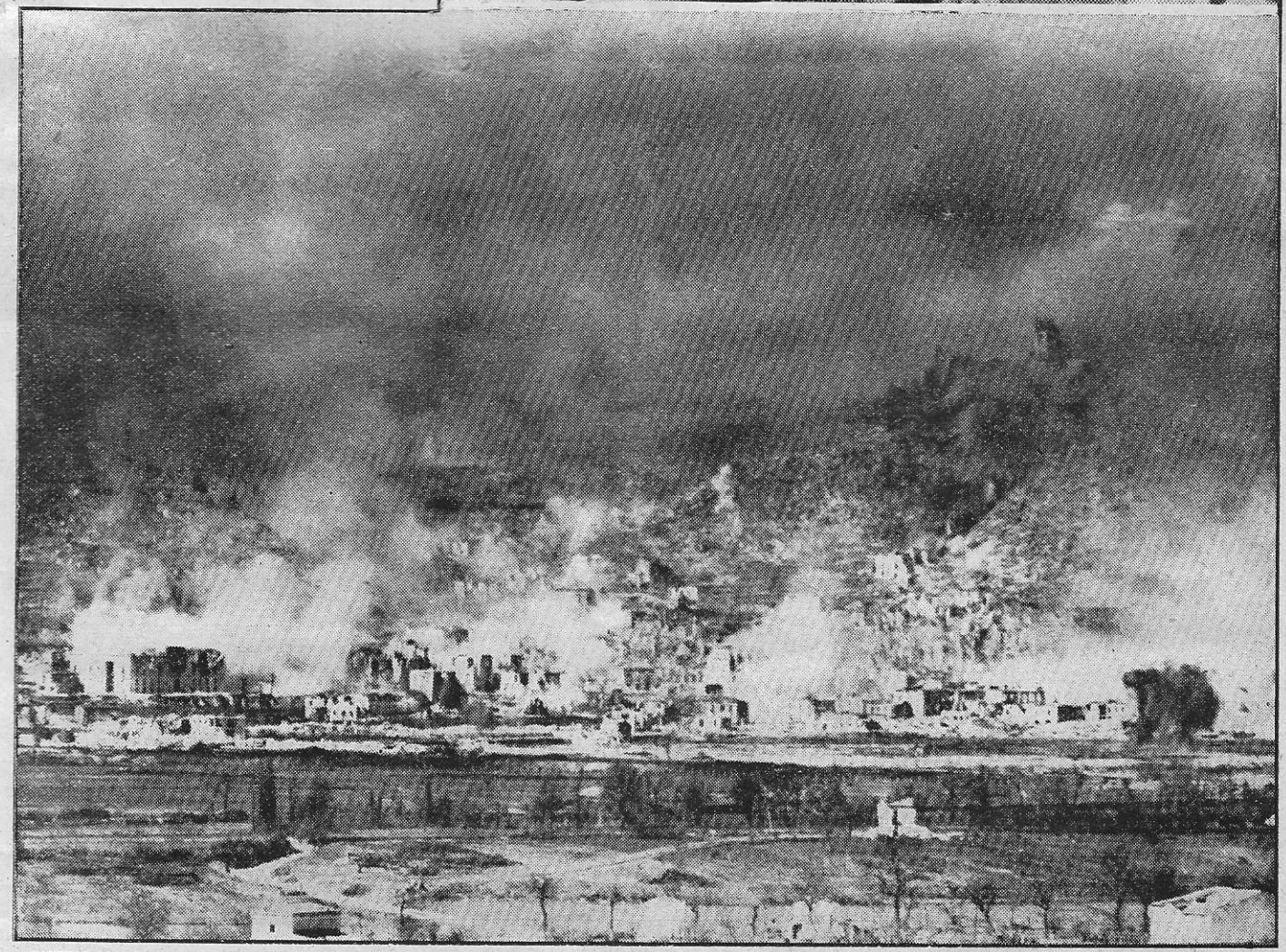
Bloody is the Fighting for the Ruins of Cassino

IN THE STREETS and in the hills around Cassino, on March 29, 1944, the 5th Army were fighting with utmost gallantry against an enemy fanatically defending a position which, after weeks of battle, had on March 15, 1944, been pounded to a mass of rubble by our bombers and artillery in attacks of a scale unprecedented for a target of comparable size. Cassino, strategically placed and well adapted for defence, has long held up the Allied forces. Beyond it lies the road to Rome.

