

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: E.O. 13526

By: NDC NARA Date: Dec 31, 2012

LST FLOTILLA FOUR

S E C R E T

the sedentary night into slivers of scarlet and orange. It is so close that the concussion is clearly felt around one's pants legs.

• Suddenly off to port a ship puffs into flame as if hit by a bomb and fire shoots across the deck from stem to stern. The flames leap high into the night, and may be seen clearly burning two hours hence. Another ship takes it to the port beam and is afire. A third displays the tragic lone red light as mute testimony to her wounds.

A A pile of embers that must once have been a plane careens crazily to the surface in one bright flash and then is snuffed out by the water.

T 0450 The ack-ack has secured save for a few stray shells that probably were lodged in gun barrels after the orders to cease firing. It is still dark and impossible to estimate the damage done. What might have been the sun had it been earlier is the dull glow of the ship that caught the first bomb, now way to the stern of the convoy still aglow.

C 0805 A lone plane wings in off the starboard quarter of the convoy from the African coast. It drops two flares--- white over red, the proper recognition signal for the hour, but three merchant ships open fire on it. Their shots are erratic. The plane drops its signal again, but the firing continues and it flies away.

• 0810 Six planes may be seen in the distance far off to port.

1100 The Commodore orders all ships who have barrage balloons to fly them, and the ~~convoy~~ soon responds.

1400 The following two reports were received over TBY:
"FROM GORILLA SHIP WHICH WAS BOMBED AND CAUGHT FIRE DURING RAID WAS ABANDONED AND IS NOW UNDER CONTROL CREW PLACED BACK ABOARD ABOUT TWO HUNDRED BAGS OF MAIL RESCUED AND NOW ESCORTED BY SPIDER AND GORILLA"

1423 "THERE WERE DEFINITELY TWO PLANES DESTROYED LAST NIGHT"

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1445 All flotilla ships were present and accounted for when dawn broke this morning, and LST 173 seems to have come closest during this baptism by fire. She reported the following by blinker:

A "AT 0403 PLANE PASSED VERY LOW ACROSS MAIN DECK
T FROM PORT TO STARBOARD AND CRASHED ABOUT FIFTY FEET
T OFF STARBOARD BEAM FOLLOWING CRASH A VERY PRONOUNCED
UNDERWATER EXPLOSION OCCURRED THROWING A HUGE BALL OF
T WATER WHICH BROKE OVER MAIN DECK AND ICT AAA NUMEROUS
PIECES OF PLANE WRECKAGE AND SHRAPNEL FOUND ABOUT
UPPER DECKS AAA NO PERSONNEL DAMAGE SUFFERED AAA ENGINE
ROOM REPORT THE FOLLOWING OUT OF COMMISSION TWO BALLAST
T TANK GUAGES AAA NUMBER TWO FIRE AND BILGE PUMP AAA OIL
PURIFIER AAA BILGE PUMP PURIFIER NOW BACK IN COMMISSION"

A 1700 Commodore orders a smoke screen from all ships having
equipment in the event that we are attacked again this
evening.

C 1900 The escort, having been ordered by TBY to begin laying
a smoke screen, slowly obscure the descending sun.

K 0800 Position 36 54 N
03 17 E

1200 Position 36 48 N
04 93 E

2000 Position 36 57 N
05 53 E

Total Sailing Time: 416 hours
Total Distance: 3659 miles

2 April 1944

The main topic of conversation throughout the day has naturally been the grim April Fool's joke played on us yesterday when the Flotilla was under attack for the first time in its history. The attack has served a two-fold purpose. It has brought the immediacy of total war close to a group of men and officers that were necessarily far removed from it. It has renewed pride in the LST as a fighting weapon now to be reckoned with.

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Any one who witnessed the impressive barrage of fire lost by our flotilla ships with their added gun installations must agree that the Landing Ship must now play a larger role in convoy operations across the Atlantic.

0800 Position No observation

1200 Position 37 04 N
08 09 E

2000 Position 37 04 N
08 53 E

Our course changed at 1515 to 180 to proceed to Bizerte.

3 April 1944

Our section of the convoy dropped anchor this morning at 1118 and awaited instructions for entry into the port. The great ships slowly made their way to the base in the two hours that followed.

