



SUPPLEMENT

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REPORT OF AN ACTION WITH THE ITALIAN FLEET OFF CALABRIA, 9th JULY, 1940.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 29th January, 1941, by Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, K.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Station.

H.M.S. WARSPITE

29th January, 1941.

Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships the accompanying narrative of operations by the Mediterranean Fleet during the period 7th to 13th July, 1940 (Operation M.A.5)*, which included the brief engagement which took place with the Italian Fleet off the Calabrian Coast on the afternoon of 9th July.

2. It was during these operations that the Fleet first received serious attention from the Italian Air Force, and Calabria was the first time contact was made with Italian surface forces, other than destroyers.

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

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

5. From an examination of enemy reports it appears that the enemy forces consisted of two battleships, 16 (possibly 17 or 18) cruisers, of which 6 (and possibly 7) were 8-inch, and 25 to 30 destroyers.

6. It will be noted that the whole action took place at very long range and that WARSPITE was the only capital ship which got within range of the enemy battleships. MALAYA fired a few salvos which fell some 3,000 yards short. ROYAL SOVEREIGN, owing to her lack of speed, never got into action at all.

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

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

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

10. Our cruisers—there were only four in action—were badly outnumbered and at times came under a very heavy fire. They were superbly handled by Vice-Admiral J. C. Tovey,

Admiralty footnote—

* Operation M A 5—an operation in the form of a sweep by the Fleet in the Central Mediterranean designed to give cover to two convoys on passage from Malta to Alexandria

C.B., D.S.O., who by his skilful manoeuvring managed to maintain a position in the van and to hold the enemy cruiser squadrons, and at the same time avoid damage to his own force. WARSPITE was able to assist him with her fire in the early stages of the action.

11. The enemy's smoke tactics were impressive and the smoke screens laid by his destroyers were very effective in completely covering his high speed retirement. With his excess speed of at least 5 knots there was little hope of catching him once he had decided to break off the action. An aircraft torpedo hit on one of his battleships was the only chance and this unfortunately did not occur.

12. The chase was continued under exceedingly heavy bombing attacks until the British Fleet was 25 miles from the Calabrian Coast, and was then reluctantly abandoned, the destroyers being very short of fuel and the enemy fleet well below the horizon.

13. A feature of the action was the value, and in some cases the amusement, derived from intercepted plain language enemy signals.

14. My remarks on the bombing attacks experienced by the Fleet during the course of these operations have already been forwarded.

15. I cannot conclude these remarks without a reference to H.M.S. EAGLE. This obsolescent aircraft carrier, with only 17 Swordfish embarked, found and kept touch with the enemy fleet, flew off two striking forces of 9 torpedo bombers within the space of 4 hours, both of which attacked, and all aircraft returned. 24 hours later a torpedo striking force was launched on shipping in Augusta and throughout the 5 days operations EAGLE maintained constant A/S patrols in daylight and carried out several searches. Much of EAGLE's aircraft operating work was done in the fleeting intervals between, and even during, bombing attacks and I consider her performance reflects great credit on Captain A. M. Bridge, Royal Navy, her Commanding Officer.

Individual pilots and observers have already been rewarded for their work during these operations.

16. The meagre material results derived from this brief meeting with the Italian Fleet were naturally very disappointing to me and all under my command, but the action was not without value. It must have shown the Italians that their Air Force and submarines cannot stop our Fleet penetrating into the Central Mediterranean and that only their main fleet can seriously interfere with our operating there. It established, I think, a certain degree of moral ascendancy, since although superior in battleships, our Fleet was heavily outnumbered in cruisers and destroyers, and the Italians had strong shore based air forces within easy range, compared to our few carrier borne aircraft.

On our side the action has shown those without previous war experience how difficult it is to hit with the gun at long range, and therefore the necessity of closing in, when this can be done, in order to get decisive results. It showed that high level bombing, even on the heavy and accurate scale experienced during these operations, yields few hits and that it is more alarming than dangerous.

