

TOBRUK A WARM SPOT

Many Wrecks In Harbor

WITH NAVY IN MEDITERRANEAN

GRAFTON MAN'S EXPERIENCES.

"Tobruk is a warm spot. The harbor is full of sunken ships, and vessels entering the port have difficulty in avoiding the wrecks. At present there are about 50-50, Italian and Allied ships," said Petty Officer (Signals) Max Robin, who is spending leave in Grafton.

Petty Officer Robin, who has had 9½ years service in the Royal Australian Navy has just completed two years' active service in the Mediterranean, and is back in Australia on leave. He is a native of Grafton, and his father Pte. D. K. Robin, served on Gallipoli and was later killed in France in the 1914-18 war.

Although he has been in some tough spots during the past two years, Petty Officer Robin can recount many humorous incidents, and at the Armistice night smoke social of the Grafton sub-branch of the R.S.S.A.I.L.A. he entertained those present with experiences during his two years' service in the Mediterranean.

After leaving Sydney in October, 1939, Petty Officer Robin went to the Mediterranean, and for some time was engaged in convoying troops to France. Later he went to Malta. This was about the time it was expected that Italy would join Germany in the war. At Malta all preparations were made for the entry of Italy into the war. In case an invasion of the island should be attempted the docks and other strategic points were "charged." Soon after Italy declared war, raids on

after Italy declared war, raids on Malta became numerous. In the time that he was there there were 125 raids, despite the fact that the Italians had assured the Maltese that, because of their love for each other, nothing but flowers would be dropped on Malta. After one raid, in which ton bombs were dropped, one Maltese remarked that they were pretty heavy flowers that the Italians dropped.

Petty Officer Robin paid a tribute to the work of the R.A.F. at Malta. There was a shortage of machines for the men of the R.A.F. They had only a few and these were known as "Faith, Hope and Charity." They did good work and made a name for themselves. "But after a fortnight we were without an air force there, and things were tough," said Petty Officer Robin. Later, other British machines arrived and they were able to repel the Italian raids.

Referring to the air raid shelters at Malta he said that some were 65 feet deep in sandstone, and on one occasion he had seen a large bomb go through over 60 feet of sandstone. He was rather amused when he saw the shelter in Hyde Park which was covered with a few feet of soil.

NEVER SHIFT TOBRUK MEN.

After leaving Malta the ship on which Petty Officer Robin was on went on the run to Tobruk. He made many trips to that place and was sure the Axis would never shift the Allied men from there. Tobruk, he said, depended on the Navy for its supplies. Ships went into the port after dark and left before daylight. In Tobruk harbor the Axis airmen showed hospital ships no respect. One hospital ship was sunk there last Easter Monday. It was plainly marked according to international law, and it was a deliberate attempt to sink the ship. Junker dive bombers came down to within 300 or 400 feet. One was later brought down, and he believed that when the pilot was questioned he said that he did not know that it was a hospital ship. He, however, said that they had instructions to bomb the hospital building on

HOWEVER, SAID THAT THEY HAD INSTRUCTIONS to bomb the hospital building on the land near Tobruk. This remark incensed the Greeks present and one struck the German.

Speaking of the evacuation of Greece, Petty Officer Robin said his ship was engaged there. The men they took off were of the opinion that had they had air support they would never have been driven out of Greece. After Greece his ship went back on the Tobruk run. Then came the invasion of Crete. Some British ships came across Germans trying to make a seaborne invasion of the island, but the vessels they were using were sunk, and none of these men reached Crete. This incident happened many miles from the island. Later a paratroop landing was undertaken, and with few British planes there it was a one-sided affair. The men on Crete were mostly those taken from Greece and they had little equipment, but they did well.

"I have met at least 25 Diggers who killed Max Schmelling. He must have died a terrible death," added Petty Officer Robin.

He said that up until the time he left to come home on leave men were still escaping from Crete.

Telling of the dive bombers at Crete during the invasion, Petty Officer Robin said that after about 48 hours of bombing and attacking by aircraft their supply of ammunition was short. They used catapults, rockets and "even threw spuds at the planes." He said that if there were British planes about the dive bombers left ships alone.