Chief among the German troops whose lives are daily being thrown away in its defence, are the men of the 1st Parachute Regiment, whom our Forces first encountered at Ortona, in Italy. There they put up a house-to-house defence when they were assailed by the 8th Army in December 1943. Now their numbers are dwindling—and they are soldiers of a quality which cannot be replaced from the Nazi reserves.

In the words of one of our war correspondents in a recent cable home : "Dogged resistance and skill of concealment are part of the German parachutist's make-up. They are street-fighting specialists. Here are two examples of the kind of fight they put up : One German unit was buried in a cellar on the day of the great Allied bombardment. It took them four days to extricate themselves. Instead of retiring exhausted, they set about building a strong-point in the rubble in which they had been buried . . . A New Zealand unit took 50 German prisoners from a house in Cassino. When they returned to the house after handing over their prisoners, they found another 50 Germans in possession."

Prolongation of the bitter fighting is due in large measure to lengthy tunnels deep beneath the town, some of these forming connexions between series of strongpoints among the rubble and all of them providing the Nazi troops with protection against even our heaviest bombardments.



EVERY UNIT OF ALLIED AIR POWER in the Mediterranean area was concentrated in the greatest air attack ever delivered against so small a target when they shattered the city of Cassino (below). Immediately after the bombing, British and U.S. artillery added a terrific barrage to complete the destruction of the ancient stone buildings which still concealed and protected enemy gun emplacements. Into the maelstrom went these Allied patrol vehicles (above), among which were Red Cross units bearing their flag of mercy.

Photos, U.S. Official

THE WAR AT SEA

by Francis E. McMurtrie

SEVERAL weeks after the completion of the operation, the Admiralty released particulars of the destruction of six U-boats in the Atlantic by the Second Escort Group. This group comprised the war-built sloops Starling, Kite, Magpie, Wild Goose and Woodpecker, under the command of Captain F. J. Walker, R.N., as senior officer (see page 711). Before the war Captain Walker was in command of the experimental anti-submarine establishment at Portland, and the theories which he then formed have been carried into practice with great success in the past eighteen months, more U-boats having been destroyed by the Second Escort Group than by any other.

Over a period of 20 days the sloops repeatedly made contact with U-boats before these could attack the convoys they were guarding. In five instances persistent depth charging resulted in the destruction of the enemy submarines under water, evidence in the shape of wreckage and bodies being seen floating. In the sixth case, the submarine was forced to surface after five and a half hours of depth charging and was engaged by the guns of the Starling, Captain Walker's vessel. Her crew at once abandoned ship, the U-boat sinking stern first immediately afterwards. Altogether 51 survivors were rescued and made prisoners. H.M.S. Woodpecker was hit by a torpedo, and afterwards foundered; but not a casualty was incurred.

SUCH successes as these illustrate the results of the system which is now employed to repel submarine attacks on shipping. Though it is partly the fruit of experience, it could not be carried into effect were it not that an ample force of escort vessels—destroyers, sloops, frigates and corvettes—is now available, as the result of the immense programme of warship construction that has been in progress in this country and the United States for three years past. All the time these vessels are increasing in numbers, whereas the destruction of U-boats during 1943 was so considerable that the total available remained more or less stationary.

HEROIC Son of a Naval Captain Proves that Heredity Counts

Furthermore, personnel of the escort craft have continued to gain valuable experience during this time. That they have thus reached a very high standard of efficiency in submarine hunting is illustrated by the latest exploits of the Second Escort Group, as briefly related. Captain Walker, whose fine record of service has gained him the C.B. and the D.S.O., is in his forty-eighth year. He is the son of a captain in the Royal Navy, evidence that heredity sometimes counts.

A HANDSHAKE FROM THE COMMANDER of the sloop H.M.S. Aberdeen obviously pleases the dog, which was found floating on timber miles out in the Atlantic after the French merchant vessel which had owned it had been torpedoed. Adopted by the Aberdeen as ship's mascot, it was promptly christened "H.M.V.," as when rescued it was sitting in the same position as the well-known gramophone record advertisement dog. *Photo, British Official*

FORTUNATELY, Japan is in no position to build warships in such large numbers as the Allies have done. She is thus constrained to watch her fine mercantile fleet gradually dwindling as the result of the excessive demands made on it by war in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Had it remained intact, the task of maintaining communications with the Dutch Indies, the Philippines, Burma, Siam, Malaya, and the various island groups seized by the Japanese in 1941-42, would still have taxed its capabilities. As it is, the losses inflicted by Allied surface warships, submarines and aircraft are believed to have reduced the total tonnage available by at least one-third; and as time goes on Allied naval and air strength expands, causing the rate of loss to rise. For such important results the losses sustained by the United States Navy's submarine flotillas cannot be considered unduly heavy. Up to the time of writing they include 23 units, all but four of them of modern design.