Finally, these operations and the action off Calabria produced throughout the Fleet a determination to overcome the air menace and not to let it interfere with our freedom of manoeuvre and hence our control of the Mediterranean.

(Signed) A. B. CUNNINGHAM.

Admiral.
Commander-in-Chief,
Mediterranean.

NARRATIVE

FLEET OPERATIONS—PERIOD, 7TH TO 13TH JULY, 1940.

The Mediterranean Fleet, less RAMILLIES and the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, left Alexandria on 7th July to carry out Operation M.A.5, the object being the safe and timely arrival at Alexandria of two convoys from Malta with evacuees and Fleet stores.

2. It was intended that the Fleet should reach a position of cover East of Cape Passero p.m. on 9th July, detaching destroyers to Malta, which with JERVIS and DIAMOND, who were already at Malta, would sail p.m. escorting the convoys. It was also intended to carry out operations against the Sicilian Coast on the 9th.

3. The fast convoy, M.F.One, consisted of the Egyptian ship EL NIL, the ex-Italian ship RODI and the British ship KNIGHT OF MALTA. The slow convoy, M.S.One, consisted of the British ships ZEELAND, KIRKLAND and MASIRAH and the Norwegian ship NOVASLI.

4. The Fleet sailed from Alexandria in three groups:—

Force A—7th Cruiser Squadron* and destroyer STUART.

Force B—Commander-in-Chief in WARSPITE, with destroyers NUBIAN, MOHAWK, HERO, HERWARD and DECOY.

Force C—Rear-Admiral, 1st Battle Squadron† in ROYAL SOVEREIGN, with MALAYA, EAGLE and destroyers HYPERION, HOSTILE, HASTY, ILEX, IMPERIAL, DAINTY, DEFENDER, JUNO, JANUS, VAMPIRE and VOYAGER.

5. All forces were clear of the harbour by noon on 8th July and proceeded as follows:—

Force A—To pass through position 35° 00' N, 21° 30' E.

Force B—To pass through position 34° 15' N, 24° 50' E.

Force C—To pass through position 33° 20' N, 27° 50' E.

6. LIVERPOOL, who was at Port Said, having just arrived there after transporting troops to Aden, sailed to rendezvous direct with Vice-Admiral (D).‡

Flying Boat Patrols.

7. The following flying boat patrols were arranged by 201 Group (R.A.F.):—

9th, 10th and 11th July—Continuous patrol on lines Malta-Cape Spartivento and Cape Colonne-Corfu.

Admiralty footnotes —

* The 7th Cruiser Squadron consisted of ORION, NEPTUNE, SYDNEY, GLOUCESTER and LIVERPOOL.

† Rear-Admiral 1st Battle Squadron—Rear-Admiral H. D. Pridham-Wippell.

‡ Vice-Admiral (D)—Vice-Admiral J. C. Tovey, C.B., D.S.O.

8th July—Flying boats on passage Malta-Zante-Malta.

12th July—Flying boats on passage Malta-Zante-Alexandria.

13th July—To a depth of 60 miles to the Westward of convoy M.S.One.

8. At 2339/7th July when in position $32^{\circ} 35' N$, $28^{\circ} 30' E$., HASTY sighted an Italian U-boat on passage on the surface at 1,000 yards range. A full pattern depth charge attack was made and the U-boat was probably sunk. At 0100/8 when rejoining Rear-Admiral, 1st Battle Squadron, another attack was carried out on a confirmed contact. It is considered that this attack damaged a second U-boat.

9. The night passed without incident, the Commander-in-Chief with Force B setting a mean line of advance of 305 degrees at 20 knots. At 0800/8 IMPERIAL was sighted returning to harbour with a burst feed tank.

10. At 0807 a report was received from PHOENIX of two enemy battleships and four destroyers in position $35^{\circ} 36' N$, $18^{\circ} 28' E$., steering 180 degrees at 0515. She attacked at extreme range but the attack was apparently unsuccessful.

