

CONFIDENTIAL.

FROM.....COMMANDING OFFICER, H.M.S. "VALENTINE",

DATE.....20th. May 1940.

No. B22/40.

TO.....FLAG OFFICER COMMANDING DOVER.

LETTER OF PROCEEDINGS - H.M.S. "VALENTINE".

The following report is being written from memory at DOVER, the ship's log and all other documents having been destroyed. Times and other details will therefore be approximate only.

FRIDAY, 10th MAY, 1940.

2.- At 0800 H.M.S. "VALENTINE" was leading a southbound TYNE - SOUTHEND convoy in the vicinity of SMITHS KNOLL and orders were received to proceed to DOVER with all despatch. On arrival at DOVER at 1200 I received detailed orders from Vice Admiral, Dover and, having completed with oil fuel and fresh provisions, proceeded at 1600 for DUNKIRK. H.M.S. "WINCHESTER" was in company (Lieutenant Commander S.E. Crewe-Read, R.N.)

3.- Both ships were supplied with S.P.02319 (2) and arrangements were made to land signal publications not required for this service on arrival at DUNKIRK.

4.- On arrival at DUNKIRK the British Naval Liaison Officer (Commander H.P. HENDERSON, R.N.) came on board and took me to the offices of Amiral Nord.

5.- Orders were received to escort a troop convoy in s.s. "ROUEN" and s.s. "COTE D'AZUR" together with the French torpilleurs "SIROCCO" and "CYCLONE" sailing for FLUSHING at 0900/11

6.- As a precaution against countermining if hit by bombs arrangements were made to disembark all depth charges except six. These were put into lighters during the night. Similar arrangements were made for H.M.S. "WESTMINSTER" and H.M.S. "VIMIERA" due to arrive on the following morning.

7.- I was given the services of a French liaison officer, Lieutenant de Vaisseau DROGOU, interpreter Q/M BERNHEIM and a pilot.

SATURDAY, 11th MAY, 1940.

8.- At 0830 H.M.S. "WESTMINSTER" and H.M.S. "VIMIERA" arrived and I informed H.M.S. "WESTMINSTER" (Lieutenant-Commander A.A.C. OUVRY, R.N.) of our orders and that he would be required to operate off NIEUPORT later in the day. I understood that the French Army attached particular importance to road communication in that vicinity.

9.- The convoy sailed at 1030 in single line in the order
"CYCLONE" (Capitaine de Vaisseau) s.s. "ROUEN",
H.M.S. "VALENTINE", s.s. "COTE d'AZUR", "SIROCCO", H.M.S. "WINCHESTER"

