrees from Yonakuni Shima at 0600. There was a fresh N.N.E. wind, a moderate sea and short swell. Cloud base was about 1,000 feet with intermittent rain and drizzle.

Course was reversed and in daylight it was soon apparent that conditions were unlikely to improve in the flying area during the day while weather reports showed that conditions over Matsuyama precluded any hope of attack. It was considered that a small fighter sweep coasting round North Formosa might find Shinchiku, but that their return journey would be a considerable gamble and surprise lost. Conditions were most unsuitable also for air-sea rescue. Operations were accordingly postponed 24 hours, and the Fleet continued to the south eastward.

At 1813 received Commander 5th Fleet's order to all Task Group Commanders to prepare for heavy enemy air attacks on 12th April. CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 2000. Course was reversed during the night to bring the Fleet to the flying-off position at dawn.

Task Force 58 reported being under heavy air attack all the afternoon, with the enemy showing a preference to commit suicide on the decks of radar pickets.

During the night I had informed Commander 5th Fleet of the postponement and that we strike Formosa on 12th and 13th April.

12th April.

The weather had improved considerably during the night. At 0530 A.C.I assumed tactical command.

Enemy reconnaissance aircraft possibly detected the Fleet at 0555 and soon afterwards enemy air activity was detected to the northward. CAP was flown off at 0615 and at 0704 Seafires had an inconclusive encounter with four eastbound Zekes, one of which was shot down. The main strikes, each of 24 bombers and 20 fighters, were flown off at 0715

from position 23° 58½' N 122° 46' E and proceeded in company around the coast. Cloud prevented either strike going over the mountains.

One strike bombed Shinchiku airfields with delay fuzed bombs and attacked dispersals. There was flak but no airborne opposition. Due to cloud conditions over Matsuyama airfield the other strike attacked their alternative target Kiirun harbour where hits were observed on the chemical plant, dock area and shipping.

One flight investigated Matsuama and found little activity. A nearby railway station and factory were attacked and one Tess was destroyed on the ground. A bridge over the river south of Matsuama was destroyed and shipping at Tansui shot up.

Two Fireflies which had been sent to rendezvous with Dumbo aircraft at Yonakuni Shima shot down four out of five eastbound Sonias* at 0920 and damaged the other. As these aircraft had not been detected by radar, fighters were thereafter maintained over the island.

Corsairs attacked aircraft which had forced landed on Yonakuni Shima and set fire to a Sally.†

At 1135 a shadowing Dinah was chased by Corsairs, which, after releasing their drop tanks, caught and destroyed it.

At 1410 a Dinah escorted by two Oscars‡ escaped our fighters in cloud.

At 1530 Hellcats to the north westward of the Fleet shot down a Zeke.

In the evening the enemy made a sortie from Ishigaki, which was intercepted by fighters, no enemy getting within sight of the Fleet. Hellcats splashed four Oscars and two Tonies§ and damaged two. The Corsairs splashed one Val|| and one Oscar, and damaged one. One Hellcat was badly damaged in this engagement, the pilot being killed when making a forced landing.

During the day, except for the evening sortie and one shadower, all enemy air traffic appeared to have been between Formosa and Sakishima. Fighter Direction of our fighters during the day was well carried out, and some excellent interceptions were made. CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 2100.

The score for the day was:—

Enemy losses:

Destroyed—airborne 16, on ground 1; total 17.

Probably destroyed—on ground 1; total 1.

Damaged—airborne 2; total 2.

Own losses:

In combat 3, other causes 1; total 4.

After dark an enemy plane carried out an apparently unsuccessful box search for the Fleet, which had disengaged to the south eastward for the night.

It was evident from signals received that the enemy were engaging in very heavy air attacks on American forces in the Okinawa area, and

Admiralty footnotes:—

* Sonias—Japanese army light bombers.

† Sally—Japanese army bomber.

‡ Oscar—Japanese army fighter.

§ Tonies—Japanese army fighters.

|| Val—Japanese navy dive bomber.

that Formosa-based planes were taking part. I came to the conclusion during the evening that we must contrive to remain for a further period; even if we could do little more than occasionally strike at the Sakishima Gunto we should anyhow provide an alternative target to take some of the weight. A.C.I had evidently come to the same conclusion, for at 2113 he informed me that, in view of the very heavy air attacks being launched against American forces on and around Okinawa, he felt that our remaining aircraft and aircrews could manage a fifth operating period provided that our losses tomorrow should remain small. In the event, and as he points out in his report, the Formosa attack days acted as tonic. I therefore made the following signal:—

COM 5th Fleet (R) CTG 52.1 C.-in-C.,
B.P.F. C IN C PAC CTF 112 From CTF 57

In view of current situation expect to be ready further operations 16th-17th April. If Formosa weather bad tomorrow intend deal with Ishigaki and significant intercepted traffic between Sakishima and Formosa both ways.

13th April.

Task Force 51 covered Sakishima Gunto.

0530. A.C.I assumed tactical command.

At 0550 four fighters were flown off. A bogey originally detected at 0540 developed into an ineffective raid by four Vals accompanied by a radar-fitted search plane probably performing the dual role of pilot plane and Gestapo. One Val dive bombed, but missed, H.M.S. *INDOMITABLE*. This aircraft switched on navigation lights and fired an incorrect recognition cartridge. It was engaged but probably not hit. A second was shot down by gunfire of the Fleet.

Unfortunately, gunfire also shot down one Hellcat which failed to clear the Fleet during the attack, and the pilot was killed.

At 0615 the CAP proper was flown off in position 23° 58.5' N 122° 46' E.

At 0640 a small group of bogeys was intercepted 25 miles to the north west of the Fleet; two Zekes were splashed by Corsairs and the remainder retired to the northward.

At 0645 Avenger strikes were flown to attack Matsuyama and Shinchiku airfields.

The weather over Matsuyama was fair, runways, barracks and dispersal points were successfully bombed, and a petrol or ammunition dump blown up. Few aircraft were seen on the airfield. Fighters shot up about 12 aircraft on Giran airfield without apparent result.

The other Avenger force bombed Shinchiku airfield through low cloud, hitting runway intersections and installations. No aircraft were lost in either of these strikes and there was no airborne opposition.

The Firefly CAP for the Dumbo attacked the suspected radar station on Yonakuni Shima with rockets and apparently destroyed it. When relieved, they also shot up luggers and small craft in the harbour close to Iriizaki.

After these bomber strikes were flown on, the Fleet disengaged to the south eastward to refuel.

At 1300 Hellcats intercepted 3 Zekes about 40 miles north of the Fleet, and Corsairs inter-

cepted a Dinah escorted by Tojos.* All the enemy aircraft escaped in cloud.

CTF assumed tactical command at 1945.

Enemy losses:

Destroyed—airborne 3.
Probably destroyed—on ground 5.
Probably damaged—on ground 1.

Own losses:

In combat 1.

It was with profound grief that Task Force 57 learned of the death of the President of the United States. A signal of sympathy was sent to CINCPAC on behalf of Task Forces 57 and 112.

At 1840 the following signal was received, and plans for a fifth operating period were made accordingly:—

CTF 57 From COM 5th Fleet

Cover Sakishima 16th and 17th unless other orders received in interim. Affirmative your message of 12th. Appreciate your co-operation and initiative.

14th April.

0630. Made contact with Task Unit 112.2.5 and Tanker Group consisting of 5 tankers in position Cootie One 21° 12' N 128° 44' E.

H.M. Ships *FORMIDABLE*, *KEMPENFELT* and *WESSEX* were also met and joined Task Force 57.

Fuelling was commenced in fine weather and proceeded with less delays than usual.

H.M.S. *ILLUSTRIOUS* was sailed for Leyte at 1755 screened by H.M. Ships *URANIA* and *QUALITY*.

As from today the United States Fleet was ordered to half mast colours, and I gave orders that British ships in harbour, or near thereto, should conform. Since United States ships do not, I understand, fly their colours in the operation areas and the half masting of our colours at sea in war is I believe only done when convoying or burying the deceased, the position was not clear as regards TF 57. I felt it fitting, however, and in keeping with what I knew to be the feeling of the Fleet for this great leader and sincere friend of the British Empire, to mark the occasion irrespective of precedent; therefore I ordered colours to be half masted for the last hour before sunset today.

The Fleet disengaged from the Tanker Force for the night.

15th April.

0730. The Fleet joined the Tanker Group, now consisting of three tankers; fuelling and general replenishing was completed by 1400, when TF 57 disengaged and took departure to cover the Sakishima area again. No supply of aircraft was available during this replenishment period.

16th April.

0530. A.C.I assumed tactical command.

No picket cruiser was stationed owing to the shortage of fighter aircraft.

0600. The Fleet CAP was flown off in position 23° 28' N 125° 18' E, 17 minutes before sunrise and in excellent operating weather.

At 0622 an enemy snoopers at 20,000 feet escaped before the CAP had time to gain height.

Admiralty footnote:—

* Tojos—Japanese army fighters.

At 0630 the first strike took off to attack Ishigaki airfields. This attack, and a further one flown off at 1230, left all the runways unserviceable.

At 0930 the second strike took off to attack Miyako airfields, where previous craters were found to be filled in and every endeavour had been made to keep the airfields unserviceable. This attack, together with another flown off at 1533, left all Miyako airfields out of action.

CAPS were left over both islands throughout the day; the one over Miyako being called up by a Japanese who invited our aircraft to return to base. Rocket-carrying Fireflies straffed a radar station at Miyako, and ground installations, barracks, and grounded aircraft generally were straffed. There was no airborne opposition over the targets and flak was moderate.

At 1700 bad height estimation was the cause of failure to intercept a bogey which crossed ahead of the Fleet from east to west.

At 1441 two divisions of fighters staggered in height and range got close to an erratic and fast moving bogey but were unable to find any target.

At 1505 a bogey was detected, range 9 miles, and followed from 25,000 feet to sea level where it disappeared. At about this time a large cloud of smoke was seen on the horizon and an unidentified twin was reported as sighted over the Fleet.

At 1536 fighters failed to find a 320 knot bogey closing from the westward, the bogey fading at 25 miles.

A possible explanation for these mysterious bogeys is that they were piloted flying bombs launched too far away and which failed to reach the Fleet before exhausting their fuel.

At 1722 Hellcats shot down a Myrt* which was apparently stalking an American Privateer search plane.

In the evening false alarms were caused by some of our fighters returning from the islands and in one case ship fire was opened on them due to an improper approach by the aircraft and faulty recognition by the ship.

