

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 straffed.

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.