

THE BATTLE OF BARDIA

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Title: North West Mounted.

Tracks: The Battle...The Fight..Way Of All Flesh.

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Lines: Stagg.

Voice: do.

In continuous stream past the Italian monument marking the Libyan border British transport rushed supplies to the spearhead divisions assaulting Bardia. Through choking dust the columns kept unflinching communication between base and front line. Often the road had been shelled, and was being roughly repaired as the convoys poured through.

Telephone wires went up, close on the heels of the advance guard. All along General Wavell's offensive combined dash and speed with the most detailed organisation. As a result, Capuzo was now in British hands - a shell-scarred desert outpost from which the weight and swiftness of attack had hurled the dispirited defenders. Nor did the Italians retreat with much intention of fighting again. Great stocks of war material lay behind, food as well as ammunition, all recklessly abandoned - a graphic proof that little hope of recovery was entertained by the fleeing legions of the outgeneralled Graziani.

Report says that some of this immense booty, good fighting equipment of more than a hundred-thousand men, will be sent to Greece. If so the good wishes of the free world go with it.

(SV MEN WITH GUN) Some of the field-guns captured were old stock, dating from the last war and even before. But that was rare. Alongside were stacks of light machine-guns and some hundreds of heavier ones too - a heart-warming sight.

Italian planes littered the desert like the skeletons of bygone caravans. Their defeat shattered Italy's last chances in Libya.

Till Sidi Barani fell every cup of water for the whole army was transported over the desert, and even then it still had to be carted to the outskirts of Bardia. Up the steep escarpment abruptly rising from the flat coastland the motor convoys wound steadily on their way to the front - nearer now to the outer ring of Bardia defences which the Australians and British had already penetrated.

Bofors anti-aircraft, highly effective against dive-bombing and all low-flying planes, guarded key points on the long route. Shells filled most of the lorries, shells by the thousand, for Bardia was a fortress, and the enemy had to be pounded to the point of surrender before the final assault. The batteries were all set, their guns trained on the town, impatient commanders watching the minute-hand crawl round to zero hour for the bombardment to open up.

(NEARER GV) The telephoto lens brings the shell-bursts nearer.

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BATTLE OF BARDIA.... continued.

Australians had pride of place in the assault and when the time came for fixed bayonets they were first into Bardia.

The Fleet Air Arm, RAF and Navy joined in the attack. Battle-ships and destroyers hurled a pulverising fire into the town.

Bardia hoisted the white flag after that last two-day attack. From the safe comfort of Rome Mussolini ordered them to hold out, but British orders were being obeyed now, and as conquerors the Australians entered the captured town.

(SV POLE) For less than 400 casualties General Wavell's army took 40-thousand prisoners at Bardia, and yet more stores and equipment to swell the enormous quantities already captured. Light tanks destroyed by anti-tank pieces witnessed the worth of our gunners and weapons. In addition 45 uninjured tanks fell into our hands. It was an overwhelming victory.

There were so many prisoners they looked like an Arsenal cup-tie crowd.... Why walk when you can ride a captured trailer-combination.

As we go to press more than a hundred-thousand captives have been counted and the Italians have lost two-thirds of their whole army in Libya. In fact the number of prisoners now exceeds the number of generals sacked by Mussolini.

Their guards gave them cigarettes. We have no quarrel with the Italian people. We only want to hit them so hard that each one will think he's got an earthquake all to himself...

Like all good fighters the Australians were, thoroughly at home in the role of victores. They went into the Italian headquarters, and among the papers they found a report of a speech by Mussolini - not half so useful as the paper its printed on.

(GV) Bardia is ours, soon all Libya, thanks to the military genius of General Wavell and the bravery of his fine army.
