



SUPPLEMENT

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FLEET AIR ARM OPERATIONS AGAINST TARANTO ON 11TH NOVEMBER, 1940.

The following Despatch was submitted to The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 16th January, 1941, by Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, K.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships the accompanying report of the Fleet Air Arm operations against Taranto on 11th November, 1940.

2. An attack on the Italian fleet at Taranto by the Fleet Air Arm with torpedoes had been under consideration for many months and long before the outbreak of war with Italy. The bridge between planning and execution was, however, a wide one, since several requirements had to be met before the operation could be undertaken with a reasonable prospect of success.

3. The most important of these requirements was good and timely photographic reconnaissance, since to plan the attack it was necessary to know not only that the battleships were in harbour but also their position and berthing with some accuracy. It was not until the Glenn Martins arrived at Malta that such reconnaissance was possible, war experience having shown that flying boats are too vulnerable and slow to approach defended ports with impunity.

4. In the event, the success of the Fleet Air Arm attack was due in no small degree to the excellent reconnaissances carried out by the Royal Air Force Glenn Martin Flight (No. 431) from Malta, under very difficult conditions and often in the face of fighter opposition.

5. An undetected approach to the selected flying off position was also most important, and to achieve this the use of long range tanks in the Swordfish aircraft was very desirable.

These were not available until ILLUSTRIOUS arrived on the Station early in September.

6. A considerable amount of night flying training was also necessary before the pilots and observers could be regarded as fully competent to undertake the long flight required for this hazardous enterprise and it was not until mid-October that the necessary state of training was reached.

7. The attack was first planned to take place on the night of 21st October, but owing to a fire in ILLUSTRIOUS' hangar a few days before, which destroyed and damaged a number of aircraft, the operation had to be deferred. It was considered again for the night of 30th/31st October, when the fleet was operating off the West coast of Greece, but it was decided not to attempt it as there was then no moon and the attack would have had to be carried out with flares, in the use of which the aircraft crews had had little practice.

8. In the meantime further photographs had been taken of the outer anchorage at Taranto by the Glenn Martins, and close examination revealed the presence of balloons and of nets surrounding the battleships. This discovery was most fortunate as these defences naturally affected the method of attack very considerably.

9. It had always been intended that both ILLUSTRIOUS and EAGLE should take part in this attack. Two days before the fleet sailed for the operation EAGLE developed serious defects to her petrol system, caused undoubtedly by the many near bomb misses she had experienced in the early days of the Italian war, and she therefore had to be left behind. Six of her T.S.R.* aircraft and crews, however, were embarked on ILLUSTRIOUS, so that the EAGLE, whose squadrons had reached a high state of efficiency, was to some extent represented in the attack.

* Admiralty footnote :—T.S.R. = Torpedo/Spotter/Reconnaissance.

10. The operation is well described in ILLUSTRIOUS' report and needs no elaboration. It was admirably planned and the determined and gallant manner in which it was carried out reflects the highest credit on all concerned.

11. The results achieved,* as disclosed by subsequent photographic reconnaissance, appear to have been:—

One CAVOUR class battleship beached and apparently abandoned.

One CAVOUR class battleship heavily damaged and beached.

One LITTORIO class battleship damaged and subsequently docked in the Taranto graving dock.

There is no definite evidence of damage to cruisers and small craft as a result of the bombing attacks but it seems probable that two cruisers may have been hit.

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

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

(Sgd.) A. B. CUNNINGHAM.
Admiral.

From:—The Commanding Officer, H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS.

Date:—13th November, 1940.

INTENTION.

It was intended to carry out this operation as proposed in Rear-Admiral Aircraft Carriers, Mediterranean's 00478/97 of 28th October, 1940, as amended by Rear-Admiral Aircraft Carriers, Mediterranean's 00478/106 of 6th November, 1940.

2. The proposed plan was as follows:—

(i) H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS and escort to be in position 270 degrees Kabbo Point (Cephalonia) 40 miles at 2000 on November 11th and fly off the first range of 12 aircraft

* *Admiralty footnote*:—

From subsequent information it was confirmed that the results were:—

Battleship CAVOUR—Hit by one torpedo abreast No. 2 turret. Bulkheads gave and after some hours ship sank.

