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B.R. 1736 (10)

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NAVAL STAFF HISTORY  
SECOND WORLD WAR

Battle Summary No. 52

THE TOBRUK RUN

JUNE 1940 TO JANUARY 1943



1956

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HISTORICAL SECTION  
ADMIRALTY, S.W.I.

Admiralty, S.W.1

25th October 1956

H.S.18/55.

B.R. 1736 (10) *Naval Staff History, Second World War, Battle Summary No. 52, The Tubruk Run, June 1940 to January 1943* having been approved by My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, is hereby promulgated.

*By Command of Their Lordships*

*J. G. Lang*

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## Foreword

The published Official Histories and Service Staff Histories or Narratives dealing with the Mediterranean and Middle East Campaigns of the Second World War include accounts of operations off the Cyrenaican coast in separate volumes of each series.

From time to time suggestions have been made that these operations—often referred to as The Tobruk Run—should be recounted as a separate story under one cover, as from an interservice point of view they carry a special significance. It would be difficult to find in the history of modern warfare a clearer example in a particular locality of the close interdependence of the three fighting Services extending over a long period. The naval part of this joint effort was recognised by ships concerned being awarded a separate Battle Honour, Libya 1940-2.

In compiling this account much assistance has been given by the Cabinet Historical (Military) Section and the Air Historical Branch.

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## BATTLE SUMMARY No. 52

## The Tobruk Run

PHASE I. BEFORE THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK, JUNE 1940 TO APRIL 1941

IN THE early days of the war in the Mediterranean, that is from June 1940 to January 1941, Tobruk was in the hands of the enemy. During that period, operations along the coast of Cyrenaica were undertaken by warships of all classes and by aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm and Royal Air Force. At 0300/11th June 1940, three hours after war with Italy began, the first war cruise of the Mediterranean Fleet started when the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, left Alexandria with two battleships, the *Warspite* and *Malaya*; one aircraft carrier, the *Eagle*; five cruisers of the 7th Cruiser Squadron, the *Orion* (flag of Vice-Admiral J. C. Tovey), *Neptune*, *Sydney*, *Liverpool* and *Gloucester*, and twelve destroyers. The 7th Cruiser Squadron was directed to sweep ahead of the fleet at 25 knots until dark on the 11th, then to carry out an attack at daylight/12th on enemy patrols off Benghazi and Tobruk. The Royal Air Force was to undertake a bombing attack at daylight/12th on ships and harbour works at Tobruk, the timing of the attack to coincide with the naval operations. The raid resulted in the old cruiser *San Giorgio* being hit, set on fire and beached. She was acting as depot ship for destroyers and small craft.

The 1st Division of the 7th Cruiser Squadron drew a blank off Benghazi, but the 2nd Division, the *Liverpool* and *Gloucester*, engaged six minesweepers off Tobruk and sank one of them. Both cruisers were under fire from shore batteries for eleven minutes without being hit, and cut mines adrift with their paravanes. About a fortnight later, the 7th Cruiser Squadron, when at sea with the fleet providing cover for convoys running between the Aegean and Egypt, also between Malta and Alexandria, intercepted and engaged three Italian destroyers on their way to Benghazi, sinking one of them, the *Espero*.

During the period June to December 1940, one or two of our submarines, operating from Alexandria, patrolled the coast between Tobruk and Benghazi. On 20th June 1940, the *Parthian* fired four torpedoes at the Italian submarine *Diamante* off Derna and sank her. The *Rorqual* laid mines on several occasions in 1940 between Derna and Benghazi and on one occasion in the Gulf of Sirte. At least two merchant ships and two torpedo boats (all Italian) are known to have been lost on her minefields.

Two Italian submarines, the *Argonauta* and the *Rubino*, when returning to Italy from patrol off Cyrenaica—or vice versa—were destroyed by bombs in the Ionian Sea on 28th and 29th June 1940, by a Sunderland aircraft, L5804, of 201 Group, R.A.F.

The first of many coastal bombardments of enemy positions and troops in Cyrenaica took place on 21st June 1940, the day before the collapse of France. Three cruisers, the *Orion*, *Neptune* and *Sydney* and the French battleship *Lorraine* with four destroyers, bombarded Bardia, a small port lying some six miles west of the Egyptian frontier. The targets consisted of coastal batteries, W/T station, ammunition dumps, power and pumping stations. The bombardment

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## BATTLE SUMMARY No. 52

## The Tobruk Run

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minutes without being hit, and cut mines adrift with their guns. The 7th Cruiser Squadron, when at sea between the Aegean and the Mediterranean, engaged three of them, the *Espero*.

Two of our submarines, the *Upholder* and *Thetis*, were based at Tobruk and Benghazi.

The *Diamante* off Derna. The *Diamante* was based at the Italian submarine base at Derna and was active on several occasions

in 1940 between Derna and Benghazi. She was sunk on one occasion in the Gulf of Sirte. At least two merchant ships and two torpedo boats (all Italian) are known to have been lost on her minefields.

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took place between 0548 and 0606/21st June at ranges between 12,000 and 14,000 yards; the coastal batteries did not reply, only anti-aircraft guns opening fire at our aircraft, and these were soon silenced by the *Neptune* and *Lorraine*. Air photographs shewed that four ammunition huts were destroyed and considerable damage was done to store houses, barracks and administrative buildings. Probably more effective results would have been obtained if at the commencement of the operation, actually at the *Sydney's* second salvo, the *Sydney's* spotting aircraft had not been attacked by R.A.F. fighters, badly damaged and forced to land at Mersa Matruh. The aircraft identification situation was again at fault when the *Lorraine* opened fire on the R.A.F. Gladiators. No enemy aircraft appeared on the scene. While this bombardment was taking place R.A.F. bombers attacked shipping in Tobruk, five destroyers carried out an anti-submarine sweep between Alexandria and Tobruk and lastly, two French cruisers, the *Suffren* and *Duguay-Trouin*, with three British destroyers cruised off the coast searching for enemy forces.

On 5th July 1940, in conjunction with the Royal Air Force, nine Swordfish aircraft of Fleet Air Arm Squadron No. 813 from the *Eagle* carried out a dusk torpedo attack on shipping in Tobruk. Operating from an airfield at Maaten Bagush, seven of the aircraft fired their torpedoes inside the harbour, as a result of which one destroyer, the *Zeffiro* was sunk and another severely damaged. The motor vessel *Manzoni* was sunk and torpedoed and the cargo vessel *Serenitas* sunk by bomb. The liner *Liguria*, 15,000 tons, was seriously damaged. The Commander-in-Chief, in reporting this action to the Admiralty, stated that its success was largely due to excellent Royal Air Force co-operation in providing reconnaissance, diversionary attacks and airfield facilities. Another bombardment of Bardia took place on 6th July by the Third Cruiser Squadron, *Capetown* (flag of Rear-Admiral E. de M. Renouf) and *Caledon* with four destroyers, which remained outside the 100 fathom line to give A/S protection. Another Fleet Air Arm attack on Tobruk Harbour was launched on 20th July. Six aircraft of 824 Squadron, which had taken off from the *Eagle* at sea on the 19th and had proceeded to the landing ground at Sidi Barrani, carried out a torpedo attack at 0240/20th by moonlight. Driving through heavy, horizontal barrage fire, they succeeded in sinking two destroyers, the *Nembo* and *Ostro*, and a cargo steamer, the *Sereno* (2,333 tons). On the same night, Blenheim bombers from 55 and 211 Squadrons, R.A.F. bombed the harbour.

In August, in order to be within striking distance of shipping located off the coast, three Swordfish of 824 Squadron (from the *Eagle*) with torpedoes, were sent to Maaten Bagush, 200 miles from Tobruk, where they were placed under the operational control of 202 Group, R.A.F. On 22nd August, early morning reconnaissance of the Gulf of Bomba, 250 miles west of Maaten Bagush, revealed a destroyer, two submarines and a depot ship in the bay. The Commanding Officer, 202 Group, despatched the three Swordfish to Sidi Barrani, 150 miles from Bomba, where they refuelled and took off at 1038 to attack the shipping reported. The attack was successful, the submarine *Iride* and auxiliary minelayer *Monte Gargano* being sunk. The *Iride* had on board three underwater assault craft, and the intention had been to launch an attack on the fleet in Alexandria.

A very heavy bombardment of enemy positions at Bardia occurred on 17th August 1940, a time of some anxiety ashore in view of strong rumours of an impending Italian advance. Italian troops were reported to be assembling at Fort Capuzzo, 11 miles south of Bardia, and numerous dumps of stores and ammunition were in and around Bardia itself. Three battleships, the *Warspite*, *Malaya*, *Ramillies* and the 8-inch cruiser *Kent*<sup>1</sup> took part. Very little

<sup>1</sup> The *Kent* was hit and extensively damaged off Bardia on 17th September 1940 by a torpedo from an Italian aircraft.



opposition was met, only a few rounds of 4-inch falling about 1,000 yards from the ships. R.A.F. fighters from 202 Group brought down 10 enemy bombers and broke up their attacks on the fleet. The ship's own aircraft, 700 Squadron (Walrus) of the Fleet Air Arm, carried out spotting duties and were protected from enemy fighters by Fleet Air Arm Gladiators operating under orders of 202 Group R.A.F. The Gladiators brought down one enemy bomber for certain; neither the R.A.F. nor F.A.A. suffered any losses. On the night of 23rd/24th August, the gunboat *Ladybird*, just arrived from China, penetrated into Bardia harbour and engaged shore targets at point blank range. At the same time the Flotilla leader *Stuart* with two destroyers bombarded the enemy seaplane base in the Gulf of Bomba.

In September 1940 the two gunboats, *Aphis* and *Ladybird*, were given the specific task of assisting the Army by operating directly according to the requirements of the military authorities. In company with various destroyers, these two gunboats were known as Force W, which was the forerunner of the Inshore Squadron. During the Italian advance in Egypt between 13th and 17th September Force W harassed the enemy near the coast between the frontier and Sidi Barrani, where the advance was halted. Between 17th September and 9th December 1940, when General Wavell launched the first British assault, Operation Compass, Force W was continually employed against targets ashore. Likewise frequent air raids were launched on Tobruk, Derna and Benghazi by the Royal Air Force and Fleet Air Arm.

The Fleet Air Arm raid on the night of 16th September 1940 calls for special mention. Swordfish aircraft of 815 and 819 Squadrons were flown off the *Illustrious* from a point 100 miles north of Benghazi. Six magnetic mines were laid within three cables of the harbour entrance and ships inside the harbour were bombed. Two destroyers were sunk, the *Aquilone* from a mine and the *Borea* from bombs. The Swordfish also sank the S.S. *Gloria Stella* (5,490 tons) and the S.S. *Maria Eugenia* (4,702 tons).

To recount each incident of Force W or of our aircraft attacks during those three months would mean wearisome repetition; it must be sufficient to say that the experience gained proved invaluable to the tasks required when the Army began its advance. By 2300/8th December 1940, the *Terror* and *Aphis* had taken up bombarding positions off Maktila, assisted by a flashing light established by the Army. The *Ladybird* took up her position off Sidi Barrani. For an hour and a half these vessels, assisted by flares dropped by Swordfish aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm, bombarded enemy strong points, camps and M.T. concentrations. The gunboats closed to within 3,000 yards, and the *Terror* fired from between 8,000 and 16,000 yards. Enemy counterfire caused no damage, and at 0100/19th the *Ladybird* and *Aphis* shaped course for Matruh to refuel and re-ammunition. One result of this bombardment was that the enemy evacuated the Maktila area, and the next morning British forces marched in unopposed.

Rapid success ashore made bombardment on the night of the 9th/10th unnecessary. Stormy weather, with heavy seas breaking on the beach, caused the abandonment of a Commando landing in Sollum Bay on the 10th. This was just as well, for the Commando itself, which had been embarked in the *Hereward*, was all but paralysed with seasickness.

On the 11th, operations were confined to Sollum Bay, where the *Terror*, *Aphis*, *Ladybird* bombarded from early morning until midnight, expending their entire outfit of ammunition. In the case of the *Terror*, this amounted to 220 rounds of 15-inch high explosive (each shell weighs approximately 9/10th of a ton) and in each gunboat 300 rounds of 6-inch. During the afternoon and evening the *Janus*, *Nubian* and *Jervis* joined in the bombardment of the coastal road and Sollum camp at a range of 10,000 yards.



The gunboats employed 'tip and run' tactics; a short run in, then developing maximum fire followed by retirement out of range. Heavy fire was encountered from shore batteries, either from guns on the coast or emplacements in Halfaya Pass but no ship was hit. Ashore, towards sunset on the 11th, the enemy's westward movement had become a rout, and many were caught between the fire of our tanks advancing from the east and that of the gunboats from the west. On this day Rear-Admiral Rawlings, with a force of battleships and cruisers, was in Sollum Bay waiting to bombard enemy concentrations if required. On the 12th, a heavy sandstorm reduced visibility to less than a mile, thus preventing the battleships bombarding Bardia or aircraft from the *Illustrious* attacking El Adem airfield. From the 14th to the 18th the *Terror* and *Aphis* were continually in action, bombarding Bardia or Sollum. The 17th might be described as their field day. At dawn the *Aphis* penetrated right into Bardia harbour and at a range of 600 yards set three ships on fire with six rounds of her 6-inch guns. During the next hour she engaged various targets at point blank range. Although under heavy rifle, Breda and machine gunfire she suffered no casualties and sustained no serious damage. The *Terror* lay outside the harbour, and reported that "volumes of black smoke continued to roll out of the entrance, indicating that the *Aphis* was having a good time". She engaged batteries seen to be firing at the *Aphis*, closing to 9,000 yards. About midday she found herself running short of 15-inch ammunition and retired to Alexandria to get more. On the way, at the request of the Army, she bombarded the road near Azzaz. By nightfall on 18th December, Fort Capuzzo and Sollum were in British hands. The first phase of the campaign was over.

With regard to organization, until 15th December 1940, Force W operated directly under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, on which date the Rear-Admiral, First Battle Squadron, took over, with Captain H. M. L. Waller, D.S.O., R.A.N., Commanding Officer of the *Stuart*, as Senior Naval Officer. Afloat, in charge of the smaller ships.

On 6th January 1941, Captain H. Hickling, R.N. was appointed as Senior Naval Officer Inshore Squadron, short title S.N.O.I.S. He was made responsible for the naval organisation at the Western Desert supply bases of Mersa Metruh, Sollum and Bardia, and was to act as Chief Naval Liaison Officer with the Army and Royal Air Force Headquarters in the desert. Naval officers in charge (N.O.I.C.) at the supply bases and Naval Liaison Officers (N.L.O.) at Army Headquarters, Gambut, and No. 202 Group, R.A.F., Sollum, were placed directly under him. On 25th January, operational control of naval forces working off the coast of Cyrenaica was transferred from R.A., 1st B.S. to S.N.O.I.S. An Army Officer was appointed to the fleet flagship as military liaison officer.

As stated above, the opening phase of the British Army's first offensive into Cyrenaica ended on 18th December 1940, when Fort Capuzzo and Sollum had been captured. While the Army was preparing for the next step forward—the capture of Bardia—the efforts of the Royal Navy were directed to the supply problem, which for a short while at Sollum was chaotic. Shortage of water there became serious. In normal circumstances, the water supply to Sollum came by pipeline from Bardia, and this supply continued until the 18th when the Italians at Bardia turned it off. Eventually, by the 24th, the problem was solved by the arrival of the Egyptian water carrier *Myriel*, capacity 3,600 tons; but for the three days of the 21st to 23rd when the water crisis was acute, the *Aphis* and *Ladybird* turned themselves into water-carriers, landing 100 tons a day from the armed boarding vessel *Fiona*. Scores of watercarts



were lined up on the beach, whence they left for immediate distribution to the troops, who were rationed to half a gallon a day for all purposes.

With reference to seaborne supplies it was decided at an interservice meeting at Alexandria on 27th December 1940, that the Navy and Air Force would protect the sea routes, and the Navy defend ships in harbour against seaborne or torpedo aircraft attacks until the Army could mount A/A batteries. The Army undertook the maintenance of water lighters and the manning of such harbour craft as the Navy was unable to man. For the protection of the supply routes destroyers patrolled to seaward, and six Swordfish aircraft from the *Eagle* operated from Maaten Bagush for a/s patrols during daylight and moonlight periods.

The second stage of the advance began on 3rd January 1941 with the assault on Bardia. At first light on the 3rd, ships of the Inshore Squadron, the 15-inch monitor *Terror* and the three gunboats, *Aphis*, *Gnat* and *Ladybird*, bombarded the area north-west of the town, then retiring northward to keep clear of the battlefleet. These ships of the Inshore Squadron had spent the previous day bombarding Bardia and engaging shore batteries. Now it was the battleships' turn. Starting at 0800 and continuing for 35 minutes the *Warspite*, *Valiant* and *Barham*, screened by seven destroyers, engaged various targets. They were assisted by spotting aircraft (*Walrus*) from the battleships. Fighters, Fulmars of 806 Squadron and A/S patrols, Swordfish of 815, 819 Squadrons of the Fleet Air Arm, were provided by the *Illustrious*.<sup>1</sup>

The task of the Navy was to plaster the area northward and eastward of the Army's assault force so as to safeguard the latter's right flank during their thrust into Bardia. The battleships fired 246 rounds of 15-inch and over 500 rounds of 6-inch and 4.5-inch, after which it is not surprising to hear that Italian troops in that area "appeared dazed". Directly the battleships had withdrawn, the *Terror* and the three gunboats kept up an intermittent bombardment in the face of several bombing attacks and gunfire from shore batteries, the *Aphis*<sup>2</sup> being slightly damaged off Wadi Raheb. By 5th January the Battle of Bardia was over. The Naval Officer-in-Charge, Bardia, moved in on that date and a naval W/T station was immediately established.