As it was suspected from this report that this force might be covering an important convoy, Vice-Admiral, Malta, was ordered to arrange for a flying boat to locate and shadow this force. The course of the Fleet was maintained pending further information.

Two submarines were sighted by EAGLE's A/S patrols, one of which was attacked with bombs.

11. In the meantime all forces were subjected to heavy bombing attacks by aircraft which appeared to come from the Dodecanese. Seven attacks were delivered on WARSPITE between 1205 and 1812, about 50 bombs being dropped. There were no hits.

12. Between 0951 and 1749 six attacks were made on Force C, about 80 bombs being dropped. There were no hits.

13. Most ships experienced some very near misses but the only hit was on Force A, GLOUCESTER being hit by one bomb on the compass platform causing the following casualties—

Officers, killed 7 (including Captain F. R. Garside, C.B.E.), 3 wounded.

Ratings, 11 killed and 6 wounded.

The damage caused to the bridge structure, and D.C.T.* necessitated gun control and steering from aft.

14. At 1510 flying boat L.5803 reported two battleships, 6 cruisers and 7 destroyers in position $33^{\circ} 35' N$, $19^{\circ} 40' E$., steering 340 degrees, and at 1610 that this force had altered to 070 degrees. This flying boat had to return to Malta at 1715 and no relief was available to continue shadowing. However, the enemy Fleet was resighted by another Sunderland from Malta early the following morning.

15. At the time, it was suspected that these two battleships were in fact 8" cruisers. The intensive bombing which had been experienced had already given the impression that the Italians had some special reason for wishing to keep us out of the Central Mediterranean.

Admiralty footnote —

* D.C.T.—Director Control Tower.

This, in conjunction with these enemy reports, made it appear that the Italians might be covering the movement of some important convoy, probably to Benghazi, and it was decided temporarily to abandon the operations in hand and to move the fleet at best speed towards Taranto to get between the enemy and his base.

Force B maintained a mean line of advance of 310 degrees at 20 knots during the night.

16. There were no incidents during the night and at 0440 EAGLE flew off three aircraft to search to a depth of 60 miles between 180 and 300 degrees.

The Approach Period 9th July, 1940
(0600-1430).

17. At 0600 the fleet was concentrated in position $36^{\circ} 55' N$, $20^{\circ} 30' E$., and cruising disposition No. 1 was ordered. The 7th Cruiser Squadron and STUART were in the van 8 miles ahead of Commander-in-Chief in WARSPITE, who was screened by NUBIAN, MOHAWK, HERO, HEReward and DECOY. The Rear-Admiral, 1st Battle Squadron, in ROYAL SOVEREIGN, with MALAYA and EAGLE, screened by HYPERION, HOSTILE, HASTY, ILEX, DAINTY, DEFENDER, JUNO, JANUS, VAMPIRE and VOYAGER, was 8 miles to the rear of WARSPITE. The mean line of advance was 260 degrees, speed 15 knots.

18. At 0732 flying boat L.5807 reported the main enemy fleet consisting of 2 battleships, 4 cruisers and 10 destroyers in position $37^{\circ} 14' N$, $16^{\circ} 51' E$., steering 330 degrees at 15 knots, and at 0739 that 6 cruisers and 8 destroyers were stationed 080 degrees 20 miles from the main fleet, steering 360 degrees, and that at 0805 the main fleet had altered to 360 degrees.

At this time the main enemy fleet were about 145 miles 280 degrees from our own fleet.

At 0810, as a result of these reports, the mean line of advance of the fleet was altered to 305 degrees at 18 knots in order to work to the Northward of the enemy fleet and if possible get between him and his base.

At 0858 three aircraft from EAGLE were flown off to search a sector between 260 and 300 degrees to maximum depth.

Between 1026 and 1135 reports were received from flying boats 5807 and 9020 and EAGLE'S Duty B and Duty C, which, though they differed considerably, yet gave an indication of the movements of the enemy.