In the afternoon a Seafire landing on INDEFATIGABLE bounced, cleared the barriers and crashed. The pilot was unhurt, but the plane wrecked an Avenger, damaged a Firefly, and knocked two ratings over the side. QUIBERON picked up one, but the other man was unfortunately not recovered.

In spite of having received no replenishment aircraft since 9th April and the lack of fighters consequently felt, A.C.I informed me that he considered a sixth operation period, if confined to one day, would be possible. I was happy therefore, in view of the sustained heavy enemy air attacks on our Fleetmates at and around Okinawa, to inform Commander 5th Fleet as follows:—

Continuing operations Sakishima tomorrow. Own losses light. Little enemy activity except anti-aircraft fire. If light losses continue, can strike final blow 19th April. Same 9th Dumbo and submarine services needed.

A further signal altering the final strike date from 19th to 20th April was made to Commander

5th Fleet as A.C.I informed me that maintenance of aircraft necessitated two days' work in the fuelling area.

At dusk the Fleet disengaged to the south eastward and CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 2110.

The score for the day was:—

Enemy:

Destroyed—airborne 1, on ground 1; total 2.

Own:

Destroyed in combat 2, operationally 3; total 5.

17th April.

A.C.I assumed tactical command at 0520.

CAP was flown off at 0600 from position 23° 34' N 125° 38' E.

In view of the apparent success of yesterday's neutralisation, the number of bombers in the main strikes was reduced; the first strike taking off at 0630. First reports showed that considerable effort had been made to fill in the runway craters at Miyako but none at Ishigaki. Consequently no bombing strike was sent to Ishigaki. Of the three strikes sent to Miyako, the first two left all airfields unserviceable and the third attacked municipal buildings and barracks.

In this last attack an Avenger was shot down and one of the crew succeeded in baling out and alighted on the water 1½ miles from Hirara town. A Walrus was quickly flown off and rescued the airman, whilst a fighter escort kept down fire which was opened from the town.

CAPS were maintained over both islands, but reported no activity on any airfields, all of which remained unserviceable at the end of the day. No operational aircraft could be found on the ground.

At 0609 a few bogeys were detected to the north west of the Fleet. Fighters sent to investigate splashed one Zeke.

At 1627 bogeys were detected 110 miles west of the Fleet. Fighters intercepted at 55 miles and two out of 6 Zekes were shot down, the others escaping in cloud.

During the afternoon a Privateer American aircraft flying at zero feet between Ishigaki and Iriomote was momentarily mistaken for a bandit* and given a short burst at extreme range by Corsairs. No damage resulted. This unfortunate incident has since been cleared up with the U.S. authorities and the question of periodical U.S. search planes approaching Task Force 57 fully discussed. It is hoped that the arrangements made will obviate such incidents in the future.

At 1750 close range weapons in KING GEORGE V suddenly opened fire on what appeared to be a blazing aircraft diving vertically on the ship. It turned out to be a dropped tank from a Corsair overhead—both parties missed.

The score for the day was:—

Enemy:

Aircraft destroyed—airborne 3.
Several small ships damaged.

Own:

Aircraft lost in combat 1.

Admiralty footnote:—

* Myrt—Japanese naval reconnaissance aircraft.

Admiralty footnote:—

* Bandit—enemy aircraft.

My signal informing Commander 5th Fleet that Task Force 57 would be available to strike again on 20th April was approved by him. The following signal from CINCPAC was also received:—

CTF 57 (R) 5th Fleet C-in-C., B.P.F.
From: CINCPAC

It was gratifying to note your message of 16th to COM 5th Fleet. Your Force is always ready to make still greater efforts whenever there is an opportunity to hit the enemy. Appreciate your offer which is traditional of British Navy.

At 1945 CTF 57 assumed tactical command and the Fleet withdrew to fuel in area Mosquito.

18th April.

0630. Commenced fuelling from Tanker Group of 5 tankers in area Mosquito. Also met Captain D.7 in NAPIER with NORMAN and NEPAL, all of whom joined Task Force 57, and UNDAUNTED who rejoined her Flotilla. Mails, stores, and correspondence were transferred but no replenishment aircraft were available; owing to the extension of operation programme none had been expected. By dusk the Fleet had completed fuelling and disengaged from the Tanker Group for the night.

Three of the five tankers, with Captain Escort Forces in PHEASANT, were detached and sailed for Leyte.

19th April.

0730. The Fleet rejoined the remaining two tankers and destroyers topped up with fuel. This second day in replenishing area was necessary in order to rest aircrews and for maintenance work on aircraft.

At 1300 the Fleet disengaged and took departure for the Sakishima area, leaving Captain D.27 in KEMPENFELT in the fuelling area with 2 tankers, SPEAKER, WOODCOCK and FINDHORN, with orders to proceed to Leyte at dawn on 21st April.

20th April.

At 0520 A.C.1 assumed tactical command. CAP was flown off at 0555 in position 23° 33' N 125° 02' E. The plan for the day followed generally the pattern of previous strikes, namely to crater the runways on all Myako and Ishigaki airfields and to maintain a CAP over them to prevent repair work, destroying any enemy airborne, and to strafe any grounded planes. In addition, 2 strikes by rocket-firing Fireflies were ordered to attack coastal shipping and ground installations.

Four bomber strikes were sent in, and found that most craters had been filled in on runways at both islands. By the end of the day all airfield runways on both islands were left unserviceable, with the exception of those at Hirara (Myako) which were only partially cratered.

There was no enemy airborne opposition over the islands and none came near the Fleet. The several bogeys detected during the day were all found to be friendly search planes when intercepted. A lugger and some junks were rocketted and left burning, as were a possible radar station and barracks.

This was not a very fruitful day. One Avenger reported ditching 10 miles south of Ishigaki. The position was searched all the afternoon and evening without success, but the

survivors were fortunately rescued the following afternoon by U.S. Naval Mariner.

The score for the day was:

Enemy losses:

Damaged on ground 1.

Own losses:

In combat 1.

At 1910 the Fleet set course for Leyte, having completed 12 strike days out of 26 days between first and last strikes. CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1930.

21st April.

H.M.S. CRANE was despatched to overtake the Tanker Group who were on their way to Leyte, to relieve H.M.S. KEMPENFELT, who was ordered to proceed at best speed to Leyte.

22nd April.

During the day, and taking advantage of the presence of Chief Staff Officer to C-in-C., B.P.F. on board H.M.S. KING GEORGE V, Rear Admiral E. J. P. Brind, C.B., C.B.E. (Flag Officer Commanding, 4th Cruiser Squadron), and Captain J. P. Wright, D.S.O. (C.S.O. to A.C.1), were transferred by destroyer to the Fleet Flagship for conferences. C.S.4 in H.M.S. SWIFTSURE was detached at 2000 with H.M. Ships GAMBIA, UGANDA and EURYALUS to proceed ahead to Leyte. Paravanes were streamed at 1700.

23rd April.

At 0700 the Fleet formed into two groups for proceeding up Leyte Gulf.

1030. Entered the searched channel and recovered paravanes at 1115.

The Fleet was brought to anchor at 1245 in San Pedro Bay, reasonably close to the ships of the Fleet Train.

During the period under review the following aircraft losses were inflicted on the enemy and suffered by TF 57:—

Enemy aircraft:

Destroyed—in air 33, on ground 38.

(Includes 2 splashed by ships' guns and 3 suiciders.)

Damaged—in air 2, on ground 50.

Own aircraft:

Losses due to enemy action 19.

Action casualties:

Pilots 16, aircrews 13.

Office of Flag Officer Commanding,
1st Aircraft Carrier Squadron,
British Pacific Fleet.

26th April, 1945.

The operations now concluded have cost us 59 aircraft against which we have to set 30 enemy aircraft shot down by fighters, 3 Kamikases*, self-destroyed, and 97 destroyed or damaged on the ground; of the latter total, some few may have been non-operational or dummies.

This is an unremunerative return, but the operation was one which offered little opportunity of effecting high losses on the enemy.

Airborne opposition in the target areas—there was none, whilst airborne attack was confined to small groups of Kamikase, who split up 30 or 40 miles from the Fleet and in their approach through cloud formed difficult targets, either for fighter interception or for gunfire.

Admiralty footnote.—

* Kamikase—Japanese "suicide" aircraft.

2. On the other hand, attacks on airfields and dispersed aircraft are difficult and costly; the management of a group of airfields which are daily attacked from dawn to dusk do not display their wares. The bombers are exposed to flak concentrated in the area of attack throughout their bombing runs, whilst Ramrod sweeps are faced with dummy or unserviceable aircraft dispersed in revetments and other conspicuous places in centres of flak, whilst those serviceable are well camouflaged or concealed in woods.

The Japanese largely use smokeless, traceless and flashless ammunition; aircraft do not know they are being fired at until they are hit.

It has been a disability that cluster or fragmentation and incendiary bombs have not been available, as these would appear to be the type of missile required to destroy aircraft dispersed in the manner stated.

3. *Fighter Direction.* Whilst the number of aircraft shot down by the fighters is small, it represents, I think, a high proportion of those available for this treatment. Fighter direction, under the control and inspiration of Acting Commander E. D. G. Lewin, D.S.O., D.S.C., Royal Navy, making use of experienced teams in H.M. Ships *INDOMITABLE* and *VICTORIOUS*, has been of the highest order; the Staff Fighter Direction Officer, Fifth Fleet, Lieutenant-Commander H. A. Rowe, United States Navy, loaned for the operation, informs me that it has been as good as or better than the Fifth Fleet standard.

4. *Hellcats.* The operational efficiency of No. 5 Wing, trained and led by Acting Lieutenant-Commander (A) T. W. Harrington, R.N., has, throughout the whole course of the operation, been remarkable. Flying by day in all weathers and sometimes by night, I can recollect but one barrier crash, whilst their break-up from the landing circuit and speed of landing-on has been exceptional; whilst not so fast in the air as Corsairs, their tactical eminence has enabled them to account for their full share of what enemy aircraft have been available.

5. *Corsairs.* The Corsair Squadrons have done all that was asked of them and more, but they have not the same proved all-weather propositions for landing-on purposes as have Hellcats, and it is a grave disability that it is dangerous to land on unless their long-range tanks have been dropped or emptied. Nor can they be used for night flying.