DUILIO—Hit by one torpedo near No. 2 turret. Sank by the bows.

ITALIA—Hit by three torpedoes—two on the starboard side forward and one port side aft. Sank.

Cruiser TRENTO—Hit by one bomb which perforated the deck and side but failed to explode.

Destroyer LIBECCIO and PESSAGNO—Slight damage from near miss bombs.

at that time. The second range of 12 aircraft to be flown off in about the same position at 2100.

(ii) The first attack to be made at about 2245 and the second at about 2345 and aircraft to be landed on in position 270 degrees Kabbo Point 20 miles.

(iii) Both attacks to be carried out in the following form:—

"The squadron of 12 aircraft to pass up the centre of the Gulf of Taranto and approach the harbour from the southwest. The primary attack to be by six torpedo aircraft against the battleships in the Mar Grande. This attack to be immediately preceded by two aircraft dropping flares (and bombs) along the eastern side of the Mar Grande in order to illuminate the targets and distract attention from the torpedo aircraft, and by four aircraft making a dive bomb attack on the attractive target presented by the line of cruisers and destroyers in the Mar Piccolo. It was expected that this attack would also distract attention from the torpedo attack."

NARRATIVE.

Preliminary Movements.

3. ILLUSTRIOUS had left Alexandria on November 6th with the Mediterranean Fleet in order to carry out Operation "Coat" (M.B.8)*.

4. Before sailing from Alexandria, in order to provide the maximum number of aircraft that could be flown off in two ranges with no surface wind (24), and as EAGLE, to their great disappointment, was unable to take part in the operation due to defective petrol tanks, eight pilots and eight observers were embarked in ILLUSTRIOUS from EAGLE, all being experienced in night flying. Five of EAGLE'S Swordfish were also embarked.

5. All Swordfish aircraft embarked were fitted with the 60 gallon internal auxiliary petrol tanks.

6. The only incidents that affected the operation during the preliminary movements were that three Swordfish forced landed in the sea on November 9th, 10th and 11th respectively and the aircraft were lost, thus reducing the number available for the Striking Force to 21. The crews were, however, picked up, two crews returning to ILLUSTRIOUS at Malta, the third being picked up by GLOUCESTER and flown on board in GLOUCESTER'S Walrus in time to take part in the operation.

7. While at Malta the opportunity was taken to discuss with Air Officer Commanding, Mediterranean, the reconnaissance and meteorological forecasts required, and on the morning of November 11th one aircraft was flown to Malta to collect some extremely good photographs of Taranto taken by the Royal Air Force on the previous day. Further reports were received from Air Officer Commanding, Mediterranean and Royal Air Force reconnaissance aircraft during the day confirming that no important movements had taken place,

* *Admiralty footnote*:—

Operation "Coat" was an attack by Naval aircraft from H.M.S. ARK ROYAL on Cagliari (Sardinia), on 9th November, 1940.

and a Royal Air Force aircraft carried out a patrol of the Gulf of Taranto until 2230 to ensure that the Italian Fleet did not leave harbour unobserved.

Flying Off Aircraft.

8. At 1800 on the 11th in position 37° 33' N. 19° 35' E. ILLUSTRIOUS and escort comprising 3rd Cruiser Squadron GLOUCESTER (C.S.3) BERWICK, GLASGOW, YORK, HYPERION (D.2) ILEX, HASTY and HAVOCK were detached by Commander-in-Chief and steered as requisite for the flying off position.

9. At 2035 the first range commenced to fly off, course 060° speed 28 knots and all twelve aircraft of the first striking force were off by 2040. The surface wind at this time was light and variable, the upper winds westerly and about ten knots and 8/10 thin cloud at 8000 feet. The moon was threequarters full.