19. At 1105, EAGLE'S Duty D reported 2 battleships and one cruiser in position $38^{\circ} 07' N$, $16^{\circ} 57' E$., with 4 other cruisers near. At 1115 flying boat L.5807 reported the enemy battlefleet in position $38^{\circ} 06' N$, $17^{\circ} 48' E$., steering 360°.

It is probable that if in this latter report these ships were correctly identified, the real position should have been considerably further to the Westward. Reports up to this time indicated that the enemy forces consisted of at least 2 battleships, 12 cruisers and 20 destroyers, and that during the forenoon they were dispersed over a wide area. It seems probable that the cruisers and destroyers reported at 0739 took a wide sweep shortly afterwards to the North-eastward and that they were joined by other cruisers and destroyers, possibly those which had been with the main fleet.

20. Acting on reconnaissance reports received up to 1115, EAGLE's striking force was flown off at 1145 to attack the enemy fleet, which at this time was believed to be in position 295 degrees 90 miles from WARSPITE, steaming North.

This position seems to have been approximately correct but, owing to an insufficiency of aircraft in EAGLE, touch was lost at 1135 and, in the event, the enemy battlefleet altered course to the Southward about this time and the striking force failed to find them.

21. WARSPITE's noon position was 37° 30' N, 18° 40' E

22. At 1215 flying boat 5803 reported 6 cruisers and 10 destroyers in position 37° 56' N, 17° 48' E., steering 220 degrees, at 25 knots, and at 1220 three 8" cruisers in position 37° 55' N, 17° 55' E., steering 225 degrees.

23. At 1252 the striking force, having missed the battlefleet, sighted a large number of enemy ships steering to the Southward and, assuming that the battlefleet last reported steering North had altered to the Southward, worked round to the Westward of this force and attacked the rear ship of the enemy line at 1330. At the time this was presumed to be a battleship, but from the high speed and rapid turning which was observed it was almost certainly a cruiser. The two battleships were by this time considerably further to the Southward. No hits were observed. Heavy A.A. fire was encountered from the cruisers and attendant destroyers but the aircraft received only superficial damage. The striking force landed on at 1434.

24. A search by EAGLE's aircraft Duty C reported no enemy ships between bearings 334 and 291 degrees to a depth of 60 miles from 38° N, 18° E., at 1330. It was now clear that at about 1200 the main enemy battlefleet had turned Southward and that the cruiser forces which had been sweeping to the North-eastward had turned South-west to effect a concentration in approximately 37° 45' N, 17° 20' E. (See Diagram No. 1.)

25. At 1340, flying boat 9020 reported 3 battleships and a large number of cruisers and destroyers in position 37° 58' N, 17° 55' E., steering 220 degrees, and at 1415 that the enemy's course and speed was 020 degrees, 18 knots. It was now clear that after concentrating the enemy had turned Northward again and that our Fleet was rapidly closing the enemy.

At this time the impression was growing that the enemy intended to stand and fight, albeit on his own ground and with more than one road of escape left open to him.

Course was maintained to the North-westward to cut him off from Taranto until it became clear at 1400 that this object had been achieved, when course was altered to 270 degrees to increase the rate of closing

26. Speed of approach was limited by the maximum speed of ROYAL SOVEREIGN, with WARSPITE acting as a battle cruiser to support the 7th Cruiser Squadron, who, being so few and lacking in 8" ships, were very weak compared with the enemy's cruiser force.

At 1430 the Commander-in-Chief in WARSPITE was in position 38° 02' N, 18° 25' E., steering 270 degrees at 22 knots. The 7th Cruiser Squadron were 8 miles ahead, with ROYAL SOVEREIGN, MALAYA and

EAGLE 10 miles astern. EAGLE's striking force landed on at 1434. At 1435, EAGLE's Duty C reported the enemy course and speed as 360 degrees 15 knots and at 1439 that the enemy centre was 260 degrees 30 miles from WARSPITE. This ended the approach period and surface contact was made soon afterwards.