In leading their squadrons the work of Temporary Acting Lieutenant-Commander (A) A. M. Tritton, R.N.V.R., No. 1830 Squadron, H.M.S. *ILLUSTRIOUS*, and Temporary Acting Lieutenant-Commander (A) C. C. Tomkinson, R.N.V.R. (since killed), No. 1836 Squadron, H.M.S. *VICTORIOUS*, has been outstanding.

6. *Seafires.* The Seafires have been used for CAP over the Fleet. Owing to their short endurance they have not been suitable for accompanying offensive strikes to the range at which these operations have been carried out.

7. *Fireflies.* It had been intended to use Fireflies against enemy coasters and coastal

vessels, but these have been painfully few; thus with the exception of occasional rocket sorties against particular targets, such as radar stations and junks, it has been necessary to relegate them to escort duties with Lifeguard submarines and Dumbo aircraft, and to flying Jack patrols. On the only occasion on which the chance of air combat presented itself, they lost no time at all; four Sonias out of five to the guns of two Fireflies.

Acting Major V. B. G. Cheesman, D.S.O., M.B.E., D.S.C., R.M., continues to lead this Squadron with distinction and address.

8. *Avengers.* Avengers have been employed throughout as bombers and have executed this task with success; their losses to flak have been relatively high; this I attribute firstly to the determination of their leaders in coming through cloud, which has frequently been at 2,000 feet, to discharge their load, and secondly to the invisibility of the enemy flak. Four hundred tons of high explosive bombs have been unloaded on enemy airfields and installations.

The service of Acting Lieutenant-Commander (A) D. R. Foster, R.N.V.R., H.M.S. *VICTORIOUS*, No. 849 Squadron, has been outstanding.

9. *Air Group Leaders.* The duties have been carried out by Commander N. S. Luard, D.S.C., R.N., H.M.S. *INDOMITABLE*, and Acting Lieutenant-Colonel R. C. Hay, D.S.C., R.M., H.M.S. *VICTORIOUS*, in an able manner, particularly by the latter, and the appointments are, I think, justified. It has been their primary task to so direct the strike and fighter leaders that their offensive effort is aimed at the most profitable sections of the ordered target areas; and to redirect their effort if, for any reason, an alternative target of better value has been presented; it has been their secondary duty to make a reconnaissance each morning of the airfields and report the position of dispersed aircraft, advising me whether fighters should be sent to strafe or not.

10. *Air attack on the Fleet.* On those occasions on which hostile aircraft have penetrated the fighter defences of the Fleet the sky has been in general overcast, whilst there has been a longstop CAP essentially maintained over the Fleet under the cloud base.

There has never been a group at which to fire, not more in fact than a single aircraft; thus there has been little opportunity to use heavy artillery: gunfire has been in the main restricted to flak, and, as this is little deterred by alterations of course, and because the time between the enemy descending through the cloud base and his arrival onboard is small, it has been my practice, unless necessary to operate aircraft, to keep the Fleet almost continuously under rudder during such attacks. The U.S. Fleet, I understand, do the same.

11. *Operation of Aircraft under impending attack.* In face of the near certainty that if a hostile aircraft gets through it will hit a carrier, it has been a nice matter to decide on the chances of interception: if assessed as unfavourable, the choice has to be made between accepting the Fleet on a steady course in wind while aircraft on deck with full tanks

and loaded with bombs are flown off—to get in the way of the guns, and derange the strike programme—or to keep them on and rely on full avoiding action. The course of action selected has been based on the two factors—estimated time available and number of loaded aircraft on deck.

12. *Friendly aircraft shot down by fire from the Fleet.* One Seafire was shot down during a day attack and for this I could see little justification.

A Hellcat was shot down at first light. For this, although there are complementary reasons, I must accept full responsibility because I misjudged the enemy's intention, and flew off the Hellcats to attack two aircraft which I estimated then to be snoopers, but had in fact hostile intent and were upon us before one of the Hellcats was clear.

13. *Performance of Carriers.* The carriers have, I think, stood up well to, what is for us, so extended a period of operational duty in the course of which 2,429 operational sorties have been flown. The maintenance crews, whom it has never been possible to stand down on any day throughout the operation, have done their work well: the carriers, but for shortage of pilots, bombs and stores, would be good to continue operating: that this should be so reflects credit on their Commanding Officers:

Captain M. M. Denny, C.B., C.B.E., R.N.
—H.M.S. VICTORIOUS,

Captain Q. D. Graham, C.B.E., D.S.O., R.N.—H.M.S. INDEFATIGABLE,

Captain C. E. Lambe, C.B., C.V.O., R.N.—H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS,

Captain J. A. S. Eccles, R.N.—H.M.S. INDOMITABLE,

Captain P. Ruck-Keene, C.B.E., R.N.—H.M.S. FORMIDABLE.*

(*This ship was brought forward from Leyte at short notice to relieve H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS and has operated in an admirable manner in spite of having joined the Fleet without previous experience of existing practice.)

14. *Extension of First Operating Period.* In view of their necessities at Okinawa, and of the fact that Task Force 58 was in the field before us, it is a matter of great regret to me to have been unable to offer to continue to operate after the 20th April: having regard to the conditions set out above and to the fact that no replenishment fighter pilots have been available throughout the operation I have not felt, having regard to the future, that it was justifiable to do so: there is the consideration also that the sooner we return to replenish and relieve, the sooner we come forward.

15. I should say in conclusion that the enemy flak positions on Myako are unsubdued and continue to inflict casualties on our aircraft: the high explosive bombs with which we are provided have proved unsuitable for their reduction: it is believed that the positions might be neutralised by an area bombardment. Any such effort would be warmly appreciated by all our aircrews.

(Signed) PHILIP L. VIAN.
Rear Admiral.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 10th July, 1945, by Admiral Sir Bruce A. Fraser, G.C.B., K.B.E., Commander-in-Chief, British Pacific Fleet.

*Office of the Commander-in-Chief,
British Pacific Fleet.
10th July, 1945.*

REPORT ON OPERATION "ICEBERG."

Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships a report on the second and last phase of Operation "Iceberg"

2. This covers the period from the 23rd April to 25th May, 1945, and is in continuation of my letter of 7th June, 1945.

3. I entirely endorse the remarks of the Vice-Admiral in paragraph 10 of his covering letter. The manner in which the ships of the First Aircraft Carrier Squadron remained in action, despite the damage sustained from "suicide" attacks, reflects the greatest credit on Vice-Admiral Sir Philip Vian and on the Commanding Officers and ships' companies of the aircraft carriers.

(Signed) BRUCE FRASER,
Admiral.

*Office of the Vice-Admiral,
Second-in-Command,
British Pacific Fleet.*

6th June, 1945.

SIR,

I have the honour to forward for your information and in continuation of my letter of 9th May, 1945, the attached narrative and report of proceedings of Task Force 57 during the second phase of Operation "Iceberg"; in so far as the British Pacific Fleet is concerned it terminates their contribution thereto.

2. The object throughout was to prevent the enemy making use of the airfields in the Sakishima Gunto group.

3. Over the whole period TF 57 was at sea for 62 days, broken by 8 days re-storing at Leyte, maintaining an intermittent neutralisation of these airfields by day. During its absence an American Task Group took over this duty and, in the later stages, aircraft based on Okinawa also took part. Whilst the latter's contribution is not known in detail their work at night was particularly welcome.

During this time the Task Force flew 4,852 sorties, dropped 875 tons of bombs and rocket projectiles, destroyed 100 enemy aircraft and damaged 70 others; various other targets such as shipping, W/T stations, etc., were also attacked. Our own losses were 33 aircraft from enemy action; in addition 92 were lost operationally.

4. Throughout the first phase of the "Iceberg" operation and in the early part of the second phase, the position from which the Force operated was not greatly changed, except on the occasion of attacking Formosa. Since it seemed possible that the enemy might be fixing the force in daylight by shore radar on the CAP, it was decided after the attack on 9th May, 1945, that it would be wiser to move the striking position further to the eastward, accepting the greater flying distance to Ishigaki. In the event, the Fleet was not seriously attacked after this was done.

5. It had been apparent since the beginning of the operation that however thoroughly the airfields were neutralised by day, the enemy was determined and able to effect repairs by night. The lack of night intruders to prevent this was keenly felt as it was evident that intermittent heckling of the airfields during the night would have slowed down the activities of the enemy working parties. Furthermore, the need for night fighters to protect the Fleet, particularly during the moonlight periods, is outstanding; so is the need for a night carrier. In this respect it was perhaps very fortunate that during our first strikes on 27th March, when the Fleet had been approached at 0245, *INDOMITABLE* flew off a Hellcat who successfully drove off the enemy aircraft, then remaining up till dawn. This may have given the Japanese the impression that we were night fighter equipped.

The problem of getting night fighter aircraft, including a night carrier, has been taken up separately, but the solution cannot be expected in the near future.

6. A further bombardment had been planned for the latter stages, but had to be cancelled on two successive days owing to weather. After the second cancellation on 9th May, damage to carriers and shortage of aircraft rendered any further bombardment unwise.

7. The assistance of the United States authorities at Leyte was greatly appreciated, and I must once more express my admiration and gratitude for the excellent arrangements for air-sea rescue by means of Lifeguard submarines and Dumbo aircraft.

8. The activities of the Fleet Train are the subject of a separate report. The service given in the fuelling area continued to improve throughout, and for this the Fleet owes much to Rear-Admiral Fisher. The regular delivery of mail, to take one instance, went far to maintain the general morale.

9. This operation has presented the British Fleet with several novel features; in particular it has stressed the strenuous efforts required from carriers who have no spare pilots and who could well benefit from a larger complement. They have unfortunately little extra accommodation available.

In other ships the principal problem was, perhaps, to maintain alertness and interest while engaged on less active duties.

I feel however that the Fleet as a whole kept in good heart throughout and did, I trust, what was required of it.

10. The Vice-Admiral Commanding the First Aircraft Carrier Squadron has remarked in his report on the manner in which the carriers contrived to remain in operation in spite of damage; I wholeheartedly subscribe to his views. Their achievements, however, derived directly from the sustained determination and leadership of Vice-Admiral Sir Philip Vian himself, for to him fell the conduct and handling of the Fleet during its most active periods.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Signed) BERNARD RAWLINGS,

Vice-Admiral.

*The Commander.
United States Fifth Fleet.*

NARRATIVE.

On 23rd April TF 57, 32 days out from Ulithi, was brought to anchor in San Pedro Roads, Leyte, and commenced making good defects and replenishing from ships of the Fleet Train.

The partial replenishment carried out at Manus in early March had been difficult due to the great distances between ships, the extreme shortage of craft and the necessity for Fleet training.