- 10.- On arrival H.M.S. "VALENTINE" and H.M.S. "WINCHESTER" remained under way to cover the ferry route BRESKENS - FLUSHING. One of the transports entered harbour but the other remained at anchor in the roads owing to lack of accommodation in the port. This ship was a source of anxiety. I ordered her into harbour by signal and verbal communication, and sent a message to the shore signal station expressing my strong wish that she should enter harbour immediately. I was very relieved when she entered harbour in the late afternoon. My impression is that the French authorities were relying too completely on the protection which could be afforded by the escort vessels.
- 11.- Dive bombing attacks occurred at 1345, between 1745 and 1910 and at 2030. Approximately 60 enemy aircraft were seen, mostly Ju 88 with some Heinkel III (new type). The objects of attack were the port and merchant shipping. Gunfire from escort vessels had the effect of keeping the aircraft at heights above 3,000 feet and disturbing their aim. It was noticed that ships with white superstructures were most frequently aimed at and one such vessel of about 3,000 tons was hit and sank during the night. There appeared to be little other damage. One salvo was aimed at H.M.S. "VALENTINE" but fell 50 yards astern. I remained under way at 8 to 10 knots and found that this gave me sufficient manoeuvring power without showing a wake.
- 12.- The weather was fine with a blue sky which clouded over at intervals. The clouds appeared to form to the northward and the first attack at 1345 occurred within a few minutes of their arrival. The sky again cleared until 1745 when the enemy again took advantage of the cloud formation to send over a series of attacks. One wave consisted of some 20 Ju 88. Clouds were at 3,000 - 5,000 feet.
- 13.- Fighter support was provided by formations of Potez 630, Blenheims and occasionally Hurricane aircraft. Lack of communication with air forces was felt to be a handicap as traffic on 375 kc/s was subject to long delays. The French have no equivalent of our "HELP" and "FORTU" messages.
- 14.- Difficulty was experienced in distinguishing friend from foe particularly between Blenheims and Ju88.
- 15.- Potez 630 and Blenheim aircraft appeared to be too slow to deal with the Ju 88 effectively. On one occasion a Ju 88 broke formation and was attacked by 3 Blenheims but escaped to the northward. Hurricanes were not seen in action and they appeared to make only short "propaganda" flights over the area.
- 16.- Our own fighters cruised at low altitude over the area and the frequent appearance of friendly aircraft within gun range was a source of anxiety and frequently delayed opening fire on enemy machines.
- 17.- In spite of these difficulties the presence of fighters was of real value but in my opinion more effective co-operation would have been achieved if the fighters had remained at high altitude and, when clouds formed, above the cloud ceiling.
- 18.- Owing to the clever use of cloud aircraft could seldom be engaged until they had commenced their dive.
- 19.- I anchored for the night off BRESKENS Whistle Buoy and instructed H.M.S. "WINCHESTER" to anchor to the westward of me. lack of fighter support.

It was evident that there were few A/A searchlights at FLUSHING and none at BRESKENS, and it was my intention to withhold fire during the night unless attacked. The night was dark and clear. H.M.S. "VALENTINE" had 105 and H.M.S. "WINCHESTER" 81 rounds per gun remaining.

SUNDAY, 12th MAY, 1940.

20.- A salvo of bombs was dropped over FLUSHING at 0347. The morning was fine and clear and when no further attacks developed it was assumed that the enemy were waiting for more favourable conditions. Clouds formed at about 1130 and one aircraft dropped bombs at 1147 followed by nine aircraft at 1155.

21.- The clouds were somewhat higher than on Saturday, the 11th May, and it was possible to engage enemy formations during the latter part of their approach.

22.- A further attack by a formation of three during the afternoon was driven off by gunfire. They returned, were again driven off, and then made off inland and were seen to drop their bombs in the direction of MIDDELBURG.

23.- In the late afternoon orders were received to proceed to DUNKIRK and H.M.S. "WESTMINSTER" and H.M.S. "VIMIERA" were met near the WANDELAAR Light Vessel and a summary of events and other information passed by V/S to H.M.S. "WESTMINSTER".

24.- At 2130 H.M.S. "VALENTINE" and H.M.S. "WINCHESTER" arrived DUNKIRK and embarked Lynch HE bringing total available to approximately 120 rounds per gun in H.M.S. "VALENTINE" and 100 in H.M.S. "WINCHESTER".

MONDAY, 13th MAY, 1940.

25.- At dawn H.M.S. "VALENTINE" and H.M.S. "WINCHESTER" proceeded to patrol off NIEUPOORT. H.M.S. "WINCHESTER" was detached during the forenoon to complete with ammunition from H.M.S. "WHITLEY" at DUNKIRK. She was retained at DUNKIRK to complete with fuel and provisions.

26.- There was no enemy air activity off NIEUPOORT and H.M.S. "VALENTINE" was ordered to return to DUNKIRK before dark.

TUESDAY, 14th MAY, 1940.

27.- H.M.S. "WHITSHED" arrived soon after daylight and came alongside to transfer ammunition. On completion H.M.S. "VALENTINE" was completed to 205 rounds per gun. H.M.S. "WINCHESTER" had ~~ammunition~~ completed from H.M.S. "WHITLEY".