Since the number of new submarines launched last year from American shipyards was about sixty, there is little consolation to be found by the enemy in the destruction of about one-third of that number in a space of over twice that period. No doubt General Tojo had these facts in mind when he told Parliament in Tokyo on March 22, 1944, that the situation had become "extraordinarily acute." He had just learned of the annihilation of yet another convoy of reinforcements and supplies dispatched to Wewak, the main Japanese base in New Guinea. At this rate it will not be long before that port will be in as hopeless a position as Rabaul in New Britain, and Kavieng in New Ireland, both of which are now cut off from succour and are under frequent bombardment by the Allied fleet. When these strongholds are eliminated, it will be the turn of Truk. Now that the Japanese airfield at Lorengau, in the Admiralty group, has been taken, and the remaining atolls in the Marshalls are falling one by one, it should soon be possible to bring Truk under attack by shore-based aircraft as well as carrier-borne planes.

SHIPS Built in Britain and U.S. for Transfer to Red Fleet

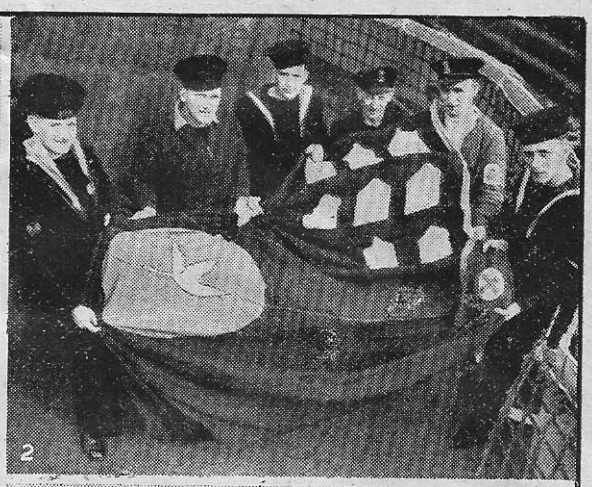
A good deal of interest was aroused by the report that the Soviet Government was about to take over one-third of the Italian fleet now operating with the Allies. This appears to have arisen through a misreading of some remarks by President Roosevelt, who actually intended to imply that the Red Fleet was to be reinforced by a quantity of fresh tonnage, built in British and American yards, equal in the aggregate to about one-third of the Italian total. Already a number of mine-sweepers, motor-torpedo-boats and submarine chasers have been transferred to the Russian flag from the United States Navy, and more ships will follow in the near future.

It would seem that the question was raised in the first instance by the Soviet Government, which is anxious to replace its naval losses. No official statement of these has appeared, but there is reason to believe that the cruiser Krasni Krim has been sunk in the Black Sea; and it is possible that her sister ship, the Chervonaya Ukraina, has also been lost. A good many destroyers and submarines have also become casualties, and the enemy have claimed that two of the cruisers in the Baltic have been sunk.

THERE are three old battleships, the Marat, Oktiabrskaya Revolutia and Pariskaya Kommuna, dating from 1911, which are long overdue for replacement. The first-named is believed to have been badly damaged by German air attacks on Kronstadt during 1942. In these circumstances it may well have been suggested that three Italian battleships, of approximately the same age and displacement, but reconstructed and modernized throughout, should be earmarked for replacement of the three old Russian ships. These three Italian vessels are the Andrea Doria, Caio Duilio and Giulio Cesare, all of which submitted to Allied control at Malta last September.

At the moment there does not appear to be any particular use for battleships in the Soviet Navy, except for bombardment of German-held coasts in the Gulf of Finland or in the Black Sea; and for such purposes the Italian ships could hardly be made available while Denmark and the Aegean islands remain in enemy hands. Actually, the principal Russian need at the moment would seem to be for vessels capable of aiding in the escort of convoys to the White Sea, such as cruisers, destroyers, sloops, frigates and minesweepers.