10. The second range of nine aircraft commenced flying off at 2128 and 8 aircraft were off by 2134. The ninth aircraft (Clifford/Going) was accidentally damaged and had to be struck down to the hangar for repairs to the wing fabric. It was at first considered that this aircraft could not be flown off in time for the attack but in view of the confidence of the crew that they could catch up, and their keenness to take part in the attack, it was flown off at 2158.

Narrative of First Attack.

11. The first striking force having taken off formed up in a position 8 miles 015° from the position of ILLUSTRIOUS at the time of flying off, and at 2057 set course for Taranto then distant 170 miles.

12. At 2115 when at a height of 4,500 feet the squadron entered the base of a cumulus cloud and some aircraft became separated with result that the whole squadron of twelve did not arrive at Taranto simultaneously.

13. The squadron commander continued with eight aircraft (5 torpedo, 2 flare droppers and one bomber). They sighted flashes of H.E. at 2252. At 2256 the flare droppers were detailed to lay their flares along the eastern side of the harbour. The other four aircraft having lost their leader, all made their attacks independently.

14. INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVES.

(i) *Williamson/Scarlett.*

Task: Torpedo attack on the battlefleet. Did not return. Last seen by Sparke at 4,000 feet over San Pietro Island.

(ii) *Sparke/Neale.*

Task: Torpedo attack on battleship.

Came in at 4,000 feet over San Pietro Island with Williamson (4A) who was last seen at 4,000 feet over the centre of the Mar Grande. At this point the pilot broke away and started his dive. The aircraft was down on the water about half way across the Mar Grande and the Taranto shoal breakwater was crossed about 2/3rds of its length from the shore at a height of 30 feet and the floating dock was observed to starboard. The original intention had been to strike at the more southerly LITTORIO (B in Plan 1) but the pilot was unable to identify it. He saw, however, the most easterly CAVOUR (E in Plan 1) directly ahead and he

dropped his torpedo at a range of approximately 700 yards. An explosion, probably that of the torpedo, was observed at the ship about a minute later. "Get away" was made by a sharp 180° turn to port over the Taranto shoal breakwater. Intense A.A. fire was experienced from the batteries at the entrance to the harbour both during the approach and the "get away." The aircraft landed on at 0120.

(iii) *Macaulay/Wray.*

Task: Torpedo attack on battleship.

This aircraft was part of the Sub-Flight led by Williamson and its narrative follows closely that of Sparke/Neale, the most easterly CAVOUR (E in Plan 1) being the target in this case also. The torpedo was dropped at approximately 600 yards range. While making a "get away" balloons were seen by the observer in a line outside the Taranto shoal breakwater at 1,000 feet. A.A. fire was experienced from the batteries on the eastern side of the harbour and from the southern batteries during the "get away." The aircraft returned without incident and landed on at 0125.

(iv) *Kemp/Bailey.*

Task: Torpedo attack on the battleships.

Came in from the west over the westerly breakwater at a height of 4,000 feet. At that time A.A. fire was met from Rondinella point on the mainland and from Lo Scanno on San Pietro Island. Fire was continued from batteries along the shore as the aircraft dived down to a position midway between Taranto Island and the most northerly cruiser, where the pilot flattened out on a line for the more northerly battleship of the LITTORIO class (A in Plan 1). Prior to reaching the water level intense A.A. fire was met from the cruisers and from small merchant vessels lying inshore off Taranto Island. Projectiles from the cruisers were observed to hit the merchant vessels and the fire only ceased when the aircraft passed between the merchant ships. The torpedo was dropped at 2318 in a position estimated at 1,000 yards from the LITTORIO and the pilot was satisfied that the aim was accurate. The observer saw the torpedo running correctly. Immediately after the drop, fire was re-opened from the cruisers. The pilot then turned to starboard and passed slightly to the westward of the end of the breakwater which extends from the eastern shore to Taranto Shoal. He continued flying a southerly course until clear. A fire was observed in the direction of the seaplane hangars. The aircraft then returned to the ship without incident.

(v) *Swayne/Buscall.*

Task: Torpedo attack on battleships.