The next objective—the capture of Tobruk—was timed to begin at dawn on 20th January. Naval harassing fire in the north-west corner of the defences was requested on the two nights preceding the attack. Captain Hickling flew to Alexandria on the 17th to obtain approval for his plans from the Commander-in-Chief. Bombardment was to be undertaken by the *Terror* and the three gunboats, assisted by the minesweeper *Bagshot* and destroyer *Voyager*. Severe gales and sandstorms occurred on the night of 19th/20th and the assault was postponed 24 hours. These storms were responsible for S.N.O.I.S. being forced landed in the Desert on his way back from Alexandria to Sollum, causing him to walk 25 miles to Mersa Matruh, where he obtained another aircraft to Sollum. The *Terror* opened fire at 2325/20th from a position 15 miles north-west of Tobruk and fired about 100 rounds mostly into a wadi where enemy troops were assembled. At 0200/21st, the *Gnat* and *Ladybird* moved in to attack at close range; but were recalled at 0122, as a signal "Cease bombarding" was received from the Army, who launched their attack at dawn/21st. By noon/22nd the entire defence area was in our hands and a harbour of some dimensions was at last available. Only five days elapsed before the first ship was unloaded. The boom defence was found to

<sup>1</sup> A week later, the *Illustrious* was seriously damaged by bombs off Malta, and was not relieved by the *Formidable* until early March 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Acting Petty Officer L. R. Poore and Able Seaman B. Chapman, both of the *Aphis*, were awarded the C.G.M. for their gallant conduct during these operations.



be 80 per cent efficient, wrecks were soon located and clear berths established. The power station was working, two distilling plants were serviceable and there was enough water in the cisterns to meet the Army's immediate requirements.

On the 25th, the *Terror* arrived to provide sea and air defence of the port until shore defences were established. The Army continued westward from Tobruk, reaching Derna on 30th January, Benghazi on 6th February and El Agheila on the Tripolitanian border—by 9th February. At Derna, until 6th March the Commanding Officer of the *Aphis* acted as naval officer-in-charge; the gunboat herself, except for a few days at Benghazi, combined the duties of W/T station, harbour defence and A/A guardship.

On 5th February, Captain A. L. Poland, D.S.O., D.S.C. took over the duties of S.N.O.I.S. from Captain Hickling.

For the last stage of the advance into Cyrenaica and during our occupation naval coastal operations of an offensive nature were not required. The Commander-in-Chief's policy was as follows:—

- (1) to continue to use Tobruk as the main supply base,
- (2) to clear Benghazi as soon as possible and run an occasional convoy there,
- (3) to keep Sollum open as a subsidiary base in case Tobruk became temporarily closed,
- (4) to use Derna only for small ships which could berth inside the break-water,
- (5) to use Bardia as a refuge for small ships and coasting schooners awaiting favourable conditions for onward passage.

The retention of Benghazi by us was considered by the Defence Committee and Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to be a matter of high importance to the strategic plan for the Middle East. It will be remembered that at this period the moving of troops from the Middle East Command to Greece had been decided upon. This would lead to the lessening of our military strength in Cyrenaica, which in turn threatened the security of the western flank of Egypt and raised doubts about our ability to hold and use Benghazi. The conditions prevailing at that port with the increasing tempo of German air attacks on our shipping on the Alexandria, Tobruk-Benghazi route, caused the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, no little anxiety. His policy quoted above, for assisting the Army after the capture of Benghazi, included the intention of clearing the port as soon as possible and running an occasional convoy there. In the event we were unable to use—and later to hold—the port due to our inability to provide adequate air protection. On 12th February, S.N.O.I.S. sailed from Tobruk in the *Chakla* for Benghazi with a clearance force comprising the minesweeper *Fareham*, three destroyers and two sloops. Also two minesweeping trawlers, the *Arthur Cavanagh* and *Milford Countess*, sailed from Alexandria on the 11th, escorted by the destroyer *Decoy*. The *Aphis* arrived on the 12th and S.N.O.I.S., while on his way to Benghazi with the clearance force, received from her by W/T a reassuring report by the Clearance Officer, Commander Douglas-Watson, who had proceeded to Benghazi by road. The *Chakla* and the clearance force entered Benghazi at 1310/13th, and the Clearance Officer at once reported to S.N.O.I.S. that the situation was not so good as had been stated. One mine for certain and probably a second were still undetonated in the harbour, following an aircraft minelaying raid on the night of 11th/12th. As a result S.N.O.I.S. decided to take his ships to sea for the night and signalled to the Army Authorities at General Headquarters to provide the maximum A/A protection for the harbour as soon as possible.



The arrival of the clearance force had been the signal for the commencement of an intensive air bombardment of the town and harbour, and if this was to continue twice daily at dawn and dusk—as in fact it did—then the question of using Benghazi to any considerable extent depended on the provision of air protection, which at the time was impracticable.

In order to assist with the defences, the *Terror*, that well seasoned defender of Cretan and Cyrenaican ports and veteran of many bombardments, sailed from Tobruk and reached Benghazi on the 17th. The A/A cruiser, *Coventry*, arrived the next day with a convoy of two ships, by which time twelve 3·7-inch guns and a number of Bofors and Bredas had been mounted. In the absence of a radar set, however, adequate warning of an attack could not be given and the toll taken of the attackers was not sufficient to deter them. Matters soon came to a head. On 14th February, a convoy of four ships, A.C.1., escorted by the *Coventry*, two corvettes and two South African A/S whalers, *Southern Isle* and *Southern Maid*, had left Alexandria for Benghazi; but, as the air defences were not yet adequate and the unloading capacity of the port was limited to 500 tons a day, only two ships were sailed to Benghazi, the other two going back to Tobruk. The two for Benghazi, as mentioned above, arrived on the 18th and off loading began on the 19th, nothing having been achieved the day before owing to alarm among local labour. Dive bombing attacks on shipping in the harbour became more and more tiresome and, observing that only 300 tons had been unloaded and that it would take eight days to clear the two ships at that rate, S.N.O.I.S. decided on the 19th to sail them back to Tobruk.

It should be noted that the port itself had been considerably damaged by enemy bombing in addition to that previously caused by our own bombing. The northern breakwater had been breached, admitting usually a heavy swell, and most of the buildings and equipment on the foreshore had been destroyed. The inner harbour was blocked by several big sunken ships, whilst there were only two or three berths in the main harbour available for good sized ships.

The General Officer Commanding in Cyrenaica, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, K.C.B., D.S.O., was in complete agreement with S.N.O.I.S. that whilst the air situation remained as it was, the risk to ships was not justified. The two partially unloaded ships, the *Palermo*, and *Escaut*, therefore left Benghazi on the 19th escorted by the *Coventry*, two corvettes and two A/S whalers for Tobruk, where—since 12th February—the work of unloading had been free from interruption by air attacks.

Over this question of the inability to hold Benghazi, the R.A.F. view was that the Navy “beat the pistol” by using the port too soon, before radar cover, fighters and anti-aircraft defences had been established. The Royal Air Force were fully occupied in maintaining pressure on the retreating enemy and had little to spare at the time for patrols over coastal shipping and could only protect the ports on a limited scale.

The R.A.F. were unable to fulfil the Navy’s request for fighter protection between the meridians of 28° and 25° East, confining themselves to covering Tobruk with a detachment of No. 73 Squadron and giving some cover west of 25° East with the Desert squadrons. This situation ruled until 17th April 1941 when the defence of Tobruk was given first priority.

It will be convenient at this point briefly to describe the situation at Tobruk between the 5th and 24th of February. The Naval Officer-in-Charge was Captain F. M. Smith, R.N.R.

During the first week of this period air raids were heavy. Two ships in the harbour were damaged by mines, the storeship *Rodi* and the petrol carrier *Adinda*. The South African A/S whaler, the *Southern Floe*, was mined and sunk at the entrance to the swept channel at 0405/11th February. There was only one survivor; no time being allowed by the explosion to get the boats out,



and she was not carrying any rafts. The other ships of the 22nd A/S Group, *Southern Isle*, *Southern Maid*, *Southern Sea*, were immediately fitted with small Carley rafts. Intensive minesweeping was carried out by the ships of the Inshore Squadron, the *Bagshot*, *Moy*, *Arthur Cavanagh* and *Milford Countess*. Army and R.A.F. requirements amounted to 3,000 tons daily, but on account of mine casualties to lighters, trouble with labour and damage from bad weather, unloading capacity was reduced by the 12th to a daily maximum of 500 tons. On the 12th, Sollum was closed as a supply port, except for feluccas which could land up to 150 tons daily. This released the A/S trawler *Wolborough* for Tobruk, and the W/T station was removed to Benghazi. The m/s trawler *Ouse* was sunk by a mine in the harbour on the 20th with casualties of 16 killed and 4 wounded. From 12th to 22nd February, Tobruk was free from air raids, the enemy having concentrated on Benghazi; but after the 22nd attacks elsewhere recommenced in force. On the 24th, the destroyer *Dainty* was bombed and sunk off Tobruk while proceeding for patrol, and the oiler *Tynefield* was bombed and badly damaged at Alexandria. There were a few motor schooners reconditioned by the Navy and some flat-topped lighters left by the Italians which eased the situation. By the 22nd, 1,400 tons of stores were being handled daily.

To return now to Benghazi. The air attacks reached a maximum on 22nd February when, in a dawn raid, extensive damage was done to the *Terror* by a 'near miss'. The Commanding Officer, Commander H. J. Haynes, on the 22nd signalled the Commander-in-Chief as follows:—

"With no dawn fighter protection as at present, I consider it only a matter of time before the ship receives a direct hit."

Later on the same day the Commander-in-Chief informed the Military and Air Commanders-in-Chief that "in view of scale of air attacks, inadequate defences and damage to H.M.S. *Terror* I have withdrawn H.M. ships from Benghazi. At dusk on the 22nd, the *Terror*, *Fareham* and *Salvia* left for Tobruk, leaving the clearance party to do the best they could. Dive bombing took place as the ships left harbour, shaking the *Fareham* severely with a 'near miss'. In the swept channel two mines exploded within 200 yards of the *Terror*, causing additional flooding to some compartments. At 1830/23rd, when still 90 miles from Tobruk a final dive bombing attack was delivered. 'Near misses' broke the ship's back between the turret and the bridge; all dynamos were put out of action and the boiler room was flooded. The *Fareham* took her in tow and the Commander-in-Chief ordered warships from Alexandria and Tobruk to go to her assistance. She was, however, beyond help. Just before midnight, with the quarterdeck awash and four feet of free board forward, Commander Haynes gave the order to abandon ship. A few hours later, she sank, her crew by then being on board the *Salvia* and *Fareham*. Thus was lost the ship which had done so much to help the Army's advance.

The inability of the Navy to use Benghazi in February 1941, and, a little later, the failure of the Army to stem Rommel's advance, marked a bad phase of the campaign in Cyrenaica. The loss of Benghazi by 3rd April and the whole of Cyrenaica by 15th April meant abandoning the use of the more western airfields, which created difficulties in providing shore based fighter protection to ships passing between Alexandria and Malta when west of 21°E.<sup>1</sup>

From early February to the beginning of April 1941, when withdrawal from Western Cyrenaica started, ships of the Inshore Squadron were employed in

<sup>1</sup> Between January 1941, when the *Illustrious* was damaged, and March 1941 when the *Formidable* arrived, the *Eagle* accompanied the Fleet to sea. The *Formidable* operated with the Fleet from mid-March to the end of May, 1941. The *Eagle* left the Mediterranean for the Indian Ocean in April, 1941.



the development and protection of the ports of Sollum, Bardia and Tobruk and Derna. Seaborne supplies to the Army were maintained through Tobruk and Derna, Benghazi was visited mainly by schooners.

The squadron during March was reduced to one corvette, three a/s whalers or trawlers, one minesweeper and one gunboat. All destroyers were withdrawn to provide escorts for Operation Lustre, the despatch of troops from Egypt to Greece. Two of the Squadron's minesweepers were diverted to Port Said to help clear the canal, which was being heavily mined from the air in February and March. [The canal was closed, either wholly or in part, for 21 days in February and 15 days in March]. At the end of March 1941, the Desert Flank, described by Sir Winston Churchill as "the peg on which all else hung", depended for its maintenance on weakened British forces opposed by greatly strengthened enemy troops. The newly reinforced Italo-German Army was massed in Tripolitania, close to the frontier of Cyrenaica at Agheila, 175 miles south of Benghazi. On 2nd March, General Wavell expressed the opinion to the Chiefs of Staff that the enemy might test us at Agheila by offensive patrolling and perhaps move up to Agedabia, 70 miles on the road towards Benghazi; but he "did not think with this force he will attempt to recover Benghazi". Later in the same message he "thought it unlikely that such an attack could develop before the end of summer". General Rommel, however, decided to attack sooner than was expected. On 31st March, six days before Hitler loosed the German hordes into Greece and Yugoslavia, Rommel's patrols crossed the border into Cyrenaica, followed by considerable and newly equipped armoured formations.

The British Army, in the circumstances prevailing, was forced to retreat. The Mediterranean Fleet did what it could to help, but it was called upon in March and April to escort troops to Greece (Operation Lustre) and then to evacuate them from Greece to Crete or Egypt (Operation Demon). The Inshore Squadron of two destroyers, three gunboats and other small craft, bombarded enemy military transport on the coast roads and airfields such as Gazala which could be brought under gunfire from sea. When possible, cruisers and additional destroyers joined in. On the night of 19th/20th April a seaborne raid on Bardia, which the enemy had re-occupied on the 14th, was carried out by a battalion of special service troops, (known now as Commandos) from the *Glennarn* and *Glengyle*, escorted by the *Coventry*, three destroyers and the submarine *Triumph* which acted as a navigational beacon. Some demolition was carried out without enemy opposition.

The enemy reached the Egyptian frontier by 14th April; having recaptured Derna on the 7th and by-passed Tobruk on the 11th, which was held mainly by the 9th Australian Division and a brigade group of the 7th Australian Division, supported by British Artillery, the whole garrison being under the command of Lieutenant General Sir Leslie Morshead.

Thus began the siege of Tobruk, which was to last 242 days.



PHASE II.—DURING THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK, APRIL TO DECEMBER 1941

IN THE months of May and June 1941 the Mediterranean Fleet was particularly active. In May a maximum effort was required to assist, and later to evacuate, the Army from Crete, and in June/July cruisers and destroyers were operating off the coast of Syria. This left only a few destroyers and minor war vessels to work with a small number of merchant ships on the Tobruk Run. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, in a message to the Admiralty on 18th June outlined the arrangements for supplying Tobruk in these somewhat straitened circumstances. Destroyers and auxiliary schooners would continue to run to maximum capacity, and a small steamer would be escorted in at irregular intervals with a petrol carrier to unload at night only. Losses in the Inshore Squadron were becoming troublesome; between 12th April and 1st June the following vessels had been sunk by bombs, either in Tobruk Harbour or between Tobruk and Sidi Barrani.

M/S Whaler	1	<i>Skudd IV</i>
Armed boarding vessels	2	<i>Fiona, Chakla</i>
Minesweepers	2	<i>Stoke, Aurora II</i>
Gunboat	1	<i>Ladybird</i> <sup>1</sup>
Sloop	1	<i>Grimsby</i>
A/S trawler	1	<i>Sindonis</i>

Also damaged by bombs, though not seriously, were the *Greyhound*, *Gnat*, *Svana* and *Falk*. The only vessel damaged on the Tobruk Run during this period by causes other than bombs was the *Gnat*, on 15th April, by a shore battery at Sollum.

In view of the scale of air attack being experienced, the Commander-in-Chief, on 7th June, ordered the temporary suspension of all shipping other than destroyers running supplies to Tobruk. This decision was reached after consultation with the Air Officer, Commanding-in-Chief, and the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. Normal service would be resumed as soon as adequate fighter protection was available.

Destroyers continued their nightly service until 15th June, when Operation Battleaxe began. This was an abortive attempt made between 15th and 17th June to relieve Tobruk and push Rommel well to the westward. It did not call for direct assistance by the Navy. Bombardments could not be carried out without fighter protection, and it was considered more important to concentrate the whole fighter strength in support of the Army. In any case, what was left of the naval forces after Greece and Crete was actively employed in mid-June off the Syrian coast. After the 17th, Desert operations quietened down and restrictions on the supply service to Tobruk were removed as soon as definite arrangements were made with the Royal Air Force to provide fighter protection.

<sup>1</sup> The *Ladybird*, commanded by Commander J. F. Blackburn, D.S.O., was sunk in Tobruk Harbour by bombs on 12th May 1941. A few weeks later, the following signal was received by the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean:—

From Officer Commanding, 1st Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment.

“ All ranks of South Staffords having had opportunity of getting to know officers and crew of H.M.S. *Ladybird* and seeing so much of their co-operation in action in the Western Desert, wish to express their sympathy at the loss of this gallant little ship.”



In the absence of an aircraft carrier<sup>1</sup> fighter cover could only be maintained within range of the airfields available to our shorebased aircraft. There were two types of German bombers to be met (a) Ju.87, the dive-bomber, with radius of action of 200 miles (b) Ju.88, with radius of action of 800 miles. Both types could be rendered ineffective by our fighters, by day, unless the enemy bombers were themselves heavily escorted. The whole Eastern Mediterranean was within range of Ju.88s, but not of Ju.87s, whose eastern limit was roughly a line from the west end of Cyprus to Daba, about 70 miles west of Alexandria. Enemy fighters, Me.109s, Me.202 and G.50s, had a maximum range of 150 miles, allowing for an hour on patrol. As Tobruk lay 70 miles inside enemy occupied territory this meant that attacks by escorted bombers could be expected in the western half of the Alexandria-Tobruk run.