The berthing plan at Leyte giving greatly reduced distances which had been arranged by R.A.F.T. before the Fleet arrived made matters considerably easier.

The fuelling, ammunitioning, storing, etc. of the Fleet commenced p.m. on the 23rd and continued throughout the week, aided by favourable weather.

Boats were again very short and quite insufficient for libertymen to be landed. Since the libertymen could not get to the beer, I authorised the beer to be brought to them, the amount available allowing one bottle per day per head; this innovation proved immensely popular.

Every Commanding Officer reported enthusiastically on this matter, there were no "scenes," and I have no doubt whatever that it was a great and well deserved boon in a period of hard work in great heat.

Prior to their departure to refit, H.M. Ships *ILLUSTRIOUS* and *ARGONAUT* were fleeced of available stores and spare gear to meet Fleet requirements.

The heat and lethargic effect of the climate which being drier was not quite so marked as at Manus, made conditions very trying for personnel employed, between and below decks, on maintenance, boiler cleaning, etc. Much work of this type had to be done at great speed and personnel concerned did well. Office work, occasioned by the inevitable influx of correspondence after such a long period at sea, was no less trying. There was in fact, little time for rest or relaxation for officers or ratings during this period and after a day or two most of us, I feel sure, wished ourselves back at sea again.

Precautions were taken against possible attack by midget submarines, explosive motor boats, and suicide swimmers, but no suspicion of attack developed.

No air raids were experienced, although the Fleet was alerted on a few occasions at night by "Flash Red" from the shore station.

On arrival at Leyte I waited upon Admiral Kincaid, Commander 7th Fleet, and with him met Vice Admiral J. L. Kauffman, Cominadmir Philippine Sea Frontier and Rear Admiral R. O. Davis, Commander Amphibious Group 13. They all lunched on board my Flagship. Commodore E. M. Evans-Lombe, Captain (S) J. R. Allfrey, Chief of Staff and Secretary to C.-in-C., B.P.F., after most useful discussions with Flag Officers of the Task Force, left Leyte by air for Guam: Captain E. C. Ewen, U.S.N., Liaison Officer with TF 57, travelled with them.

Uppermost in my mind during the first few days at Leyte was the question of the future employment of Task Force 57. I had been

informed by C.-in-C., B.P.F., that alternative employment for the Fleet in the immediate future was under consideration as follows:—

(a) Continuation of Operation "Iceberg" as already planned.

(b) Withdrawal from "Iceberg" and engagement on an operation in Borneo with target date of leaving Leyte approximately 15th May. C.-in-C. signals made the latter appear the most probable. On 27th April a signal was received from C.-in-C. making it clear that the Fleet would not participate in the Borneo operation and C.-in-C., Pacific in a signal informed me that we should continue with Operation "Iceberg." This was very satisfactory.

In my signal I had informed Commander 5th Fleet of my intention and ability, unless otherwise ordered, to proceed from Leyte with TF 57 on 1st May to continue the neutralisation of Sakishima Gunto for a period of from three to four weeks before requiring to withdraw for major replenishment. Operations were planned for a cycle of two days of strikes followed by two for replenishment, the first strikes to be carried out on 4th and 5th May.

By the evening of 30th April the replenishment of the Fleet was completed; thanks to the energy and foresight of the Rear Admiral Commanding Fleet Train, and those under him, the arrangements made by the Rear Admiral Commanding Destroyers greatly contributing. The Tanker Group, to top up the Fleet on their passage, north, sailed from Leyte at 0700 on 30th April. H.M.S. QUILLIAM from Australia joined TF 57 on 28th April.

1st May.

Task Force 57 sailed from Leyte in groups at 0630 and consisted of the following ships:—

1st Battle Squadron
KING GEORGE V (Flag of CTF 57—
B.S.I),
HOWE;

1st Carrier Squadron
INDOMITABLE (Flag of 2nd-in-Command
TF 57—A.C.I),
VICTORIOUS,
FORMIDABLE,
INDEFATIGABLE;

4th Cruiser Squadron
SWIFTSURE (Flag of C.S.4),
UGANDA,
GAMBIA,
EURYALUS,
BLACK PRINCE;

25th Destroyer Flotilla
GRENVILLE (Capt. D.25),
URSA,
UNDINE,
URCHIN,
URANIA,
UNDAUNTED;

4th Destroyer Flotilla
QUILLIAM (Capt. D.4);
QUEENBOROUGH,
QUIBERON,
QUICKMATCH,
QUALITY;

27th Destroyer Flotilla
KEMPENFELT (Capt. D.27),
WHIRLWIND,
WESSEX.

The 7th Destroyer Flotilla, consisting of H.M. Ships NAPIER (Capt. D.7), NEPAL, NORMAN and NIZAM were, for the initial stages of the operation, assigned to Task Force 112 for duty as escorts with the Tanker Groups.

H.M. Ships ILLUSTRIOUS, ARGONAUT, WAGER and WHELP remained at Leyte to sail on 4th May for Sydney and refit. H.M.S. ARGONAUT was left with orders to put into Lae, New Guinea, on her way south.

H.M.S. ULSTER with bomb damage remained at Leyte having damage made good sufficient for her to proceed to another port for major repairs.

2nd May.

At 1730 CTF 57 assumed tactical command.

3rd May.

At 0600 made rendezvous in position Mosquito (x) with the Commander, Logistic Support Group in H.M.S. CRANE, H.M. Ships AVON and WHIMBREL and R.F.A.s SAN AMBROSIO, SAN ADOLPHO and CEDARDALE.

All cruisers and destroyers topped up with fuel.

UGANDA, whilst casting off from her tanker, inadvertently lay back on one oil hose, which parted and fouled a propeller. This she was able to clear by the use of shallow water divers. By 1530 fuelling was completed. The Fleet took departure for the operations area and the Tanker Group for area Cootie.

The plan for the opening of operations was:—

(a) To make airfields of the Sakishima Gunto unserviceable by bombing runways and air installations.

(b) To conduct an offensive against flak positions and to assist in cratering runways by ship bombardment.

(c) To maintain an offensive CAP over the islands.

The particular plan for the first day was for the bombarding force to bombard Miyako airfields and flak positions at about noon, from medium range, with the Carrier Force about 30 miles to the southward.

4th May.

At 0500 A.C.I assumed tactical command. Clouds were about 9/10 at 6,000 feet when the CAP was flown off at 0540 in position 23° 44' N 125° 11' E.

Ten minutes later enemy air activity in the vicinity of Sakishima was detected, the general trend of traffic being to the eastward. One small group approached the Fleet and Hellcats shot down one Zeke before the others escaped in cloud.

Bomber strikes were flown off at 0605 for Miyako and at 0815 for Ishigaki.

At Miyako the weather was good, visibility excellent and 1/10 cloud at 3,000 feet. Repair work on the airfields had apparently been proceeding by night since the day strikes by TF 52. All A.A. batteries opened fire on our aircraft. Runways at Hirara were well bombed and a direct hit on an A.A. position observed. Conditions for bombardment appeared good.

At Ishigaki one runway of Miyara airfield was found serviceable and left well cratered.

At 0800 the Dumbo aircraft provided by CTF 51 arrived, and was stationed between the target and the Carrier Force until 1700.

When taking off for the Ishigaki strike, one Avenger crashed into the sea, but the crew were rescued unhurt by the safety destroyer.

At 0827 an enemy aircraft approached the Force at a great height. Our fighters could not get high enough to intercept through lack of oxygen, and the enemy entered the artillery zone. Fire was opened in blind control, but the enemy was never seen and retired to the westward.

Before deciding to disengage from the carriers for bombardment I weighed up the following considerations:—

(a) The need for bombardment in an endeavour to reduce A.A. fire ashore.

(b) Conditions for bombardment near the target had been reported as excellent.

(c) The effect on morale of ships of the bombarding force would be most beneficial.

To be balanced against this I took into consideration the fact that the Fleet had been sighted. That in itself was nothing strange, and had happened several times before without being followed by any attack on the Fleet.

After discussing the situation with A.C.1, I detached with the bombarding force at 1000 in position $23^{\circ} 54' N$ $125^{\circ} 10' E$ and closed Miyako at 24 knots. The carriers provided an additional CAP for this force as well as aircraft for spotting.

At 1155 the bombarding force passed through position $24^{\circ} 33.5' N$ $125^{\circ} 10' E$ on the bombarding course of 070° at 15 knots. H.M. Ships KING GEORGE V and HOWE were in open order line ahead and screened by 25th Destroyer Flotilla and H.M. Ships EURYALUS and BLACK PRINCE who occupied the two port, i.e. inshore, positions on the screen. H.M.S. SWIFTSURE, H.M.N.Z.S. GAMBIA and H.M.C.S. UGANDA in open order line ahead were stationed 270° 3 miles, i.e. fire off port quarter of the Fleet Flagship. Conditions were ideal.

At 1205 fire was opened. H.M. Ships EURYALUS and BLACK PRINCE carried out a simultaneous "air burst" shoot on the A.A. defence area of Nobara airfield. H.M. Ships KING GEORGE V and HOWE bombarded Hirara airfield and the A.A. defence area to the north of the airfield, respectively. On completion of the "air burst" shoot H.M. Ships SWIFTSURE and H.M.N.Z.S. GAMBIA bombarded Nobara airfield, and H.M.C.S. UGANDA Sukama air strip.

In spite of comparatively close ranges, no form of opposition from the shore was encountered. Fire was ceased at 1250.

Photographs show that the runways at Nobara and Sukama were well hit and that all rounds from H.M.S. HOWE fell in the target area, but no photographs were obtained to show results by H.M.S. KING GEORGE V.

A few minutes after bombardment was commenced I received a signal from A.C.1 to say that H.M.S. FORMIDABLE had been hit and was reduced to 18 knots. I accordingly informed the Bombarding Force and instructed ships to speed up the bombardment. As signals were corrupt and the situation not quite clear I ordered the cease fire a little earlier than planned and at 1247 turned the force to the southward and closed the carriers at 25 knots.

As soon as the Bombarding Force had disengaged, A.C.1 formed the eight destroyers

left with him so that two destroyers were equally spaced between each carrier and on the line joining adjacent carriers. This provided the best natural gun support and clear arcs of fire.

