

SICILY RAIDED FROM MALTA

The Royal Air Force in Malta has had one of its busiest twenty-four hours since the war started. On Wednesday night the enemy slipped over a small number of bombers. They did no military damage and, as a result of co-operation between night fighters, A.A. guns and searchlights, two of the raiders were shot down and another was probably destroyed. That night also, our night fighters attacked a seaplane base in Sicily. A German seaplane was shot down in flames into the sea, and a motor vessel was shot up from low level.

On Thursday morning, the enemy attempted a high flying fighter sweep near Malta, but Spitfires went up and met them out at sea and dispersed them, damaging two German fighters in the process.

In the afternoon, Sicilian aerodromes suffered their most damaging strafing. Spitfires swarmed across the Sicilian coast at almost ground level. Some of their objectives were raked by both cannon and machine-gun fire. They included hangars, dispersal huts and pens, barrack blocks, stores, buildings and water tanks in a railway yard. Fitters working on Italian fighters were killed, and groups of soldiers were shot up. Hostile aircraft were attacked in the air also in the act of taking off, and on the ground.

One squadron of Spitfires shot down four Ju.88s and damaged many others. They damaged a further Ju.88 on the ground and a Me.109 was destroyed in the act of taking off. This squadron was so busy dealing with aircraft in the air that they could take no further part in the ground-strafting, having run out of ammunition. The aerodromes were enveloped in dense smoke when the aircraft left. The following casualties were inflicted: ten enemy aircraft were destroyed, four bombers and two fighters in the air, three bombers and one fighter on the ground. Many others were probably destroyed or damaged. On the way home, three schooners off the coast were shot up.

An Axis convoy was attacked at dusk with both torpedoes and bombs, and a medium-sized merchant vessel which was escorted by a destroyer was sunk. She was hit squarely amidships by a torpedo. Escorting fighters say they saw three torpedo hits, and a direct bomb hit in the stern was observed. The ship blew up, blazing from stem to stern, and was left with decks awash and back broken. Two attacking aircraft did not release their torpedoes as the vessel was already finished. This vessel and the destroyer were both shot up from varying heights, and the destroyer was seen to be smoking.

Our protecting fighters destroyed an Italian Cant bomber and damaged a Ju.88 which tried to interfere later.

On Thursday night, Sicily came in for more punishment. Two aerodromes were bombed and on another an attack was made on a landing aircraft, which ran off the runway and appeared to crash. In another place, seaplanes, hangars, cars and a large building with all lights on were shot up.

Apart from the damage done on the ground during this period of little more than twenty-four hours, a total of fourteen enemy aircraft were destroyed and many others probably destroyed or damaged for the loss of three of our fighters.