

43-75

THE ITALIAN FLEET SURRENDERS.

The unforgettable sight of a war fleet steaming in to surrender itself. The main body of the Italian fleet from Spezia and Taranto stretched over the Mediterranean for a distance of five miles. Under an escort of two British Battleships and a destroyer screen, the Italian warships, following the course prescribed in the Armistice terms, are moving in an impressive array towards Malta.

The naval wealth of a beaten nation given up in surrender. The scene in Malta harbour recalls that day at the end of the last war when the German fleet sailed into Scapa Flow. Admiral Cunningham marked the end of this spectacular event in the history of the British Navy when he authorised the terse official statement :- "The Italian Battle Fleet is now anchored under the Guns of Malta".

Admiral Zara, Second in Command of the Italian Fleet made the formal surrender at Valetta. He is met on the Quay by Commodore Dick, Chief of Staff to Admiral Cunningham, and Captain Roderick Edward, Chief of Staff, Malta. Admiral Zara is extended the courtesy of a Guard of Honour. He is filling the place of Admiral Jackobi who was killed when the Germans bombed and sank the battleship ROMA off Sardinia.

Admiral Zara then leaves by car to meet Sir Andrew Cunningham. For the surrender Conference he is escorted to the C-in-C's room at Naval headquarters.

Malta wears a proud by dignified expression in spite of her jubilation at the sight of those silent ships in her harbour. Admiral Cunningham escorted Admiral Zara from the Quayside as he retired to his ship.

More than thirty warships had dropped anchor in the bomb battered harbour. The disillusioned men who looked out at Malta from their decks must have felt the moment keenly. We can imagine against whom their bitterness was levelled. Their stay in Malta was not made long. Their ultimate destination was to be Alexandria. For more than strategic reasons, Malta was no resting place for these ships.

It is fitting that we end with words taken from a message sent by the King to Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham. "I wish to send you and to all under your command my heartfelt congratulations on this triumphant result of three years of war in the Mediterranean. You may be sure that throughout the Empire we are all proud of this glorious chapter in the history of the British Navy.