

**Military Matters: The Norwegian Navy in the Second World War**

**Edmund Hall (ESC 239)**

When considering the many foreign forces that have been in Egypt over the last 200 years one of the last that is likely to spring to mind would be that of Norway. I also imagine that if our members were asked to give examples I don't think the question would get much of a response – if any.

After the German occupation of Norway early in the war little was left of the Royal Norwegian Navy - (*Kongelige Norske Marine*)-KGL: much of it had been out of date already in September 1939, and 13 ships escaped to Britain. The King of Norway set up a government in exile to continue the fight from bases in UK until the war ended and these ships were subordinated to the Royal Navy. At the time Norway had one of the largest merchant fleets, which remained loyal to the crown.

As there was a general shortage of minesweepers, patrol vessels and auxiliaries, the British naval authorities asked the Norwegian Navy to help to fill the various gaps. In the Antarctic at the time of the invasion of Norway was a large Norwegian whaling fleet, comprising numerous sturdy ships of 300-500 tons well suited for conversion to such jobs. They were requisitioned by the Norwegian Government.

In 1941 the Royal Norwegian Navy took over four whalers at Durban and after conversion they sailed for Alexandria via the Suez Canal: the first two, *Noble Nora* and *Transvalia*, reached Alexandria on November 8 to form the 168th Minesweeping Group. They were soon joined by the *Egeland* and *John Williamson*, both crewed entirely by Norwegians, as was the *Transvalia*. The *Noble Nora* was under the command of Lieutenant C L Carroll RNR.

Other whalers from South Africa and six from Trinidad were to come soon after, and the following units served in the Mediterranean: 156th Minesweeping Group, 166th Minesweeping Group, 167th Minesweeping Group, 168th Minesweeping Group and the 25th Anti-Submarine Group (anti-submarine whalers operating out of Alexandria, Port Said, Haifa and Tobruk). The *Egeland* was lost off the coast of Gaza on November

29, 1941 while the others were used in the Mediterranean until they were transferred, after strained relations between the British and Norwegians, to the Greek Navy in autumn 1943.

I can only assume that the Norwegians used the British postal systems and the only cover I have seen (*illustrated*) is franked with EPP 55, which is nominally subscribed to the South Africans. The back has machine cancels for Cairo 24



April 1942 12AM and Alexandria April 1942 4PM. Possibly then the letter had the green oval KGL. NORSKE MARINE cachet applied on ship at Port Said.