Bizerte, whose yellow and white stucco buildings seemed to glow in the noon sun when we were off shore, was found to be a city in total ruins. Buildings on every hand point their broken fingers to the sky and try to stare through the sightless eyes that once were their windows. Sunken ships line the harbor like great gored beasts. It impresses one as Hollywood's idea of what a bombed-out city should look like. This impression is enhanced by the profusion of airplane hangars, which dot the countryside, looking like so many movie sound stages.

Our ships moored bow to along a concrete wall and the unloading operation began immediately--- this time under the personal direction of the Flotilla Commander and Lt. G.H. Lowe, Operations officer--- both of whom waited on the dock for their ships to come in. The program of launching the LCT, defueling and future loading is being arranged at this instant.

4 April 1944

The flotilla commander, at the present SOFA Landing Craft Bizerte, had arrived from the scene of action at Anzio last night and has taken personal charge of the flotilla once again.

He had departed from Patuxent on 12 March and arrived Port Lyautey, French Morocco on the following day where he

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further transferred to Algiers to report for duty to Com 8th Fleet. The 15th of March found him in Bizerte to lay the groundwork for the coming of the flotilla and to report to the commander of the 8th Amphibious Force.

On March 16th, the flotilla commander flew to Naples for temporary duty as an observer on the staff of Com LST Flot 1, and it was from here that he departed to spend four days at Annzio.

The Italian beachhead proved very illuminating in respect to the discharge and subsequent loading of LST convoys and the picture is now firmly in mind. Conferences were held, between bombing attacks, with Army and Navy authorities based there including the Captain of the Port and the British Officer In Charge, Commander Lockhart. Operational efficiency in the sector seems to have improved lately by dint of the fact that all LST's are vehicle loaded.

19th of March, duty was resumed at Naples until flying time for Bizerte on the 3rd to meet the flotilla. Last minute arrangements were made with Lt. G.H. Lowe, flotilla operations officer, who had also preceded the flotilla by plane. It seems now to be a question of fitting the ships into the processing plan which has already been formulated for them.

The social side of the calendar was brightened this day by a visit from Commander Rodney Helping, RN who is commander of the British flotilla moored alongside us and a return visit later in the day to his flagship LST 198.

5 April 1944

LST 141 is the first to have launched her LCT being assisted by an experienced CB crew. Staff representatives as well as First Lieutenants from all our ships witnessed the launching as the remainder of the flotilla will have no aid in this respect.

The launching was satisfactory in every way except for the fact that it seemed to take an inordinate amount of time. The ship slowly, very slowly listed to

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to starboard to such an alarming degree that one was convinced it was the LST that was to be launched rather than the LCT. After the required list was finally reached, it was a matter of seconds before the landing craft leaped from the side in a great swoosh that sent a ten foot wall of water between its side and the side of the ship acting as a sort of cushion. Once in the water, the LCT acted like a thing alive and behaved rather in the fashion of a young bucking broncho, parting lines and slapping through the water until controlled by the tugs that came racing to its aid.

6 April 1944

The communications department has been greatly magnified as an activity now that the Flotilla Commander is also Commander Task Group _____, Commander Assault Group _____, Commander Yellow Beach and SOPA Landing Craft Bizerte. In this last regard we have taken steps to have LCI (L) 17 assist in radar jamming tests this week off Point Kamar.

All LCT launchings have been belayed pending further orders. But the flotilla ships still have their gaping jaws wide open to receive all manner of cargo destined for points North.

7 April 1944

Eight flotilla ships, having been fully gorged, sail tonight for Maddalena under the direction of Lt. Commander H.F. Holmshaw. These include LST's 32, 140, 174, 210, 265, 525, 526. This is the first entry of Flotilla Four into the active War zone.

A new wrinkle in preparedness came today when medical officers reported aboard all ships as permanent members of ship's company. Since the LST, on her return journey, has now proved especially capable of transporting the wounded, they will be more than welcome.

8 April 1944

LST's 519 and 538 joined the group of draftees when they sailed this morning at 1000 for Ajaccio. Ships in the Bizerte area continue loading soon to become a veritable Pandora's box for the enemy.

