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June 1942

THE BATTLE OF THE CONVOYS.

Out from Gibraltar head British ships, British seamen and British sinews of war for Malta. It is the eve of the "Battle of the Convoys", an action in particular, yet all part of the hard and costly toil which is the everyday lot of the men who fight in the Mediterranean. You will remember how two large convoys were recently involved; one going east from ~~Gibraltar~~ Gibraltar to Malta, and the other West from Alexandria to Tobruk and Malta. For over three days and nights it was a strenuous fight against Axis warships, submarines, dive bombers, torpedo planes and heavy bombers. Depth charges were dropped as the undersea attackers sought their victims. Everything that Malta needs is carried to her across the seas. The route to the George Cross Island lies through hundreds of miles of dangerous water, where sky and sea fill with engines of destruction; where every mile is fought for by British seamen, airmen and, in fact, everyone engaged in the task of getting supplies through. The life of any ship may hang on the trigger-finger of one man.

Good shooting accounted for many enemy planes. Here's one shot out of the sky to end up in a cloud of smoke as the tanks burst. Attacks by three hundred enemy aircraft were fought off by the Navy, the R.A.F. and the Fleet Air Arm. Meanwhile, to the West, the attacks on the Alexandria convoy were being met. Every man knew the enemy would make tremendous efforts to stop it. Losses there were bound to be; but the men set about their perilous enterprise and, as the bombers came over in waves, put up a terrific screen of fire as bombs fell all about them.

And here's how one ship in the convoy damaged in the engagement set to work on the hand capstan in true old Naval style, while a fiddler beat out a jig for the timing.

Here now is the scene as the vessels escorting the convoy from Gibraltar lay a smoke screen around the Merchantmen, as protection from the main Italian Battle Fleet which had ventured out. What happened to

Mussolini's warships at the hands of the British and American airmen is a long story; but they knocked them about so badly that, what was left packed off back to Taranto. By now, every available Axis plane was thrown into the battle. Once again the sky was split open by anti-aircraft shell fire as the convoy held doggedly to its course.

Here comes an Italian Torpedo carrier right overhead, losing height as tracer bullets rip into it. That burst of fire did get him. Here he goes in a death dive into the water.

After long days of almost continuous fighting, the Battle of the Convoys begins to burn itself out. Men who have had little or no time to think of food snatch a hasty meal. The cargo they have brought has cost a price. Men have died, ships have gone. It's the same with all seaborne supplies, and we should never forget it. The British Isles and Malta both live on the precious contents of our Merchant ships. Malta knows well what effort goes into its bringing. Every day, every hour, the people of Malta thank God for the British Navy and the Mercantile Marine, but do all of us?