Having got detached from the leader this pilot waited off the harbour for ¼ hour for the arrival of the other aircraft. The first flare was seen and the pilot came in at 1,000 feet over the westerly breakwater, encountering severe A.A. fire from the ships and batteries at the entrance. Flying easterly across the Mar Grande and losing height until reaching the end of the Taranto Shoal breakwater he made a sharp turn to port so as to approach the more northerly LITTORIO (A in Plan 1) from the east. The torpedo was dropped at about 2215 at a range of approximately 400 yards and the

aircraft continued passing directly over the LITTORIO. A column of smoke was observed to arise suddenly from directly abaft the funnels of the LITTORIO. The "get away" was made past the cruisers who fired at the aircraft and over San Pietro Island when severe A.A. fire was encountered. Three balloons round the harbour were observed to catch fire, probably as a result of the enemy's own A.A. fire. ILLUSTRIOUS was sighted at 0140 and the aircraft landed on 10 minutes later.

(vi) *Maund/Bull.*

Task: Torpedo attack on battleships.

Came in over land north of Rondinella point encountering A.A. fire from the end of the point, followed by fire from the cruisers and from the entrance to the canal while gliding down to the torpedo dropping position approximately 4 cables S.S.W. of the mouth of the Canal. When the aircraft reached the water the fire was passing overhead and the pilot was able to flatten out and make an accurate drop at the more southerly LITTORIO (B in Plan 1) at a range of approximately 1,300 yards. The observer saw the torpedo run. After dropping, the pilot made a sharp turn to starboard, doubled back amongst the merchant ships off the commercial basin and then over the northern end of San Pietro Island out to sea encountering severe A.A. pom-pom fire from Lo Scanno point on the northern extremity of the island. The aircraft then returned to the ship without incident.

(vii) *Kiggell/Janvrin.*

Task: To drop flares along the eastern shore and S.A.P. bombs on any convenient target.

The aircraft was detached by the Squadron Commander off Cape San Vito and came in at 7,500 feet. Over Cape San Vito and the promontory H.E. A.A. fire was encountered. Commencing at 2302 a line of eight flares was dropped at half mile intervals set to burn at 4,500 feet. After the flares had been dropped and appeared to be providing satisfactory illumination, the pilot turned to starboard and cruised around for 15-20 minutes looking for a target, and then made a dive bombing attack on the most southerly oil storage depot (See Plan 1) from which a pipe line leads to the new jetty. No results were observed. 'Get away' was made at 2325 in a southerly direction. ILLUSTRIOUS was sighted at 0112 and the aircraft landed on at 0120.

(viii) *Lamb/Grieve.*

Task: Stand by flare dropper.

Came in astern of Kiggell/Janvrin but as the first flares appeared satisfactory no flares were dropped. The course flown and the A.A. fire experienced was the same as that by Kiggell/Janvrin and the same oil storage depot was the target for a dive bombing attack but no results were observed.

(ix) *Patch/Goodwin.*

Task: Dive bombing attack on the line of cruisers and destroyers moored stem on against the quay side on the south of the Mar Piccolo.

The aircraft came in at 8,500 feet over San Pietro Island at 2306, encountering fire from both Islands and from Rondinella Point,

crossed the Mar Grande and the canal and to the middle of the western portion of the Mar Piccolo. Difficulty was experienced at first in identifying the target which appeared to be in a shadow but two minutes after crossing the canal the target was identified and a dive bombing attack was made from 1,500 feet obliquely across two cruisers from N.W. to S.E. at 2315. Pom-pom fire from a number of points along the quay side, and from the cruisers in the Mar Piccolo (See Plan 1) was encountered. The pilot then turned east and about five minutes later a large fire was observed from the direction of the seaplane base. Further anti-aircraft fire was met from a point near the village of San Gorgio but this was avoided by diving behind the neighbouring range of hills. The aircraft crossed the coast in a southerly direction some 8 miles east of Taranto harbour. ILLUSTRIOUS was sighted at 0135 and landed on at 0155.