Weather during the Approach.

27. During the forenoon the wind veered from North-west to North by West, force 5, but later back to North-west again. The sea was slight, visibility 15 to 20 miles. The sky was clear up to 0800 but was 2/10ths clouded at noon.

The Fleet Action.

28. At 1452 NEPTUNE reported two enemy vessels in sight bearing 238 degrees.

At 1455 ORION sighted 3 destroyers bearing 234 degrees, 31,000 yards.

At 1500 ORION sighted three destroyers and 4 cruisers between 240 and 270 degrees.

29. At 1500 (See Diagram No. 2) the 7th Cruiser Squadron, except the damaged GLOUCESTER who had been ordered to join EAGLE, was 10 miles 260 degrees from WARSPITE and were formed on a line of bearing 320 degrees and steering 270 degrees at 18 knots. NUBIAN and 4 destroyers were screening WARSPITE.

EAGLE, screened by VOYAGER and VAMPIRE, was proceeding to take up a position 10 miles to Eastward of WARSPITE and was shortly joined by GLOUCESTER who, by reason of her bomb hit the previous day, was unfit to engage in serious action.

30. The cruisers were then rapidly closing the enemy forces which were distant 12 to 18 miles between bearings of 235 and 270 degrees. At 1508 NEPTUNE sighted 2 enemy battleships bearing 250 degrees 15 miles, and the course of the 7th Cruiser Squadron was altered to 000 degrees and then to 045 degrees at 1510 to avoid getting too heavily engaged until WARSPITE was in a position to give support. At 1514 the 7th Cruiser Squadron's line of bearing was altered to 350 degrees and the enemy cruisers marked "C" in the diagram opened fire at a range of 23,600 yards. At 1516 the 7th Cruiser Squadron altered course to 025 degrees and at 1520 to 030 degrees to open "A" arcs.*

31. At 1512 the 7th Cruiser Squadron was ordered by Vice-Admiral (D) to engage an equal number of enemy ships. NEPTUNE and LIVERPOOL opened fire at a range of 22,100 yards and SYDNEY opened fire at the fourth cruiser from the right, thought to be of the ZARA class. ORION opened fire first on a destroyer (Z in Diagram No. 2) then on the right hand cruiser bearing 249 degrees, range 23,700 yards.

32. In the meantime the enemy advanced forces were sighted from WARSPITE who opened fire on an 8" cruiser bearing 265 degrees at a range of 26,400 yards. This was a cruiser in "C" Squadron (Diagram No. 2) which was then engaging and being engaged

Admiralty footnote —

* "A" arcs—the arcs on which all guns of a ship's main armament will bear, thus allowing them to fire simultaneously at the enemy.

by the 7th Cr. Squadron. Ten salvos were fired and a hit possibly obtained with the last salvo. One of the WARSPITE's aircraft was on the catapult preparing to fly off but it became so urgent that fire should be opened in support of the heavily outnumbered cruisers that delay could not be accepted. The aircraft was damaged by the blast of "X" turret and subsequently jettisoned.

33. At 1530 the enemy turned away making smoke and fire was checked. WARSPITE turned through 360 degrees and made an "S" bend to enable MALAYA, who had been ordered by the Commander-in-Chief to press on at utmost speed, to catch up. The 7th Cruiser Squadron also made a 360 degree turn to starboard to conform. The enemy fire during this time was ineffective (1514 to 1530) but our cruisers were straddled several times and at 1524 splinters from a near miss damaged NEPTUNE's catapult and aircraft. The latter was jettisoned soon after as it was leaking petrol. No hits were obtained on the enemy.

34. Between 1533 and 1536 WARSPITE fired 4 salvos at each of two 6" cruisers. These cruisers were evidently of the starboard wing column which had been coming up from the Southward, but were now steering to the Eastward apparently trying to work round to get at EAGLE. At 1545 EAGLE again flew off her striking force.

