



SUPPLEMENT

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MEDITERRANEAN CONVOY OPERATIONS.

OPERATION "EXCESS"

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 19th March, 1941 by Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, G.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Station.

*Mediterranean,
19th March, 1941.*

OPERATIONS M.C.4 AND M.C.6

Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships the enclosed reports on Operation M.C.4 (which included Operation "Excess") and Operation M.C.6,* carried out between 6th and 18th January, 1941.

2. These operations marked the advent of the German Air Force in strength in the Mediterranean, and included the damaging of H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS on 10th January and the loss of H.M.S. SOUTHAMPTON on 11th January.

3. The incident reported in paragraph 7 of Enclosure No. 6† illustrates the difficulty of passage through the Narrows during periods of bright moon when, in order to avoid the known minefields, it is necessary to pass within gun and visibility range of Pantellaria.

Admiralty footnotes

* Operations M.C.4 and M.C.6—see paragraph 1 of Commander-in-Chief's narrative

† This enclosure is not included. The incident referred to was the apparent detection of GLOUCESTER and SOUTHAMPTON by the defences of Pantellaria on the night of 8th/9th January

4. With regard to the dawn action reported in Enclosures Nos. 6 and 9,* it is thought that this must have been a chance encounter, as so small an Italian force would hardly have been sent unsupported to attack a heavily defended convoy. The heavy expenditure of ammunition by BONAVENTURE, largely incurred in an effort to sink a crippled ship, serves to emphasise the importance of using the torpedo at close range on such occasions.

5. I fully concur with the remarks of the Vice-Admiral, Light Forces† concerning the towing of GALLANT by MOHAWK (Enclosure No. 11‡), and consider that this was a most ably conducted operation.

It cannot be satisfactorily determined whether GALLANT was mined or torpedoed, but the absence of tracks and failure by the enemy to claim her sinking lend probability to the supposition that it was a mine.

6. The dive bombing attacks by German aircraft were most efficiently performed and came as an unpleasant surprise. The results of short range A.A. fire were disappointing, though it has been subsequently learned that this fire was in fact more effective than it appeared, and the Germans suffered considerable loss.

Admiralty footnotes

* These enclosures are not included. The action referred to was a brief encounter at dawn on 10th January by ships escorting Convoy "Excess" with two unidentified enemy vessels which delivered a torpedo attack on them

† Vice-Admiral, Light Forces—Vice-Admiral H. D. Pridham-Wippell, C.B., C.V.O.

‡ This enclosure is not included. The Vice-Admiral, Light Forces remarked that he considered that the Commanding Officer of MOHAWK "showed determination and good judgment in continuing the tow"