

January 42
March 42
Convoy

OUR NAVY IN ACTION....ITALIAN FLEET BEATEN IN THE
MEDITERRANEAN... REAL BATTLE PICTURES FROM OUR CAMERAMEN AT SEA.

"The Admiralty reports that Convoys have passed successfully through the Central Mediterranean despite attempted enemy attack". Those are the words of a recent Admiralty communique which we can now bring to life by pictures received from our cameramen aboard. It goes on to say - "The enemy made great efforts to inflict serious loss by employing both aircraft and surface forces but the only contact which the enemy succeeded in making was by aircraft". This is the attack which maybe you found it hard to visualise when you read those words. This is the day-long contest between shell and bomb, ship and plane which was fought out in a welter of flying steel, and which you learnt about in a paragraph in the papers, or on the radio. This is war.

What else does that communique say? It says - "Two merchant ships were damaged and had subsequently to be sunk by our forces. The remainder safely reached their destination". And the reason why they did so was because every man aboard fought like hell. They shot down five enemy planes for certain, with four others severely damaged. They've done a lot more shooting since then, and there's plenty more to be done before it's all over.

Day and night these attacks on our convoys continue. This brings us to one of the biggest assaults made by the enemy in recent months. The great Naval battle of Palm Sunday approaches. The fight in which Rear Admiral Vian of Cossack fame completely foiled Italian attempts to destroy another convoy.

Steadily the convoy sails on, while the escorting warships are on the alert for a vastly superior enemy force known to be in the ~~the~~ vicinity. Again Axis bombers come in to attack, after an Italian Naval Squadron is sighted on the horizon. This time bad weather accompanies the raiders and a high sea runs as bombs fall into the turbulent waters.

Now comes that David and Goliath battle where our destroyers close in on the Italians with a torpedo attack. Round the convoy is laid a heavy smoke screen obscuring it from the enemy; a screen into which the Italians dare not penetrate. Through this dense blanket of smoke ~~of~~ our one ~~our~~ 6 inch gun cruiser and the destroyers make fast Sorties. One of them later returning to report that she had scored a hit with a torpedo on the 35,000 ton Italian battleship LITTORIO.

The LITTORIO sailed out with the first Italian fleet ever to seek combat with British warships - and ran into Admiral Philip Vian's force which smashed off two heavy attacks and sailed on without loss of a ship.

By now the weather had reached gale force and when the naval action was finally broken off with Another Mussolini failure to chalk up, the Luftwaffe stepped in again. During this new series of attacks, one ship in the convoy was hit and subsequently sank; one destroyer was also hit, but was able to reach harbour.

It might be opportune at this moment, to give a thought to the cameraman who kept turning during the heat of these attacks, so as to bring to the screen the living story of this great sea and air battle.

On the Tuesday, three days after the opening of the engagement, the enemy renewed his air attack, but without inflicting any further damage.

Admiral Vian's warships successfully fought off repeated dive bombing attacks - as his squadron made for Alexandria, while the Convoy and its escort sailed nearer and nearer its destination. Let us quote now the Rear-Admiral's signal to his force after the battle. "By your endeavour", he said, "the Italian Fleet failed to make contact with the Convey, nor did the Axis Air Forces damage any ship in it until off Malta, notwithstanding the great scale of the attack. Above all, Malta has received stores vital to the Island's Defence".

The arrival in Harbour is a moment of splendid achievement. From ships lying at anchor comes the heart-warming note of ships sirens blown in welcome, and the cheers of seamen and the people who live in that heroic island.

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By superb leadership Admiral Vian successfully concluded one of the most daring and audacious actions of the war. A prolonged fight won by a small British force against great odds.