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9 April 1944

Our entry into War on 1 April 1944 continues to have overtones a week later. A conversation with Commander Yancey, commander of the destroyer squadron that escorted us from Norfolk to Bizerte, elicited the fact that the attack included well upwards of 35 torpedo planes plus one submarine. Bearings of the sub on the flagship radar (1 April 1944 this report) were checked and proved substantially correct.

It has now been established that LST 526 is to be credited with shooting down one of the enemy planes that night. The plane was identified as a German two engine Junker bomber, and was hit by all port guns at a distance of 200 yards, elevation approximately 50 feet. The wing of the plane slashed through the port side mast rigging damaging IFF and Radar on the ship.

The Flotilla today proudly sports a terse, but meaningful "Well Done" from Commander Eighth Amphibious Force addressed to Group 11 ships.

10 April 1944

It would appear that the LST's that still have their LCT's aboard are to remain beasts of burden for a little yet. We have been informed that we are to make the trek to Oran day after tomorrow, there to await further orders for possible inclusion in an entirely different theatre of War.

The flotilla is being reorganized. Some ships are to be transferred to other commands to be replaced by new additions to our forces.

11 April 1944

Losing our ships was somewhat like seeing old friends slip silently away into the night with only an Au Revoir and a hope that we shall meet again one day. It is still Flot Four, but now it is to include several old sea dogs that have been over for quite some time---wise probably in the ways of War, but needing to be fitted into the pattern that we have set for our ships and our officers and men.

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The new flotilla reorganization takes the following formula and is effective 13 April 1944:

LST Group 11

Div 21

327
360
383
384
385
386

Div 22

1
359
377
378
379

LST Group 12

Div 23

27
28
212
262
266
538

Div 24

75
351
519
539
540

Tomorrow is sailing day.

12 April 1944

At 1400 today we are launched on our second convoy in less than a month, but this time with the Flotilla Commander in personal charge. We have not only our LST's but also tow in surf board fashion LCT's fresh from the Anzio front and destined for Oran.

2000 Position 37 23 N
09 16 E

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LST FLOTILLA FOUR

S E C R E T

From: Commander LST Flotilla Four
To: Commander In Chief, U.S. Fleet
Subject: War Diary, period 1 to 30 April 1944
Enclosure: (A) Composition of Flotilla

LST Flotilla Four - Commander T.W. Greene, USN, Commanding -
is now enroute from Norfolk, Virginia to Bizerte, Tunisia.

1 April 1944

A 0300 Radar reports unidentified object appearing 600 yards
off our starboard bow just the other side of the LST 262.
This object, which is believed to be an enemy submarine,
shows up again at 0320. It appears as a bright spot on the
screen lasting for about a minute in duration and then fades
out as if it had submerged. Its bearing on this second
report is 80 degrees relative at about a mile and four
tenths. It appears again five minutes later and has dropped
T back to appear at a bearing of 88 degrees relative at the
same distance. Picked up very faintly this third time.

T 0355 Depth charges may be felt off our port quarter.
They seem to be some distance away as the concussion is
extremely faint.

A 0400 Two white rockets appear almost simultaneously off
our port quarter not more than a thousand yards away.

C 0405 GENERAL QUARTERS AND FLOTILLA FOUR IS UNDER ATTACK.
K Two white flares burst upon the blackness of the night and
illuminate our section of the convoy off the starboard
quarter. Suddenly the flagship is bathed in the luminescent
half-glow of two flares descending slowly to sea off the
port bow, followed by a third and then a fourth. The entire
convoy comes to life at the same instant and opens fire on
everything in every direction. The frenzied scatter of
20 millimeter tracers makes a glowing Juliet's cap of the
four flares to port as they encircle them. A blast from
one of our 40's in the bow extinguishes the first, as the
silver tip of a plane wing appears momentarily and then
is swallowed in black.

The fire is scattered now, ships shooting dangerously
close to ships. The boom of the cruiser's battery breaks

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2000 Position 36 55 N
02 50 E

We approach Charchell and safety precautions are tightened as we near the X that marked Flot Four's baptism under fire. Barrage balloons have been flying since we left Bizerte and will continue to do so until further orders.