R.A.F. fighters at this time, Hurricanes, Tomahawks, and Martlets, could deal with either bombers or fighter escorts. At 100 miles from their airfield they could maintain a patrol of one hour, and the most western base from which they could operate was the refuelling ground at Sidi Barrani, 100 miles from Tobruk. Five squadrons, Nos. 73, 250, 274 of the Royal Air Force and Nos 1 and 2 of the South African Air Force were available and operated on the Tobruk Run in June and July 1941. One squadron of the Fleet Air Arm, No. 805, which had been formed at Dekheila (Alexandria), with Martlets in January 1941, was re-equipped with Hurricanes in June and took part in the protection of shipping on the Tobruk Run. The Royal Air Force also had a squadron of Beaufighters with a range of 300 miles which could be, and was, used on the Tobruk Run; but being large and without rear guns these aircraft were at a disadvantage in combat with Me. 109s or G.50s, though they could deal effectively with bombers or long range fighters such as Me. 110s.

The Inshore Squadron, on 18th June 1941, comprised four destroyers, three sloops, two gunboats and a number of minor war vessels such as whalers, trawlers, minesweepers, auxiliary schooners and A lighters. The latter were an early edition of L.C.T.'s. Beginning on that day, destroyers worked in pairs, unloading at Tobruk two nights out of three. On the 23rd, the petrol carrier, *Pass of Balmaha*, escorted by the sloops *Auckland* and *Parramatta*, together with the storeship *Antiklia*, escorted by the sloop *Flamingo*, left Alexandria for Tobruk. On this occasion there was no fighter protection, owing partly to a failure in communication, partly to aircraft being grounded by enemy action; also there was difficulty over the slow speed (six knots) of the *Pass of Balmaha*. At 1430/24th, when 20 miles north-east of Tobruk, three formations of dive-bombers, about 16 Ju.87s in each, attacked the *Pass of Balmaha* and her escorts. The *Auckland* was hit aft and sank at 1530, after being hit several more times. Further high-level attacks followed, and a second wave of dive bombers attacked at 1900, again with three separate formations of 16 Ju.87s. The *Parramatta* shot down two aircraft and returned undamaged to Alexandria with the *Auckland's* survivors. The *Pass of Balmaha* was slightly damaged by a 'near miss' but reached Tobruk during the night, being towed in by the *Waterhen*, which was taking supplies. Considering the number of attacks, the limited fighter protection<sup>2</sup> and the fact that the *Pass*

<sup>1</sup> The *Formidable*, with only four of her fighters serviceable, was seriously damaged by bombs off Crete on 26th May 1941. Thereafter, the Eastern Mediterranean had no carriers until the enemy was cleared out of the whole of North Africa in May 1943. In this matter, the Royal Air Force express the view that "even if another aircraft carrier had been available for service in the Eastern Mediterranean, it is extremely unlikely that she would have been hazarded in areas outside the range of our shore-based fighters and within the range of enemy daylight escorted bombers." This view, however, seems to have disregarded the employment by a carrier of her own fighters.

<sup>2</sup> Some Hurricanes of No. 274 Squadron were acting as escort. They shot down one S79 and reported damaging another.



of *Balmaha* was almost a stationary target, the results must have been disappointing to the enemy. The *Antiklia* was sent into Mersa Matruh and ordered not to proceed to Tobruk until a promise of adequate fighter protection had been received. She tried again on the 27th, escorted by the *Parramatta* and with fighter protection, but heavy weather brought her speed down to four knots and she returned to Matruh. The *Parramatta* went on to Tobruk and helped the *Southern Maid* to escort the *Pass of Balmaha* back to Alexandria by 30th June.

The last two days of June 1941 were typical of the Tobruk Run and are therefore given in some detail. It is not proposed, for obvious reasons, to do the same for every voyage of the 'little ships'. At 2000/29th, when 100 miles east of Tobruk, the *Waterhen* was hit by a bomb and brought to a standstill. The *Defender* took her ship's company on board and attempted after dark to take her in tow. While doing so, an Italian U-boat, the *Tembien*, was sighted close ahead, the *Defender* opened fire but the *Tembien* crash-dived and escaped. The *Waterhen* was taken in tow, but flooding spread from the engine to the boiler room, and at 0150/30th she capsized and sank. There were no casualties, and the *Defender* returned to Alexandria with the *Waterhen's* ship's company.

Tobruk failed to receive that day's expected cargoes, but the next day, in spite of heavy air attacks, some 2,000 tons of stores reached the garrison. In the afternoon of the 29th, a small convoy of two 6-knot storeships, the *Antiklia* and *Miranda*, escorted by the *Flamingo*, *Cricket* and *Southern Isle*, left Mersa Matruh for Tobruk under fighter cover. From 1340/30th onwards, while nearing Tobruk, the convoy and escorts were attacked by a total of some 60 Ju.87s and Ju.88s accompanied by Me.110s and G.50s. Relays of fighters from Nos. 73, 250 and 274 Squadrons, R.A.F. and No. 1 Squadron of the South African Air Force, went into action and drove off the attackers, bringing down two Me.110s for the loss of one Tomahawk and one Hurricane. The *Antiklia* and *Miranda* reached Tobruk safely, but the *Flamingo's* machinery was damaged by a 'near miss' and the *Cricket* had one boiler room flooded, besides other slight damage. The *Flamingo* took the *Cricket* in tow at dark for Alexandria, being joined by the Tug *St. Issey* during the night. The Commander-in-Chief congratulated all concerned on this determined action.

As a result of the operations on the 30th new arrangements had to be made for fighter protection, because the Royal Air Force could not continue to provide it on that scale for such slow convoys. Over 70 aircraft had been employed, and the patrols of 12 had usually met between 30 and 40 enemy fighters. The consequent inevitable losses and unserviceability of our aircraft could not be accepted. Accordingly, instead of small and slow supply steamers it was decided to employ A lighters. Eight of these, speed 10 knots, were to be used, running in pairs unescorted. The first pair arrived at Tobruk on 7th July.<sup>1</sup>

During the first week in July the destroyer run continued without further damage, in spite of frequent enemy air attacks on Tobruk. In July 1941 there were 75 daylight and 35 night air raids, mostly by a few aircraft, which accounted for there being only slight damage. On the 1st and 4th there were large scale dive bombing raids by formations of 30 to 40 aircraft, but apart from No. 2 Jetty being breached there was otherwise little damage.

In a raid on the 6th no damage was reported, and it is recorded that Tug *C.307* shot down her second enemy aircraft. The arduous work of 'running the gauntlet' continued during July. One destroyer, the *Defender*, was hit by aircraft bombs early on the 11th, when 60 miles east of Tobruk. Her

<sup>1</sup> From 11th July to 25th October 1941, when A lighters were withdrawn to Port Said to refit, ten lighters in all had carried 2,800 tons of stores, 48 heavy and seven light tanks, and a number of guns and vehicles to Tobruk. Five of the ten were sunk.



engine room and one boiler room were flooded and her back was broken. The *Vendetta* took her in tow but she sank lower in the water and finally had to be sunk off Sidi Barrani. On various dates in July the *Decoy*, *Stuart*, *Vendetta* and *Hero* received slight damage in air attacks but were only out of action for a few days. Two A lighters, *A.10* and *A.8* were sunk while under fighter protection. On the 15th, the R.A.F. fighter patrol escorting *A.10* and *A.11* met 12 Ju.87s escorted by G.50s and Me.110s. Six Ju.87s and one Me.110 were shot down for the loss of two Hurricanes. On the 29th, when *A.8* was lost the R.A.F. fighter patrol brought down four Ju.87s and two Me.109s for the loss of two Tomahawks.

An experimental addition to the supply runners was made during July by the decision to employ the two fast minelayers, *Abdiel* and *Latona*, each with one destroyer. There was delay in unloading at Tobruk owing to constant air raids and shelling of the harbour by gunfire, and as neither ship was able to discharge more than half her cargo of 100 tons in the time available there seemed to be little gain in employing a minelayer in place of a second destroyer. For the time being the experiment was abandoned and both vessels were employed on Operation Guillotine between 18th July and 29th August, when the 50th Division and units of the Royal Air Force were transported to Cyprus from Egypt.

It may be remarked here that by mid-July 1941, despite the loss of Crete, the main strategic situation in the Mediterranean had been strengthened in our favour by the successful completion of the Syrian campaign and—on a larger scale—by the unexpectedly stout resistance of the Russian armies to the German invasion.

The Commander-in-Chief had decided early in June that, since he no longer had an aircraft carrier and as the forward airfields in Cyrenaica were in enemy hands, convoys between Malta and Alexandria would not be run for the time being; also, all his escort craft were fully employed with troop movements to Cyprus or on the Tobruk Run. In the months of August, September, October and early November, 1941, besides the routine supply trips to Tobruk by the Inshore Squadron a series of troopings trips were undertaken between Alexandria and Tobruk.

The first of these, Operation Treacle, was carried out in the second half of August. It involved the relief of the 18th Australian Infantry Brigade at Tobruk by a Polish Brigade. There were ten voyages, in seven of which the fast minelayers, *Abdiel* and *Latona* took part with two or three destroyers. Fighter protection was provided and a covering force of cruisers gave additional A/A protection. Special arrangements were made at Tobruk for speedy disembarkation. The totals of personnel and stores transported in Operation Treacle were:—

Disembarked at Tobruk—personnel, 6,116; stores, 1,297 tons  
Embarked from Tobruk—personnel 4,432; invalids 610.

In addition, as part of the regular supplies there were landed during August:—

From small merchant ships—	<i>Pass of Balmaha</i>	—900 tons of petrol
„ „ „ „	<i>Lesbos</i>	—306 tons of stores
„ A/S trawler	<i>Wolborough</i>	—110 tons of stores
„ Auxiliary schooner	<i>Maria Giovanna</i>	—155 tons of stores

The only casualties were the destroyer *Nizam*, slightly damaged by a 'near-miss' on 21st August, and a more serious affair on the 27th when the cruiser *Phoebe* was hit by an aircraft torpedo in a night attack. She eventually reached Alexandria under her own steam, and in October left the Mediterranean for the Navy Yard, Brooklyn.



In his report for this period the S.N.O. Inshore Squadron mentions several other points of interest besides Operation Treacle. For instance, he stated that the defences of Tobruk gained in efficiency by amalgamation of the anti-aircraft and coast defence guns under one command. At Mersa Matruh, on one occasion, the night of 8th/9th August, night fighters were employed instead of an anti-aircraft barrage on enemy aircraft, but the change was not a success as a number of bombs fell in the harbour area for the first time. At Tobruk there were 37 daylight high level bomb attacks and 31 night raids. During the month 13 enemy aircraft were shot down by A/A gunfire. Enemy batteries bombarded Tobruk intermittently without causing serious damage, but they had considerable nuisance value in delaying unloading.

Owing to the presence of fighter escort, shipping losses on the Alexandria-Tobruk route in August were light. For instance, at 1955/2nd, the *Vendetta* and *Havock* were attacked by about 25 Ju.87s and Me.109s. Twelve South African Hurricanes shot down three Ju.87s and one Me.109 for the loss of three Hurricanes; both destroyers arrived safely at Tobruk.

Casualties in August were as follows:—

Sunk—*Thorbyn*, A/S trawler . . . by aircraft off Tobruk  
*A.14*—tank lighter craft . . . mine in Tobruk  
*Skudd III*—m/s whaler . . . aircraft at Tobruk  
*Kephallinia*, auxiliary schooner . . . foundered off Mersa Matruh  
 Damaged—*Phoebe*, 5.25-inch cruiser . . . aircraft off Tobruk  
*Sotra*, minesweeper . . . aircraft off Mersa Matruh

In September, Operation Supercharge took place, and 5,000 more Australian troops were replaced in Tobruk by part of the British 70th Division from Syria, who were brought from Beirut to Alexandria by the 7th Cruiser Squadron, the *Ajax*, *Neptune* and *Hobart*. The cruisers then acted as a special covering force to two fast minelayers and eleven destroyers, which made nine trips between Alexandria and Tobruk from the 17th to 27th of September, a moonless period. Strong R.A.F. fighter protection was given in daylight hours. The total of Personnel and stores transported was as follows:—

<i>Landed at Tobruk</i>		<i>Embarked from Tobruk</i>	
Officers and men	6,308	Officers and men	5,444
Stores	2,100 tons	Wounded	544
		(also one prisoner of war)	

The Inshore Squadron continued with the regular supply service during September, the total quantity of stores landed at Tobruk including 3,330 tons of ammunition and supplies, 750 tons of petrol and 29 tanks. S.N.O.I.S., in his report, remarked that there was a deficit of 34 tons a day on the daily maintenance figure of 145, mainly due to personnel being carried at the expense of stores. He also pointed out that although nearly all the shipping bound for Tobruk was attacked by bombing there had been no casualties, only two destroyers, the *Decoy* and *Kimberley*, being 'near-missed' on 9th September.

The next moonless spell was in the middle of October when Operation Cultivate was undertaken to relieve the remaining Australian troops in Tobruk by another portion of the 70th Division from Syria. The operation was similar to Supercharge, with a fast minelayer and three destroyers running nearly every night. The minelayer carried 150 tons of stores and 25 men westward and 450 men eastward; the destroyers each carried 325 men and 15 tons of stores or 75 men and 50 tons of stores. The landing of stores averaged 103 tons a day. Altogether 7,138 troops were taken to Tobruk and 7,234 (including 727 wounded) brought back to Alexandria. About 1,000 Australian



troops had for the time being to be left in Tobruk as the last trip of the series had to be abandoned. The *Latona*, with three destroyers, the *Hero*, *Encounter* and *Hotspur*, at 2105/25th October when about 40 miles east of Tobruk, was heavily attacked by aircraft. The *Latona* was hit by a bomb in the after engine room, set severely on fire and immobilised. The deck cargo of ammunition exploded and the magazine blew up. Fatal casualties were four officers, twenty ratings and seven soldiers; all the remainder of the crew and passengers were taken off by the *Hero* and *Encounter*. The *Hero* was damaged by a 'near-miss' while alongside the *Latona*, but all three destroyers arrived back at Alexandria on the 26th.

The fourth of this series of trooping trips, Operation Approach, which began on 13th November 1941, was of short duration, as the advance of the Eighth Army into Cyrenaica, Operation Crusader, began on the 18th. The *Abdiel* and six destroyers completed three trips in which the remaining 1,000 Australians were brought out of Tobruk. General Sikorski, the Polish Prime Minister, took passage in the *Kipling* to inspect the Polish troops in Tobruk.

Before describing the naval operations in support of the Army in Operation Crusader it will be convenient here to conclude the account of supplies during the siege and the naval casualties during the remaining ten weeks. By U-boat and aircraft the enemy strained every nerve to stop supplies reaching the garrison; their efforts failed but the cost to the Royal and Merchant Navies was heavy.

In October, the shipping casualties were as follows:

<i>Sunk</i>	<i>Cause</i>
<i>Kos</i> 21, A/S whaler	a/c bomb
<i>A.2</i> and <i>A.7</i> , landing craft	U-boat gunfire <sup>1</sup>
<i>Latona</i> , fast minelayer	a/c bomb
<i>Damaged</i>	<i>Cause</i>
<i>Tiberio</i> , auxiliary schooner	a/c bomb
<i>Sotra</i> , m/s trawler	shore gunfire
<i>Gnat</i> , gunboat	U-boat torpedo ( <i>U.79</i> )
<i>Hero</i> , destroyer	a/c bomb

In November:

<i>Sunk</i>	<i>Cause</i>
<i>Maria Giovanna</i> , auxiliary schooner	aground and captured
<i>Parramatta</i> (R.A.N.), sloop	U-boat torpedo ( <i>U.559</i> )

*Damaged*

<i>Glenroy</i> , special service vessel	<i>Cause</i>
	a/c torpedo

1st to 9th December:—

<i>Sunk</i>	<i>Cause</i>
<i>Chakdina</i> , armed boarding vessel	a/c torpedo
<i>Chantala</i> , armed boarding vessel	mine
<i>Damaged</i>	<i>Cause</i>
<i>Jackal</i> , destroyer	a/c torpedo
<i>Flamingo</i> , sloop	a/c bombs

Two merchant ships, the *Pass of Balmaha* and *Samos*, were sunk in October by U-boat torpedo, and a third, the *Gebel Kebir*, was damaged by aircraft bombs. During the whole period of the siege, that is from 11th April to 9th

<sup>1</sup> This was on 12th October 1941, and was probably the first hostile act of German U-boats, which began arriving in the Mediterranean in September 1941. Twenty-seven passed through Gibraltar Strait before the end of the year. Two were destroyed in November and four in December, leaving 21 operational by the beginning of 1942. In the Eastern Mediterranean they were based on Salamis and began operating on the Tobruk Run early in October. Aircraft and ship escorts made 12 attacks on U-boats during the month.



December 1941, 26 warships were sunk and four seriously damaged. Five merchant ships were sunk and four seriously damaged. Two hospital ships, the *Vita* and *Karapara*, were seriously damaged by aircraft.

Personnel casualties of ships at sea on the Tobruk Run for the same period were as follows:—

<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>
From warships, 184	110
From merchant ships, 31	3

With regard to the total amount of supplies and transport of troops involved in the siege, the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, includes the following statement in Part II of his Dispatch, 1st November 1941 to 15th August 1942 (London Gazette, 13th January 1948):—  
 “. . . the task of maintaining supplies to the garrison was carried out entirely by the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy. Between them they transported 72 tanks, 92 guns and 34,000 tons of stores; replaced 32,667 men of the garrison by 34,113 fresh troops and withdrew 7,516 wounded and 7,097 prisoners of war.”