35. At 1548 WARSPITE's second aircraft was catapulted for action observation, Duty Q.

36. At 1551 the 7th Cruiser Squadron was on a course of 310 degrees to close the enemy again and WARSPITE was steering 345 degrees. Six enemy cruisers were in sight ahead of the enemy battlefleet. This squadron is presumed to be the Port wing column "A" in diagram No 3.

37. At 1553 WARSPITE opened fire on the right hand of the two enemy battleships of the CAVOUR class, bearing 287 degrees, range 26,000 yards. WARSPITE was under fire from both enemy battleships and was shortly afterwards straddled. MALAYA was now in station on a bearing of 180 degrees from WARSPITE and fired 4 salvos at the enemy battleships at extreme range but these fell short. The enemy fired with moderate accuracy, the majority of the salvos falling within 1,000 yards but nearly all having a large spread. Only one closely bunched salvo was observed which fell about 2 cables on WARSPITE's port bow. At 1600 the enemy was straddled and one hit observed at the base of the foremost funnel. The enemy then started to alter course away making smoke and WARSPITE altered to 310 degrees, speed 17 knots.

38. WARSPITE ceased firing at 1604 after firing 17 salvos, the enemy being obscured in smoke. MALAYA fired 4 more salvos, all short and ceased fire at 1608.

At 1605 EAGLE's striking force attacked a cruiser of the BOLZANO class and it is believed that at least one hit was obtained. No report of this hit was received until 1715.

39. At 1609 WARSPITE opened fire on an enemy cruiser bearing 313 degrees, range 24,600 yards. This was presumably one of "A" squadron which had drawn ahead of the battleships and appeared to be working round to the

Northward. Fire was checked after 6 salvos as the enemy turned away making smoke.

40. In the meantime the destroyers, who had been released from WARSPITE at 1525, MALAYA at 1545 and ROYAL SOVEREIGN at 1552, had concentrated and at 1600 were on the disengaged bow of the battlefleet and steering a similar course at 25 to 27 knots. JUNO and JANUS joined the 14th Flotilla, HERO and HEReward the 2nd Flotilla and DECOY the 10th Flotilla. Some of these destroyers were narrowly missed by heavy shells when passing to the Eastward of WARSPITE at 1554. At 1602 the 10th and 14th Flotillas came under heavy fire from enemy cruisers but were not hit. ROYAL SOVEREIGN in the meantime was pressing on at the maximum speed her engines could give, but never got within range at all.

41. At 1605 enemy destroyers were observed from WARSPITE to be moving across to starboard from the van of the enemy fleet and at 1610 the tracks of three or more torpedoes were seen by the 14th Flotilla passing close to them. These were evidently fired at very long range.

42. Our destroyers were ordered at 1614 to counter attack enemy destroyers and at this time were 4 miles East-north-east of WARSPITE and turning to the North-west.

43. At 1619 the 10th Flotilla opened fire on the enemy destroyers at a range of 12,600 yards. STUART's first salvo appeared to hit. At this time the three flotillas were disposed with guides on a line of bearing 220 degrees, destroyers disposed 180 degrees from guides, course 300 degrees. The 7th Cruiser Squadron were also engaging the enemy destroyers.

44. Between 1615 and 1630 a number of enemy destroyers, probably two flotillas, having worked across to starboard of their main fleet, delivered a half-hearted attack. As soon as they had (presumably) fired torpedoes they turned away Westward making smoke. It was observed that the second flotilla to attack retired through the smoke made by the first flotilla. Spasmodic firing was opened by all forces during the short intervals in which the enemy was in range and not obscured by smoke. No hits were observed by WARSPITE's aircraft.

45. Between 1630 and 1640 enemy destroyers were dodging in and out of their smoke screens and spasmodic firing by our flotillas was opened. Two torpedoes were seen to cross NUBIAN's stern at 1640. WARSPITE fired a few salvos of 6" and MALAYA one salvo, at enemy destroyers between 1639 and 1641 when they disappeared in smoke.