15 April 1944

Fourth day at sea.

The harbor charts have already been broken out as we approach our destination. Our course at 0830 changed to 240 and then again at 1840 to 260. At 2000 we watch the passage of a hospital ship brilliantly stabbing the gloom of the night like some huge, floating Christmas tree.

0800 Position 36 45 N
01 10 E

1200 Position 36 20 N
00 15 E

16 April 1944

Rain splattered our entrance into Oran's impressive harbor but it could not obscure the huge sign along the quai which seemed to dominate every ripple in the water---
"UN SEUL BUT * LA VICTOIRE! : GENERAL GIRAUD".

Soon after we landed staff officers scurried over our new ships with Flotilla check-off lists. The new ships seem sadly lacking in equipment and are badly in need of repair. They are indeed the "Ugly Ducklings" of the Flotilla and it is urgently hoped that they will be granted the necessary availability and soon.

17 April 1944

The augmented flotilla staff is now in action. We have received a Repair Officer and an Assault Boat Officer as well as medical officers on each of our ships that came from Bizerte.

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The day was spent in contacting the Naval Base here and setting up the program for future operations.

There was also a minor reunion for our long lost ships that had left the States on March 24th under the direction of Commander C.A. Legg and had gone straight to Oran.

18 April 1944

The French have taken over logistics it seems. The great ships yawn wide as all manner of men and equipment lumber aboard under the direction of French officers. Tanks seem to predominate with trucks and jeeps not far behind.

We have effected a liason with the French staff here in Oran and are momentarily expecting the arrival of this contingent's senior officer from Algiers.

19 April 1944

With the news that the French are to board us tomorrow, the flotilla staff scurried about the city for a recording of the "Marseillaise". None were to be found in Oran. One staff officer's search and a little French led him from record shop to record shop to the Conservatoire de Musique and finally to the home of the grandmother of the director. A two hour conversation (in French) finally produced the recording after the dear little old lady had recovered from her first alarming impression that the officer sought not her recording, but her recording machine . . .

Lt. Colonel Paul Remy, Senior officer of the French detachment, accompanied by his aide, Commandant Chernvalier paid a visit to flotilla headquarters aboard the USS LST 266 later in the day. The Colonel and the Flotilla Commander chatted away amiably for the better part of an hour through a staff officer, Ensign S.R. Rodgers who acted as interpreter in halting French and much sign language.

Apparently the "needle in the recording machine" search payed dividends in improved Franco-American relations for the French officers seemed greatly impressed as we played "La Marseillaise" over the ship's loud speaker as their boat slowly moved away. The Colonel was heard to elicit the comment that the Americans are "très ingénious".

The convoy conference held aboard the 540 straightened out last minute details and tomorrow is the day.

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20 April 1944

At 0330 Flot Four began its third successive convoy with the Flotilla Commander in charge of all amphibious craft and Commander Wilson, commander of LCI (L) Flot Two.

By 1300 we were in column on a course of 200 that changed at 1900 to one of 280.

0800 Position 36 10 N
00 34 W

1200 Position 36 12 N
00 45 W

2000 Position 36 08 N
01 11 W

21 April 1944

Second day at sea.

We are already old hands at passing Gibraltar and have now slipped past it for the second time, during the night, this trip. The Spanish mainland was a blaze of lights, rather a novelty in a war darkened Mediterranean.

Our course at 0915 changed to 266, which was simple for the OOD to remember being also the number of our flagship; and at 2238 course changed to 245.

0800 Position 36 11 N
02 55 W

1200 Position 36 10 N
03 28 W

2000 Position 36 10 N
04 45 W

22 April 1944

Third day at sea.

"French With Some Tears" seems to be the order of the day aboard our ships. The Second Division we are carrying is everywhere and they speak no English. We are amazed that the

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French we learned in school is actually spoken as their everyday language by so many people, and there is a general breaking out of forgotten French dictionaries and grammars.

Course remains 245.

0800 Position 35 46 N
06 22 W

1200 Position 35 13 N
08 00 W

23 April 1944

Fourth day at sea.

