

MADAGASCAR - FIRST PICTURES. 5-074000

An African port North of the Equator.

After months of intensive and secret preparation, the Naval invading force with regular troops, Commando Units and R.A.F. and Fleet Air Arm support, lie in waiting for the signal to set sail for the occupation of Madagascar. A great convoy assembled for the descent on the third largest island in the world. Japan was reaching out to seize it and dominate the Indian Ocean, but Britain struck first to safeguard the routes to her Middle East and Indian Armies.

This is the holiday cruise like atmosphere that settles around the troop transport ships, as African vendors come alongside to sell a variety of tropical fruits, including things which, those who remember them, will recognise as bananas.

Lying off the east coast of Africa, Madagascar (about four times as large as England and Wales) occupies a very strategic position in the Indian Ocean. Madagascar bound under the Command of South African born Admiral Syfret, the Naval Forces head out on the start of a brilliant piece of co-ordinated work by the three Services. The men who were one jump ahead of Laval, make for the French Naval port which the Japs were seeking to grab as they grabbed French Indo-China. The voyage is livened up with a practice shoot. Guns which are to be used in action are warmed up.

Keeping cool in canvas swimming pools erected on deck is another diversion which is just what the Ships doctor ordered. This little bleke goes round in circles looking for Madagascar.

"Hello, there already - think I'll take a sniff around the Madagasworks."

Crossing the line calls up all the time hounded good humoured fun, with Father Neptune presiding over his light-hearted subjects who forget war for a while in a grand old rough and tumble. From the Captain to the Cook, all enter into the spirit of Carnival which takes hold of everyone and makes them forget for a while the sterner business which confronts them.

As the grey ships near their destination, the convoy settles down to its stern purpose. As we close in to one of the big ships we catch a glimpse of Royal Marines transferring on to a destroyer. These are the men who will be taken under the cover of darkness into the harbour of Diego Suarez.

In the gathering gloom, the frontal attack is prepared while the forces are massed for the main assault on the West Coast at Courier Bay behind Diego Suarez and Antsirana.

Final operational orders from Admiral Syfret are delivered by a destroyer which looms out of the dusk on this turgidly hot night of swift surprise. This is the scene at the entrance to Diego Suarez harbour as the shore batteries were engaged by our Naval Guns.

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MADAGASCAR - PART TWO.

From carrier a strong force of Fleet Air-Arm planes, acting as Air artillery, give first-class support to our troops, greatly helping to quell resistance. Squadrons of planes striking from the sea, while the main land assault develops in the French rear across the isthmus.

Several powerful gun emplacements are subjected to bombardment, while other batteries in the Garrison are silenced without a shot being fired. When our landings begin, Commando Units, Marines and South African troops cross the intervening distance in landing craft. While the assault looks pacific in this region it is in the West that General Sturgess is pressing hard across the ten miles separating Courier Bay from Diego Suarez. This diversionary attack in the East has the effect of distracting the town's defences, while the main thrust is being made elsewhere. Although early reports placed the casualties as heavy, subsequent communique disclosed the fact that losses were much fewer than the fighting at first suggested. Within 48 hours of the first landing, the Naval Base at Diego Suarez is in British hands. After receipt of a message that a protocol has been signed, a naval force enters the harbour and resistance is at an end. Several stiff encounters with the opposing forces had been fought, but the arrival of a hospital ship in the harbour soon establishes the fact that hostilities are at an end.

Every endeavour had been made to take the island as bloodlessly and as rapidly as possible. The French Colony is now relieved of the threat of Japanese occupation. An attempted scuttling of a German ship in dry dock was frustrated. When final surrender was established Madagascar came under the protection of Great Britain for the duration.

As anchor chains run out from British warships moored in the harbour, we take you aboard the flagship to meet the leaders of this expedition. Rear-Admiral Syfret, Major General Sturgess and Brigadier-General Festing, under whose combined leadership the Japanese were outwitted in this theatre of war.

Outside French Headquarters, the Commander-in-Chief ~~will~~ reviews a Guard of Honour made up of soldiers and Marines who participated in the action.

To the martial music of a Military Band, the local inhabitants begin to lose their first nervous feelings, coming out into the streets carrying white flags as evidence of their intentions. The general attitude was never favourably disposed to the Japanese.

Most of the defenders were French Colonial troops including Malagasy and Senegalese units. These men have not been made to feel the weight of a conquering force. It has been reported that many of them are eager to join the ranks of the Free French.

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Fraternizing with the local residents comes easy to our men who bear them no ill will.

Another remarkable feature of this occupation is the wholesale destruction of French aerodromes and aircraft. Early air attacks accounted for much of it; but according to one report, many of the planes were grounded and burned out on the first day, to prevent their use.

Against a large portrait of Petain, British and French assemble at Antsirana for the signing of the terms of surrender. Admiral Syfret presides over the British delegation.

As the final picture to the story, we show you the men who helped to strike a solid blow against the ~~Axis~~ Axis in the victorious expedition to Madagascar.

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