5 British Sloops Sink 6 U-Boats in 20 Days



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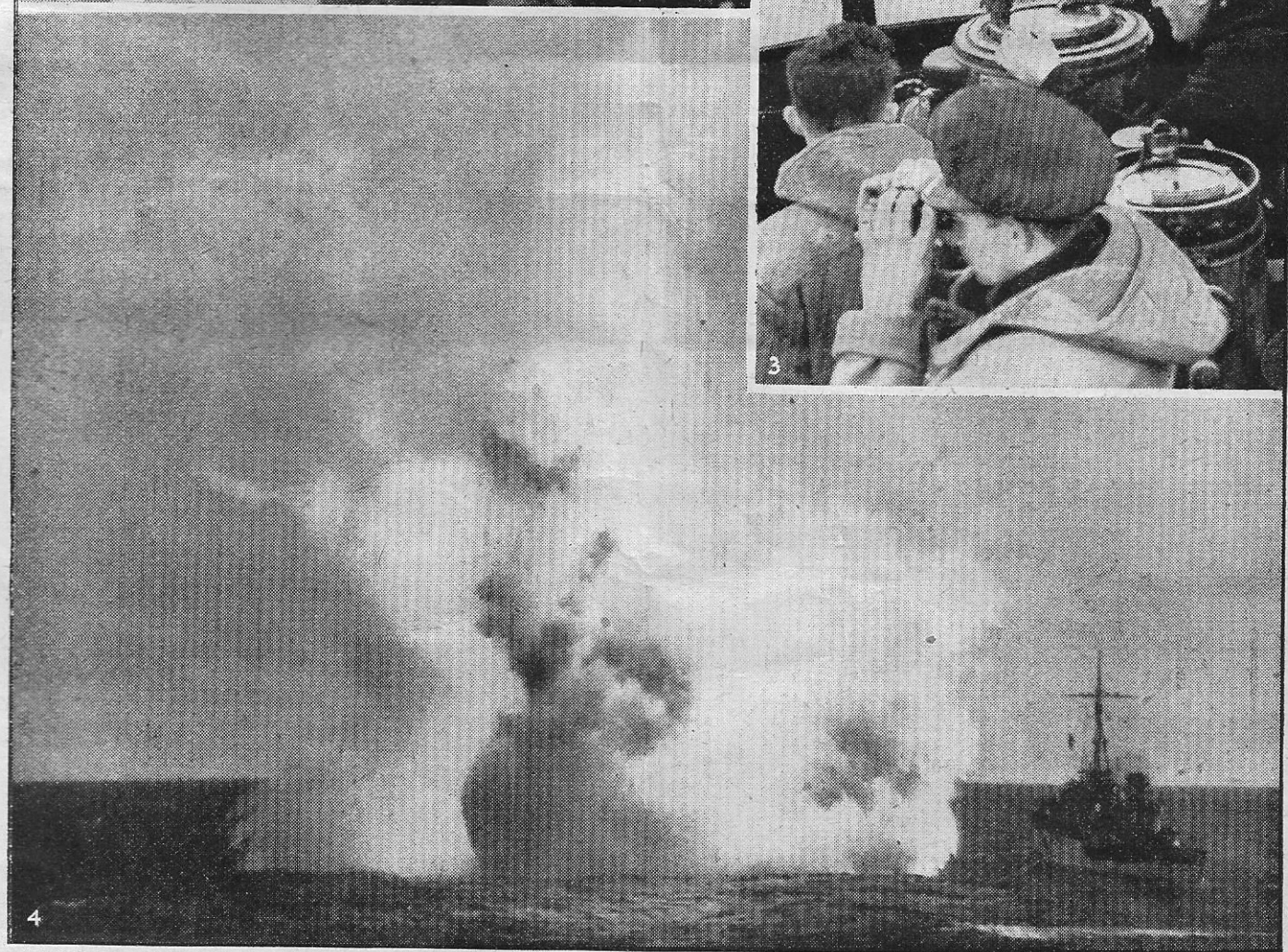

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MOST TRIUMPHANT U-BOAT HUNT OF THE WAR recently ended with a tremendous welcome home for the sloop H.M.S. Starling (1), whose Captain Walker, C.B., D.S.O., R.N., is seen on the bridge taking a hasty snack whilst in action (3, right). Four other sloops of the Second Escort Group, commanded by Capt. Walker, assisted in the sinking of six U-boats within 20 days; an exploding depth charge from H.M.S. Kite throws up a great column of water (4), and the crew of H.M.S. Wild Goose display their battle-flag (2). See p. 719. *Photos, British Official; Topical*

The Fleet Oiler Waits On Our Fighting Ships

Her cargo is crude oil for the big ships' furnaces, and petrol for the planes they carry, or for the brood of an aircraft carrier. A warship may be stranded without fuel, unable to steam, steer, or anchor—a sitting shot for the enemy ; all its hopes are then placed in the speedy services of one of these Handmaidens of the Navy, whose work is described by CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW.