28.- At 0930 H.M.S. "VALENTINE" entered DUNKIRK harbour to complete with fuel and provisions. H.M.S. "WINCHESTER" and H.M.S. "WHITSHED" proceeded to rendezvous with Captain D19 off the MAAS Light Vessel. H.M.S. "WHITLEY" and H.M.S. "WESTMINSTER" from FLUSHING were also detailed for this operation.

29.- All empty ammunition boxes and cylinders were taken from H.M.S. "WHITSHED" and landed ashore at DUNKIRK, together with all 4-inch practice ammunition carried (3 months allowance). Opportunity was also taken to land Confidential Books in the care of the Naval Control Service at the British Vice-Consulate.

30.- I was informed of the military situation in WALCHEREN and BEVELAND and that escort vessels might be required to operate up the River SCHELDE (Fr. ESCAUT). I gathered that air co-operation was a doubtful factor after the first day owing to lack of fighter aircraft.

31.- At 1700 left DUNKIRK for FLUSHING arriving at 2030 to find H.M.S. "WHITLEY" and H.M.S. "VIMIERA" in the roads. H.M.S. "WHITLEY" reported intermittent air attacks throughout the day and that deliberate attacks were now being made on the escort vessels. He also reported being in touch with 2nd Lieutenant BALFOUR of General HEYWOODS mission then based on MIDDELBURG.

32.- My policy for the night was as for Saturday, 11th May, and ships were anchored in positions well clear of the port of FLUSHING.

33.- Enemy air activity during the night was confined to laying parachute mines. No clear targets were presented and fire was not opened. The positions of the mines were reported to Amiral Nord.

WEDNESDAY, 15th MAY, 1940.

34.- Having decided to weigh anchor at 0345 I was rudely disturbed by a salvo of bombs in the vicinity at 0335. Aircraft were neither seen nor heard.

35.- At 0743 ordered H.M.S. "WINCHESTER" to join me at FLUSHING. It was not realized that she had been damaged until the receipt of Vice Admiral, Dover's 0838 ordering me to escort her to DOVER. I detailed H.M.S. "VIMIERA" as it had been intended to send that ship to DOVER for fuel and stores on relief by H.M.S. "WINCHESTER". I also desired to remain in touch with the situation at FLUSHING which was obviously critical.

36.- I had intended embarking British refugees from MIDDELBURG in H.M.S. "VIMIERA" but there was not now time to collect them and I passed a message to the shore station via H.M.S. "WHITLEY" advising that they be sent to BRESKENS in the ferry.

37.- During the morning Lieutenant BALFOUR came on board. We discussed the local situation and I passed an urgent W/T message for him to Admiralty for the War Office, (T.O.O.0830). I asked him to inform the local authorities that I was ready to provide A/A support up the River SCHELDE, but that I was anxious not to remain on patrol there any longer than necessary. Amiral Nord was so informed by signal (T.O.O.0802).

38.- Lieutenant BALFOUR informed me that the eastern part of BEVELAND might be occupied by the enemy during the day but that their progress should be stopped by strong defences based on inundations.

39.- Several air attacks took place on FLUSHING during the forenoon mostly level bombing from 8 to 10,000 feet. There was a cloud background and two or three shoots of about 20 rounds per gun were carried out by H.M.S. "VALENTINE", H.M.S. "WHITLEY" confirmed that fire was accurate and aircraft were seen to jink. Air activity ceased at about 1100.

40.- Just before 1130 I received a message from Amiral Nord to expect three fighters at that time. These machines did not arrive.

41.- About 1300 a Dutch tug brought off a Dutch Naval Officer and pilot. The officer handed me a note from the Dutch Commander-in-Chief requesting cover for the TERNEUZEN - BORSELE (BEVELAND) ferry. I proceeded at 15 knots with H.M.S. "WHITLEY" 1 mile astern.