On 12th September, the headquarters of the Senior Naval Officer, Inshore Squadron, were moved from Tobruk to Mersa Matruh to enable him the more easily to control the movements of ships operating in the area south of 33° N. and between 27° 30' E. and 20° E., that is, between Mersa Matruh and Benghazi. He was also made responsible for arranging fighter protection for ships within his area direct with the Royal Air Force.

On the night of 15th/16th September the *Aphis* bombarded an enemy battery which had been shelling Tobruk. The battery did not reopen fire for eight days. Bardia was the target of the Royal Air Force and Fleet Air Arm Squadron 826 on 27th and 28th September, a medium sized merchant ship having been sighted unloading there at daylight on the 27th. The ship was apparently not hit. There was a curious sequel to this episode a few days later. On 30th September, the auxiliary schooner *Tiberio*, on a routine supply trip to Tobruk from Alexandria, was attacked between Bardia and Tobruk by Blenheim bombers of R.A.F. No. 204 Squadron. At the time of the attack she was being escorted by *enemy* fighters who evidently thought she was the above-mentioned merchant ship from Bardia. These fighters engaged the Blenheims who had also thought—in view of the air escort—that she must be that same merchant ship. The *Tiberio* was slightly damaged by a ‘near-miss’ but arrived safely at Tobruk on the night of the 30th/1st, grateful—no doubt—to the enemy for saving her from her friends. She continued on supply service until 23rd December 1941, when she foundered in bad weather off Mersa Matruh.

The gunboat *Gnat* arrived at Tobruk early on 19th October with two A lighters, having bombarded the tiresome battery east of Tobruk on the way. She again bombarded it during the night of the 19th/20th, and then sailed with the A lighters for Alexandria after dark on the 20th. The cruisers *Ajax*, *Hobart* and *Galatea* with two destroyers bombarded the battery on the night of the 20th/21st, but within 24 hours it recommenced firing into the harbour. On her way back to Alexandria the *Gnat*, when about 60 miles east of Tobruk at 0445/21st October, was torpedoed by a U-boat (*U.79*). Her bows were blown off and part of the torpedo, German and electric, was found on board. Four destroyers were detailed to go to her assistance, but later the Commander-in-Chief ordered them to turn eastward on account of threatened air attack. Eventually four destroyers made contact with the *Gnat* before sunset. The *Griffin* took her in tow and under strong fighter protection she arrived at Alexandria on the 23rd. Bardia came in for more attention on 22nd October when, as a result of a report of a U-boat unloading petrol there, three destroyers



bombarded the harbour.<sup>1</sup> This was followed on the night of the 23rd/24th by heavy bombardment of the petrol dump area at Bardia from the *Ajax*, *Neptune* and *Hobart*. At the same time, four destroyers shot up enemy positions in the Sollum area. In the morning of the 26th the same cruisers with three destroyers bombarded the gun repair depot in the Bardia area and spotting aircraft reported many hits on gun repair shops.<sup>2</sup> The following night, two M.T.B.'s 68 and 215, carried out a minelaying operation against Bardia, but it was only partially successful, as 215 mistook the position and laid her mines in an adjoining bay. In the full moon period, 28th October to 8th November 1941, supplies to Tobruk, except by schooner, were suspended, and opportunity was taken to transport elements of the 5th Indian Division from Alexandria to Cyprus and the 50th Division from Cyprus to Palestine.

We now come to the operations immediately preceding the relief of Tobruk. By mid-November 1941, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force had considerably weakened the Axis Army's powers of resistance by cutting short his supplies. German and Italian accounts of these losses differ. According to the Italians not less than 30 per cent in September and 20 per cent in October of war supplies loaded in Italy failed to reach Libya, while losses of fuel for transport and aviation for those months were 24 per cent and 21 per cent respectively. German figures quoted by Admiral Weichold<sup>3</sup> shew a higher percentage. He states that in October only 18,500 tons arrived in Libya. Between 18th and 23rd November out of eight supply ships destined for Benghazi four were turned back and the route from Italy to Tripoli had been closed since 19th October. Severe losses on his convoys to Libya were inflicted by Force K<sup>4</sup> operating from Malta. Thus, it was clear that Rommel's pipeline was being severely damaged. For this and for reasons of higher strategy the time was ripe for the Eighth Army to move west from Egypt. On the night of 17th/18th November, 1941, Lieutenant General Sir Alan Cunningham, K.C.B., D.S.O., launched his attacks on a broad front, Operation Crusader, in the northern sector of the Egypt-Cyrenaica frontier between Sollum and Fort Maddalena. At a suitable moment the garrison of Tobruk was to make a sortie to the south-east and meet the troops coming westward. XXX Corps which included the 7th Armoured Division (The Desert Rats) and the 1st South African Division was to make a wide sweep up towards Tobruk from the south.

From 18th to 30th November fighting in the area south-east of Tobruk was very severe, and on the 26th the Tobruk garrison captured El Duda, 10 miles south-east of the Tobruk perimeter and five miles from the hotly contested strong point of Sidi Rezegh. On the night of the 26th, the first contact was made between the Tobruk garrison and the relieving force, but by 2nd December Rommel had managed to break through the corridor formed by the junction of the Tobruk garrison with the 6th New Zealand Brigade and 4th Armoured Brigade. By 4th December Rommel had begun a general withdrawal to the Gazala line, 20 miles west of Tobruk. From enemy

<sup>1</sup> This U-boat was the Italian *Atropo*, which unloaded 54 tons of fuel at Bardia on the 22nd.

<sup>2</sup> Efforts to discover from enemy records the effects of the many coastal bombardments could not produce anything substantial, owing to the absence of records of individual units and by the fact that the Afrika Korps War Diary for the period is missing.

<sup>3</sup> Vice-Admiral Eberhard Weichold was German Admiral in Rome from June 1940 to March 1943. At first he was Senior Liaison Officer to the Italian Naval Staff; but from November 1941 he was also in command of all German naval forces operating in the Mediterranean.

<sup>4</sup> Force K, which comprised two 6-inch cruisers, *Aurora* and *Penelope*, and two destroyers, *Lance* and *Lively*, began operating from Malta on 21st October 1941. On the night of 8th/9th November 1941, Force K sank a convoy of seven loaded merchant ships, totalling 40,000 tons, making for Tripoli.



documents it appears that in effect he lost the battle on 23rd November when, in over-running the 5th South African Brigade, he lost more than half his tanks. On 9th December 1941, a Cairo communique announced that "British troops from Tobruk joined hands in El Adem with South African and Indian troops from the south-east—the Siege of Tobruk has therefore been raised."

Naval assistance to the Army during the advance was given directly by bombardments and indirectly by intensifying attacks on enemy supply ships. With regard to indirect support, between 18th November and 13th December our submarines sank four supply ships on the Italo-Libyan routes and aircraft sank three. Force K, on 24th November, sank two German steamers with cargoes of ammunition and petrol in a position about 150 miles north east of Benghazi. On 20th/21st November a convoy of four ships fully loaded for Libya was turned back south of Messina Strait, following attacks by aircraft and submarines from Malta. On 1st December 1941, aircraft shared with Force K in the sinking of the tanker *Iridio Mantovani*, (10,540 tons), loaded with 7,000 tons of petrol in a position 50 miles north west of Tripoli.

In addition to these operations, ships of the Inshore Squadron and of the larger vessels of the Mediterranean Fleet took a direct part. Bombardments by cruisers on enemy positions in the Halfaya Pass took place on the night of 18th/19th November, and on military transport on the Bardia—Tobruk road on the night of 20th/21st. Before the attack was launched both sides made use of submarines to land raiding parties behind the enemy lines. On 12th November, a German sabotage party of two officers and seven ratings were landed from *U.331* (the boat which torpedoed the *Barham* on 25th November) near Daba, 60 miles west of Alexandria, with the intention of mining the railway between Alexandria and Mersa Matruh, but they were captured before doing any harm. On our side, on the night of 14th/15th November, the *Torbay* and *Talisman* landed a raiding party of 36 men in the enemy's rear near Apollonia, about 170 miles along the coast west of Tobruk. They were part of No. 11 (Scottish) Commando under Colonel R. G. Laycock and included Lieutenant-Colonel G. C. T. Keyes, son of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes. The party planned to cut telephone and telegraph communications, and to attack the German headquarters in that area, which was done on the night of the 17th/18th. Rommel himself had not returned from Rome, and after killing a number of Germans the party dispersed, being directed by Colonel Laycock to find their own way back to our lines. Lieutenant Colonel Keyes was killed, and received a posthumous V.C. The *Torbay* attempted re-embarkation on four nights but finally abandoned it on the 21st, failure being due at first to bad weather and then to strong enemy patrols.

After the commencement of the Army's advance a new phase began which entailed considerable reorganization of the Inshore Squadron. Orders were issued by the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, for Operation Aggression, the maintenance of supplies to the Army by sea. The ports of Mersa Matruh, Tobruk and when occupied, Derna and Benghazi, were to be cleared for the reception of supplies and the evacuation of wounded prisoners. It was estimated that the following supplies would have to be conveyed by sea as the Army advanced:—

	<i>Mersa Matruh</i>	<i>Tobruk</i>	<i>Derna</i>	<i>Benghazi</i>
Fresh water 600 tons a day for 14 days, then 80 tons daily		—	—	—
Cased petrol	—	400	—	} 600
Stores	—	600	200	
Bulk petrol	—	100	—	



In addition, certain personnel would have to be transported, and the R.A.F. would require 370 tons of aviation spirit at Tobruk immediately on its relief.

The Forces were organized as follows:—

The <i>Inshore Squadron</i>	Gunboat <i>Aphis</i> , m/s trawler <i>Moy</i> , 4 M.L.'s, 2 mine-sweepers, 1 schooner and 3 tugs.
The <i>Western Desert Escort Force</i>	7 Whalers (the 22nd and 25th A/S Groups, South African). 2 Sloops, <i>Parramatta</i> (Australian), <i>Flamingo</i> 1 Special service vessel, <i>Glenroy</i> .
<i>Supply ships</i>	2 armed boarding vessels, <i>Chakdina</i> , <i>Chantala</i> , 1 A/S trawler— <i>Wolborough</i>
(Commissioned by the Royal Navy)	1 ex-merchant ship— <i>Toneline</i> (for bulk petrol) 3 schooners—(1 for cased petrol, 2 as store carriers).

Also, some merchant ships were chartered; two water carriers, six cased petrol carriers, five store carriers, one bulk petrol and water carrier, one tug and lighter carrier, one hospital ship (*Ramb IV*) and one transport (*Warszawa*). Convoy sailings would commence on the day after the relief of Tobruk, convoys being numbered and designated A.T.—Alexandria—Tobruk, T.A.—Tobruk—Alexandria. Ships to and from Mersa Matruh were to be included in the A.T. and T.A. convoys. Derna would be used for the discharge of small storeships and schooners, which were to proceed independently at night between Tobruk and Derna. When Benghazi was opened certain convoys would be routed there, subject to the Commander-in-Chief's approval.

Naval base, clearance and salvage parties for Derna would be employed at Tobruk until sent on by the N.O.I.C. Parties for Benghazi would be sent direct from Alexandria.

Arrangements were made with the Air Officer Commanding, 201 Naval Co-operation Group, to provide fighter protection for convoys with certain priorities, classed as special, normal and low.

*The Fleet Air Arm Squadrons were to be employed as follows:—*

803, 805, 806	36 Hurricanes	operating from Mersa Matruh for protection of shipping between Alexandria and Benghazi. (Moved to Fort Maddalena 22nd November and to Tobruk on 11th December).
815	6 Albacores 6 A.S.V.* Swordfish	operating from Sidi Barrani for A/S patrols and A/S escorts to convoys. A.S.V. radar was fitted early in December.
826	12 Albacores	Anti-shipping striking force when released from co-operating with the Army. Spotting for naval bombardments, flare dropping and night bombing of M.T. and tank concentrations.

N.B.—805, 806, 815 Squadrons were ex-*Illustrious*  
803, 826 Squadrons were ex-*Formidable*.

An anti-submarine striking force of two destroyers would operate in the vicinity of westbound convoys. By day, a/s searching aircraft of F.A.A. Squadron

\* Anti-surface vessel, airborne radar.



815 would work ahead of the convoys, and A.S.V. Swordfish would cover the convoy's line of advance at night.

Thus, so far as planning could arrange, the Royal Navy was ready to back up the Army in their advance.

A few incidents of the early stages of Operation Aggression call for comment. On the night of the 22nd/23rd November the special service vessel *Glenroy*, escorted by the A.A. Cruiser *Carlisle* and three destroyers, left Alexandria for Tobruk, carrying 16 lighters, two motor towing launches and 80 Army personnel. At 1620/23rd when half way to Tobruk, she was hit by an aircraft torpedo in No. 5 hold and the engine room was flooded. The *Carlisle* took her in tow towards Alexandria, escorted by two destroyers; five more destroyers joining later, having abandoned an A/S sweep. The *Farndale* took off the troops from the *Glenroy* and proceeded to Tobruk. On the 24th, she was beached close west of Mersa Matruh, being refloated a few days later and towed by the tugs *St. Issey* and *St. Monance* to Alexandria. Another loss occurred early on the 23rd, when the auxiliary schooner, *Maria Giovanna*, ran aground in enemy territory west of Tobruk and her crew were taken prisoner. On 25th November occurred a good example of interservice co-operation. It was learnt that the S.S. *Exton* was approaching Aden with a cargo of ammunition for tanks. In order to rush the ammunition to the Western Desert the cruiser *Ceres*, then at Aden, embarked it and proceeded at high speed to Port Sudan, whence it was transported by air to the Army in Cyrenaica. On 27th November, the day after the Tobruk garrison had first made contact with the New Zealand Division the Inshore Squadron lost a valuable unit. At 0100/27th, when 20 miles north-east of Tobruk the Australian sloop *Parramatta* was torpedoed and sunk by *U.559*. The *Avon Vale* hunted the submarine without success, and then rescued the survivors who numbered only 20. The ammunition ship *Hanne*, which was being escorted by the *Parramatta*, reached harbour safely. The Commander-in-Chief sent a message of sympathy to the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board:—"I deeply deplore the loss of the *Parramatta*. This fine little ship had built up for herself a splendid standard of efficiency and achievements fully in keeping with the record of H.M. Australian ships in the Mediterranean."

Although on 2nd December the relief of Tobruk had not been accomplished and fighter protection over the port was still not available it was nonetheless decided to open that port for the reception of regular convoys. Accordingly, Convoy A.T.1, organised in two sections, had sailed from Alexandria on 30th November. The slow section; namely, the Greek steamer *Elpis* with ammunition, the tug *St. Issey* with two lighters and three A lighters, was escorted by the sloops *Tarra* and *Flamingo* and two A/S trawlers. The Greek destroyer, *Kondouriotis*, kept in company as far as Mersa Matruh. The fast section, the *Chakdina* with stores and the *Kirkland* with cased petrol, was escorted by two destroyers, the *Heythrop* and *Avon Vale* and one A/S trawler. Both sections arrived safely at Tobruk on 2nd December and were successfully unloaded. Convoy A.T.2, in two sections as in A.T.1, left Alexandria on 4th December, arriving safely on the 6th. The first T.A. convoy left Tobruk for Alexandria on 5th December. It was escorted by two destroyers and two trawlers and brought back wounded and prisoners of war. Shortly after leaving Tobruk, at 2135/5th, the *Chakdina* was hit by an aircraft torpedo and sank immediately. She had on board about 300 British wounded and 100 prisoners of war, about half of whom were rescued by the *Farndale* and *Thorgrim*. Amongst the survivors was one of Rommel's Corps Commanders, General von Ravenstein.

As our forces drew nearer Tobruk air attacks on our supply ships were



intensified, particularly on 7th December. At 1700 on that day<sup>1</sup> when the *Yarra* and *Flamingo* were returning to Tobruk from an A/S sweep, the *Flamingo* was hit in the engine room by two bombs. The *Yarra* took the *Flamingo* in tow and reached Tobruk safely, leaving on the 8th for Alexandria. Also on the 7th the *Chantala* blew up on an aircraft laid mine in Tobruk harbour, but personnel casualties were slight. On 8th December, as a result of the opening of the land supply route to Tobruk, further sea convoys to that port were temporarily suspended.

After the Siege of Tobruk had been raised the Inshore Squadron and Western Desert Escort Force were fully occupied until the end of December 1941 with Operation Aggression, mentioned above. From 9th to 13th December the Eighth Army, comprising XIII and XXX Corps, was regrouping to assault Rommel's position in the Gazala line. On 13th December, XIII Corps launched a new attack, the intention being to cut off his line of retreat and surround him. For various reasons this hope was not fulfilled, but a considerable toll of his forces was exacted. XXX Corps was left to deal with the garrisons at Sollum, Bardia and Halfaya. Part of XIII Corps, chiefly the 4th Indian Division, took up the pursuit on the northern flank on the 17th and by the evening of the 18th had secured the airfields at Tmimi, close west of the Gulf of Bomba; also Martuba, 20 miles south of Derna and a third at a point two miles south of Derna. By the 20th the northern sweep of the advance had passed Derna and on the 23rd reached Barce, 40 miles east of Benghazi. Main columns moved south-west and a small column advanced on Benghazi which was reached on the 24th. In all stages of the advance the Royal Air Force played a notable part with strategical and tactical air reconnaissance units, fighter and bomber squadrons. From the 17th to 27th of December fighters carried out 1413 sorties and bombers from the Western Desert airfields 291 effective sorties. The bomber sorties included ten by Fleet Air Arm Squadron 826 in direct support attacks by night. From Malta, during the same period, bombers carried out 130 effective sorties, which included 18 by F.A.A. Squadrons 828 and 830 in night attacks on enemy ports and bases and 10 attacks on shipping at sea.

