

Air Ministry News ServiceAir Ministry Bulletin No. 9665HAVOC BY MALTA'S AIR FORCES

Malta's air forces struck viciously at the enemy by day and night on Wednesday when, in the early afternoon, they torpedoed a very large enemy tanker almost within sight of the Italian coast and, at night, fighter-intruders wrought havoc among the railways of Sicily and the toe of Italy.

The earlier operation involved every branch of the Royal Air Force in Malta. It began in the early morning when a reconnaissance aircraft sighted the enemy convoy, a very large vessel with destroyers and a heavy air escort. Malta's torpedo-bombers went out immediately, with long-range fighters to protect them. They flew through rain-squalls until, emerging suddenly from a belt of rain, they came upon the convoy and took it completely by surprise. The torpedo-bombers went in to the attack in a tight formation just above the water and aimed their torpedoes at the big ship. At least three torpedoes struck, and large clouds of black smoke came from the tanker's stern and decks.

All the time, air fights were going on in and out of the low clouds, as the Messerschmitts attempted to attack the torpedo-aircraft before being headed off by the long-range fighters. When the formation set course for Malta, 200 miles away, one Messerschmitt 110 had been destroyed by a torpedo-bomber and nearly a dozen others damaged in the general melee. It was not possible for the long-range fighters to carry every combat to a conclusion, as their primary task was to keep the enemy away from the torpedo-aircraft.

"It was a perfect copy-book attack," said a flight commander of the torpedo squadron. "We went in close together, dropped our torpedoes, formed up, and got away again too closely packed for the Messerschmitts to be able to do much about attacking us."

As the striking force neared Malta, Spitfires covered its arrival and a reconnaissance aircraft took off to view the damage. The pilot of this aircraft found two enemy aircraft, one a flying boat, circling a huge patch of oil a quarter of mile in diameter in the area of the attack. The flying boat dashed for cloud cover in such haste that it stalled and crashed into the sea - literally frightened to death.

As soon as night fell, Malta went on the offensive again with fighter-intruders ranging over Sicily and the toe of Italy in the moonlight. They left trails of havoc on the railways. Trains were attacked until the locomotives either blew up or were brought to a standstill, enveloped in steam. A goods train was raked, brilliant white flashes coming from the trucks. Two railway stations and a railway junction were gunned thoroughly, and heavy black smoke came from one station, two explosions from another, and a dazzling white glow from the junction. The intruders shot up signal boxes at other points and rounded off the night with a cannon attack on a 2,000 tons ship off the coast.

Altogether it was a grand day for the air force in Malta - and very appropriate as the film of Malta's bad days, "Malta, G.C." yesterday began its first run on the island.

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