42.- When clear of the anchorage I increased speed to 22 knots. There had been no enemy air activity for three hours and I thought it important to reach the new position as soon as possible. I now consider this, to have been a mistake as the large wake must have attracted attention from the air and most certainly provided a magnificent aiming mark.

- 43.- When about 2 miles from TERNEUZEN I reduced speed to 15 knots and within a few minutes the ship was hit by two large bombs from a Ju 88. The aircraft was not seen until after the bombs were dropped at a height of about 1000 feet. The approach was at a very steep angle and the explosions occurred before fire could be opened. Four bombs estimated at 250 lb. or larger were dropped.
- 44.- H.M.S. "WHITLEY" was attacked simultaneously by a second aircraft but not hit.
- 45.- One bomb went down the after funnel and exploded No. 2 boiler. The second bomb hit the ships side on the starboard side abreast the bridge. The main steam pipe was hit but the ship had sufficient way to reach the southern bank of the river where she beached forward at an angle of about 30 degrees to the bank and a list of 20 degrees to port. There was no damage abaft the forward engine room bulkhead but the engine room commenced to fill through the broken fire main and other pipes.
- 46.- It was evident that the ship had no buoyancy between the forward engine room bulkhead and the chain locker and any attempt at salvage even under peace conditions was out of the question. I gave the order to prepare to abandon ship but kept the machine guns manned in case of further attack.
- 47.- The Aldis signalling lantern was working and I ordered H.M.S. "WHITLEY" to withdraw. Before doing so, however, she lowered a boat with her doctor and medical supplies. I consider this to have been a very gallant action on the part of Lieutenant-Commander G.N. ROLFE, R.N. The services rendered by the boat's crew and Surgeon-Lieutenant R.N.V.R. were of great value and saved many lives.
- 48.- The secret and confidential papers and charts were burnt by fire in the Chart House.
- 49.- Charges had already been fitted to the Asdic dome but the whole of the ships structure in this vicinity was opened up by the explosion and the charges did not fire. I considered the dome and oscillator probably effectively destroyed but had no means of verifying this. It was impossible to get at the dome from inside owing to oil fuel.
- 50.- Other demolitions were not attempted as it was intended to revisit the wreck later when the crew had been evacuated. I was by no means certain that the ship would not slide off the bank into deep water or capsize to port.
- 51.- Lieutenant C.E. SHEEN, R.N. carried out his duties in an exemplary manner and supervised the evacuation of many seriously wounded men. Although seriously wounded himself Surgeon-Lieutenant BURROWS, R.N.V.R. attended to the injured until his colleague from H.M.S. "WHITLEY" arrived.
- 52.- A small fire at the forward end of the mess deck was reported to me by Mr. S.F. BURROW, Gunner, R.N. who, although wounded in the leg, made his way over the wreckage and extinguished it. As a precaution all ready use ammunition on the forward gun platform was thrown overboard.
- 53.- French soldiers were in the vicinity and within a short time ambulances in charge of Dr. VAN BREDA VRIESMAN of TERNEUZEN arrived and took away the wounded.

54.- I made contact with a French Company H.Q. and arrangements were made for the accommodation of the survivors in a farm. Before leaving the wreck I received an assurance from a French army officer that guards would be placed to ensure that no unauthorized person went on board. French soldiers went on board and brought ashore and buried the only three bodies that could be found on board.

55.- I then proceeded to TERNEUZEN and telephoned the situation to Commander HENDERSON at the office of Amiral Nord at DUNKIRK. I then got into touch with the French Engineers and made arrangements for salvage of portable equipment and demolition of other armaments. The following list of equipment to be destroyed was given to them and the positions explained by my French liaison officer, Lieutenant de Vaisseau DROGOU:-

Asdic equipment including Bridge hut.
Fire control clocks.
Director and rangefinder.
Guns.
Recognition lamps.

56.- They were also asked to ensure that the fire in the Chart House was fully effective in destroying books and papers.