On 12th December 1941, the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, was informed by the Prime Minister that, owing to the new threat to the Malay Peninsula and Burma, certain reinforcements on their way to the Middle East had had to be diverted to the Far East, and these included the Army's 18th Division and four light bomber squadrons of the Royal Air Force. Towards the end of 1941 we suffered some severe naval losses in the Mediterranean; in the Western Mediterranean, the *Ark Royal* by *U.81* on 14th November; in the Eastern half, the *Barham* sunk by *U.331*<sup>2</sup> on 25th November, the *Galatea* by *U.557* on 14th December, the *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* seriously damaged by assault craft in Alexandria on 19th December: the *Neptune* sunk and *Aurora* seriously damaged by mines off Tripoli on 19th December. In short, it was becoming all too clear that, in spite of the Army's successful second conquest of Cyrenaica, the situation as regards the threat to Egypt in February 1942 was likely to be akin to that of February 1941. Further comment on this point is made at the beginning of Phase III.

<sup>1</sup> This date, 7th December 1941, was almost as notable a day in the Second World War as 3rd September 1939. As a result of surprise landings by the Japanese in Thailand, Malaya and U.S.A. territory, a heavy carrier borne air attack on the naval base at Honolulu and an air attack on Singapore, both Great Britain and the U.S.A. declared a state of war to exist with Japan from 2145/7th December.

<sup>2</sup> Aircraft avenged the *Barham* a year later. On 17th November 1942, *U.331* was sunk in the Western Mediterranean by Albacores of 820 Squadron from the *Formidable* and R.A.F. Hudsons from 500 Squadron.



While, as described above the Army and the Royal Air Force were engaged in direct contact with the enemy on land the Mediterranean Fleet was busy at sea supporting the advance of the Army by gunfire and supplies, also in recommencing traffic between Malta and Alexandria which had ceased from June to November 1941. Cruisers and destroyers patrolled off Derna nightly up to the 10th, hoping to intercept Italian warships reported to be running petrol to that port. On 2nd December returning from the Derna interception patrol the *Jackal* was hit right aft by an aircraft torpedo. Although the steering compartment was wrecked her propellers and shafts were undamaged and she continued under her own power at 14 knots. British and Greek destroyers patrolled the coast of Cyrenaica, ready to give immediate help on demand by the Army. The *Aphis* bombarded enemy concentrations of transport and supply dumps near the Bardia-Tobruk road on the night of the 1st/2nd, then moved west and fired 94 rounds on the night of the 3rd/4th at enemy vehicles on the Tobruk-Derna road. Twice in the evening of the 6th she again bombarded tanks and vehicles on that road, illumination and spotting being provided by Albacore aircraft of F.A.A. 826 Squadron. In all these bombardments land-based observation posts played their part. After dark on the 7th she again fired on traffic on the coastal road. Admiral Vian, at sea with the *Naiad* and two destroyers, completed the Derna interception patrol on the 10th and closed the port of Derna at daylight. The three ships bombarded the harbour area at close range, being heavily attacked by dive bombers and torpedo aircraft but escaped damage.

On the 13th, as our fighter aircraft could again cover Tobruk the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, gave instruction for convoys to arrive at and leave Tobruk during daylight. Accordingly, Convoy A.T.3, three storeships and two A lighters escorted by three destroyers, left Alexandria on that day, arriving at Tobruk on the 15th; thereafter, convoys sailed every three or four days. Derna was captured on 19th December and two days later the Naval Officer-in-Charge and the clearance party were established and reported the port usable by small ships.

The Western Desert Schooner Force at once began a regular service between Tobruk and Derna. Benghazi was captured on the 24th and was reported to be devastated. There were no cranes or lighters, and more ships had been sunk in the harbour. The piers were damaged. On the night of the 25th/26th mines were laid off the harbour by enemy aircraft. An advance clearance party was sent forward over land on the 25th, but the main clearance party coming by sea had to wait for fighter protection. By 31st December the main party had arrived with a specially formed minesweeping flotilla.

On 21st December, the Western Desert Escort Force was strengthened by the Tenth Corvette Group from the Levant—the *Peony*, *Salvia* and *Hyacinth*, and, in exchange, the 25th A/S Group (South African), the Whalers *Falk*, *Klo*, *Cocker* and *Thorgrim* were transferred to the Levant. Two destroyers were detailed to act as an A/S striking force with A. T. and T.A. convoys, with orders to hunt any U-boats reported within 25 miles of a convoy.

Late in December 1941 the 167th Minesweeping Group, the South African whalers, *Bever*, *Boksburg*, *Parktown* and *Langlaagte* (early 1942), arrived at Alexandria and operated on the Tobruk Run. Earlier in the year the 166th group of minesweeping whalers (South African), *Gribb*, *Imhoff*, *Seksern* and *Treern* went to Haifa to be fitted with LL gear, and later operated on the Tobruk Run.

German U-boats, varying in numbers from 4 to 6 operated south of 33° N between 23° 30' E (20 miles west of Tobruk) and 31° E (half way between Alexandria and Port Said). "Owing to the development of the situation in



North Africa," said the Captain, U-boats in the Mediterranean, Lieutenant Commander Oehr in his War Diary of December 1941, "our U-boats are concentrated off Tobruk". Italian U-boats operated east of  $31^{\circ}$  E and west of  $23^{\circ} 30'$  E, and their larger boats were employed on fuel or special ferry trips to Bardia. On one of these trips, on 11th December, the *Caracciolo* was sunk by the *Farndale*, close north of Bardia. She was carrying evacuees from Cyrenaica, including an Italian General who was drowned; six officers and 47 ratings were rescued.

During December 1941, 31 attacks on U-boats were made in the Eastern Mediterranean. Two German U-boats were sunk by our forces and one in error by the Italians. *U.79* was sunk on 23rd December off Bardia by the destroyer striking force and escort to Convoy A.T.5 (*Hotspur*, *Hasty*, *Heythrop*) and *U.75* on the 28th off Mersa Matruh by the striking force for Convoy T.A.6, (*Kipling* and *Legion*). The third, *U.557*, was sunk on the 16th off Suda Bay by the Italian torpedo boat *Orione*. These kills provided some compensation for our own losses caused by U-boats: on 14th December, when just about to enter the searched channel to Alexandria, the cruiser *Galatea* was hit amidship by two torpedoes from *U.557* and sank almost at once. Captain E. W. B. Sims was lost with 22 officers and 448 ratings. Late on the 23rd, the storeship *Shuntien*, with 850 prisoners of war on board, was sunk east of Tobruk by *U.559*. The *Heythrop* rescued 19 survivors and the *Salvia* another 100 but was herself torpedoed a few hours later by *U.568*. Four officers and 54 ratings were lost in addition to those previously rescued from the *Shuntien*.

In the afternoon of the 26th the Polish ship *Warszawa*, in Convoy A.T.6, was torpedoed by *U.559*. The *Peony* took her in tow, but within a few hours she was again torpedoed, and sank. The boom defence vessel *Burgonet*, which was also in Convoy A.T.6, rescued over 300 survivors, mostly personnel for Tobruk, and escort vessels recovered nearly all the remainder.

Two other casualties call for special mention. On 13th December, the much valued water carrier *Myriel*, under escort by two South African A/S Whalers, the *Southern Isle* and *Southern Sea*, was torpedoed by *U.431* in a position 45 miles west of Alexandria, but did not sink and reached Alexandria in tow the next day. A fortnight later, the store carrier *Volo*, a veteran of the Tobruk and Malta Runs, when returning to Alexandria in Convoy T.A.6, was torpedoed and sunk off Sidi Barrani by *U.559*; there were 14 survivors.

A further word is required to complete the story of seaborne supplies during Operation Crusader. As on the first occasion,<sup>1</sup> in December 1940, it seemed likely that the speed of the Army's advance would outrun the rate of opening up supply ports.

To avoid awkward supply complications during the second advance the General Officer Commanding decided temporarily to hold a NW—SE line running through Agedabia while re-organising for the next step forward. It was calculated that a supply of 400 tons of petrol a day would enable the Army to advance as far as Buerat, a point on the coast 180 miles west of the Tripolitanian frontier, after which 800 tons would be necessary. On Christmas Day 1941 the position was as follows:—except for 10,000 of the enemy surrounded at Bardia and Halfaya, Cyrenaica was clear of the enemy as far west as Agedabia. The supply ports of Tobruk, Derna and Benghazi were being developed. Tobruk was handling 600 tons a day and was expected shortly to reach 2,000 tons daily. Derna could receive one ship of under 15 feet draught. An advance naval port clearance party had arrived at Benghazi. Army motor transport supply convoys were running daily from railroad at

<sup>1</sup> Admiral Rawlings, in his report on naval operations in support of the first British advance, remarked that "its speed illustrated the physical law that an object moving rapidly tends to create a vacuum behind it".



Mersa Matruh to Tobruk, making a desert detour behind Bardia and Halfaya. From Tobruk motor transport convoys were running daily to Msus, 80 miles south east of Benghazi.

Between 18th November and 25th December, 17,708 tons of general stores were landed at Tobruk, while Mersa Matruh received 13,600 tons, three quarters of which was water in bulk. Benghazi as stated, had been thoroughly devastated. The advance port party had been sent there overland, but the main clearance party could not be sent without fighter protection, which just at that time was held up by swamped airfields. It arrived eventually on 31st December. Tobruk during this period enjoyed a certain freedom from air raids, 16 out of 37 days being raid free. The last appearance of dive bombers was on 25th November when a force of 40 Stukas and Me.110's met a patrol of 20 Tomahawks and lost 12 aircraft at a cost of two Tomahawks.

Military operations for the recapture of Bardia began on Christmas Day. The *Aphis* bombarded enemy positions there on 30th December, and the *Ajax* with four destroyers engaged shore batteries on the 31st. The garrison surrendered on 2nd January 1942.

This concludes the story of the Tobruk Run for the period ending with the Army's occupation of Cyrenaica in 1941.



PHASE III.—SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS, JANUARY 1942 TO JANUARY 1943.

CONDITIONS off the coast of Cyrenaica during 1942 were somewhat different from those in 1941. The effect of our severe naval losses in December 1941 was to reduce the striking power of the fleet just at the time when we had again reached a position in Cyrenaica which, with the recovery of the forward airfields, would enable the Commander-in-Chief<sup>1</sup> to resume supplies to Malta from Egypt and operate offensively in the Central Mediterranean. Although these naval losses might have contributed to the decision by the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to abandon his intention of continuing the Eighth Army's advance west of the Tripolitanian frontier, the principal reason for this step was the difficulty of supply across some 300 miles of desert tracks in the forward areas. Furthermore, reinforcements intended for the Army in December had been diverted to the Far East, and early in January 1942 two squadrons of Blenheim bombers were withdrawn from Western Desert operations and sent to the Far East. On the enemy's side, in response to an appeal for help from Mussolini, sections of the Luftwaffe were released from the Russian Front to reinforce the Mediterranean. In December 1941, Fliegerfuhrer, Afrika, received two fighter groups as reinforcements and had his dive-bomber and heavy fighter squadrons brought up to strength. The Italian Air Force in North Africa in mid December received reinforcements of fighters and bombers.

These reinforcements, taken into account with our losses, led to a revival of the enemy's supplies in January 1942 and enabled Rommel to build up his resources sufficiently to launch his second counter-offensive on the 21st of that month. By 4th February we had evacuated Benghazi and Derna, and the Eighth Army had withdrawn to the Gazala-Bir Hacheim line, approximately 30 miles west of the meridian of Tobruk.

The two armies confronted each other in that position until 26th May, when Rommel again attacked. On 21st June, Tobruk which had been in our hands since 9th December 1941, was lost and the Eighth Army recoiled across the Egyptian frontier to reform on the El Alamein line by 30th June. This was only about 40 miles from Alexandria. This meant that the Mediterranean Fleet's main base was well within range of daylight air attacks under fighter escort. The Fleet, except for four destroyers and one flotilla of M.T.B's, was accordingly withdrawn to Port Said and Haifa; the submarines from Malta and Alexandria going to Beirut.

From January to mid-June 1942, as described above, Tobruk was in our hands, so that fighter cover for ships of the Inshore Squadron and shipping on the Tobruk Run was readily available, but the German U-boats continued to cause trouble. In the period between the relief of Tobruk on 9th December 1941 and its recapture by the enemy on 21st June 1942 losses of ships concerned with Cyrenaican operations from U-boats and aircraft were as follows:—

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<sup>1</sup> Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham hauled down his flag on 1st April 1942, being relieved temporarily by Acting-Admiral Sir Henry D. Pridham-Wippell. On 20th May 1942, Acting Admiral Sir Henry H. Harwood hoisted his flag in the *Queen Elizabeth* and assumed command of the Mediterranean Station.



*Losses from U-boat attack.* (See Index for dates).

*Warships*

Two cruisers, *Naiad*, by *U.565*, *Galatea* by *U.557*; four destroyers, *Heythrop* and *Jaguar* by *U.652*, *Grove* by *U.77*; *Gurkha* by *U.133*; one M/S whaler, *Sotra*, by *U.431*; one A/S whaler, *Cocker* by *U.331*; one Royal Fleet Auxiliary, *Slavol*, by *U.205*; one corvette, *Salvia*, by *U.568*.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary, *Brambleleaf*, was torpedoed and seriously damaged by *U.81*.

*Merchant Ships*

Four; *Kirkland* by *U.565*, *Eocene* by *U.431*, *Havre* by *U.453*, *Athene* (Norwegian) by *U.559*.

*Losses from aircraft attack.* (See Index for dates).

*Warships*

Three destroyers, *Jackal*, *Kipling*, *Lively*—when attempting to intercept an enemy convoy making for Benghazi.

*Merchant Ships*

Four; *Hanne*, *Bintang*, *Calderon*, *Ramb IV* (hospital ship).

U-boats in the same area and during the same five months lost three of their number:—*U.577* by aircraft of 230 Squadron, Royal Air Force; *U.568* by the destroyers *Eridge*, *Hero*, *Hurworth*; *U.652* by aircraft of 815 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm and 203 Squadron, R.A.F.

Personnel losses from ships in above list were:—

	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>
Warships	1,102	39
Merchant Ships	320 <sup>1</sup>	7

The last AT and TA convoys to sail or arrive before Tobruk fell were numbered 49. The westbound one, AT.49, suffered the loss of two merchant ships *Havre* and *Athene* sunk, and the R.F.A. *Brambleleaf* damaged, all by U-boat.

The surviving ships, *Hannah Moller* and *Heron*, with their escort arrived Tobruk on 11th June. Convoy TA.49 left Tobruk on 17th June, and arrived Alexandria on the 19th; it included all empty storeships, so that when the fortress fell on the 21st only small craft remained to be sunk or captured. In the evacuation the N.O.I.C., Captain F. M. Smith, C.B.E., D.S.O., R.D., R.N.R. was mortally wounded, and S.N.O.I.S., Captain P. N. Walter, D.S.O. was wounded and taken prisoner. The latter had relieved Captain Poland on 10th March 1942. The post of S.N.O.I.S. remained vacant until 26th October 1942, when Captain C. Wauchope was appointed.

The South African minesweeping whaler, *Parktown*, was engaged and sunk by enemy E-boats off Bardia while towing Tug. *C.307* from Tobruk to Mersa Matruh. Both ships made a gallant fight until their engines were put out of action. The *Parktown's* Commanding Officer, Lieutenant J. Jagger and four ratings were killed. Fighter aircraft drove the E-boats off, and the crew of Tug *C.307* returned on board, freed a fouled propeller, effected engine repairs and got underway by 1800. She and *M.T.B.266* rescued survivors of the *Parktown*.

The ships and small craft that escaped from Tobruk were the two minesweepers, *Bever* and *Aberdare*, six M.T.B's, three M.L.'s, three tugs and two small landing craft.

<sup>1</sup> Of these, 150 were patients in the *Ramb IV*.



From the end of June 1942 to the end of October, seaborne supplies for the Army in the Western Desert were not required; occasional bombardments of Mersa Matruh and the Daba area were called for, and in one case a major raiding operation (Agreement) took place. This was in September on Tobruk and though not successful, it may have helped Rommel to become 'coast-hop minded'.<sup>1</sup> After his failure to break through at Alam el Halfa early in September he sent the 90th Light Division to Daba, 30 miles west of Alamein, with orders to combine anti-enemy landing defensive preparations with routine training.

On the opening night of the Battle of Alamein, 23rd/24th October 1942, three destroyers, eight M.T.B.'s and 12 L.C.T.'s carried out a dummy landing, Operation Slender, at Ras Kanais, 30 miles west of Daba and shortly afterwards the 90th Light Division was put at two hours notice but did not move up to the line until the 27th/28th. On the 27th, the Army Commander, General Sir Bernard Montgomery, thanked the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean for the "valuable assistance afforded by the naval operations on 'D' night." He added: "Information suggests that this operation had influence on our main objective".

With regard to supplies during the Army's third and finally successful advance, once again the 'little ships' were prominent. Rommel began a general retreat on 3rd November 1942, and as the Army went forward and cleared the enemy from the ports, minesweepers quickly swept the approaches. L.C.T.'s carrying full cargoes were sailed to the nearest port, and after unloading were used for discharging the merchant ships.

