

RENOWN. As contact was now definitely established course was altered to 180° to range the striking force and aircraft were flown off at 0926 in position 47° 16' N. 15° 51' W.

59. In the meantime the spotting aircraft which had been flown off at 0509 had become lost in rain, failed to establish contact by W/T with KING GEORGE V and eventually had to be D/Fd back.

60. After sighting MAORI I considered detaching ARK ROYAL to the southward to range the striking force, keeping RENOWN in the vicinity of MAORI ready to support KING GEORGE V and RODNEY as required. I decided however that the appearance of RENOWN on the scene before KING GEORGE V established contact was undesirable in view of the low visibility and furthermore it was imperative to afford ARK ROYAL the maximum degree of protection should KING GEORGE V fail to establish contact and thus leave the third striking force as the only means of dealing with BISMARCK.

61. Heavy gunfire was heard to the northward at 0855 but no report was received indicating what ship or ships were in action.

62. At 0940 SHEFFIELD appeared from the westward, and I ordered her to join ARK ROYAL on a course of 290° while RENOWN turned towards the scene of action to investigate. ARK ROYAL was instructed to fly off a spotting aircraft for RENOWN.

63. At 0952 a signal was intercepted from Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, ordering destroyers to close. Five minutes before this I had informed Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, that SHEFFIELD and ARK ROYAL had been detached, and that RENOWN was closing him from the southward; I also requested his position, course and speed.

64. The Commander-in-Chief's signal ordering the destroyers to close coupled with NORFOLK's signal that she had ceased flank marking and Rear-Admiral, Commanding, 1st Cruiser Squadron's signal ordering DORSETSHIRE to torpedo BISMARCK at close range, led me to suppose that the action was successfully concluded so in view of the Admiralty signal which had just been received indicating that a heavy scale of air attack was to be expected I decided to rejoin ARK ROYAL to afford A.A. protection. I informed Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, accordingly at 0953.

65. At 1025 as I still had no definite information I asked Commander-in-Chief if he had disposed of the enemy; he replied that she was still afloat, adding three minutes later that he could not get her to sink by gunfire. Shortly afterwards Commander-in-Chief also informed me that he had been forced to discontinue the action on account of fuel. I was about to order the T/B striking force to finish off the BISMARCK when DORSETSHIRE, who had been ordered by Rear-Admiral, Commanding, 1st Cruiser Squadron to torpedo the enemy at close range, reported at 1034 that the BISMARCK was sinking and at 1039 that she had been sunk.

66. The torpedo striking force from ARK ROYAL located the BISMARCK just in time to see the finish of the action. The enemy was

down in the water, on fire and silenced. DORSETSHIRE was seen to be in close proximity to BISMARCK and would have been endangered by a torpedo attack on the latter. The striking force therefore closed KING GEORGE V for instructions but could obtain no answer either by V/S or W/T. The striking force then returned to the vicinity of the BISMARCK and were in time to see DORSETSHIRE sink her with torpedoes from close range.

67. Meanwhile at 0955 an enemy aircraft had been sighted by RENOWN and engaged. About this time COSSACK and NORFOLK both reported that they were being bombed. SHEFFIELD'S R.D.F. was not efficient owing to damage from splinters when she had been engaged by BISMARCK. Enemy aircraft were sighted from time to time and engaged whenever they came out of the clouds. Weather conditions prevented the use of fighters. There appeared to be both Focke-Wolfes and Heinkels present.

68. The striking force returned about 1115 and were ordered to jettison their torpedoes before landing on as the motion of the ship was even greater than the previous day and to land on with torpedoes would have jeopardised the aircraft. Whilst landing on was in progress a Heinkel came out of the clouds and dropped a stick of two large and about five smaller bombs 600 yards astern and to port of ARK ROYAL. This was the last interference experienced by Force "H". Landing on was completed by 1152, and from then on the air appeared clear of enemy aircraft and course was shaped to the southward at 24 knots.

(Signed) J. F. SOMERVILLE,
Vice Admiral.

Flag Officer Commanding,
Force "H".

APPENDIX.

COASTAL COMMAND OPERATIONS IN CONNECTION WITH THE BISMARCK AND PRINZ EUGEN 21ST-27TH MAY, 1941.

May 21st.

At 1300 hours an aircraft of P.R.U. located and photographed one Bismarck class battleship and one Hipper class cruiser at anchor in small fjords near Bergen.

The weather deteriorated during the afternoon and evening but a strike of 6 Whitleys of No. 612 Squadron and 12 Hudsons of Nos. 220 and 269 Squadrons took off between 2150 and 2330 hours to attack. Owing to bad weather conditions only 2 Hudsons dropped bombs, and poor visibility prevented any results being observed.

May 22nd.

Aircraft patrolled off the Norwegian coast from first light but weather conditions by 1000 hours had forced all of them to return. Blenheims of No. 248 Squadron maintained meteorological sorties off the coast all day reporting the weather conditions, which became worse with 10/10 cloud down to sea level.

Sunderlands of No. 201 Squadron maintained a patrol up the meridian of 5° West between latitudes 6220 N and 6500 N from 0930, but had to return at 1100 on account of fog with nil visibility.