

Hospital ship TJITJALENGKA was contacted by aircraft and directed to the Fleet: she embarked a few sick and casualties.

H.M.A.S. NORMAN joined TF 57 replacing H.M.A.S. NEPAL. Captain D. 27 in H.M.S. KEMPENFELT assumed Senior Officer Destroyers for experience, vice Captain D. 4 in QUILLIAM who remained with the Force.

At 1800 detached H.M. Ships BENDIGO and CAIRNS with R.F.A.s SAN AMBROSIO, SAN ADOLPHO and CEDARDALE to Manus. H.M.S. PARRETT acted as additional escort to them until dusk on 21st May, with orders to detach and proceed to Leyte at that time. At 1930 H.M.A.S. NEPAL was detached to Leyte to augment the escorts available to CTF 112 for the forthcoming move south of the Fleet Train.

At 1930 the Fleet took departure for the operations area.

American Task Group 52.1 covered Sakishima.

20th May.

The flying-off position for the day was to be 23° 39' N 126° 40' E.

First light was at 0458 when clouds were low and about 8/10 and the horizon clear. At 0500 the four "KK" destroyers including H.M.S. QUILLIAM, left the screen as previously arranged, and started to close their carriers to form astern of them. The Fleet was proceeding at 16 knots.

At 0510 A.C.1 assumed tactical command. The clouds were low and rain had started. A.C.1 therefore ordered the postponement of flying off aircraft for 15 minutes.

At 0515 the Fleet ran into dense fog. At 0524 H.M.S. QUILLIAM, endeavouring to form astern of H.M.S. INDOMITABLE, collided with her. Fortunately no casualties were sustained, but superficial above water damage was caused to H.M.S. INDOMITABLE, and serious damage to the bow of H.M.S. QUILLIAM. As soon as the damaged destroyer was clear of the screen, H.M.A.S. NORMAN was ordered to take her in tow. At 0615 H.M.S. BLACK PRINCE was sent to stand by both ships and escort them to area Cootie. The Commander Logistic Support Group was later ordered by signal to despatch from area Cootie H.M. Tug WEASEL to tow, and H.M.S. RULER to provide air cover.

H.M.A.S. NORMAN experienced considerable difficulty in towing H.M.S. QUILLIAM stern first, as the wrecked bow hanging in the water acted as a formidable hard over rudder. By 1300 H.M.S. BLACK PRINCE had taken over the tow, but the same difficulty restricted the towing speed to 3 and later to 5½ knots.

As the weather remained unsuitable for flying, the Fleet was manoeuvred until 0745 so as to cover the damaged destroyer.

At 0745, by which time the weather had improved slightly CAPS and the first strike were flown off. Although 4 bomber strikes were planned, weather conditions throughout the day made only one strike possible and seriously hampered its effectiveness.

Strike Able, after only finding the island with great difficulty, bombed Hirara town in Miyako through a clear patch of cloud, while Fireflies rocketed ground installations.

Strikes Baker and Charlie had to be cancelled for weather, and the outlook for strike Dog was far from promising. However, in view of CTF 51's signal stressing the importance of evening strikes on Sakishima in order to reduce the weight of dusk and moonlight attacks on Okinawa, it was decided to make the attempt, and the strike took off at 1530 for Ishigaki. The weather however was so bad that the strike was unable to get through to the island and had to be brought back to the Fleet.

During the forenoon CTG 99.2's signal was received, indicating the intention of that group to strike Miyako with shore based aircraft at 1700. It was therefore decided to withdraw CAPS from that island by 1600. The strike planned for Ishigaki at 1630 was not altered. These intentions were communicated to CTF 51 and CTG 99.2. In the event, however, and presumably because of weather, CTG 99.2 cancelled his strike.

At 1210 two bogeys were detected 50 miles to the westward tracking 040°. Fighters sent to intercept found both aircraft were friendly bombers. No information of their presence nor mission was known to this Force.

At 1000 a Corsair from H.M.S. VICTORIOUS, heavily hit by flak, was reported to have ditched. Fellow Corsairs searched without success for the pilot who they consider could not have survived. At 1529 a Corsair ditched on taking off from H.M.S. FORMIDABLE. The pilot was recovered unhurt by the KK destroyer.

At 1845 the usual radar pickets were recalled and by 1900 all CAPS had landed on; the Fleet withdrew to the southward for the night, and CTF 57 assumed tactical command at 1930. At 2100 TF 57 passed close to H.M.S. BLACK PRINCE who reported that H.M.S. QUILLIAM was satisfactorily in tow.

Enemy aircraft destroyed or damaged, nil.
1 junk and 3 barges were damaged.

Bombs dropped on targets, 6½ tons plus 24 R/P.

Own losses:—in combat 1 Corsair; operationally 1 Hellcat, 1 Seafire.

21st May.

A.C.1 assumed tactical command at 0510. Flying-off had been planned for 0540 from a position 85 miles 110° from Miyako. The weather at dawn was similar to the previous day except that the Fleet was clear of fog patches. Flying-off was therefore postponed. Four Hellcats were flown off at 0600 to investigate the weather within a 30 mile radius. They reported clear weather to east and west, and improving weather to the northward. Acting on this information the first strike was flown off at 0655.

Five bomber strikes were sent in, three to Miyako and two to Ishigaki.

Strikes for Miyako were flown off at 0655, 1210 and 1610. Nobara and Hirara runways were well plastered with bombs, 2 fires started in the warehouse area of Hirara town, and a radio weather station was hit. A tented camp was strafed.