On 8th November 1942, the day that our forces re-occupied Mersa Matruh, even before the entrance had been swept, two L.C.T.'s unloaded petrol in Smugglers' Cove, east of Matruh harbour. After the long spell of inactivity waiting for the offensive to begin, the first Western Desert convoy of two merchant ships and four L.C.T.'s, left Alexandria on 9th November for Mersa Matruh. On that day 46 mines were swept up in the vicinity of Mersa Matruh, and H.M.S. *Cromer*, Senior Officer 14th Minesweeping Flotilla, was mined and sunk with a loss of three officers and 43 ratings. On 14th November, the cased petrol carrier, *Empire Patrol*, left Alexandria for Bardia and Tobruk with 2,200 tons of aviation spirit and 300 tons of benzine for the advanced landing grounds at Gazala. And so the story continues until the end of January 1943, when the Eighth Army reached Tripoli, having re-occupied Tobruk, Derna and Benghazi for the third and last time on 13th, 17th and 20th November 1942 respectively.

Recognition of the special value of the services rendered by ships operating off the coast of Cyrenaica between September 1940 and June 1942 was given by the award of the Battle Honour, Libya 1940-42. [A.F.O.2565/54]. It is of interest to recall that, 128 years before, for their part in assisting the Army at the capture of Saint Sebastian in 1813 the officers and men of ships concerned were awarded the Naval General Service Medal (1793-1840) with the essentially Army clasp of St. Sebastian.

In 1915, during the First World War, while air warfare was in its infancy, combined operations on a large scale took place on another peninsula, Gallipoli; where the British Army was joined by Commonwealth forces from Australia, New Zealand and India, and where considerable assistance was rendered by the Navy. In the Second World War, the Middle East saw the South African forces join the next generation of Australians and New Zealanders alongside the British Army; Australian, South African and New Zealand warships and aircraft operating with the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.

<sup>1</sup> The *Sibh* was sunk by shore gunfire from Tobruk and the *Coventry* seriously damaged by bombs, having to be sunk by the *Zulu*, which was herself then sunk by bombs.



From the outset there was very close co-operation between all three fighting services, a factor which lasted the whole period of the Tobruk Run. All kinds of fighting took place; air to air; submarine to submarine; surface ship to surface ship; and every conceivable combination of any of these. Coastal bombardment was a common occurrence and through it all ran the necessity for keeping the Army supplied.

In Cyrenaica, as in other parts of the world, the effect of air power on sea and land warfare was fully demonstrated, and the dire consequences of the loss of airfields painfully realised. This was especially so in the Eastern Mediterranean after May 1941, when no aircraft carrier could be spared for that area, and as a result, for five months, the Commander-in-Chief suspended the voyages of all surface supply ships between Malta and Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In June 1941, the Commander-in-Chief began a submarine supply service to Malta. Between June and December 1941 16 storing trips to Malta were run by submarines, three from the United Kingdom, two from Gibraltar and 11 from Alexandria. The most important part of their cargoes was aviation petrol, which averaged about 50 tons a trip.



## APPENDIX

### Ships awarded the Battle Honour, LIBYA 1940-2

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| <p><i>Abdiel</i> 1941<br/> <i>Aberdare</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Airedale</i> 1942<br/> <i>Aldenham</i> 1942<br/> <i>Antwerp</i> 1942<br/> <i>Aphis</i> 1940-2<br/> <i>Arrow</i> 1942<br/> <i>Arthur Cavanagh</i> 1941<br/> <i>Auckland</i> 1941<br/> <i>Aurora II</i> 1941<br/> <i>Avon Vale</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Bagshot</i> 1941<br/> <i>Beaufort</i> 1942<br/> <i>Bever</i> (S.A.N.F.) 1942<br/> <i>Boksburg</i> (S.A.N.F.) 1942<br/> <i>Burgonet</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Calcutta</i> 1941<br/> <i>Calm</i> 1941<br/> <i>Carlisle</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Chakdina</i> 1941<br/> <i>Chakla</i> 1940-1<br/> <i>Chantala</i> 1941<br/> <i>Cocker</i> (ex KOS 19) 1941-2<br/> <i>Coventry</i> 1941<br/> <i>Cricket</i> 1941<br/> <i>Croome</i> 1942<br/> <i>Dainty</i> 1940-1<br/> <i>Decoy</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Defender</i> 1941<br/> <i>Delphinium</i> 1942<br/> <i>Dulverton</i> 1942<br/> <i>Encounter</i> 1941<br/> <i>Erica</i> 1942<br/> <i>Eridge</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Exmoor</i> 1942<br/> <i>Falk</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Fareham</i> 1941<br/> <i>Farndale</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Farnham</i> 1942<br/> <i>Fiona</i> 1940-1<br/> <i>Firmament</i> 1942<br/> <i>Flamingo</i> 1941<br/> <i>Glenearn</i> 1941<br/> <i>Glenogle</i> 1941<br/> <i>Glenroy</i> 1941<br/> <i>Gloxinia</i> 1941-2</p> | <p><i>Gnat</i> 1941<br/> <i>Greyhound</i> 1941<br/> <i>Gribb</i> (S.A.N.F.) 1942<br/> <i>Griffin</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Grimsby</i> 1941<br/> <i>Grove</i> 1942<br/> <i>Hailstorm</i> 1941<br/> <i>Hasty</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Havock</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Hereward</i> 1940<br/> <i>Hero</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Heythrop</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Hotspur</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Huntley</i> 1941<br/> <i>Hurworth</i> 1942<br/> <i>Hyacinth</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Hyperion</i> 1940<br/> <i>Imhoff</i> (S.A.N.F.) 1942<br/> <i>Jackal</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Jaguar</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Janus</i> 1940<br/> <i>Jervis</i> 1940-2<br/> <i>Juno</i> 1940<br/> <i>Kai</i> 1941<br/> <i>Kandahar</i> 1941<br/> <i>Kimberley</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Kingston</i> 1941<br/> <i>Kingston Coral</i> 1942<br/> <i>Kingston Crystal</i> 1942<br/> <i>Kipling</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Klo</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Kos 21</i> 1941<br/> <i>Ladybird</i> 1940-1<br/> <i>Langlaate</i> (S.A.N.F.) 1942<br/> <i>Latona</i> 1941<br/> <i>Legion</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Lively</i> 1942<br/> <i>Malines</i> 1942<br/> <i>May</i> 1941<br/> <i>Milford Countess</i> 1941<br/> <i>Mohawk</i> 1940<br/> <i>Moy</i> 1941-2<br/> <i>Muroto</i> 1941<br/> <i>Napier</i> 1941<br/> <i>Nebb</i> 1941<br/> <i>Nizam</i> (R.A.N.) 1941</p> |
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*Cricket*, gunboat, escort to *Antiklia* and *Miranda*, 20/30.6.41, 12; damaged by bombs, 29.6.41, and taken in tow to Alexandria, 12.

*Cromer*, minesweeper, mined and sunk off Mersa Matruh, 9.11.42, 27.

Cruisers, 7th C. Squadron, cruise off Benghazi and Tobruk, 12.6.40, 1; 7th C. Squadron, bombardment of Bardia, 21.6.40, 1; 7th C. Squadron, action with Italian destroyers north of Benghazi, 28.6.40, 1; 3rd C. Squadron, bombardment of Bardia, 6.7.40, 2; French, *Suffren* and *Duguay-Trouin*, cruise off Cyrenaican coast, 21.6.40, 2; 7th C. Squadron, transport of troops from Beirut to Alexandria, September 1941, 14; 7th C. Squadron, covering force to Operation Supercharge, 17-27.9.41, 14; bombarded enemy battery east of Tobruk, 20/21.10.41, 16; bombarded petrol dumps at Bardia, 23/24.10.41, 17; bombarded

Convoys—*continued*

gun repair depot at Bardia, 26.10.41, 17; bombarded enemy positions in Halfaya Pass, 18/19.11.41, 18; bombarded enemy transport on Bardia-Tobruk road, 20/21.11.41, 18.

Cunningham, Admiral Sir Andrew B., G.C.B., D.S.O.,\*\* (See Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean), Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, June 1939 to April 1942.

Cunningham, Lieutenant General Sir Alan, K.C.B., D.S.O., General Officer commanding, Eighth Army, Western Desert, November 1941, 17.

*Dainty*, destroyer, sunk by bombs off Tobruk, 24.2.41, 8.

*Decoy*, destroyer, arrived Benghazi with clearance force, 13.2.41, 6.

*Defender*, destroyer, rescued *Waterhen's* ship's company, 29.6.41, 12; bombed and sunk, 60 miles east of Tobruk, 11.7.41, 13.

Derna, British Army occupy for the first time, 30.1.41, 6; used for berthing small ships, February 1941, 6; recaptured by the enemy, 8.4.41, 9; Eighth Army occupy for the second time, 19.12.41, 21; destroyers patrol off, 1 to 10.12.41, 22; again taken by the enemy, 4.2.42, 25; Eighth Army occupy for the third time, 17.11.42, 27.

Destroyers, twelve take part in first war cruise of Mediterranean Fleet, 11 to 14.6.40, 1; four assist in bombardment of Bardia, 21.6.40, 1; five carry out a/s sweep along coast, 21.6.40, 2; four assist in bombardment of Bardia, 6.7.40, 2; two assist *Stuart* in bombardment of seaplane base, Gulf of Bomba, 23.8.40, 3; three assist *Terror* in bombardment of coastal road at Sollum, 11.12.40, 3; in March 1941, temporarily withdrawn from Tobruk Run for Operation Lustre, 9; April and May 1941, mainly employed off Greece and Crete, 9; June and July 1941, off Syrian coast, 10; August to November 1941, supplies and transport of troops on Tobruk Run, 13, 14; 18th November to end of December 1941, supporting the Army's advance, Operation Crusader, 19, 20, 22.

*Diamante*, Italian submarine, sunk off Derna by the *Parthian*, 20.6.40, 1.

*Duguay-Trouin*, French 6-inch cruiser, cruise off Cyrenaican coast, 21.6.40, 2.

*Eagle*, aircraft carrier, first war cruise of Mediterranean Fleet, 11 to 14.6.40, 1; 813 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm, operating from Maaten Bagush, attack Tobruk, 5.7.40, 2; 824 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm, take off at sea on 19.7.40, land at Sidi Barrani and attack Tobruk on 25.7.40, 2; three Swordfish of 824 Squadron attack enemy shipping in Gulf of Bomba, 22.8.40, 2; left Mediterranean for operations in Indian Ocean, April 1941, 8.



- Elpis*, ammunition ship, Greek, in Convoy AT.1, 30.1.41, 20.
- Empire Patrol*, (ex Italian *Rodi*), cased petrol carrier left Alexandria for Bardia and Tobruk with petrol for R.A.F., 14.11.42, 27.
- Encounter*, destroyer, rescues survivors from the *Latona*, 25.10.41, 15.
- Eocene*, merchant ship, torpedoed and sunk off Tobruk by *U.431*, 20.5.42, 26.
- Eridge*, destroyer, with *Hero* and *Hurworth*, sank *U.568* off Tobruk, 28.5.42, 26.
- Escaut*, merchant ship, partially unloaded at Benghazi, 19.2.41, 7.
- Espero*, Italian destroyer, sunk by 7th Cruiser Squadron, north of Benghazi, 28.6.40, 1.
- Exton*, merchant ship, cargo of ammunition for tanks in Western Desert transhipped in the *Ceres*, 25.11.41, 20.
- Falk* a/s whaler, 25th A/S Group, (South African), transferred to the Levant from the Tobruk Run, 21.12.41, 22.
- Fareham*, minesweeper, arrived Benghazi with clearance force, 13.2.41, 6; left Benghazi for Tobruk, 22.2.41, 8; took the *Terror* in tow, 23.2.41, 8; rescued survivors from the *Terror*, 24.2.41, 8.
- Farnedale*, destroyer, embarked troops from the *Glenroy*, 23.11.41, 20; embarked troops from the *Chakdina*, 5.12.41, 20; sank *Caracciolo* off Bardia, 11.12.41, 22.
- Fiona*, armed boarding vessel, supplied water for the Army at Sollum, 21 to 23.12.40, 4; sunk by bombs, 50 miles N.W. of Sidi Barrani, 18.4.41, 10.
- Flamingo*, sloop, escort to *Antiklia* to Mersa Matruh, 23.6.41, 11; escort to *Antiklia* to Tobruk, 30.6.41, 12; damaged by bombs off Tobruk, 7.12.41, 21.
- Fleet Air Arm, Squadron No. 813, Swordfish torpedo attack on shipping in Tobruk, 5.7.40, 2; Squadron No. 824, Swordfish torpedo attack on shipping in Tobruk, 20.7.40, 2; Squadron No. 824, Swordfish attack on shipping in Gulf of Bomba, 22.8.40, 2; Squadron No. 700, Walrus spotting duties during bombardment of Bardia, 17.8.40, 3; Squadron No. 815, 819, Swordfish bombing and minelaying raid on Benghazi, 16.9.40, 3; Squadron No. 805, Martlets, re-equipped with Hurricanes, June 1941, 11; Squadron No. 826, Albatrosses, with R.A.F. bombed Bardia, 27/28.9.41, 16; Squadron No. 803, 805, 806, 815, 826, organisation, December, 1941, 19; Squadron No. 826, 828 Albatrosses, activities during Operation Crusader; from Malta, Squadron No. 830, (Swordfish), 21; 815 Squadron, with 203, Squadron, R.A.F., sank *U.652* off Sollum 2.6.42, 26.
- Fleet, Mediterranean, first war cruise, 11.6.40, 1; Greece and Crete operations, March, April, May 1941, 9, 10; Syrian coast operations, June, July 1941, 10; support to the Army, November–December 1941, 18 to 21; withdrawn from Alexandria to Port Said and Haifa, July 1942, 25.
- Force K, sank two enemy supply ships, N.E. of Benghazi, 24.11.41, 18.
- Force W, formed in September 1940, 3; under operational control of Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, 15.12.40, 4; under operational control of Rear-Admiral, 1st Battle Squadron, 15.12.40 to 25.1.41, 4; under operational control of S.N.O. Inshore Squadron, 15.1.41, 4.
- Formidable*, aircraft carrier, relieved *Illustrious* in Eastern Mediterranean, March 1941, 5; damaged off Crete, 26.5.41, 11.
- Galatea*, 6-inch cruiser, bombarded enemy battery east of Tobruk, 20/21.10.41, 16; sunk by *U.557* off Alexandria, 14.12.41, 21.
- Gebel Kebir*, Egyptian merchant ship, damaged by bombs in Mersa Matruh, 4.10.41, 15.
- General Officer Commanding in Cyrenaica, January to March 1941; Lieutenant General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, K.C.B., D.S.O. concurs with S.N.O.I.S. that without fighter protection ships could not remain at Benghazi, 19.2.41, 7.
- Glennearn*, special service vessel, landing of Commando battalion at Bardia, 19/20.4.41, 9.
- Glengyle*, special service vessel, landing of Commando battalion at Bardia, 19/20.4.41, 9.
- Glenroy*, special service vessel, damaged by aircraft torpedo off Mersa Matruh, 23.11.41, 20.
- Gloucester*, 6-inch cruiser, first war cruise of Mediterranean Fleet, 11 to 14.6.40, 1; engaged enemy minesweeper off Tobruk, 12.6.40, 1; engaged enemy destroyers north of Benghazi, 28.6.40, 1.
- Gnat*, gunboat, bombardment of selected area N.W. of Bardia, 3.1.41, 5; bombardment of Tobruk cancelled at request of Army, 21.1.41, 5; damaged by gunfire from shore battery, Sollum, 15.4.41, 10; bombarded enemy battery east of Tobruk, 19/20.10.41, 16; seriously damaged by torpedo from *U.79*, 60 miles east of Tobruk, 21.10.41, 16.
- Griffin*, destroyer, took damaged *Gnat* in tow, 21.10.41, 16.
- Grimshy*, sloop, sunk by bombs off Tobruk, 25.5.41, 10.
- Grove*, destroyer, torpedoed and sunk by *U.77* off Bardia, 12.6.42, 26.
- Gunboats, see *Aphis*, *Cricketer*, *Gnat*, *Ladybird*. Employment of 'tip and run' tactics for bombardment, 4.



