

7. The degree of air support given to our light forces from 9th May onwards may best be judged by the almost complete freedom from enemy interference enjoyed by them. Only one incident marred the co-operation between air and naval forces—the bombing of H.M. Ships BICESTER and ZETLAND on 9th May by our own fighter-bombers. This incident was immediately and fully investigated and was due to the fact that information as to the movements of the destroyers failed to reach some of the forward aerodromes before the aircraft took off early that day.

8. The whole sea area in which the destroyers were required to operate had been heavily mined, both by the enemy and ourselves. Most of our mines, however, had been set to flood by the beginning of May, and it was judged that our intelligence of enemy minefields was good enough to allow a sharp distinction to be drawn between areas where the risk of mines was great and those where the risk could be accepted. In the event, this judgment proved correct, and no casualties from mines were suffered by the destroyers.

9. The minefields had, however, a considerable effect on the operations, particularly the large field which extended north-eastward from Cape Blanc. The destroyers operating from Bone were forced to go a long way round the northern edge of this minefield when proceeding to and from patrol, and in doing so exposed themselves to air attack. This resulted in one casualty, when O.R.P. BLYSKAWICA was

near missed and slightly damaged and was unable to take any further part in the operations.

10. Minesweepers had been concentrated at Bone as soon as the fall of Bizerta seemed imminent, and by 11th May they had swept a channel through to Bizerta. This early success on their part was a forerunner to the excellent work they performed in the succeeding weeks, and it contributed materially to the successful work of the destroyer patrols by saving the destroyers a great deal of unnecessary steaming.

11. From 9th May onwards, ten to twelve destroyers were constantly on patrol off the Cape Bon peninsula, with a similar number of coastal craft in the inshore area by night, until all attempts by the enemy to evacuate had ceased. The patrols resulted in the capture of some 700 prisoners and in the complete denial to the enemy of any chance of evacuating by sea any important part of his forces.

12. To maintain the patrols at the strengths required meant a special effort on the part of the destroyers, coastal craft and maintenance staffs alike. That this effort would be forthcoming was only to be expected; all concerned met the demands that were made on them with the same cheerful spirit with which they faced the not inconsiderable risks that had to be run.

(Signed) A. B. CUNNINGHAM,
*Admiral of the Fleet,
Commander-in-Chief.*

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