46. During this period of the action (i.e. between the time CAVOUR was hit and the time our own fleet approached the smoke screen) P/L signals from the enemy were intercepted saying that he was "constrained to retire," ordering his flotillas to make smoke, to attack with torpedoes, and also a warning that they were approaching the submarine line.

These signals, together with my own appreciation of the existing situation, made it appear unwise and playing the enemy's own game to plunge straight into the smoke screen.

Course was therefore altered to work round to the Northward and windward of the smoke

screen, course having been altered to 340 degrees at 1635. Our destroyers were well clear of the smoke by 1700 but the enemy were out of sight, evidently having retired at high speed to the Westward and South-westward.

47. Between 1640 and 1925 a series of heavy bombing attacks were made on our fleet by enemy aircraft operating from shore bases. WARSPITE was bombed at 1641, 1715, 1735, 1823 and 1911. EAGLE was bombed at 1743, 1809, 1826, 1842 and 1900. These two ships received the most attention but the 7th Cruiser Squadron received numerous attacks and many bombs fell near the destroyers. In some cases attacks were made from a considerable height. There were no hits and the fleet suffered no damage but there were numerous near misses and a few minor casualties from splinters. MALAYA claimed to have damaged two aircraft with A.A. fire but no enemy machines were definitely seen to crash.

48. From 1700 the fleet steered 270 degrees, the destroyers forming Cruising Order No. 3 in company with the 7th Cruiser Squadron to the Northward of WARSPITE. By 1735 the fleet was within 25 miles of the coast of Calabria and course was altered to 200 degrees. When, however, it became clear that the enemy had no intention of resuming the fight and could not be intercepted before making Messina, course was altered to 160 degrees at 1830 to open the land and to 130 degrees at 1930.

49. After the action, as subsequently reported by WARSPITE's aircraft, the enemy fleet was left in considerable confusion, all units making off at high speed to the South-west and Westward towards the Straits of Messina and Port Augusta. It was not until 1800 that they sorted themselves out, the cruiser squadrons taking station to the South-eastward of their battleships and destroyers to the North-west and astern of them. The last enemy report was received from WARSPITE's aircraft at 1905 and the enemy fleet was then in position 37° 54' N, 16° 21' E, i.e. about 10 miles off Cape Spartivento, steering 230 degrees at 18 knots.

They were attacked by their own bombers at 1705 and again at 1857. No hits were observed.

50. At 2115 course was altered to 220 degrees for a position South of Malta. There were no incidents during the night.

51. The following destroyers were detached so as to arrive at Malta at 0500—STUART, DAINTY, DEFENDER, HYPERION, HOSTILE, HASTY, ILEX, JUNO. (STUART arrived with only 15 tons of fuel remaining).

52. At 0800 the fleet was in position 35° 24' N, 15° 27' E., steering West, and remained cruising to the South of Malta throughout the day while destroyers were fuelled.

53. An air raid took place on Malta at 0855 but no destroyers were hit. Three or four enemy aircraft were shot down.

54. The first batch of destroyers completed fuelling at 1115 and rejoined the Commander-in-Chief at 1525. HERO, HEReward, DECOY, VAMPIRE and VOYAGER were then sent in, the last three to sail with convoy M.S. One after refuelling. At 2030 ROYAL SOVEREIGN with NUBIAN, MOHAWK and JANUS were sent in, and GLOUCESTER and

STUART were detached to join convoy M.F. One which had been sailed from Malta by the Vice-Admiral, Malta, at 2300 on 9th July escorted by DIAMOND, JERVIS, and VEN-DETTA.