57.- At that time the French army was advancing and appeared to have every chance of holding BEVELAND and it did not appear urgently necessary to carry out demolitions. A French Engineer Officer assured me that they would be carried out when necessary.

58.- Arrangements were then made for transport for the survivors and the party left in one bus and three large lorries provided by the Dutch authorities for OOSTBURG arriving there about 0100/16th.

THURSDAY, 16th MAY, 1940.

59.- The survivors left OOSTBURG at 0730 for DUNKIRK arriving about 1300. Arrangements were made with the French authorities for their accommodation and they left in the train ferry for Dover a.m. 17th May.

60.- I remained at DUNKIRK until p.m. Saturday 18th May to make arrangements for the wounded. British ambulances visited TERNEUZEN during the night 16th/17th May and moved all except five who could not be moved with safety, to BOULOGNE.

61.- Detailed lists of casualties have been forwarded separately.

GENERAL REMARKS.

62.- A magnificent piece of work was done by S.P.O's "CHASE" and NEWTON and Stokers FOUNTAIN and WARWOOD. These men were in the steaming boiler room and succeeded in shutting off the oil supply to the sprayers, eight of which were in use. This prompt action at the very centre of a large explosion showed remarkable coolness and devotion to duty.

63.- Petty Officers GILBERT and THORNTON assisted by Able Seaman DOYLE carried out difficult rescue work from the lower mess deck where seriously wounded men were immersed in oil fuel, the tanks having been opened up by the explosion.

- 64.- Able Seaman BOYCE who rendered valuable service in ferrying wounded men in Carley rafts to the river bank.
- 65.- Lieutenant de Vaisseau DROGOU and Q/M BERNHEIM were of the greatest assistance to me on this as on all other occasions.
- 66.- Lieutenant R.M. MACFIE, R.N.V.R. whose station was at the director was seriously wounded in the head. This officer had rendered excellent service throughout the operations in controlling the armament remaining alert at his station from dawn until dark.
- 67.- Others I wish to commend specially for their services during these operations are Mr. HAMMOND, Warrant Engineer, R.N., my coxswain C.P.O. POPE, C.P.O. WAKEHAM, leading telegraphist LYONS and Leading Signelman RICE.
- 68.- All of my officers and ship's company without exception behaved splendidly.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,



J. Buchanan

COMMANDER, R.A.N.

CONFIDENTIAL.

APPENDIX TO REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS - H.M.S. "VALENTINE"
DATED 20TH MAY, 1940.

NOTES ON TACTICS.

Remarks on air co-operation have been made in paragraphs 13 to 17.

2. After this experience I would take the following precaution to guard against surprise attack. After guns loaded with a barrage setting with orders to open fire without further orders at any aircraft seen approaching within 30 degrees of right astern, special lookouts being placed in this sector. If in doubt an occasional round fired in the direction of the sun might be a deterrent to attack.
3. Gun mountings in H.M.S. "VALENTINE" were fitted with "gate and fence" open sights supplied by H.M. Gunnery School, Devonport. These sights were used effectively in local control for dealing with dive bombing attacks. Fuze settings were estimated by the O.C.Q. This method of firing was used against the attack driven off on 12th May (see paragraph 22).
4. Targets seldom came within range of the 0.5 inch machine guns.
5. It was found necessary to remain at action stations continually from 0400 to 2200 when operating off FLUSHING. Personnel stood the strain very well but some falling off in the efficiency of the lookout was inevitable in quiet periods. Meals were served at the quarters by supply parties but some arrangement for meals under cover would be required in bad weather. Had the operations continued I was contemplating the organisation of a guard ship over the meal hours.
6. It is considered essential for two and preferably three A.A. destroyers to work in company in order to cover all directions of approach and for mutual support. A form of patrol in separate areas or in single line ahead at intervals of 1 mile at 8 - 10 knots was found to be suitable.