THERE IS one type of ship which seldom gets the credit she deserves, although without her the Navy would be to all intents and purposes immobilized. The role played by the Fleet Oiler is unique, for she differs considerably from the coal-burning Navy's colliers. Seldom was the necessary fuel transferred from ship to ship in open sea ; coaling was a laborious, messy and difficult task at anchor ; at sea, with a wind blowing, it was practically impossible.

The oiler has changed all that. By her sturdy work she enables the fighting ships to perform exceptional voyages, lengthens their capacity of action, and generally keeps them tended. Her 12,000 tons of invaluable oil is always at the Navy's service ; and if the battleships, cruisers and destroyers cannot break off their duties to come to her, she simply lifts her anchors and goes—at full speed—to them.

Normally she lies, well-hidden, in some lonely loch or fjord with a perpetual brood of hungry vessels nuzzling at her, for all the world like a sow with her litter. She is officially listed as a Fleet Auxiliary, being both Royal Navy and Merchant Navy, and her crew is hand-picked, because specialists are needed to perform the oiler's onerous tasks. It is man's work to bring a laden oiler alongside a towering battleship in a seaway, when both vessels are sheering awkwardly under helm, and high seas are doing their utmost to frustrate the necessary union.

Yet the warships must have oil—not only heavy oil to feed their furnaces, but high octane spirit to fill all the tanks of the planes carried. Or an aircraft carrier may demand attention. Also the oiler acts to some extent as general supply ship to the mobile fleet ; she serves as mail-boat, beef-boat, canteen fi ler. Also, possessing as she usually does, a commodious sick-bay with an adequate pe sonnel of doctors and sick-berth stewards, she can, on occasion, serve as a useful clearing hospital for casualties which need more specialized care than is obtainable aboard a fighting ship liable to meet hot action every ti ne smoke is spotted on the skyline.

AN oiler's existence when at her moorings in shelter can be prosaic and monotonous. For lonely harbours are usually selected, so that refuelling warships can come and go without interfering with normal traffic ; but there is always the variety of some ship, great or small, appearing out of nowhere with a peremptory demand for the precious fluid that is the Navy's life-blood. And the people of such client-ships usually have interesting stories to tell, of breathless attacks from the air, of bombardments of enemy coasts, of sorties on stealthy convoys, of pitched battles between giant-ship and giant-ship off Norwegian coasts.

The close-packed crews of destroyers and corvettes like to clamber aboard and stretch their cramped legs in the spaciousness of the oiler, although her lean, low decks are hampered by countless gadgets designed for quick action in refuelling. Although, when moored, immune from the actual hazards of seagoing, the daily—sometimes hourly—arrivals bring the tang of spindrift with them ; as often as not they are ice-coated and bleached from constant battling with unfriendly seas, and every man-Jack aboard the visitors is eager for mail. So that a friendly atmosphere prevails all around. There is a sort of motherliness about the oiler, offering a cordial welcome home.

There is nothing outstandingly beautiful about these glorified tankers. Indeed, with engines and funnels aft, a long expanse of deck, broken only by the midships superstructure of the bridge and officers' accommodation, she is ugly, looking draggled and sluttish alongside the sleek, razor-lined craft that come to her. She is strictly utilitarian. But her crew know their job inside out, by day and by night, for when a warship needs fuel she usually needs it in a hurry. And, as Nelson said, five minutes might spell the difference between defeat and victory. Lights may not be exhibited ; the coupling of oil-hose has very often to be done in black darkness, with rain sluicing like Niagara, or snow falling almost impenetrably.

Decks too Hot to Walk Upon

The atmosphere aboard the oiler is close and oppressive, especially below, for, as any moment might bring a call for what she carries, the liquid fuel must be kept liquid by the steampipes interspersing the giant tanks. For crude oil such as is used in ships' furnaces solidifies if not kept at a certain temperature ; and it can happen that the decks are actually too hot to walk upon. Refuelling whilst at anchor is a simple matter in many ways : it merely means that the linking hose-pipes must be attached to the warships' intakes, and the pumps set going for as long as is necessary to rebunker.