(x) *Sarra/Bowker.*

Task: Dive bombing attack on cruisers and destroyers in the Mar Piccolo.

Coming in at a height of 8,000 feet over the western mainland and diving to 1,500 feet over the Mar Piccolo, the pilot was unable to identify the target. He accordingly continued along the southern shore of the Mar Piccolo and delivered an attack on the seaplane base (See Plan 1) from a height of 500 feet. A direct hit on one hangar and further hits on the slipways were observed and a large explosion occurred in the hangar. Much pom-pom and machine gun fire was met, it being particularly intense just after the attack. The aircraft made its 'get away' to the south and went out to sea about 5 miles east of the harbour and returned to the ship without incident.

(xi) *Forde/Mardel-Ferreira.*

Task: Dive bombing attack on cruisers and destroyers in the Mar Piccolo (See Plan 1).

This aircraft was separated from the leader and arrived as the first flare was dropped and came in east of Cape San Vito a large fire being observed on the oil storage depot previously attacked by the flare dropping aircraft. No A.A. fire was met until that from a position 1,400 yards N.W. of the oil storage depot. On reaching the Mar Piccolo the pilot turned to port and delivered his attack on the target from N.E. to S.W. releasing at 1,500 feet. The first bomb hit the water short of two cruisers but the remainder should have hit the cruiser although no immediate results were observed. Intense A.A. fire from the cruisers moored in the Mar Piccolo was met throughout the dive. The pilot was uncertain whether his bombs had released and circled the western basin of the Mar Piccolo and repeated the attack. The 'get away' was made to the northwest, the aircraft going out to sea about 5 miles west of the harbour. While going out a flash and big fire was seen near the seaplane hangar.

(xii) *Murray/Paine.*

Task: Dive bombing attack on cruisers and destroyers in the Mar Piccolo (See Plan 1).

This aircraft arrived when the attack was in progress and came in east of Cape San Vito

while the flares were dropping. The pilot continued until the eastern end of the Mar Piccolo was reached and turning to port flew along the southern shore. The attack was delivered from 3,000 feet, the bombs dropping in a line running from E. to W. commencing by the most eastern jetty and extending across four of the destroyers to the most westerly cruiser in the line. The pilot made his 'get away' turning sharply 180° to port over the land and returning by the way he had come. A big fire near the seaplane hangar was observed. The aircraft returned to the ship without incident.

SECTION II.

NARRATIVE OF SECOND ATTACK.

15. The second striking force formed up in position 8 miles, 130 degrees from H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS at a distance of 177 miles from Taranto and took departure at 2145 at a height of 3,000 feet.

16. Morford-Green were in an aircraft which was fitted with an external overload petrol tank. At 2205 the tank fell off and the securing straps began to bang on the fuselage; the pilot was therefore forced to return to the carrier. On approaching the position of the ship the observer fired a Red Verrey Light to indicate that the aircraft was returning in distress, but as it was not expected H.M. Ships ILLUSTRIOUS and BÉRWICK opened fire. The aircraft then fired a 2 star identification light and gunfire ceased. The aircraft remained outside gun-range for another 15 minutes, then made a further approach and was landed on.

17. At 2250 the Squadron commenced to climb and at 2315 sighted flares and anti-aircraft fire from Taranto, a distance of 60 miles, and intermittent firing continued until at 2350, when at 8,000 feet, the north-west shore of the Gulf of Taranto was sighted and the Squadron turned to the north-east. At 2255 the flare droppers were detached and the remainder continued into attack.

18. INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVES (SECOND FORCE).

(i) *Hale-Carlisle*.

Task: Torpedo attack.

Considerable fire was experienced from San Pietro Island during the last stages of the approach, and the aircraft came in 1 mile north of Rondinella Point at 5,000 feet, and glided down over the commercial basin, being fired at from the eastern corner of the basin. The pilot then steered directly for the more northerly battleship of the LITTORIO class (A in Plan 1), the torpedo being dropped at a range of approximately 700 yards. The "get away" was made to starboard and the aircraft passed just north of the Taranto Shoal Breakwater. The observer saw balloons at approximately 3,000 feet and the pilot, seeing mooring barges, avoided them. Anti-aircraft fire was met intermittently throughout attack—particularly from destroyers on leaving. H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS was sighted at 0155 and aircraft landed on at 0200.

