

both to ensure gaining contact with the enemy and to avoid any possibility of SHEFFIELD being mistaken for the target. SHEFFIELD was instructed to home the striking force by D/F.

33. The aircraft approached SHEFFIELD at 1955 below the clouds and then climbed to a height of 6,000 feet. The weather conditions at this time appeared to be ideal for a synchronised torpedo attack, cloud 7/10ths from 2,000 to 5,000 feet. During the climb contact was lost with SHEFFIELD but regained at 2035 when a bearing and distance (110° 12 miles) of BISMARCK was passed by SHEFFIELD by V/S. The force took departure for the target in sub flights in line astern at 2040. On nearing the enemy a thick bank of cloud with base about 700 feet and top between 6,000 and 10,000 feet was encountered and the force became split up. At 2047, when it was calculated that the enemy would be in a suitable position for an attack down wind from astern, No. 1 sub flight dived through the cloud, but on reaching the base the enemy was seen four miles down wind to the eastward. Position for an attack on the port beam was gained by approaching just in the clouds, and the final dive to attack was made at 2055. One aircraft from No. 3 sub flight followed closely and also attacked from the port beam. This aircraft observed a hit on BISMARCK about two-thirds of her length from forward. All four aircraft came under intense and accurate fire from the first moment of sighting until out of range.

34. No. 2 sub flight, having climbed to 9,000 feet in cloud, dived down on a bearing obtained by A.S.V. and two aircraft attacked from the starboard beam under intense fire. The third aircraft having lost touch with his sub flight in the clouds returned to SHEFFIELD for a range and bearing on the target. Having obtained this he pressed home a lone and determined attack from the port bow in face of very heavy opposition, and his crew saw the torpedo strike BISMARCK amidships port side.

35. No. 4 sub flight followed No. 3 sub flight into the cloud and became iced up at 6,600 feet. After seven minutes the aircraft dived and found a clear patch at 2,000 feet. BISMARCK was sighted almost at once engaging No. 2 sub flight to starboard. All four aircraft circled astern of the target and attacked simultaneously from port coming under heavy fire. One aircraft was hit many times and both pilot and air gunner were wounded, the observer being uninjured. 175 holes were counted in this aircraft which had to be written off as one of the longerons had been cut.

36. No. 5 sub flight of two aircraft lost contact with the remainder and with each other in the cloud. Having started to ice up at 7,000 feet they came down and when still in cloud at 3,500 feet one was engaged by A.A. fire. On coming out of the cloud this pilot saw the enemy ahead of him and down wind so retired into the cloud, being engaged continuously while gaining a more favourable position. He eventually came in low on the BISMARCK's starboard bow and dropped just outside 1,000 yards. The other aircraft of this sub flight made three attempts to come in but was so heavily engaged

on each appearance that he finally jettisoned his torpedo and returned to ARK ROYAL.

37. No. 6 sub flight followed into the cloud and when at 6,300 feet turned 40 degrees to port and climbed clear at 7,450 feet, waited for about 15 minutes and returned to SHEFFIELD for another range and bearing of the enemy. These two aircraft then searched at sea level and attacked on the starboard beam. Intense fire prevented close approach and one dropped at about 4,000 yards while the other returned to the carrier and jettisoned before landing on.

38. The striking force attack took much longer than had been anticipated (2055 to 2125) owing to bad weather conditions around BISMARCK who appeared to be under a cold front.

39. At 2040 a signal was received from Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, giving his position, course and speed at 1800 as 49° 48' N. 17° 33' W., 100°, 22 knots, with RODNEY in company. He also stated that unless the enemy's speed was reduced he would have to return in KING GEORGE V at midnight to refuel, leaving RODNEY to continue the chase. He recommended that RENOWN should remain with ARK ROYAL.

40. During and after the torpedo attack on BISMARCK shadowing aircraft reported frequent alterations of course and that she was making smoke. On receipt of these reports RENOWN and ARK ROYAL altered course as requisite to maintain a position some 40 miles distant from the enemy in order that flying operations could not be unexpectedly hampered. It appeared possible that BISMARCK was endeavouring to shake off shadowers before dark; on the other hand she might have suffered damage to shafts or steering gear as a result of the torpedo attacks.

41. Owing to the time taken to deliver the T/B attack insufficient light remained to carry out another attack before dark. Aircraft could have flown off but in the failing light location of the target would have been difficult, friend might have been mistaken for foe and certainly many of the aircraft would have failed to regain the carrier. It was therefore decided to maintain shadowing aircraft as long as possible and concentrate on preparing all remaining Swordfish for a strong striking force at dawn.

42. Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, requested that aircraft might give the destroyers a visual link with the enemy and ARK ROYAL was instructed to comply. The two shadowing aircraft were ordered to remain in touch as long as possible and establish this link before returning. They left the BISMARCK at 2230 and, after making a detour in heavy rain, located the destroyers. By this time, however, they were not certain of their own position and were unable to assist the destroyers. These two aircraft were D/Fd back to ARK ROYAL, landing on at 2320 when it was practically dark.

43. At 2220 ARK ROYAL reported that one torpedo had definitely hit BISMARCK amidships, and Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, was informed accordingly at 2225. Later, information was received from ARK ROYAL that a second hit had most probably been obtained aft, and Commander-in-Chief was again informed at 2240.