The Flotilla Commander has ordered a pooling of rations that all aboard may eat alike. This was generally agreed to be the humane thing to do since otherwise our French allies would need subsist on Army S rations for a long voyage. This will mean, of course, that there must be some tightening up in our usually lavish menu. For instance, one dessert a day for this trip. ONE DESSERT A DAY! ... War is indeed as Sherman said . . .

0800 Position 34 52 N
09 45 W

1200 Position No observation

2000 Position 35 05 N
11 19 W

24 April 1944

Fifth day at sea.

This convoy has a certain British breeziness to it that is evidenced day by day through the Convoy Commodore's communications to us. It make the whole thing more and more like an afloat League of Nations--- the Americans, the British, and the French. Today we were "presented" with two more LST's and were asked to "take them under our wing". Which we do, after learning that they are the LSE 1 and British LST 415.

At 0350 course changed to 285.

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0800 Position 35 42 N
13 09 W

1200 Position 35 49 N
12 53 W

2000 Position 36 29 N
15 04 W

25 April 1944

Sixth day at sea.

Surely the Krauts are wondering as to the destination of this particular convoy because we actually do not know ourselves. General destination is UK, but thence? It is our first experience actually being "at sea" about a thing of this nature, and sets rather a mood of adventure to the whole movement.

We should be turning to the northward trek in the morning and will soon be running the gauntlet of the Bay of Biscay. Two white flares at 1836 today changed our course to 338.

0800 Position 37 25 N
16 45 W

1200 Position 37 40 N
17 23 W

2000 Position 38 20 N
17 59 W

26 April 1944

Seventh day at sea.

Our destination surely enjoys the passionate anonymity of things top secret. Today the Convoy Commodore asked us our goal and we could not answer.

The French continue to harrass and amuse us. Things have progressed admirably beyond the sign language stage, and we are now granting in Gallic tones. The ability to speak French however is no sinecure since many of the troops are pure Arab. One staff officer found this out to his chagrin this morning. He is assigned to a life raft in charge of

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20 French troops, eight of whom are Arabs --- all named Mohammed. They vary this a bit by being designated Mohammed A, Mohammed B, and so on. This officer explained to the group, in his best French, the procedure to be used in case of abandoning ship and seemed, as he talked, to be getting his message across best to the Arabs in his group. They nodded enthusiastically every time he drove a point home, and were wreathed in smiles. After he had dismissed them, he was informed that not one of his charges spoke a word of French. When he asked why all the smiling and nodding, the answer was that they just merely "wished to be polite" . . .

Course changed at 1145 to 005.

0800 Position 39 49 N
18 43 W

1200 Position 40 17 N
18 41 W

2000 Position 41 10 N
18 23 W

27 April 1944

Eighth day at sea.

The evening is calm and just before dusk our loud speaker hums with a Glen Miller arrangement of "The Lamp Lighter's Serenade". This is rather an anomaly just before darkening ship, but the entire effect is peculiarly American. "It Could Only Happen Here". Morale is high and precautions closely observed.

We have had complaints from the British LST 415 that she is being closed up on during the night. We have investigated with a night long radar plot and have found these charges to be unfounded.

0800 Position 42 41 N
18 34 W

2000 Position 43 45 N
18 18 W

28 April 1944

Ninth day at sea.

The dramatic news of the death of the Secretary of the Navy flashed round the convoy this afternoon by blinker. We have had no news since leaving Oran and this was the first message we were able to pick up. All ships under our charge have been notified of the passing of the Secretary.

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0800 Position 45 06 N
18 05 W

1200 Position 45 38 N
18 02 W

2000 Position 46 42 N
18 04 W

29 April 1944

Tenth day at sea.

The convoy is shrouded in mourning as the sun begins its ascent from the water. All ships fly their flags at half mast, and Whitehall has ordered all His Majesty's ships and stations to wear their flags in a similar manner for the late Col. Frank Knox. The Flotilla Commander, as senior U.S. Naval officer present, has been the recipient of many messages of condolence from the British ships in company.

There is something uniquely mournful about a ship with her ensign at the dip; the whole vessel seems just a little bit sunken, not quite so proud as the last time you saw her--- almost as if she were depressed by the weight of her sorrow.

At 1040 course shifted to 068.