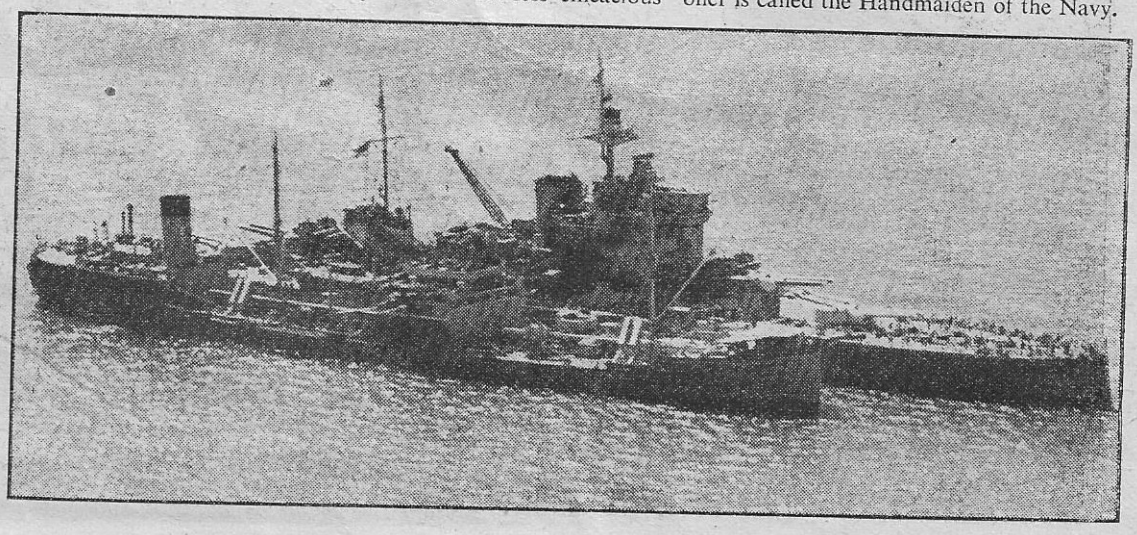
There is, of course, a constant liability to attack from the air, since the enemy's reconnaissance aircraft are over quite often. If an oiler can be sunk, it means delay in the movements of the ships dependent on her. And during that delay, commerce-raiders might break through the cordon and escape to open sea, where an infinite amount of damage can be wrought. So the oiler is well-armed, though her guns seem as if fitted as an afterthought ; they do not blend into her outlines in the same way as do those of fighting ships. But they are not the less efficacious on that account ; they have brought down diving raiders wholesale.

It is frequently necessary for the fleet oiler to leave her moorings and steam to a busier port to replenish her supplies and be overhauled. She needs to go warily on such voyages, for the lurking U-boat is very watchful, and she would be a good prize for the scurrying E-boats that are always waiting on opportunity. Since the oiler usually owns a good turn of speed, escorts are not considered essential ; and in case of attack she occasionally has to fight her own way through such hazards as may offer.

THE fact that enemy surface ships are more or less penned in to close waters limits the oiler's activities. To maintain the tireless patrol of the misted Northern seas demands much steady steaming ; but not much of it is performed at high speed, for high speed devours oil greedily. The great battleships and the tiny corvettes alike can usually manage to make port before supplies run out. But it can happen that a warship, detached on duty, runs short of fuel ; and when that happens the fleet oiler has to go to the customer.

The fleet oiler's navigation staff is superexcellent. They must be so, to locate that trivial pinpoint presented by a small ship in the middle of a mighty sea. For the most part wireless silence must be maintained, in case the location of the warship is betrayed to the enemy ; at night time "darken-ship" is the order. Only infinitesimal lights may be shown at the best of times. Once the "dry" ship is spotted, expert seamanship is necessary to bring the two alongside ; and mooring gear of superior quality must be employed to hold them together, with great fenders dropped between hull and hull to take the chafe of the rubbing, grinding sides.

It is when sea-warfare finds wider fields than the narrow waters of the North that the fleet oiler shows her outstanding value. It often happens that a fleet of big ships must steam many thousands of miles at high speed to perform a vital mission. She must accompany the fleet or steam out from harbour to intercept it at a signal ; and she must, ranging alongside ship after empty ship, replenish their stores. Such a task means long working hours for the crew. In occasional instances the battle formation of the fleet cannot be disturbed, and the refuelling must take place at night, in total darkness, with the ships reeling drunkenly. Crude oil for the fires, refined petrol for the aircraft : no wonder the oiler is called the Handmaiden of the Navy.



THROUGH FEED-PIPES connecting the fleet oiler and H.M.S. Warspite (right) the life-blood of the Royal Navy flows. On the services of the tanker the several successes of the Warspite have depended, as is the case with other of our fighting ships in this war.
Photo, British Official