



SUPPLEMENT

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THE BATTLE OF SIRTE OF 22ND MARCH, 1942.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 2nd June, 1942, by Admiral Sir Henry H. Harwood, K.C.B., O.B.E., Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Station.

*Mediterranean,
2nd June, 1942.*

Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships the attached reports of proceedings during Operation M.G. One between 19th March and 28th March, 1942.* This operation was carried out with the object of passing a convoy (M.W.10) of four ships to Malta, where it was most urgently required. In the course of the operation a greatly superior Italian surface force which attempted to intercept the convoy was driven off.

Plan.

2. When running the previous Malta convoy (M.W.9) in February, 1942, an attempt was made to escape detection during the first and second days out from Alexandria by splitting the convoy and simulating two normal Tobruk convoys. In the event this proved a failure. Further, an attempt to keep clear of JU.87s from Cyrenaica during the passage of the central basin by keeping well to the northward had little effect owing to the weight of attack from aerodromes in Greece and Crete.

3. It was therefore decided to keep convoy M.W.10 together throughout, and to use all

available forces to fight the convoy through, and to reinforce this escort at dawn D.3 by Force K* from Malta. The route was chosen with a view to:—

(a) arriving at Malta at dawn,

(b) being as far to the westward by darkness on D.2 as was possible consistent with remaining within range of long-range fighter protection during daylight,

(c) taking advantage of a suspected weakness in the enemy's air reconnaissance of the area between Crete and Cyrenaica, and at the same time avoiding suspected U-boat areas,

(d) keeping well south during the passage of the central basin to increase the distance to be covered by surface forces attempting to intercept.

4. To reduce the scale of air attack on the convoy, the Eighth Army were to carry out a feint advance (Operation "Fullsize") on D.2. It was hoped that this would focus the attention of the enemy air forces on the land, and so draw off some of the attack from the convoy. In the event this feint achieved its object very successfully.

5. Simultaneously the Royal Air Force were to undertake as heavy attacks as possible on enemy aerodromes in Cyrenaica and Crete. Anti-ship striking forces were to be held in readiness on D.3, when interception by surface forces was a possibility.

6. Covering submarine patrols were established by two submarines in the southern approaches to Messina and four in the Gulf of Taranto.

* Admiralty footnote: Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, G.C.B., D.S.O., was Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Station at the time when this operation was carried out.

* Admiralty footnote: Force K—H.M. Ships PENELOPE (Cruiser) and LEGION (Destroyer).