

Yank Fliers Called Marvelous In Battle Against Italians

AN ALLIED AIRDROME IN THE LIBYAN DESERT—The full story of the attack by American fliers Monday on an Italian fleet in the Mediterranean—was told Wednesday by Major Alfred Kalberer, leader of the United States Army craft.

The American attack was followed up immediately by British torpedo-carrying planes which sank a cruiser which the Americans had set afire, it was disclosed.

The Americans caught the Italian warships by surprise and encountered only a few rounds of anti-aircraft fire, these missing "by a mile", the Americans said.

The British torpedo bombers, however, ran into the brunt of the anti-aircraft fire as the Italians got their defenses into operation belatedly, and only two of the British planes reached home undamaged.

"We took off before dawn," Kalberer said. "Our American Liberators and two British Liberators got in formation at dawn at an agreed-upon rendezvous along the coast. One of the British Liberators which was slower could not keep up with us and went back."

The squadron leader said the bombers passed over a British convoy whose escort vessels opened fire at sight of strange-looking planes which they did not recognize. They kept shooting until halted by signal.

Tossing a fragment of anti-aircraft shell onto a table afterward, Kalberer said with a laugh: "That's what they put into my plane. It's probably lend-lease material. But we got off safely."

"At 9," Kalberer said, "we saw smoke on the horizon. It was the Italian fleet out of Taranto. We were waiting for our rendezvous with British torpedo planes, but the fleet showed up before we had expected, so we went at it."

"We coasted down and came at them out of the sun. They apparently neither heard nor saw us. They were not expecting a high altitude attack."

"Our first flight went for the second battleship," Kalberer said, "leaving the first one for two other flights. We had expected to drop bombs 50 feet apart, but we got such a marvelous target we



—AP WIREPHOTO
MAJOR KALBERER

let them all go and then saw smoke pouring out from aft.

"The second flight tackled the first battleship, and the third flight, seeing that one smoking, decided to go at the cruiser and destroyer."

"We saw the cruiser afire and as we were leaving the British planes came in, giving it a torpedo, and later it was sunk by a submarine."

"We coasted down almost to the surface of the water and were going home when two Messerschmitts—one a 109-F and one a two-motored 110—got on our tails. We were flying in a most unorthodox formation and we must have puzzled them."

"They came down several times and drew back as though not quite sure what we were. Then they made up their minds and swooped on us. We got the 110 and saw it plunge into the water. The tail gunner of one of our ships and the upper turret of another seemed to have got into it together."

"The only damage they did to us was to send a bullet between the legs of one rear gunner."

"We used oxygen before and during the attack for two hours in all," Kalberer said. "We were not so high that it was necessary, but at that height it increases efficiency."

"It was a perfect operation. There was not a single hitch. Even gasoline consumption was exactly what we had figured."

"It went as smoothly as a commercial airliner. The boys I had with me were marvelous. I have been flying for years and some of those boys are just out of training, but they are as good as I am any day."

"It was a revelation of what those American training schools are doing. They are turning out finished fliers."

The Americans have been here in full operating force only two weeks. During that time they have been confined close to their work and their desert barracks. They have not even had Cairo leave since their arrival.

Some are veterans of Java and India, some bright-faced

boyish fliers just out of training schools—but all are ready for action.

Commanding the full detachment is Col. H. A. Halverson of Boone, Iowa, who remained in the background and let Kalberer tell the story of the raid which he led.

Second in command is Lt. Col. George McGuire of Coffeyville, Kan. Among other members of the staff are Majors Paul Davis of Atlanta, John Payne of Austin, Texas, and Captains Francis B. Rang of Albuquerque, N. M., John W. Wilkinson of Burnside, Ky., and James W. Sibert of Indianapolis.

In all the American and RAF attacks cost the Italians a heavy cruiser and two destroyers sunk and two battleships, two cruisers and two destroyers badly damaged, besides at least fourteen enemy planes shot down and many more damaged.