At about 1100 three small groups of bogeys were detected to the westward, and were soon followed up by a fourth. Probably 16 to 20 enemy aircraft were employed with some acting as decoys. Fighters engaged one group working round to the southward, but one Kamikaze group penetrated to the carriers and was first detected when a plane was seen diving on the Force. Analysis shows that this group escaped detection either because, in the absence of the Bombarding Force, too many of the reduced number of radar sets were fully engaged tracking the diversionary planes and too few acting as warning sets, or else because they made a very low approach followed by a very high climb at about 15 miles range.

There were no bandits on the screen within 20 miles when at 1131 a Zeke was seen diving from a great height on to H.M.S. FORMIDABLE and engaged by gunfire. A.C.1 thereupon manoeuvred his Force under wheel at high speed by successive emergency turns. Though reported hit by close range weapons from his target, the Kamikaze crashed into the flight deck of H.M.S. FORMIDABLE near the island structure and started a large fire in the deck park of aircraft. A.C.1 manoeuvred the formation to keep in close touch with the damaged ship, whose speed was temporarily reduced to 18 knots.

The Kamikaze appeared to release his bomb just before the aircraft hit the deck, causing the following damage: casualties 8 killed and 47 wounded; 1 Corsair and 10 Avengers damaged, beyond repair; all radar except one set put out of action; both barriers damaged, the forward one irreparable; flight deck holed 2 feet square, indentation 10 feet square and 2 feet deep at the centre; armoured deck splinter passed through hangar deck, horizontal partition between down takes, escape hatch which was shut, and so to the centre boiler room where it caused slight damage and loss of steam, and finally pierced the inner bottom.

Two minutes later, at 1133, 2 enemy aircraft crashed in flames ten miles to the southward, the result of our fighters.

At 1134 a Zeke flying from forward to aft off the starboard bow of H.M.S. INDOMITABLE was engaged by 4.5 in. guns and temporarily disappeared in cloud. It soon reappeared diving at the ship as steeply as about 60° from the starboard beam. The Force was turning to starboard at the time and H.M.S. INDOMITABLE's wheel was increased to hard over. As the plane approached it was heavily engaged by close range weapons from the ship and set on fire; it flattened out at the last moment, deck landed on the flight deck, and bounded over the side, taking the radar arrays of the port midships directors with it. The bomb appeared to explode shortly after the plane submerged.

At 1142 another Zeke dived steeply on H.M.S. INDOMITABLE whose close range weapons and those of H.M.S. QUALITY hit him hard and often. The aircraft burst into flames and crashed into the sea about 10 yards off the starboard bow of the ship.

No damage or casualties were sustained in either of these two attacks, apart from that caused to the radar arrays.

Meanwhile the fires in H.M.S. FORMIDABLE were soon under control, and by 1254 the ship was capable of 24 knots. It was estimated that one barrier would be in action by 1600, and that the flight deck hole would be patched by then.

At 1215 it became necessary to turn into the wind and land on fighters, although enemy aircraft were known to be still in the vicinity. Aircraft from H.M.S. FORMIDABLE were landed on the other carriers.

At 1220 a Jill* was shot down by fighters from H.M.S. INDOMITABLE and half an hour later a Val met the same fate by Seafires from H.M.S. INDEFATIGABLE. By 1420 the Bombarding Force was being manoeuvred close to the Carrier Force, and the Fleet reformed in Cruising Disposition at 1450.

As the strike programme planned for the day had been completed, and as considerable re-organisation was necessary with the flight deck of H.M.S. FORMIDABLE out of action, the Fleet commenced withdrawing to the south eastward. By 1700 H.M.S. FORMIDABLE was able to receive 13 of her Corsairs—a fine recovery.

At about 1515 Corsairs from H.M.S. VICTORIOUS intercepted and shot down a Judy to the northward.

Although at various times during the afternoon there were enemy aircraft in the vicinity, it was not until 1720 that the development of another attack became evident. This was however broken up very satisfactorily by our fighters. At 1721 a Judy, believed to be the Gestapo of the Group, was shot down from 24,000 feet to the eastward by fighters. A few minutes later Seafires from H.M.S. INDEFATIGABLE intercepted 4 Zekes to the southward and shot down 3 before the other escaped to the northward.

At 1732 a Hellcat returning for an emergency landing was fired on by H.M.S. FORMIDABLE and hit. The aircraft crashed but the pilot was rescued unhurt by H.M.S. UNDAUNTED.

At 1820 Corsairs from H.M.S. VICTORIOUS were sent to intercept a bogey to the northward. They found and shot down the Zeke.

At 1945 CTF 57 assumed tactical command. A total of 14 enemy aircraft, all airborne, were destroyed during the day, 11 by fighters, 2 shot down by gunfire including one which bounded off the deck of H.M.S. INDOMITABLE, and 1 originally damaged by gunfire but which completed its suicide dive on H.M.S. FORMIDABLE. Several small vessels around the islands were damaged. Our losses totalled 15. In combat 1 Avenger. Other causes: 11 Avengers, 1 Seafire, 1 Hellcat, 1 Corsair, including 1 Corsair and 10 Avengers by bomb damage in H.M.S. FORMIDABLE.

Tonnage of bombs dropped on targets—43½ tons plus 50 rocket projectiles.

5th May.

As the state of affairs in H.M.S. FORMIDABLE was not clear, the programme for the

day was arranged on the basis that the ship would keep 8 fighters at readiness to reinforce the CAP if required. At 0420 the ship reported that repairs to her centre boiler room were complete and that full speed was available.

A.C.1 assumed tactical command at 0500, and at 0545 the first CAP was flown off in position 23° 10' N 125° 29' E.

Runways on Miyako and Ishigaki were well bombed again, and all of them left unserviceable by the end of the day. A CAP was maintained over each island.

Three operational aircraft were found on the ground and destroyed, and a petrol dump was left blazing. It was noteworthy that no flak at all was encountered over Miyako, and it is hoped that the previous day's bombardment was responsible for this at least temporary change for the airmen.

The American Dumbo rescue aircraft was again maintained by CTF 51 between the Fleet and the target from 0830 till 1700.

A high snooper was detected at about 0730 and a long chase of 300 miles followed. This eventually finished at 0920 when Corsairs of H.M.S. FORMIDABLE, but operating from H.M.S. VICTORIOUS, splashed the Zeke 80 miles from the Fleet and from 30,000 feet—a good result.

During the day 2 Avengers escorted by fighters were sent to Keramo Retto with press material and Comdr. A. Kimmins, Royal Navy.

Enemy losses:

Destroyed—airborne 1, on ground 3; total 4.

Probably damaged—on ground 2.

Own losses:

In combat nil, operational 1 Corsair, 2 Seafires; total 3.

Tonnage of bombs dropped on targets—31 tons plus 56 R/P.

At 1905 the Fleet withdrew and set course for area Cootie. CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1945.

6th May.

At 0630 met in area Cootie, H.M. and H.M.A. Ships CRANE, RULER, STRIKER, NAPIER, NORMAN, NEPAL, AVON, WHIMBREL, PHEASANT, and R.F.A.s WAVE KING, WAVE MONARCH, SAN AMBROSIO, SAN ADOLPHO, CEDARDALE.

H.M.A.S. NAPIER joined. TF 57 vice H.M.S. KEMPENFELT with defects.

Fuelling with the tankers and exchange of aircraft with H.M.S. STRIKER continued throughout the day.

Casualties from H.M.S. FORMIDABLE were transferred to H.M.S. STRIKER, who in company with H.M.S. KEMPENFELT, took departure at 1915 for Leyte. The need for a hospital ship in the vicinity was considered and CTF 112 was requested to sail one as soon as ready if Admiralty instructions could by now be complied with. At 1534 CAP aircraft were sent to investigate a surface radar contact to the north eastward and identified a northbound U.S. armed merchant vessel in company with a U.S. hospital ship.

At 1845 the Fleet detached from the Tanker Group for the night.

U.S. Task Group 52.1 covered Sakishima.

Admiralty footnote:—

* Jill—Japanese naval torpedo-aircraft.

7th May.

At 0615 Cruising Disposition was formed on the tankers, and fuelling recommenced.

Fuelling and exchange of stores, mail and correspondence were completed by 1400, when the Fleet disengaged from the tankers.

H.M.A.S. NORMAN was ordered to escort R.F.A.s WAVE KING and WAVE MONARCH to Leyte, and H.M. Ships WHIMBREL and AVON similarly escorted R.F.A.s SAN AMBROSIO, SAN ADOLPHO and CEDAR-DALE.

During this day and yesterday H.M.S. FORMIDABLE was busy making good bomb damage, and became fully operational.

At 1400 the Fleet in Cruising Disposition took departure for the operations area.

Late this night the very satisfactory and gratifying news of the unconditional surrender of the German Armed Forces to the Allies was received. Active operations were ordered to cease at 0001B on 9th May, 1945.

U.S. Task Group 52.1 covered Sakishima.

8th May

The plan for the day was to bomb Miyako and Ishigaki, to maintain the usual island CAPS, and also to bombard Ishigaki runways and A.A. positions with the battleships and 6 in. cruisers. The Carrier Squadron, supported by both 5.25 in. cruisers and 8 destroyers were to close Ishigaki behind the bombarding force until such time as land echoes would just not interfere with air warning.

The weather deteriorated during the night, and at 0400 as the forecast gave no hope of improvement, the plan to bombard was cancelled in favour of one to carry out four bomber strikes following previous patterns.

At 0515 A.C.1 assumed tactical command, and at 0600 CAPS for the islands and Fleet were flown off in position 22° 53' N 125° 40' E. The weather was overcast and raining at the time, and the island CAPS soon reported similar conditions with the islands difficult to locate. The first strike was therefore cancelled. It was decided to remain in the operating area to await better weather, but at 1015 the island CAPS reported no improvement and the meteorological chart showed Formosa to be shut down by similar weather.

Since it was thus evident that Sakishima could be of no use to the enemy in such conditions, at 1050 the Fleet withdrew to the south eastward, maintaining a reduced CAP.

Although the weather forecast for the following day promised deterioration rather than improvement I informed Commander 5th Fleet of the withdrawal due to weather, and of my intention to strike on 9th and 10th May. Plans for bombardment on 9th May were abandoned. At 1805, just after the last CAP for the day had been flown off, visibility shut down completely with continuous heavy rain. There were indications of clearer weather to the westward and course was shaped towards it. It was with difficulty that fighters were vectored back to the Fleet and searchlights were burned to aid them. At 1905 the fighters at sea level, having sighted the searchlights, reached the Fleet and were flown on.

CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1920.

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9th May

At 0510 A.C.1 assumed tactical command. The weather although showery was much improved and continued to do so during the day.

