

FORTY YEARS ON

In November, 1941, three teams of specially-trained divers from the Italian Navy launched an attack by night on the Mediterranean Fleet as it lay at anchor at Alexandria.

The attack was very successful and resulted in the crippling of the battleships 'Queen Elizabeth' and 'Valiant' which were out of action for many months afterwards.

The senior member of the teams - all of whom were captured and made prisoners of war - was later awarded the Gold Medal for Valour, equivalent of the Victoria Cross, which was pinned on his breast by Crown Prince Umberto.

After the war the story of this exploit was recalled in books and films. One of the films was made by an Italian company with the title 'Human Torpedoes'; the other, starring John Mills, was called simply 'Valiant'. Both scripts were highly fictionalised, because they were both written by De La Penne (he of the Gold Medal) whose bravery was only equalled by his lively imagination.

In both 'stories', an important part was played by the interrogating officer. In the Italian version he was cast as a full Commander, RN, with a bullying manner; in English he appeared correctly dressed as a Lieutenant, RNVN, but added drama was supplied by giving him Anglo-Italian parentage, and hence divided loyalties when questioning his mother's compatriots.

Neither film had a great box-office success. After all, what British audience wants to know about a Royal Navy defeat?

De La Penne is now living in honoured retirement in his native country and all the other characters in the story are dead, save one, the interrogating officer.

He is now the editor of 'The Wychwood'.

N. C. W.

LADIES! Are you interested in meeting other women for discussion and participation in matters concerning the quality of life for us all?

Then why not come to a Meeting of N.C.W. -the National Council of Women. We also have speakers on a variety of subjects of local and national interest; on the Arts; in fact, on anything you care to name.

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