55. Flying boat reconnaissance of Augusta had located 3 cruisers and 8 destroyers in harbour and at 1850 EAGLE's striking force was flown off to carry out a dusk attack. Unfortunately these forces had left harbour before the striking force arrived. One flight, however, located a destroyer of the NAVIGATORI class in a small bay to the Northward and sank it. The other flight returned without having dropped torpedoes. The striking force landed at Malta on completion of the operation.

56. At 2000 the 7th Cruiser Squadron was detached to search to the Eastward in the wake of convoy M.F. One.

57. At 2100 the fleet was in position 35° 28' N, 14° 30' E., steering 180 degrees. There were no incidents during the night.

Thursday, 11th July.

58. At 0130 course was altered to 000 degrees so as to be in position 35° 10' N, 15° 00' E., at 0800. ROYAL SOVEREIGN, with HERO, HEReward, NUBIAN, MOHAWK and JANUS, rejoined from Malta at this time and EAGLE landed on the striking force from Malta.

59. At 0900 the Commander-in-Chief in WARSPITE screened by NUBIAN, MOHAWK, JUNO and JANUS, proceeded ahead at 19 knots to return to Alexandria. The Rear-Admiral, 1st Battle Squadron, in ROYAL SOVEREIGN, with EAGLE and MALAYA and remaining destroyers, proceeded on a mean line of advance of 080 degrees at 12 knots to cover the passage of the convoys.

60. The fleet was again subjected to heavy bombing attacks. Between 1248 and 1815 five attacks were made on WARSPITE and attendant destroyers, 66 bombs being dropped. Between 1112 and 1804, twelve attacks were carried out on the forces in company with the Rear-Admiral, 1st Battle Squadron, about 120 bombs being dropped, and four bombing attacks were carried out on convoy M.S. One. There was no damage and no casualties. It was noted that the ship was shadowed by aircraft who transmitted "longs" by W/T at intervals in order to direct attacking aircraft.

61. At 1500 convoy M.S. One was passed and VAMPIRE relieved JANUS on WARSPITE's screen, JANUS remaining with the convoy.

62. WARSPITE was in position 34° 22' N, 19° 17' E., steering 110 degrees at 2100.

Friday, 12th July.

63. There were no incidents during the night. Course was altered from time to time during the day to throw off shadowing and attacking aircraft. At 0700, Vice-Admiral (D) with the 7th Cruiser Squadron rejoined the Commander-in-Chief and was then detached with ORION and NEPTUNE to join convoy M.F. One, LIVERPOOL and SYDNEY remaining in company with WARSPITE.

64. The following bombing attacks took place during the day:—

Between 0850 and 1150 seventeen attacks were made on WARSPITE, about 300 bombs being dropped.

Between 1110 and 1804 three attacks were made on the 1st Battle Squadron and EAGLE, 25 bombs being dropped.

There were no hits but several near misses.

As a result of these attacks a course was set, to close the Egyptian coast and No. 252 Wing requested to send fighters. Fighters were sent later in the afternoon but no more attacks developed.

65. The Rear-Admiral, 3rd Cruiser Squadron in CAPETOWN, and CALEDON, sailed from Alexandria to rendezvous with convoy M.S. One at 1000/13th in the vicinity of position 33° 50' N, 23° 00' E

Saturday, 13th July.

66. The Commander-in-Chief in WARSPITE, with the 7th Cruiser Squadron and escorting

destroyers, arrived Alexandria at 0600 and convoy M.F. One and escort at 0900. RAMILLIES, screened by HAVOCK, IMPERIAL, DIAMOND and VENDETTA, was then sailed to escort convoy M.S. One.

67. The force with Rear-Admiral, 1st Battle Squadron, was subjected to bombing attacks between 1056 and 1623. During this time EAGLE's three Gladiators shot down a shadowing aircraft and 2 bombers and another was so severely damaged that it probably did not reach home. Blenheim fighters were sent out during the afternoon to provide protection.

68. Force C entered harbour at Alexandria at 0815 on 14th July, and the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, convoy M.S. One and escort, and RAMILLIES, at 0900 on the 15th.

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