At 0545 the CAPS were flown off in position 23° 06' N 126° 00' E. Weather over the targets was reported as satisfactory. All runways at Hirara were reported as serviceable.

Four bomber strikes were flown off during the day, two to each island, the first being launched at 0830 in position 23° 40' N 125° 34' E. All runways were re-cratered, a direct hit was scored on one aircraft on the ground at Miyako. A motor transport park at Ishigaki was attacked, three vehicles being destroyed for certain.

Low flying fighters discovered a Val hidden in a cave. Firing through the entrance to the cave they destroyed the enemy in flames.

At 1145 the Fleet was sighted by a bogey which approached within 30 miles. Fighters drove it off but were unable to catch it.

At 1645 bogeys were detected very low 22 miles to the westward, coming in fast. Four Seafires intercepted at 15 miles, but allowed themselves to be all decoyed away by one aircraft which they shot down. Meanwhile four other enemy planes evaded another division of Seafires, and after climbing to about 3,000 feet penetrated to the Fleet.

From 1650 onwards the Fleet was radically manoeuvred by emergency turns at 22 knots. One minute after such a turn of 60° to starboard was executed, a suicider made a 10° angle dive onto H.M.S. VICTORIOUS from her starboard quarter. The enemy was well hit by close range weapons but crashed onto the flight deck near the forward lift. The resulting fire was quickly brought under control, but the bomb explosion holed the flight deck, put the accelerator out of action, rendered one 4.5 in. gun unserviceable, and damaged one lift hoisting motor.

At 1656 another Kamikaze made a shallow power glide from astern on H.M.S. VICTORIOUS. Though hit hard by gunfire, and well on fire, it hit the flight deck aft a glancing blow, and burning furiously passed over the side. Damage to the ship was confined to one arrester unit out of action, a 40 mm. gun director destroyed, and four Corsairs on deck damaged beyond repair.

Casualties from both these attacks were three killed, four seriously injured, and 15 wounded.

At 1657 a third suicider made a pass at H.M.S. VICTORIOUS but then shifted target to H.M.S. HOWE further ahead, and approached her from the starboard quarter in a long shallow dive. This time the attacker was hit at a more reasonable range, and continued to be so until he crashed in flames 100 yards from H.M.S. HOWE after passing over the quarterdeck.

At 1705 a fourth Kamikaze approached H.M.S. FORMIDABLE and then H.M.S. INDOMITABLE, being engaged by both ships without apparent result. It then turned and dived into the after deck park of H.M.S. FORMIDABLE.

There was a large explosion and fire and a great deal of smoke. Speed was reduced to 15 knots to aid control of the fire which was

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

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

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

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

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

CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 2000.

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

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

10th May

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

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

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

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

To combat this, it was decided:—

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

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

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

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

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

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

11th May

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

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

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

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

12th May

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

The radar pickets, H.M. Ships SWIFT-SURE with KEMPENFELT, and UGANDA with WESSEX, were stationed 12 miles 315° and 225° respectively from the Fleet centre.

Cruising Disposition was formed.

In overcast weather the Fleet and island CAPS and the first bomber strike were flown off at 0540, twelve minutes before sunrise, from a position 23° 40' N 126° 51' E.

Four bomber strikes were flown off during the day. One attacked Ishigaki and three Miyako; a second strike on Ishigaki had been planned but had to be cancelled owing to weather conditions. At Ishigaki, Miyara and Ishigaki runways, which were found to be serviceable, were again put out of action and A.A. and dispersal areas were strafed. No new aircraft nor activity were found. The squadron leader of 1844 Squadron was regrettably lost in his Hellcat to A.A. fire when bombing A.A. positions.

At Miyako, one runway at Hirara and both at Nobara were found to be serviceable. By the end of the first strike this position was reversed, and subsequent strikes attacked A.A. positions and installations. A large oil fire was started, a direct hit made on a 4 in. A.A. Battery, Hirara Barracks hit, and 3 aircraft found on the ground were probably damaged.

An Avenger with engine trouble ditched 75 miles west of the Fleet at 0805. The U.S.S. BLUEFISH proceeded to the position (in the Air Surface Zone), and at 1515 rescued the crew. A CAP of four Corsairs was sent to cover the submarine. The Dumbo aircraft, maintained in readiness at Keramo Retto, took off and also assisted in directing this rescue.

At 0937 another Avenger was forced to ditch, giving a position 100 miles in error from the actual position. The helio flashing of the crew at 1540 was fortunately seen by Fireflies returning to the Fleet, and H.M.S. KEMPENFELT was led to the spot by Dumbo aircraft and rescued them.

No enemy aircraft were airborne in the vicinity of the Fleet or islands during the day.

At 1915 the radar pickets rejoined. At 1930 the dusk CAP was landed on and the Fleet withdrew to the southward for the night.

CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 2010.

The score for the day was:—

3 enemy aircraft probably damaged on the ground.

65½ tons of bombs and 32 R/P directed at targets.

A 200 ton coaster damaged.

Own losses:—in combat 1 Hellcat, 1 Avenger; operationally 1 Avenger, 1 Corsair, 1 Seafire; total 5.

13th May.

At 0510 A.C.1 assumed tactical command.

Radar pickets and counter-Kamikaze destroyers were stationed, and at 0540 Fleet and Islands CAPS were flown off in position 24° 20' N 126° 55' E in fine weather.

The island CAPS reported that Ishigaki runways were again serviceable and a thin strip of Miyara runway had been repaired. At Miyako one runway at Hirara and both at Nobara had been made possibly serviceable.

Four bomber strikes were flown during the day, three to Miyako and one to Ishigaki.

At Miyako all runways were left unserviceable, a barracks was strafed, 8 barges were hit, and 3 major oil fires started.

The position of a new revetted dispersal area discovered at Hirara was reported to the Commander 5th Fleet and other interested U.S. authorities.

At Ishigaki camouflaged buildings and storage dumps were hit, as were two radio stations one of which was left in flames.

At 0948 a possible submarine contact was obtained close to the Fleet in position 24° 20' N 126° 48' E. Three destroyers were detached to hunt with a CAP of 4 Corsairs.

At 1203 a possible contact was attacked with depth charges, and 2 Avengers were flown off for Fleet ASP, and another armed with depth charges was sent to assist the hunt. The possible contact was later reported as stationary, and although the hunt was continued throughout the afternoon no S/M contact was found, nor is it now considered that a S/M was ever present.

An Avenger returning to land on H.M.S. FORMIDABLE was unable to lower flaps and one wheel. As it was undesirable to risk damage to the only remaining barrier in H.M.S. FORMIDABLE, the aircraft was ordered to land on H.M.S. INDOMITABLE. This the pilot did with skill and judgment and with very minor damage to his aircraft.

Again there was no enemy air activity near the Fleet or islands.

At 1920 the dusk CAP was landed on and the Fleet withdrew to fuel in area Cootie.

CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1950.

The score for the day was:—

Enemy aircraft destroyed and damaged, nil.

62½ tons bombs plus 34 R/P directed at targets.

9 camouflaged barges and a few small craft damaged.

Own losses:—in combat nil; operationally 1 Seafire.

14th May.

At 0630 in area Cootie met H.M. Ships RULER, CRANE, WOODCOCK, PHEASANT, WEASEL and R.F.A.s ARNDALE and DINGLEDALE from whom fuelling commenced. The other and incoming Tanker Group were late at the rendezvous. They were found by search aircraft from the CAP and directed to the Fleet and consisted of H.M. Ships STRIKER, NIZAM and R.F.A.s WAVE KING and WAVE MONARCH. They were in station by 1100.

Forty tons of bombs were transferred by H.M.S. BLACK PRINCE from H.M.S. FORMIDABLE to H.M.S. INDEFATIGABLE. This was necessary because the dimensions of American bombs supplied to ships at Leyte had prevented the full number required being stowed in H.M.S. INDEFATIGABLE. This transfer was made expeditiously, rate of embarkation rising to about one a minute as experience was gained.

During the forenoon, search aircraft were sent to direct the hospital ship TJITJALENGKA to the Fleet. This ship had been sent at my request to remain at call within 30 miles of a position 85 miles to the eastward of the normal dawn position of the Fleet in the fuelling area. Casualties by now fit to be moved were transferred to TJITJALENGKA by destroyer in the afternoon.

During the day Sakishima was covered by TU 52.1.3.

At 1910 the Fleet disengaged from the Tanker Group for the night.

At this stage it became necessary to consider the date on which the Fleet would leave the operations area for major storing in the rear bases. The tankers and repair ships of the Fleet Train, based at Leyte, require early notice of a firm date for redistribution in order that with their slow speed they might reach their new stations in time to meet the Fleet and fulfil their functions.

As the Fleet was due at the storing ports early in June, and as it was evident that a considerable amount of work would be required to make good the battle damage to carriers, it appeared desirable to conclude operations with the twelfth strike day on 25th May, and so ensure the Fleet being ready to resume operations when required in July.

After consultation with A.C.1, I accordingly sent the following signal:—

Action COM 5th Fleet C IN C PAC both
Info C:in-C., B.P.F. VA(Q) FONAS(A)
CTF 112 From CTF 57

Propose with your concurrence TF57 continues present strikes until 24 and 25 May then CTF57 in KING GEORGE V, 3 destroyers proceed Guam arriving 1000 28th leave 0600 30th for Manus. If you concur request authority these four ships fuel with U.S. supplies Guam. Remainder TF57 to Manus after fuelling Cootie 26th arriving in forenoon 30th. Could carry out further strikes if losses remain light on 28th and 29th May which would delay above programme for four days. CTF112 will divert slow tankers to Manus or Cootie which necessitates early decision on your needs.

15th May.

The Fleet reformed on the Tanker Group at 0630, and fuelling and exchange of stores, aircraft and correspondence was continued and completed by 1700.

H.M. Ships TROUBRIDGE and TENACIOUS joined TF 57.

H.M.A.S. NEPAL from TU 112.2.5 joined TF 57.

Captain D.25 in GRENVILLE joined TU 112.2.5 to be left in the servicing area, and Captain D.4 in H.M.S. QUILLIAM assumed Senior Officer Destroyers. This was done, with the concurrence of Rear Admiral Destroyers, in order to give different Captains D experience as the Senior Officer.

The following were detached to Leyte in the afternoon:—

H.M. Ships STRIKER and NAPIER.

H.M.A.S. NIZAM with R.F.A.s WAVE KING and WAVE MONARCH.

