

11. On the 13th, it was decided to add the Irish Guards to the Bodo force and the Headquarters of the 24th Brigade. They embarked in the s.s. CHROBRY which had brought 3 Tanks from England for the Bodo Force. While on passage with STORK and WOLVERINE as escort the CHROBRY was bombed and set on fire, the four senior officers of the Battalion being killed. The troops were saved and brought back to Harstad but their equipment was lost. It was then decided to send the South Wales Borderers in the EFFINGHAM but she grounded and became a total loss during the night 17th-18th. The troops were brought back to Harstad in EFFINGHAM's Escort, COVENTRY, CAIRO, MATABELE and ECHO, while the greater part of the Military Stores, with 4 Bren Carriers out of 10 were salvaged in Local Craft and landed at Bodo. EFFINGHAM was finally destroyed by torpedo.

12. During the next few days the troops after being re-equipped at Harstad were taken to Bodo by Destroyers, but news from that area was of the continual advance of the enemy.

13. On the 18th Colonel Trappes-Lomax of the Scots Guards reported withdrawing from Mo.

14. On the 21st General Auchinleck informed me that he was proposing to appoint Colonel Gubbins in command of the 24th Brigade and Independent Companies, that is, of all forces in the Bodo area. With this I fully agreed. Brigadier Fraser had had to be invalided on account of a wound received earlier when reconnoitring at Ankenes in the Narvik area.

15. Enemy air power in the Bodo area steadily increased and with corresponding harassing effect upon our forces. Only on one occasion was it possible to hit back and then (on the 27th May) 2 Gladiators brought down 4 enemy aircraft.

16. A trawler force, to work in the Bodo area, arrived at Skjelfjord from England on the 18th May under the command of Lieutenant-Commander (acting Commander) W. R. Fell, R.N. These vessels not being suitable for the work, Commander Fell organised a force of local vessels and took them south on the 24th May where they performed remarkable work and were almost continuously in action for seven days.

17. A telegram was received on the 24th May from the Chiefs of Staff ordering the evacuation of the whole of our forces from North Norway. Plans to reinforce Bodo were then abandoned and instructions were sent to Brigadier Gubbins to be prepared to evacuate.

18. On May 28 the enemy with a force of 30 aeroplanes bombed the town of Bodo, which to a greater extent than most Norwegian towns was built of stone, until it was reduced to complete ruin.

19. The evacuation of Bodo was successfully accomplished on the 29th and 31st, 1,000 men being taken direct to U.K. in VINDICTIVE and the remainder brought to Harstad in Destroyers and small craft.

SECTION VI.

THE FINAL OPERATIONS FOR THE CAPTURE OF NARVIK.

1. The landing effected by the two battalions of the Foreign Legion at Bjerkvik on the

12th/13th May, in addition to establishing contact with French troops working south, had as its object the occupation of the Oydejord Peninsula, and the northern shore of Rombaks Fiord. This was held by some to be a necessary prelude to any direct attack upon Narvik itself, allowing, as it would, of the positioning of field artillery on the peninsula to support such an attack. As soon as the necessary area had been occupied and, with the assistance of H.M.S. FAME, the northern shore of Rombaks Fiord had been cleared and occupied as far as Lillelorget, General Bethouart felt himself ready for the next stage, for which he had prepared his plan, i.e., the capture of Narvik. Commander Hubback was attached to the French Staff for this purpose; his success in this work in connection with Bjervik had been much appreciated by the French Command. My general direction to him was that he was to do everything to further the project and to promise that all possible naval support would be forthcoming. He carried out this work admirably. It was decided that the attack would take place on May 23rd/24th or on the first favourable opportunity after that date. This was the earliest date it was estimated the M.L.Cs. could be released from what, at the moment, was the all important work of preparing Bardufoss and Skaanland Aerodromes for the reception of Hurricanes and Gladiators. The conditions that were required to form a favourable opportunity were held to be either—

(a) Such weather conditions as were likely to largely reduce or abolish any danger of air attack; or

(b) The ability to provide efficient fighter protection overhead.

2. The weather, towards the date mentioned, turned fine and seemed settled and with the impending arrival of the Hurricanes on the 26th/27th it was eventually decided that the operation should take place on the 27th/28th and that date was adhered to.

3. The plan, in so far as the naval operations were concerned, is forwarded separately and, except in one or two minor details, it was adhered to.

4. The ships that took part were CAIRO (Flag), SOUTHAMPTON (R.A.18), COVENTRY (C.S.20) and the Destroyers WHIRLIND, FAME, HAVELOCK, WALKER and FIREDRAKE.

5. The plan is open to criticism in details—its great merit, however, was in that it was the plan of those who had to carry it out. The weak point in the plan was that owing to the paucity of transport available—a less bold man than General Bethouart might well have made this an excuse for inaction—it was necessary to leave the First Flight of 290 men unsupported for an unduly long time as the timetable in the plan indicates. Owing to the hard work to which the M.L.Cs. had been subjected in transporting guns and plant and stores of all sorts required for the completion of the aerodromes at Bardufoss and Skaanland and the sinking of one during an air raid, only two of these vessels were available—and one of these was only capable of about three knots. The A.L.Cs. similarly were reduced from four to three, one of them having been burnt out. An attempt was made to supplement the means of transport by using the two picket boats of