- Gurkha*, destroyer, torpedoed and sunk by *U.133* Sidi Barrani, 17.1.42, 26.
- Hannah Moller*, merchant ship, with *Heron*, last convoy to arrive Tobruk before recapture, June 1942, 26.
- Hanne*, ammunition ship, arrived Tobruk, 27.11.41, 20; sunk by bombs off Tobruk, 22.2.42, 26.
- Hasty*, destroyer, with *Hotspur* and *Heythrop*, sank *U.79* off Bardia, 23.12.41, 23.
- Hawock*, destroyer, heavily attacked by dive bombers on way to Tobruk, attack beaten off by South African Hurricanes, 2.8.41, 14.
- Havre*, merchant ship, torpedoed and sunk by *U.453* off Alexandria, 10.6.42, 26.
- Hereward*, destroyer, embarked Commando for landing in Sollum Bay, 10.12.40, 3.
- Hero*, destroyer, rescued survivors from the *Latona*, 25.10.41, 15; damaged by bombs off Bardia, 25.10.41, 15; with *Eridge* and *Hurworth*, sank *U.568* off Tobruk, 28.5.42, 26.
- Heythrop*, destroyer, with *Hasty* and *Hotspur*, sank *U.79* off Bardia, 23.12.41, 23; rescued survivors from the *Slunhtien*, 23.2.41, 23; torpedoed and sunk by *U.652* off Bardia, 20.3.42, 26.
- Hobart*, (R.A.N.), 6-inch cruiser, transferred troops of 70th Division from Beirut to Alexandria, September 1941, 14; covering force for Operation Supercharge, September 1941, 14; bombarded enemy battery east of Tobruk, 21.10.41, 16; bombarded petrol dumps at Bardia, 24.10.41, 17; bombarded gun repair depot at Bardia, 26.10.41, 17.
- Hotspur*, destroyer, with *Hasty* and *Heythrop*, sank *U.79* off Bardia, 23.12.41, 23.
- Hurworth*, destroyer, with *Eridge* and *Hero*, sank *U.568* off Tobruk, 28.5.42, 26.
- Hyacinth*, corvette, 10th Corvette Group, joined Western Desert Escort Force, 21.12.41, 22.
- Illustrious*, aircraft carrier, Swordfish of 815 and 819 Squadrons, bombing and mine-laying raid on Benghazi, 16.9.40, 3; Swordfish of 815 and 819 Squadrons provide fighter and a/s patrols for battleships' bombardment of Bardia, 3.1.41, 5; seriously damaged by bombing off Malta 10.1.41, 5.
- Inshore Squadron, Captain H. Hickling appointed Senior Naval Officer, short title S.N.O.I.S., 6.1.41, 4; relieved by Captain A. L. Poland, D.S.O., D.S.C., 5.2.41, 6; operational control assumed by S.N.O.I.S., 4; S.N.O.I.S. arrived with clearance force at Benghazi, 13.2.41, 6; employment during British occupation of Cyrenaica, February–March 1941, 9; composition in March 1941, 9; employment during evacuation of Cyrenaica, 1 to 15.4.41, 9; losses between 12th April and 1st June 1941, 10; composition in mid-June 1941, 11; report of S.N.O.I.S. for July–August 1941, 14; total stores for Tobruk handled in September 1941, 14; Headquarters of S.N.O.I.S. moved to Mersa Matruh, 12.9.41, 16; S.N.O.I.S. made responsible for arranging fighter protection direct with Royal Air Force, September 1941, 16; re-organisation for Operation Aggression, December 1941, 18.
- Iride*, Italian submarine, sunk by Swordfish of 824 Squadron F.A.A., in Gulf of Bomba, 22.8.40, 2.
- Jackal*, destroyer, damaged by aircraft torpedo off Tobruk, 2.12.41, 22; sunk by aircraft, bombs (and own forces) off Sidi Barrani, 12.5.42, 26.
- Jaguar*, destroyer, torpedoed and sunk by *U.652* off Sidi Barrani, 26.3.42, 26.
- Janus*, destroyer, bombardment of the coastal road, Sollum, 11.12.40, 3.
- Jervis*, destroyer, bombardment of the coastal road, Sollum, 11.12.40, 3.
- Kent*, 8-inch cruiser, bombardment of Bardia, 17.8.40, 2; damaged by aircraft torpedo off Bardia, 17.9.40, 2.
- Kephalinia*, auxiliary schooner, foundered off Mersa Matruh, 13.8.41, 14.
- Keyes, Lieutenant-Colonel, G.C.T. Keyes, V.C., killed in raid on German headquarters in Desert, 15.11.41, 18.
- Kipling*, destroyer, took General Sikorski, Prime Minister of Poland, to Tobruk, 13.11.41, 15; with *Legion*, sank *U.75* off Mersa Matruh, 28.12.41, 23; sunk by bombs off Sidi Barrani, 11.5.42, 26.
- Kirkland*, cascd petrol carrier, in Convoy AT.1, 30.11.41, 20; torpedoed and sunk by *U.565* off Tobruk, 23.4.42, 26.
- Kilo*, a/s whaler, 25th A/S Group (South African), transferred to the Levant from the Tobruk Run, 21.12.41, 22.
- Kondouriotis*, Greek destroyer, part escort to Convoy AT.1, 30.11.41, 20.
- Kos 21*, a/s whaler, bombed and sunk off Tobruk, 4.10.41, 15.
- L.C.T., landing craft, tank, twelve in Operation Slender, 23.10.42, 27; two unloaded petrol at Smuggler's Cove, Mersa Matruh, 8.11.42, 27; four included in first Western Desert convoy, 9.11.42, 27.
- Ladybird*, gunboat, with *Aphis*, original member of Force W, September 1940, 3; engaged shore batteries, 23/24.8.40, 3; bombardment of Sidi Barrani, 8/9.12.40, 3; operations in Sollum Bay, 11.12.40, 3; acted as water carrier for Army at Sollum, 21 to 23.12.40, 4; bombarded area N.W. of Bardia 3.1.41, 5; bombardment of Tobruk cancelled at request of Army,



*Ladybird*, gunboat—*continued*

21.1.41, 5; sunk by bombs in Tobruk, 12.5.41, 10; signal of appreciation from Officer Commanding 1st Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment, 10.

*Latona*, fast minelayer, temporary employed on Tobruk Run, mid-July 1941, 13; transport of troops between Alexandria and Tobruk, 2nd half of July and August, 13; bombed and sunk 40 miles east of Tobruk, 25.10.41, 15.

Laycock, Colonel R.G., D.S.O., in command of raiding party on Rommel's headquarters in the Desert, 15.11.41, 18.

*Legion*, destroyer with *Kipling*, sank *U.75* off Mersa Matruh 28.12.41 23.

*Lesbos*, storeship, employed on Tobruk Run, July 1941, 13.

*Liguria*, Italian merchant ship, seriously damaged in joint R.A.F. and F.A.A. attack on Tobruk, 5.7.40, 2.

*Lively*, destroyer, sunk by bombs off Bardia, 11.5.42, 26.

*Liverpool*, 6-inch cruiser, first war cruise of Mediterranean Fleet, 11 to 14.6.40, 1; engaged enemy minesweeper off Tobruk, 12.6.40, 1; engaged enemy destroyer north of Benghazi, 28.6.40, 1.

*Lorraine*, French battleship, bombardment of Bardia, 21.6.40, 1.

Losses, warships and merchant ships, 12th April to 9th December 1941, 16; warships and merchant ships, January to mid-June 1942, 26.

*M.T.B.*'s, eight boats in Operation Slender, 23.10.42, 27.

*M.T.B.*'s, 68 and 215, minelaying operation in Bardia Harbour, 27.10.41, 17.

*M.T.B.* 266, rescued survivors from the *Parktown*, 21.6.42, 26.

*Malaya*, battleship, first war cruise of Mediterranean Fleet, 11 to 14.6.40, 1; bombardment of Bardia, 17.8.40, 2.

*Manzoni*, Italian motor vessel, sunk in Tobruk by torpedo from *Swordfish* of F.A.A. Squadron 813, 5.7.40, 2.

*Maria Giovanna*, auxiliary schooner, employed on Tobruk Run, July 1941, 13; ran aground and captured, 22.11.41, 20.

Mersa Matruh, A/A defence on the night of 8/9.8.41, 14; S.N.O.I.S. moved headquarters from Tobruk, 12.9.41, 16.

*Milford Countess*, m/s trawler, arrived Benghazi with clearance force, 13.2.41, 6; intensive minesweeping at Tobruk, February 1941, 8.

Mines, *Rorqual* laid successful minefields off coast of Cyrenaica, 1940, 1; 815 and 819 Squadron, F.A.A. bombing and minelaying raid, Benghazi, 16.9.40, 3; enemy aircraft minelaying raid at Benghazi, 11/12.2.41, 6; intensive minesweeping at

Mines—*continued*

Tobruk, February 1941, 8; damage to ships in Tobruk, February 1941, 7; minelaying raid by *M.T.B.*'s in Bardia Harbour, 27.10.41, 17; enemy aircraft lay mines off Benghazi, 26.12.41, 22; 46 enemy mines swept by 14th m/s flotilla off Mersa Matruh, 9.11.42, 27.

*Miranda*, storeship, arrived Tobruk after heavy air attack, 30.6.41, 12.

*Monte Gargano*, Italian minelayer, sunk by *Swordfish* of 824 Squadron, F.A.A., in Gulf of Bomba, 22.10.40, 2.

*Moy*, m/s trawler, intensive minesweeping at Tobruk, February, 1941, 8.

*Myriel*, Egyptian water carrier, arrived Sollum, 24.12.40, 4; damaged by torpedo from *U.431* off Alexandria, 13.12.41, 23.

*Naiad*, 5.25-inch cruiser, flagship of 15th Cruiser Squadron, bombardment of Derna, 10.12.41, 22; torpedoed and sunk by *U.565* off Sidi Barrani, 11.3.42, 26.

*Nembo*, Italian destroyer, sunk in Tobruk harbour by *Swordfish* of 824 Squadron, F.A.A., 20.7.40, 2.

*Neptune*, 6-inch cruiser, first war cruise of Mediterranean Fleet, 11 to 14.6.40, 1; bombardment of Bardia, 21.6.40, 1; transferred troops of 70th Division from Beirut to Alexandria and acted as covering force to Operation Supercharge, September, 1941, 14; bombarded petrol dumps at Bardia, 23/24.10.41, 17; bombarded gun repair depot at Bardia, 26.10.41, 17; sunk by mines off Tripoli, 19.12.41, 21.

N.O.I.C., Tobruk, Captain F. M. Smith, C.B.E., D.S.O., R.D., R.N.R. mortally wounded at Tobruk, 21.6.42, 26.

*Nubian*, destroyer, bombardment of coastal road, Sollum, 11.12.40, 3.

Operations, *Lustre*, despatch of troops to Greece, March 1941, 9; *Demon*, evacuation of troops from Greece, April 1941, 9; *Battleaxe*, attempt to relieve Tobruk, June 1941, 10; *Guillotine*, transport of troops to Cyprus, July, August 1941, 13; *Treacle*, relief of Australian Brigade in Tobruk by Polish Brigade, August 1941, 13; *Supercharge*, replacement of Australian troops in Tobruk by part of 70th Division from Syria, September, 1941, 14; *Cultivate*, further replacement of Australian troops in Tobruk, October, 1941, 14; *Approach*, last trooping trip to Tobruk before Operation *Crusader*, November 1941, 15; *Crusader*, Army advance into Cyrenaica, November 1941, 17; *Aggression*, naval measures to support Army in Operation *Crusader*, Nov./Dec. 1941, 18; *Agreement*, raid on Tobruk, 14.9.42, 27; *Slender*, naval support on night of Alamein, 23/24.10.42, 27.

*Orion*, 6-inch cruiser, first war cruise of Mediterranean Fleet, 11-14.6.40, 1; bombardment of Bardia, 21.6.40, 1.



- Palermo*, merchant ship, partially unloaded at Benghazi, 19.2.41, 7.
- Parktown* South African m/s whaler, sunk by E.-boats off Bardia, 21.6.42, 26.
- Parramatta*, R.A.N. sloop, escort to *Pass of Balmaha*, 23/24.6.41, 11; rescued survivors of *Auckland*, 24.6.41, 11; sunk by torpedo from *U.559* off Tobruk, 27.11.41, 20.
- Pass of Balmaha*, petrol carrier, heavily attacked by aircraft in Tobruk Run, 23/24.6.41, 11; arrived Tobruk in tow of *Waterhen*, 24.6.41, 11; sunk by U-boat off Mersa Matruh, 17.10.41, 15.
- Peony*, corvette, 10th Corvette Group, joined Western Desert Escort Force 21.12.41, 22; took damaged *Warszawa* in tow, 26.12.41, 23.
- Phoebe*, 5.25-inch cruiser, damaged by aircraft torpedo off Bardia, 27.8.41, 13.
- Queen Elizabeth*, battleship, seriously damaged by assault craft in Alexandria harbour, 19.12.41, 21.
- R.A.F., Royal Air Force, (see Air).
- Radar, absence of warning set at Benghazi, 7.
- Raiding parties, landing from *Glennary* and *Glengyle* at Bardia, 19/20.4.41, 9; German landing from *U.337* near Daba, 12.11.41, 18; Scottish Commando landing near Apollonia from *Torbay* and *Talisman*, 15.11.41, 18.
- Ramb IV*, hospital ship, sunk by bombs and our forces off Alexandria, 10.5.42, 26.
- Ramillies*, battleship, bombardment of Bardia, 17.8.40, 2.
- Rawlings, Rear-Admiral H.B., O.B.E., Rear-Admiral, First Battle Squadron, operation control of Force W, 15.12.40 to 25.1.41, 4.
- Rodi*, storeship, damaged by mines in Tobruk, February 1941, 7.
- Rommel, General Erwin, break through relieving force, 2.12.41, 17; began general withdrawal to Gazala line, 4.12.41, 17; started second offensive into Cyrenaica, 21.1.42, 25; failure to break through at Alam el Halfa, 2.9.42, 27; began general and final retreat, 3.11.42, 27.
- Rorqual*, submarine, successful minefields off Cyrenaica, 1940, 1.
- S.N.O.I.S., Senior Naval Officer, Inshore Squadron; Captain H. Hickling, 6.1.41 to 5.2.41, 4; forced-landed in Desert, 20.1.41, 5; Captain A. L. Poland, D.S.O., D.S.C., 5.2.41 to 10.3.42, 6; arrived Benghazi with clearance force, 13.2.41, 6; agreement with G.O.C., Cyrenaica over sailing ships from Benghazi, 19.2.41, 7; comments on defence of Tobruk, August 1941, 14; headquarters moved to Mersa Matruh, 12.9.41, 16; Captain P. N. Walter, D.S.O., 10.3.42 to 21.6.42, S.N.O.I.S.—continued
- wounded and taken prisoner, 26; Captain C. Wauchope, C.B.E., D.S.C., 26.10.42 to June, 1943, 26; (then became N.O.I.C., Tripoli and S.N.O., Tripolitania).
- St. Issey*, tug, with *Flamingo*, towed *Cricket* to Alexandria, 30.6.41, 12; towed damaged *Glenroy* to Alexandria, 29.11.41, 20; Convoy AT.1, towed lighters to Tobruk, 4.12.41, 20.
- St. Monance*, tug, towed *Glenroy* to Alexandria, 20.11.41, 20.
- Salvia*, corvette, left Benghazi for Tobruk, 22.2.41, 8; rescued survivors from *Terror*, 24.2.41, 8; 10th Corvette Group, joined Western Desert Escort Force, 21.12.41, 22; sunk by *U.568* off Tobruk, 23.12.41, 23.
- Samas*, Greek merchant ship, sunk by U-boat off Mersa Matruh, 17.10.41, 15.
- San Giorgio*, Italian cruiser (old), depot ship at Tobruk, bombed by R.A.F., 12.6.40, 1.
- Serenitas*, Italian merchant ship, sunk by R.A.F. bombs in Tobruk, 5.7.40, 2.
- Shuntien*, storeship, sunk by *U.559* off Tobruk, 23.12.41, 23.
- Sikh*, destroyer, sunk by shore gunfire from Tobruk, 14.9.42, 27.
- Sindonis*, a/s trawler, sunk by bombs, Tobruk, 29.5.41, 10.
- Skudd III*, m/s whaler, bombed and sunk in Tobruk, 27.8.41, 14.
- Skudd IV*, m/s whaler, bombed and sunk in Tobruk, 13.4.41, 10.
- Slavol*, Royal Fleet Auxiliary, sunk by *U.205* off Sidi Barrani, 26.3.42, 26.
- Sollum, closed as a supply port, except for feluccas, 12.2.41, 8.
- Sotra*, m/s trawler, damaged by bombs off Mersa Matruh, 3.8.41, 14; damaged by gunfire in Tobruk, 1.10.41, 15; torpedoed and sunk by *U.431* off Bardia, 29.1.42, 26.
- Southern Isle* South African a/s whaler, escort to Benghazi convoy, 14 to 18.2.41, 7; escort to *Antiklia* and *Miranda*, 29/30.6.41, 12; escort to *Myriel*, 13.12.41, 23.
- Southern Maid*, South African a/s whaler, escort to Benghazi convoy, 14 to 18.2.41, 7; escort to *Pass of Balmaha*, 28/30.6.41, 12.
- Southern Floe*, South African, a/s whaler, sunk by mine off Tobruk, 11.2.41, 7.
- Southern Sea*, South African, a/s whaler, 22nd A/S Group, escort to *Myriel*, 13.12.41, 23.
- Stoke*, minesweeper, sunk by bombs, Tobruk, 7.5.41, 10.
- Stuart*, R.A.N., flotilla leader, bombarded enemy seaplane base in Gulf of Bomba, 24.8.40, 3.