H.M. Ships PHEASANT and WOODCOCK with R.F.A.s ARNDALE and DINGLEDALE.

It had been hoped that H.M.A.S. NIZAM would join TF 57 for the next two strike periods, but she was not fit for operations owing to a small number of cases of infantile paralysis, for which she remained in quarantine.

TU 52.1.3 again covered Sakishima to-day.

At 1705 the Fleet disengaged from the Tanker Group and departure was taken for the operations area.

During the day the following signals were received:—

CTF 57. From COM 5th Fleet
Not necessary keep up coverage of Sakishima after 25th.

CTF 57. From CINCPAC
Arrival KING GEORGE V and 3 destroyers Guam 28th May approved. Will be pleased welcome you. Guam has available fuel for topping off.

16th May.

At 0510 A.C.1 assumed tactical command. Radar pickets were sent out and counter-Kamikaze destroyers closed their carriers.

At 0540 in position 23° 40' N 126° 51' E the Fleet and island CAPS and the first bomber strike for Miyako were flown off.

Five bomber strikes were sent to the islands during the day, three to Miyako and two to Ishigaki. As the result of these and the efforts of the CAPS, all runways were made unserviceable; four new aircraft which appeared operational were strafed but did not burn, 3 others were damaged; 10 small craft of various classes were damaged and four of them left in a sinking condition; 4 lorry loads of Japanese troops were exterminated; a large explosion was caused in Ohama town; 5 direct hits with S.A.P. bombs were made on a large cave shelter.

Several of our planes were damaged by flak.

One Avenger taking off from H.M.S. FORMIDABLE ditched; H.M.S. QUALITY rescued the crew one of whom was injured. A Corsair from H.M.S. VICTORIOUS developed engine trouble at 20,000 feet and was forced to ditch near the Fleet; H.M.S. TENACIOUS rescued the pilot.

At 1735 a Corsair from H.M.S. VICTORIOUS ditched 3 miles from Miyako; the Lifeguard submarine U.S.S. BLUEFISH was informed and made another skilful rescue by picking up this pilot during the night. The Dumbo aircraft from Kerama Retto, unaware of the rescue, as was A.C.1 at the time, carried out a search the following morning. These fine efforts by the American rescue submarines and aircraft have been greatly appreciated.

The dusk CAP landed on at 1935 and the Fleet withdrew to the southward for the night. No enemy were airborne in the vicinity during the day.

CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1950.

Seven enemy aircraft were damaged on the ground. 77½ tons of bombs and 112 R/P were expended on the targets, 2 suicide type boats were sunk, 2 small craft were probably sunk, and a large number of assorted types of barge and small craft were damaged, several being

left in flames. Our own losses were:—in combat 1 Corsair; operationally 2 Corsairs, 1 Avenger, 1 Seafire.

17th May.

At 0510 A.C.1 assumed tactical command, and the usual radar pickets and counter-Kamikaze destroyers were stationed.

The day broke with very light winds of only one or two knots, a state of affairs which persisted and proved a handicap throughout the day. The state of boiler brickwork in several ships, and the defective centre stern tube bush in H.M.S. INDOMITABLE, made high speeds most undesirable. Without high speed, little safety margin was left for operating aircraft.

At 0540 the Fleet and island CAPS were flown off from a position 85 miles 110° from Miyako. It had been planned to send in four bomber strikes, two to each island, but the second strike to Ishigaki was cancelled owing to damage to H.M.S. VICTORIOUS barriers by deck crashes, and the very light winds accentuating the defective stern bush in H.M.S. INDOMITABLE. All airfields were left unserviceable except Miyara which may not have been sufficiently cratered. Ohama and Hirara towns were bombed, and barges and small craft were well strafed.

A number of Japanese soldiers were discovered; their names will in due course be recorded in Yasakuni Shrine.

At 0742 a Corsair making an emergency landing on H.M.S. VICTORIOUS removed 2 arrester wires, crashed through both barriers, burst into flames and passed over the side. On its way it seriously damaged 2 Corsairs and 1 Avenger in the deck park. One officer and one rating were mortally injured, 2 ratings seriously injured and two others slightly hurt.

The ship reported that 2 jury barriers would be rigged but that it would take some time to do so. It became necessary therefore to distribute the ship's airborne aircraft to other carriers. At 1145 H.M.S. VICTORIOUS reported that 2 jury barriers were ready, and arrangements were therefore made to land on her aircraft. Though the first landed on safely, the second aircraft bounced in the gap left by the removal of the 2 arrester wires and demolished one of the jury barriers. The second jury barrier was removed 2 hours later by a similar cause.

As a result 20 aircraft from the ship had to be accommodated in other carriers, causing congestion and offering three attractive targets of deck parked aircraft to any Kamikaze. Fortunately enemy aircraft were conspicuous by their absence throughout the day.

At 1200 a Hellcat from H.M.S. INDOMITABLE was ordered to bale out just ahead of the Fleet as the pilot was unable to release an armed bomb. The pilot was picked up by H.M.S. TROUBRIDGE.

By 1715 H.M.S. VICTORIOUS had once again rigged jury barriers and was able to accept some of her aircraft from other carriers.

CAPS were maintained until 1915, when radar pickets were recalled, and the Fleet withdrew to area Cootie to fuel.

CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1940.

Enemy aircraft destroyed or damaged, nil. 56 tons of bombs and 30 R/P expended on targets. Many barges and small craft damaged and several left burning. Own losses:—in combat 1 Corsair; operationally 1 Hellcat, 1 Corsair, 1 Avenger, 1 Seafire.

I informed British authorities concerned of the actual dates for arrival of units of the Fleet at the various ports of replenishment.

18th May.

At 0545 met in area Cootie H.M. Ships CRANE, RULER, GRENVILLE, CHASER, NORMAN, WHIMBREL, BENDIGO, PARRETT, WEASEL and R.F.A.s SAN AMBROSIO, SAN ADOLPHO, CEDARDALE. The Fleet formed on the Tanker Group and fuelling and exchange of aircraft and stores commenced.

H.M.S. BLACK PRINCE transferred bombs from H.M.S. FORMIDABLE to H.M.S. INDEFATIGABLE.

At 1103 H.M.S. FORMIDABLE was observed to be on fire, caused by a Corsair in the hangar accidentally firing her guns into an Avenger; the latter exploded. Fighting this serious fire was made difficult by the fact that the fire curtains were out of action due to earlier enemy suicide attacks. It was extinguished by drenching the hangar, but at a cost of 7 Avengers and 21 Corsairs in conditions varying from complete loss to flyable duds. By the evening the Commanding Officer reported that he considered his ship capable of operating with jury lighting in the hangar. Arrangements were therefore made to replace her damaged aircraft as far as possible, and for the ship to continue operations at any rate for the next strike period. As the repaired barriers in H.M.S. VICTORIOUS could not be guaranteed to stand up to further barrier crashes or enemy damage the availability of H.M.S. FORMIDABLE's flight deck was an important factor, and in any case, it would only lower her morale were she unable to continue in the Fleet.

At 1800 the Tanker Group were turned to the reverse course to enable them to rendezvous with the Ammunition Carrier ROBERT MAERSK expected in position Cootie (1) at 0600 the following morning. Meanwhile the transfer of bombs by cruiser continued until dark.

H.M.S. WHIMBREL was detached with mails to Leyte.

American Task Group 52.1 covered Sakishima.

19th May.

At 0645 the Fleet again formed on the Tanker Group, which now included the ROBERT MAERSK with supplies of bombs, and H.M.S. CAIRNS. The transfer of bombs, fuel and stores was continued. H.M.S. VICTORIOUS and later H.M.S. INDOMITABLE went alongside ROBERT MAERSK and embarked bombs by whip and inhaul method, the rate of transfer being about 75 bombs per hour.

Continuous rain and low visibility in the afternoon prevented flying and seriously upset the numbers of replenishment aircraft to be flown in to H.M.S. FORMIDABLE and the flyable duds which were to be flown from her to H.M.S. CHASER.

Hospital ship TJITJALENGKA was contacted by aircraft and directed to the Fleet; she embarked a few sick and casualties.

H.M.A.S. NORMAN joined TF 57 replacing H.M.A.S. NEPAL. Captain D. 27 in H.M.S. KEMPENFELT assumed Senior Officer Destroyers for experience, vice Captain D. 4 in QUILLIAM who remained with the Force.

At 1800 detached H.M. Ships BENDIGO and CAIRNS with R.F.A.s SAN AMBROSIO, SAN ADOLPHO and CEDARDALE to Manus. H.M.S. PARRETT acted as additional escort to them until dusk on 21st May, with orders to detach and proceed to Leyte at that time. At 1930 H.M.A.S. NEPAL was detached to Leyte to augment the escorts available to CTF 112 for the forthcoming move south of the Fleet Train.

At 1930 the Fleet took departure for the operations area.

American Task Group 52.1 covered Sakishima.

20th May.

The flying-off position for the day was to be 23° 39' N 126° 40' E.

First light was at 0458 when clouds were low and about 8/10 and the horizon clear. At 0500 the four "KK" destroyers including H.M.S. QUILLIAM, left the screen as previously arranged, and started to close their carriers to form astern of them. The Fleet was proceeding at 16 knots.

At 0510 A.C.1 assumed tactical command. The clouds were low and rain had started. A.C.1 therefore ordered the postponement of flying off aircraft for 15 minutes.

At 0515 the Fleet ran into dense fog. At 0524 H.M.S. QUILLIAM, endeavouring to form astern of H.M.S. INDOMITABLE, collided with her. Fortunately no casualties were sustained, but superficial above water damage was caused to H.M.S. INDOMITABLE, and serious damage to the bow of H.M.S. QUILLIAM. As soon as the damaged destroyer was clear of the screen, H.M.A.S. NORMAN was ordered to take her in tow. At 0615 H.M.S. BLACK PRINCE was sent to stand by both ships and escort them to area Cootie. The Commander Logistic Support Group was later ordered by signal to despatch from area Cootie H.M. Tug WEASEL to tow, and H.M.S. RULER to provide air cover.

H.M.A.S. NORMAN experienced considerable difficulty in towing H.M.S. QUILLIAM stern first, as the wrecked bow hanging in the water acted as a formidable hard over rudder. By 1300 H.M.S. BLACK PRINCE had taken over the tow, but the same difficulty restricted the towing speed to 3 and later to 5½ knots.

As the weather remained unsuitable for flying, the Fleet was manoeuvred until 0745 so as to cover the damaged destroyer.

