

WAR IN THE AIR

General MacArthur and his men are making an epic stand in the island of Luzon, and it is amazing that they should be able to hold out so long against such heavy odds. There has been a remarkably fine air fight over the Cavite province of the Philippines, in which an unspecified number of P40 American fighters completely wiped out six enemy fighters with the loss of only one of their own number. Incidentally, this incident has brought into prominence the name of an officer of the Philippine Air Force, a body about which not much is usually heard. The officer in question is named Capt. Jesus Villamor, and he was flying a photographic aircraft with the P40s as escort. He had just landed his machine when the enemy fighters appeared. The escort had not landed and were able to turn upon the raiders. It is to be hoped that the photographs proved useful to the defenders.

The Flying Tank Again

THE Rome wireless has broadcast the statement that the Axis forces in Libya are using tanks carried to the front by air. It is possible that some very light vehicles of not more than five tons or so might be so transported, but it could not be done on a large scale, and in the Libyan battle very light tanks are not likely to be of much use unless they appeared in considerable numbers. The light American tanks which we used in the initial encounter round Sidi Rezekh seem to have suffered fairly heavily. Any such light stuff on the Axis side would be easy prey to the 20 mm. cannons of the R.A.F. fighters. On the whole, that story need not be taken very seriously. It was probably intended

ATLANTIC PATROL: The U.S. Navy employ blimps for submarine patrols along the eastern seaboard. It is to be hoped that no long-range cannon-armed F.W. Condor will arrive on the scene.

to cheer up the public in Italy.

Escape of the German Warships

ABOUT 11 a.m. on Thursday, February 12, R.A.F. aircraft reported that the German warships *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen*, with an escort of destroyers, torpedo boats, E-boats and minesweepers, were approaching the Straits of Dover from the west. They had evidently slipped out from Brest at a moment when no Coastal Command reconnaissance machine was in the offing. A strong body of fighters flew above the ships. The movement evidently took the British authorities by surprise. The last news which we had heard of the two big German warships was that they were both in dry dock. The *Gneisenau* had been thus accommodated for months, and the *Scharnhorst* had been dry-docked after her return from her little outing to La Pallice. In the last few weeks several bombing raids on Brest by aircraft of Bomber Command had been announced, though the raids had not been so frequent or so heavy as they had been a while ago. Perhaps it had been believed that the ships needed a good deal more repair work after the long

period of heavy bombing to which they had been subjected, and that there was no immediate probability of their being able to put to sea. It may also be surmised that the last thing which the Germans were expected to do was to brave the passage of the narrow Straits of Dover. If so, they scored by their daring in doing the unexpected thing. They were helped by low cloud and a visibility which varied from three to five miles, and the ships were never in sight of the English shore.

The Dover Naval Command sent out *Swordfish* with torpedoes and Coastal Beauforts, also carrying the same useful weapon. R.A.F. fighters swarmed overhead, and later on Bomber Command sent out its own appropriate contingent. Motor torpedo-boats likewise plunged into the fray. The enemy put up a smoke screen, and there was an intense barrage from the German ships. According to the first reports, the *Swordfish* scored at least one hit on one of the heavy ships, Coastal Beauforts claimed three hits, and the crews of the bombers were confident that each of the main enemy units was hit by bombs. One of the motor torpedo-boats also claimed a possible hit with a torpedo, but the smoke screen and the fury of the fire made accurate observation impossible.

At 3.45 p.m. British destroyers arrived on the scene and attacked in a rain squall. They also believed that they had scored one hit with a torpedo. However, the German ships

PILOT'S BIVVY. On the Western Desert R.A.F. air crews live in holes cut in the sand with a covering of bivouac sheets.