- Submarines, (see U-boats), patrol and mine-laying off Cyrenaica, 1940, 1; sank four enemy supply ships between 18th November and 13th December, 1941, 18; raiding parties landed at Apollonia by *Torbay* and *Talisman*, 15.11.41, 18; supply service to Malta, June to December 1941, 28.
- Suffren*, French 8-inch cruiser, cruise off Cyrenaica coast, 21.6.40, 2.
- Supplies, water for the Army at Sollum, gunboats as carriers, 21 to 23.12.40, 4; seaborne, arrangements at interservice meeting at Alexandria, 27.12.40, 5; Army and Royal Air Force requirements at Tobruk, February 1941, 8; total involved in siege of Tobruk, 16; suspended, to Tobruk, 28th October to 8th November, 1941, 17; damage done to enemy's, September to November, 1941, 17; maintenance of Army in Operation Crusader, December, 1941, 18 to 22.
- Sydney*, R.A.N., 6-inch cruiser, first war cruise of Mediterranean Fleet, 11 to 14.6.40, 1; bombardment of Bardia, 21.6.40, 1.
- Talisman*, submarine, landed raiding party, Apollonia, 15.11.41, 18.
- Tembien*, Italian submarine, unsuccessfully attacked by *Defender*, 29.6.41, 12.
- Terror*, 15-inch monitor, bombardment of Maktula, 8/9.12.40, 3; operations in Sollum Bay, 11.12.40, 3; continually in action, 14 to 18.12.40, 4; bombardment of area N.W. of Bardia, 3.1.41, 5; bombardment in support of Army, 3 to 5.1.41, 5; bombardment of Tobruk, previous to assault by Army, 20.1.41, 5; arrived Tobruk to provide A/A defence, 25.1.41, 6; arrived Benghazi to provide A/A defence, 17.2.41, 7; badly damaged by bombs 'near-miss', 22.2.41, 8; left Benghazi for Tobruk, 22.2.41, 8; further damage by mines and bombs, 23.2.41, 8; sunk off Derna, 0400/24.2.41, 8.
- Thorbyn*, a/s trawler, bombed and sunk off Tobruk, 19.8.41, 14.
- Thorgrim*, South African, a/s trawler, rescued survivors from *Chakdina*, 5.12.41, 20; transferred to the Levant from the Tobruk Run, 21.12.41, 22.
- Tiberio*, auxiliary schooner, damaged by 'near-miss' off Tobruk by own aircraft, 16; foundered off Mersa Matruh, 23.12.41, 16.
- Tobruk, in enemy hands, June 1940 to January 1941, 1; bombing attack by Royal Air Force, 12.6.40, 1; bombing attack by Royal Air Force, 21.6.40, 2; bombing and torpedo attack by R.A.F. and Fleet Air Arm, 5.7.40, 2; bombing and torpedo attack by R.A.F. and Fleet Air Arm, 20.7.40, 2; frequent attacks by R.A.F. and F.A.A. between July and December, 1940, 3; Army assault and capture, 20 to 22.1.41, 5; state of harbour
- Tobruk—*continued*
- after capture, 22.1.41, 5, 6; situation between 5th and 24th February 1941, 7, 8; by-passed by Rommel, siege commenced, 11.4.41, 9; summary of air raids, July 1941, 12; special arrangements for rapid disembarkation of troops during Operation Treacle, August 1941, 13; amalgamation of A/A and coast defence guns under one command, July 1941, 14; air raids and gunfire bombardments, August 1941, 14; total of personnel and stores in Operation Supercharge, September 1941, 14; garrison sortie, capture of El Duda and first contact with relieving force, 26.11.41, 17; Cairo communique announces relief, 9.12.41, 18; Convoy AT.1 arrived, 2.12.41, 20; rate of handling supplies, 25.12.41, 23; in our hands, January to mid-June, 1942, 25; recaptured by Rommel, 21.6.42, 25; raid on harbour, mid-September 1942, 27; final recapture by Eighth Army, 13.11.42, 27.
- Torbay*, submarine, landed raiding party, Apollonia, 15.11.41, 18.
- Triumph*, submarine, acted as navigational beacon for raid on Bardia, 19/20.4.41, 9.
- Tynefield*, tanker, bombed and damaged in air raid on Alexandria, 25.7.41, 8.
- U-boats, German, first appearance on Tobruk Run, 12.10.41, 15; ordered to concentrate off Tobruk, December 1941, 22; areas for German and Italian submarines on the Tobruk Run, 22.
- U.75*, sunk by the *Kipling* and *Legion* off Mersa Matruh, 28.12.41, 23.
- U.77*, torpedoed and sank the destroyer *Grove* off Bardia, 12.6.42, 26.
- U.79*, torpedoed and damaged the *Gnat*, 60 miles east of Tobruk, 21.10.41, 15; sunk by the *Hotspur*, *Hasty* and *Heythrop* off Bardia, 23.12.41, 23.
- U.81*, torpedoed and seriously damaged the *Brambleleaf* off Daba, 10.6.42, 26.
- U.205.*, torpedoed and sank *Slavol* off Sidi Barrani, 26.3.42, 26.
- U.331*, landed sabotage party near Daba, 12.11.41, 18; torpedoed and sank the battleship *Barham* off Sidi Barrani 25.11.41, 21; torpedoed and sank the a/s whaler *Cocker* off Daba, 4.6.42, 26.
- U.431*, torpedoed and damaged water carrier *Myriel* off Alexandria, 13.12.41, 23; torpedoed and sank m/s trawler *Sotra* off Bardia, 29.1.42, 26; torpedoed and sank S.S. *Eocene* off Tobruk, 20.5.42, 26.
- U.453*, torpedoed and sank S.S. *Havre* off Alexandria, 10.6.42, 26.
- U.557*, torpedoed and sank cruiser *Galatea* off Alexandria, 14.12.41, 23; sunk by Italian torpedo boat *Orione* off Suda Bay, 16.12.41, 23.




- U.559*, torpedoed and sank sloop *Parramatta* off Tobruk, 27.11.41, 20; torpedoed and sank S.S. *Shuntien* off Tobruk, 23.12.41, 23; torpedoed and sank S.S. *Warszawa* off Tobruk, 26.12.41, 23; torpedoed and sank S.S. *Volo* off Sidi Barrani, 27.12.41, 23; torpedoed and sank S.S. *Athene* off Daba, 10.6.42, 26.
- U.565*, torpedoed and sank S.S. *Kirkland* off Tobruk, 23.4.42, 26; torpedoed and sank cruiser *Naiad* off Sidi Barrani, 11.3.42, 26.
- U.568*, torpedoed and sank corvette *Salvia* off Tobruk, 23.12.41, 23; sunk by *Eridge*, *Hero*, *Hurworth* off Tobruk, 28.5.42, 26.
- U.577*, sunk by aircraft of 230 Squadron R.A.F. off Sollum, 9.1.42, 26.
- U.652*, torpedoed and sank destroyer *Heythrop* off Bardia, 20.3.42, 26; torpedoed and sank destroyer *Jaguar* off Sidi Barrani, 26.3.42, 26; sunk by 815 Squadron, F.A.A. and 203 Squadron R.A.F. off Sollum, 2.6.42, 26.
- Valiant*, battleship, support for the Army's assault on Bardia, 3.1.41, 5; seriously damaged by assault craft on Alexandria, 19.12.41, 21.
- Vendetta*, R.A.N., destroyer, took *Defender* in tow, 11.7.41, 13; arrived Tobruk after heavy air attacks beaten off by South African fighters, 2.8.41, 14.
- Vian, Rear-Admiral Philip J., D.S.O., Rear-Admiral 15th Cruiser Squadron, flag in *Naiad*, bombardment of Derna, 10.12.41, 22.
- Volo*, S.S. store carrier, torpedoed and sunk off Sidi Barrani by *U.559*, 27.12.41, 23.
- Voyager*, destroyer, assisting bombardment force in assault on Tobruk, 21.1.41, 5.
- W/T, naval station moved from Sollum to Benghazi, 13.2.41, 8.
- Waller, Captain H. M. L., D.S.O., R.A.N., Captain (D) Destroyer Flotilla, commanding H.M.A.S. *Stuart*, temporary S.N.O. Afloat of small ships of Force W, 15.12.40, 4.
- Walter, Captain P. N., D.S.O., S.N.O.I.S. at fall of Tobruk, wounded and taken prisoner, 21.6.42, 26.
- Warspite*, battleship, flagship of Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, first war cruise, 11/14.6.40, 1; bombardment of Bardia, 17.8.40, 2; support for the Army's assault on Bardia, 3.1.41, 5.
- Warszawa*, Polish transport, torpedoed and sunk by *U.559* off Tobruk, 26.12.41, 23.
- Water, difficulties of supply at Sollum, December 1940, 4.
- Waterhen*, R.A.N., destroyer, towed *Pass of Balmahu* into Tobruk, 24.6.41, 11; bombed and sunk, 100 miles east of Tobruk, 29.6.41, 12.
- Western Desert Escort Force, composition for Operation Aggression, December 1941, 19; strengthened by 10th Corvette Group, 21.1.41, 22.
- Western Desert Schooner Force, began regular service between Tobruk and Derna, 19.12.41, 22.
- Wilson, Lieutenant General Sir Henry Maitland, K.C.B., D.S.O., General Officer Commanding in Cyrenaica January to March 1941, 7.
- Wolborough*, a/s trawler, transferred from Sollum to Tobruk, 13.2.41, 8.
- Yarra*, R.A.N., sloop, escort to Convoy AT.1, 30.11.41, 20; towed *Flamingo* to Tobruk, 7.12.41, 21.
- Zeffiro*, Italian destroyer, sunk by aircraft torpedo from Swordfish of 813 Squadron, F.A.A. in Tobruk, 5.7.40, 2.
- Zulu*, destroyer, sunk by aircraft bombs when returning from raid on Tobruk, 14.9.42, 27.






# MEDITERRANEAN AND BLACK SEA REFERENCE CHART

Frontiers shown as in 1937.  
Ports at which there were Foreign Naval Authorities (1937)  
are indicated thus 

PLAN I



# MEDITERRANEAN AND BLACK SEA REFERENCE CHART

Frontiers shown as in 1937.  
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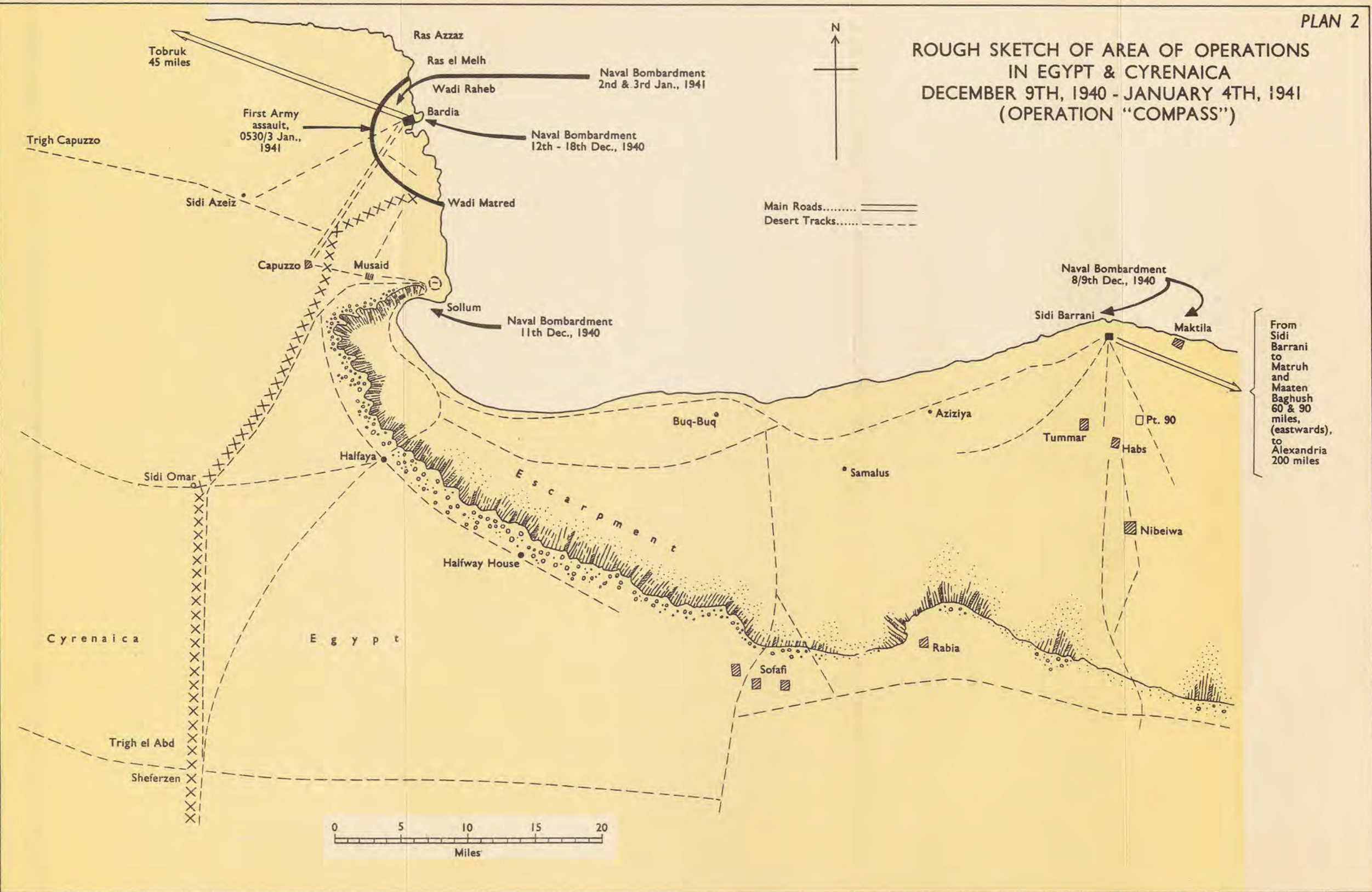
PLAN I



# ROUGH SKETCH OF AREA OF OPERATIONS IN EGYPT & CYRENAICA DECEMBER 9TH, 1940 - JANUARY 4TH, 1941 (OPERATION "COMPASS")



Main Roads.....  
Desert Tracks.....



Tobruk  
45 miles

Ras Azzaz

Ras el Melh

Wadi Raheb

Bardia

Wadi Matred

First Army  
assault,  
0530/3 Jan.,  
1941

Naval Bombardment  
2nd & 3rd Jan., 1941

Naval Bombardment  
12th - 18th Dec., 1940

Trigh Capuzzo

Sidi Azeiz

Capuzzo

Musaid

Sollum

Naval Bombardment  
11th Dec., 1940

Naval Bombardment  
8/9th Dec., 1940

Sidi Barrani

Maktila

From Sidi Barrani to Matruh and Maaten Baghush 60 & 90 miles, (eastwards), to Alexandria 200 miles

Buq-Buq

Aziziya

Pt. 90

Tummar

Habs

Sidi Omar

Halfaya

Escarpment

Samalus

Nibeiba

Halfway House

Rabia

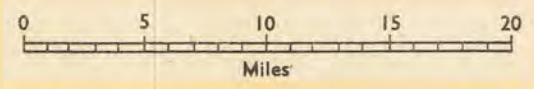
Cyrenaica

Egypt

Sofafi

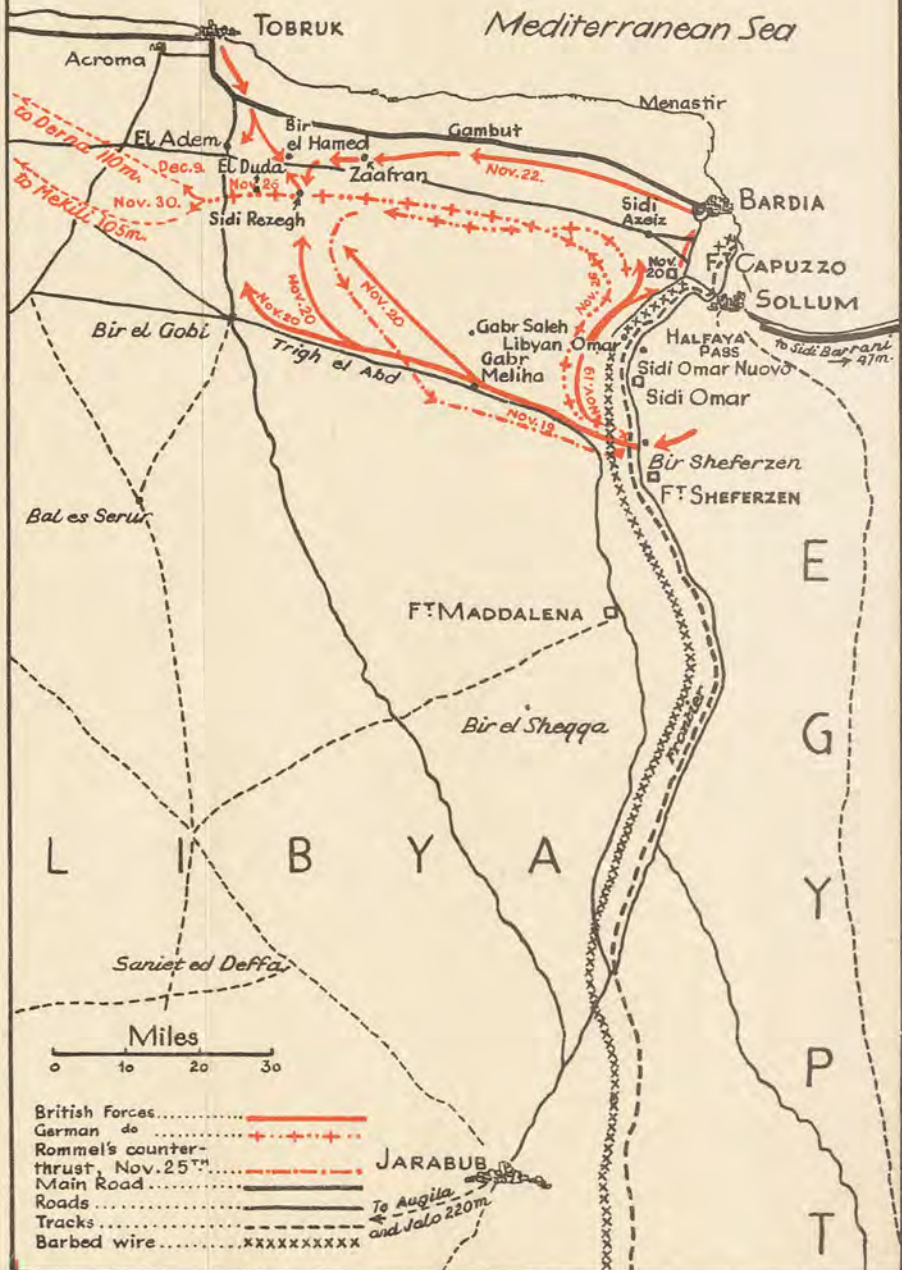
Trigh el Abd

Sheferzen





OPERATION CRUSADER



Drawn by Historical Section.

H.S. 1113/55