0800 Position 48 12 N
18 03 W

1200 Position 48 46 N
17 47 W

2000 Position 49 05 N
16 10 W

30 April 1944

Eleventh day at sea.

Through the good offices of our escort, we have learned that our destination is Penarth in South Wales, and with typical British joviality, the Commodore wishes us "God Speed" and the inevitable "Cheerio!"

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13 April 1944

Second day at sea.

Our course at 0634 is 290 in a stormy Mediterranean. The going is particularly difficult because of the added complication of the tow. One ship after another flashes us casualty reports. At 1145 the tow of the flagship, LST 266 broke loose, and once freed, stubbornly refused to be jockeyed back into position. Rain-slashed sailors looking like a Morton salt ad came to life tried time and time again to catch the bridle, and it was only through the use of a line throwing gun that they finally succeeded.

Finally with the tows once again riding easy, came the news that the LCT 205 was in difficulty in the stormy sea and was cracking up. This is the LCT which capsized in Italy and had to be towed bottom up to Bizerte. LST 262 was advised to proceed with her post haste to Djidjelli, nearest repair base, and one escort was dispatched to accompany her.

Course at 1744 changed to 274.

0800 Position 37 11 N
07 10 E

1200 Position 37 11 N
06 41 E

2000 Position 37 08 N
06 05 E

14 April 1944

Third day at sea.

There is a hot sun today and the waters are immeasurably stilled. The tows ride more easily. At 0800 course was changed to 260.

0800 Position 37 20 N
04 50 E

1200 Position 37 14 N
04 17 E

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Enclosure: (A) Composition of the Flotilla.

LST Flotilla FOUR - Commander T. W. Greene, USN, Commanding.
Pennant is in LST 266. Administration for the flotilla is aboard
the flagship.

LST Group 11 - Commander I. C. McKee, USNR, Commanding

Div. 21

327 Lt. C. J. Gilleran, USCG, Commanding
360 Lt. W. C. Hanway, Jr. USNR, Commanding
383 Lt. (jg) J. I. Lynch, USN, Commanding
384 Lt. J. H. Miller, USNR, Commanding
385 Lt. Stasavich, USNR, Commanding
386 Lt. D. A. Pace, USNR, Commanding

Div. 22

1 Lt. W. L. Horton, USCGR, Commanding
359 Lt. H.V.R. Palmer, Jr. USNR, Commanding
377 Lt. J. P. Cunningham, USNR, Commanding
378 Lt. E. C. Anderson, USNR, Commanding
379 Lt. J. B. Chase, USNR, Commanding

LST Group 12 - Commander C. A. Legg, USN, Commanding

Div. 23

27 Lt. (jg) A. Volton, USCG, Commanding
28 Lt. W. N. Finley, Jr. USNR, Commanding
212 Lt. M. D. Ellis, USN, Commanding
262 Lt. V. Hill, USCG, Commanding
266 Lt. L. A. Bolon, USNR, Commanding
538 Ens. H. W. Williams, Jr. USN, Commanding

Div. 24

75 Lt. S. A. Sokulski, USN, Commanding
351 Lt. R. W. Caldwell, USNR, Commanding
519 Ens. F. L. Brimmer, USN, Commanding
539 Ens. T. J. Austin, USN, Commanding
540 Ens. V. F. Veihman, USNR, Commanding

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We near our new theatre of operations. The last few nights have brought us advance notices: "Red Lyme, Red Scillies, Red Lizard". Once again the end of a month finds us only an hour's flying time from the coast of France . . .

Course changed at 1002 to 078.

0800 Position 49 42 N
13 46 W

1200 Position 49 50 N
13 01 W

2000 Position 50 01 N
11 20 W

The fourth month of the year has been a month of action for its namesake flotilla. It has been a cycle that started appropriately enough with our first enemy engagement off the southern coast of France on the opening day of the month, and its closing day finds us on the east coast of France. The interlude between has completely reorganized the flotilla. We have lost ships that were an integral part of our organization, that made us a compact, similar unit with the same background from the same spawning waters. We have transferred from the Mediterranean theatre and now enter a completely new scene, the European Theatre of Operations. Perhaps this will be our most important casting yet.


T.W. GREENE