At 0745, by which time the weather had improved slightly CAPS and the first strike were flown off. Although 4 bomber strikes were planned, weather conditions throughout the day made only one strike possible and seriously hampered its effectiveness.

Strike Able, after only finding the island with great difficulty, bombed Hirara town in Miyako through a clear patch of cloud, while Fireflies rocketed ground installations.

Strikes Baker and Charlie had to be cancelled for weather, and the outlook for strike Dog was far from promising. However, in view of CTF 51's signal stressing the importance of evening strikes on Sakishima in order to reduce the weight of dusk and moonlight attacks on Okinawa, it was decided to make the attempt, and the strike took off at 1530 for Ishigaki. The weather however was so bad that the strike was unable to get through to the island and had to be brought back to the Fleet.

During the forenoon CTG 99.2's signal was received, indicating the intention of that group to strike Miyako with shore based aircraft at 1700. It was therefore decided to withdraw CAPS from that island by 1600. The strike planned for Ishigaki at 1630 was not altered. These intentions were communicated to CTF 51 and CTG 99.2. In the event, however, and presumably because of weather, CTG 99.2 cancelled his strike.

At 1210 two bogeys were detected 50 miles to the westward tracking 040°. Fighters sent to intercept found both aircraft were friendly bombers. No information of their presence nor mission was known to this Force.

At 1000 a Corsair from H.M.S. VICTORIOUS, heavily hit by flak, was reported to have ditched. Fellow Corsairs searched without success for the pilot who they consider could not have survived. At 1529 a Corsair ditched on taking off from H.M.S. FORMIDABLE. The pilot was recovered unhurt by the KK destroyer.

At 1845 the usual radar pickets were recalled and by 1900 all CAPS had landed on; the Fleet withdrew to the southward for the night, and CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1930. At 2100 TF 57 passed close to H.M.S. BLACK PRINCE who reported that H.M.S. QUILLIAM was satisfactorily in tow.

Enemy aircraft destroyed or damaged, nil.
1 junk and 3 barges were damaged.

Bombs dropped on targets, 6½ tons plus 24 R/P.

Own losses:—in combat 1 Corsair; operationally 1 Hellcat, 1 Seafire.

21st May.

A.C.1 assumed tactical command at 0510. Flying-off had been planned for 0540 from a position 85 miles 110° from Miyako. The weather at dawn was similar to the previous day except that the Fleet was clear of fog patches. Flying-off was therefore postponed. Four Hellcats were flown off at 0600 to investigate the weather within a 30 mile radius. They reported clear weather to east and west, and improving weather to the northward. Acting on this information the first strike was flown off at 0655.

Five bomber strikes were sent in, three to Miyako and two to Ishigaki.

Strikes for Miyako were flown off at 0655, 1210 and 1610. Nobara and Hirara runways were well plastered with bombs, 2 fires started in the warehouse area of Hirara town, and a radio weather station was hit. A tented camp was strafed.

The Ishigaki strikes took off at 0855 and 1440. Both runways at Ishigaki field were left unserviceable and Miyara airfield was hit.

Low cloud varying between 7/10 and 9/10 made bombing difficult at both islands.

At 1423 a high snooper was detected approaching the Fleet from the westward. Fighters were ordered to 30,000 feet and at 1442 intercepted 36 miles to the south westward at 26,000 feet. The enemy, a Myrt, was shot down 4 minutes later by Hellcats from H.M.S. **INDOMITABLE**.

One airborne enemy aircraft was shot down. Several barges were damaged.

55½ tons of bombs plus 95 R/P were dropped on targets.

Own losses:—in combat nil; operationally 1 Avenger and 2 Seafires.

During the day Commander Third Fleet's signal was received. This indicated the nature of future operations for the British Pacific Fleet. In the light of this, and after consulting A.C.1, it was decided to release H.M.S. **FORMIDABLE** early for repair of battle damage. It was felt that this was necessary to ensure that 4 carriers would be available for operations on completion of the forthcoming storing period. This decision was communicated to Commander Fifth Fleet.

At 1930 the dusk CAP were landed on, radar pickets were recalled, and the Fleet withdrew to area Cootie. CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1930.

22nd May.

At 0700 in position Cootie (1) the following were met:—

(a) H.M. Tug **WEASEL** towing H.M.S. **QUILLIAM** escorted by H.M. Ships **BLACK PRINCE**, **GRENVILLE**, **NORMAN** and **RULER**.

(b) Ships of the Fleet Train consisting of H.M. and H.M.A. Ships **CRANE**, **CHASER**, **SPEAKER**, **NAPIER**, **AVON** and **FINDHORN**, and R.F.A.s **WAVE KING**, **WAVE MONARCH**, **AASE MAERSK**, **SAN AMADO**, **ROBERT MAERSK**.

(c) Reinforcements H.M. Ships **QUADRANT** and **TERMAGENT** who joined TF 57.

Captain D. 25 in H.M.S. **GRENVILLE** rejoined TF 57 as Senior Officer Destroyers, and H.M.S. **WESSEX** took her place as escort to TU 112.2.5.

Fuelling, and exchange of aircraft and stores and bombs, were carried out throughout the day.

After receiving mails and discharging excess complement the damaged H.M.S. **QUILLIAM** proceeded in tow of H.M. Tug **WEASEL** to Leyte, H.M.A.S. **NORMAN** acting as escort. CTF 112 was requested to arrange for a larger tug to meet and relieve H.M.S. **WEASEL**. (The American tug **TURKEY** was kindly sent out from Leyte, where the tow arrived safely on 28th May.)

At 1800 H.M.S. **FORMIDABLE** was detached with orders to proceed to Manus and then Sydney to expedite repair of battle damage. She was escorted by H.M. Ships **KEMPENFELT** and **WHIRLWIND**, both of whom were due for refit.

American Task Unit 52.1.3 covered Saki-shima on this day.

At 1915 the Fleet disengaged from the Tanker Group for the night.

23rd May.

At 0745 the Fleet reformed on the Tanker Group, and fuelling and exchange of stores were continued.

H.M.N.Z.S. **ACHILLES** joined TF 57.

During the day 2 Hellcats from H.M.S. **CHASER** crashed into the sea: neither pilot was recovered.

Owing to the plunger block on the centre shaft overheating and wiping in H.M.S. **INDOMITABLE**, her speed had to be limited to 22 knots.

Sakishima was covered by American Task Unit 52.1.3.

At 1800 H.M. and H.M.A. Ships **CHASER**, **SPEAKER** and **NAPIER** were detached for Manus.

At 1815 the Fleet detached from the Tanker Group taking departure for the operations area with only 3 carriers in company. It had been hoped to bombard Miyako on the morrow, but with the reduced number of aircraft available it was judged wiser to forego this plan in favour of an entire air effort.

24th May.

At 0510 A.C.1 assumed tactical command.

In view of the absence of H.M.S. **FORMIDABLE**, it was planned to send in only 4 strikes each day, the first to be flown off 2 hours later than normal so as to provide late afternoon strikes as desired by CTF 51.

At dawn visibility was low, the sky overcast with rain and drizzle. Flying-off was postponed. At 0900 four fighters flown off reported weather improving slowly in the vicinity, and at 1000 it was decided to make 3 strikes during the day, the flying-off position being 23° 40' N 126° 52' E.

Strikes on Miyako were flown off at 1045 and 1515. Cloud over the target was 10/10 at 6,000 to 9,000 feet. Nobara runways were left unserviceable and Hirara runways were hit. Hirara town and Nishibara were hit by 12 and 4 bombs respectively. A radio station was rocketted, as were camouflaged buildings in the wooded area near Hirara where one large explosion was observed.

The Ishigaki strike took off at 1245. All runways at Ishigaki airfield were left unserviceable. Three hits with 1,600 lb. bombs were observed on a suspected aircraft storage in a low cliff on the north side of Ishigaki east-west runway. The CAP over Ishigaki found on the ground and probably damaged 2 aircraft believed to be operational.

After a day with no enemy air activity in the vicinity the last CAP was landed on at 1907 and radar pickets were recalled. The Fleet withdrew to the southward for the night, and CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1940.

2 enemy aircraft were probably damaged on the ground. 31 tons of bombs plus 40 R/P were dropped on targets. Own losses nil.

25th May.

A.C.I assumed tactical command at 0510.

The unfavourable dawn weather cleared earlier to-day so that the first strike was able to be flown off at 0600 in position 23° 40' N 126° 52' E.

3 strikes were sent to Miyako, flying off at 0600, 1115, and 1400. Results of the last strike could not be observed owing to low cloud. 26 hits were observed on Nobara runways which were left unserviceable, and 14 hits were made on Hirara runways. The Amphibious Tank Bases, a barracks, and barges at Osaki were attacked. A fire was started at Sukama town, and the suicide boat base was rocketted.

At Ishigaki 8 bomb hits were made on each of the main Ishigaki and Miyara airfields runways.

It was observed that progress was being made in levelling a new airstrip near Hegina airfield.

The returning strike from Ishigaki made contact with U.S.S. BLUEFISH, who reported that during the previous night lights had been observed on Ishigaki airfield. This enterprising submarine commander had therefore bombarded the airfield.

At about 1700 a Corsair returning to the Fleet ditched near her carrier. The pilot was picked up unhurt by the attendant destroyer. There was no enemy air activity in the vicinity all day. All aircraft were flown on by 1910 and the Fleet withdrew.

CTF 57 in H.M.S. KING GEORGE V with H.M. Ships TROUBRIDGE, TENACIOUS and TERMAGENT detached at 2200 and set course for Guam.

The remainder of the Fleet, under the command of A.C.I, set course for area Cootie to top off ships with fuel as necessary for them to reach Manus, and thence to disperse to their rear bases for major storing.

The following signals were subsequently exchanged between C IN C PAC and CTF 57:—

CTF 57 Info C.-in-C., B.P.F. C IN C PAC ADV 5th Fleet

From COM 5th Fleet

I would express to you, to your officers and to your men, after two months operations as a Fifth Fleet Task Force, my appreciation of your fine work and co-operative spirit. Task Force 57 has mirrored the great traditions of the Royal Navy to the American Task Forces.—Spruance.

COM 5th Fleet Info C IN C PAC ADV C.-in-C., B.P.F.

From CTF 57

We are proud to have been in a position to lend a hand in this crucial operation and hope we may continue so doing until Victory. Will pass your generous message with great personal pleasure to all of the British Pacific Fleet who have been honoured by serving under you. Regret my Flagship and I were not able to greet you on your return to Guam.

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