(ii) *Bayly-Slaughter*.

Task: Torpedo attack.

This aircraft is missing. It was last seen following the Squadron Commander over Rondinella Point.

(iii) *Lea-Jones*.

Task: Torpedo attack.

Came in astern of the Squadron Commander over Rondinella Point, gliding down to a point 2½ cables south of the canal. The torpedo was dropped at the most northerly CAVOUR (C in Plan 1) at a range of approximately 800 yards. "Get away" was made by turning sharply to starboard between two cruisers and over Lo Scanno Point on San Pietro Island. Severe anti-aircraft fire was received from batteries on each side of the southern end of the Canal, and from cruisers and destroyers in the Mar Grande. When leaving, a fire and petrol smoke were observed near the power station on the mainland behind Rondinella Point. Aircraft landed on at 0230.

(iv) *Torrens-Spence—Sutton*.

Task: Torpedo attack.

Came in over Cape Rondinella, astern of the Squadron Commander, and glided down to a point 5 cables south of the canal. Anti-aircraft fire was experienced from three positions on Taranto Island from the cruisers and the largest battleship. It is probable that the aircraft was silhouetted to the cruisers by the light of the flares. The torpedo was dropped at the more northerly LITTORIO (A in Plan 1) at a range of approximately 700 yards. "Get away" was made by turning to starboard, out between San Paolo Island and the submerged barrier running from the eastern mainland. Pom-pom and machine gun fire was met from San Paolo, San Pietro, and from small gate vessels in the gap on the way out. The aircraft landed on at 0215.

(v) *Welham-Humphreys*.

Task: Torpedo attack.

Came in astern of the Squadron Commander over Rondinella Point, over Mar Piccolo, and the Town of Taranto, and turned to starboard to the centre of the Mar Grande. Encountering a balloon which was avoided, the pilot then dived down to attack, during which period the aircraft received hits from machine gun bullets, one of which hit the outer aileron rod, putting the aircraft temporarily out of control. Control was however regained and the torpedo was dropped at a range estimated at 500 yards on the port quarter of one of the LITTORIOS (B in Plan 1). "Get away" was made by turning sharply to starboard and the aircraft went out to sea over the northern point of San Pietro.

Intense anti-aircraft fire was directed towards the aircraft during the "get away" and a hit was received on the port wing, probably from a 40 mm. explosive projectile.

Aircraft landed on at about 0205.

(vi) *Hamilton-Weekes*.

Task: Dropping Flares.

Came in over Cape San Vito at 7,500 feet, and dived to 5,000 feet, dropping a line of flares at intervals of 15 seconds to the eastward of the harbour. Pom-pom fire was experienced when coming over Cape San Vito and H.E. while releasing the flares.

After dropping all flares successfully, this aircraft delivered a dive bombing attack from a height of 2,500 feet on the oil storage depot. A small fire was caused. The aircraft made

a "get away" well to the eastward and landed on at 0230.

(vii) *Skelton-Perkins*.

Task: Dropping Flares.

Approach course was similar to Hamilton-Weekes except that the flares were dropped south-east of the harbour. Eight flares were dropped at between 6,500 feet and 5,000 feet, set to burn 3,000 feet lower. Bombs were dropped near the oil storage depot, but it is not considered that hits had been secured. Anti-aircraft fire similar to that of Hamilton-Weekes was experienced, some of the bursts during the dive bomb attack being particularly close.

The aircraft landed on at 0200.

(viii) *Clifford-Going*.

Task: Bombing Cruisers and Destroyers in Mar Piccolo (See Plan 1).

This aircraft started $\frac{1}{2}$ hour late as stated in paragraph 10 and arrived at Taranto when the second attack was already in progress. The aircraft came in over the land about 5 miles east of the harbour entrance, and steered straight over the dockyard to the far side of the Mar Piccolo.

Turning to port a dive bombing attack was made from 2,500 feet along the line of cruisers and destroyers from west to east. A stick of 250-lb. S.A.P. bombs was dropped across the cruisers. The pilot then turned north across the Mar Piccolo, later swinging to starboard and returning over the mainland and out to sea about 5 miles eastward of the harbour entrance.

A large fire in one of the battleships was seen to be raging for over 5 minutes.

Anti-aircraft fire was experienced the whole time the aircraft was over the land, the pom-pom fire being particularly intense during the bombing attack.

Aircraft landed on at 0250.

19. All aircraft, except the two missing, were landed on by 0250, and the Force rejoined the Commander-in-Chief at 0730.

20. It is noteworthy that the enemy did not use the searchlights at all during either of the attacks.

RESULTS OF THE ATTACKS.

21. The only information so far available of the results of the attacks are in Vice Admiral, Malta's 2031-12 and 2345-12, as follows:—

To:—C. in C., From:—V.A.M.
(R) R.A.A.
F.O.H.
Admiralty.

Have examined Taranto photographs carefully and until enlarged I do not wish unduly to raise your hopes but definitely appears that:—

(a) One LITTORIO class is down by the bows with fore-castle awash and a heavy list to starboard. Numerous auxiliaries alongside.

(b) One CAVOUR class beached opposite entrance to graving dock under construction. Stern including "Y" turret is under water. Ship is heavily listed to starboard.

(c) Inner harbour: 2 cruisers are listed to starboard and are surrounded by oil fuel.

(d) Two auxiliaries off commercial basin appear to have stern under water.

2. Hearty congratulations on a great effort. Our small contribution to-day one Macchi 200 and one Corpse.

T.O.O.2031—12th November.

To:—C. in C. From:—V.A.M.
(R) Admiralty,
R.A.A.
F.O.H.

My 2031-12. The stem only of northern CAVOUR class battleship shows on photograph but by fix from entrance of Passagio Picolo which also just shows the bows is in about 4 fathoms. There is oil round the stem and it seems certain the ship has been beached. The remaining one LITTORIO and two CAVOUR class battleships appear undamaged.

T.O.O. 2345—12th November.

Royal Air Force Co-operation.

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

Repetition.

23. It was proposed to repeat the operation on the following night and a Striking Force of 15 aircraft comprising 6 torpedo aircraft, 7 dive bombers and 2 flare droppers was prepared, but the operation was cancelled owing to the unfavourable weather report.

General Remarks.

24. Duplex Pistol.

There was considerable debate as to the wisdom of using Duplex pistols in such constricted waters. It was decided to run off 100 yards of the safety range and the battery resistance was removed to ensure that the torpedoes would remain dangerous on completion of their run.

The decision to use them was indeed fortunate as the results could not have been obtained by any other weapon.

To those whose faith in this weapon has remained unshaken the greatest honour is due and their faith has been amply justified by 3 battleships being either sunk or crippled by 9—or possibly 11—18 inch torpedoes.

25. Spirit in which the attack was made.

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

26. The Fleet Air Arm.

Although the proper function of the Fleet Air Arm may perhaps be the operation of aircraft

against an enemy in the open sea it has been demonstrated before, and repeated in no uncertain fashion by this success that the ability to strike unexpectedly is conferred by the Fleet Air Arm.

It is often felt that this arm which has had a long struggle with adverse opinions and its unspectacular aircraft is underestimated in its power. It is hoped that this victory will be considered a suitable reward to those whose work and faith in the Fleet Air Arm has made it possible.

(Sgd.) D. W. BOYD.
Captain.

The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

Forwarded, concurring with Commanding Officer, H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS report.

From information at present available this attack has achieved considerable success.

Recommendations under Mediterranean Confidential Memorandum 115 are being forwarded separately.

(Sgd.) A. L. ST. G. LYSTER.

*Rear-Admiral Commanding
Mediterranean Aircraft Carriers.*

H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS.

26th November, 1940.

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