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FIRST AND SECOND BATTLES OF NARVIK ON 10th AND 13th APRIL 1940 RESPECTIVELY.

The following Despatch was submitted on the 25th April, 1940, to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty by Rear Admiral R. H. C. Hallifax, Rear Admiral (D), Home Fleet.

*Rear Admiral (D), Home Fleet,
H.M.S. Woolwich.*

25th April, 1940.

Be pleased to lay before the Board a narrative of the First Battle of Narvik, which has been prepared by the Commanding Officer, H.M.S. HOTSPUR, the senior surviving officer, and the report of the C.O. H.M.S. HAVOCK.

(Sgd.) R. H. C. HALLIFAX,
Rear Admiral.

H.M.S. HOTSPUR.

25th April, 1940.

SIR,

I have the honour to forward herewith reports from H.M. Ships HOTSPUR and HOSTILE on the destroyer raid on Narvik on 10th April, 1940. As senior surviving officer of this raid, I feel I should also attempt to give some co-ordinated account. In doing so, I am using information obtained from H.M. Ships HOTSPUR, HOSTILE and surviving officers from H.M.S. HARDY. No report has yet been received from H.M.S. HAVOCK and of course, nothing is available from H.M.S. HUNTER.

2. HARDY (Captain B. A. W. Warburton-Lee*), HUNTER (Lieutenant-Commander L. de Villiers), HOTSPUR (Commander H. F. H.

Layman) and HAVOCK (Lieutenant-Commander R. E. Courage), left Sullom Voe† at dawn on 7th April, in company with the Twentieth Destroyer Flotilla and joined RENOWN north of the Shetlands. The whole force proceeded in company towards Vest Fiord, destroyers being eventually detached to lay the minefield off Eggeloyssa at dawn, 8th April, 1940.

3. After guarding the minefield for a few hours reports of 2 enemy destroyers were received from GLOWWORM and ships of the Second Destroyer Flotilla joined RENOWN southwest of the Lofoten Islands before dark.

4. At daylight on 9th April, 1940, the RENOWN encountered SCHARNHORST and HIPPER. The Second Destroyer Flotilla, stationed astern of RENOWN carried out a divisional concentration on HIPPER but the range was probably too great. All destroyers were soon left behind in the heavy seas, but not before both HARDY and HUNTER had narrowly escaped being hit.

5. The Second Destroyer Flotilla was then detached to patrol east of the Lofoten Islands. After about two hours this patrol was broken off on receipt of orders to go to Narvik. Just before leaving her patrol position HOTSPUR made visual contact with REPULSE.

6. (Available reports tended to show that Narvik was only lightly held so the flotilla was stopped off Tranoy at about 1600 to obtain information and HOSTILE (Commander J. P. Wright) joined. It was then learnt that the enemy held the place in force.

7. The following "Most Immediate" message was sent by Captain (D), Second Destroyer

* Admiralty footnote: Captain (D), 2nd Destroyer Flotilla.

† Admiralty footnote: Sullom Voe—a harbour in the Shetland Isle.

Flotilla, to Admiralty, Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet and Vice Admiral Commanding Battle Cruiser Squadron.

"Norwegians report Germans holding Narvik in force also 6 destroyers and 1 submarine are there and channel is possibly mined.

Intend attacking at dawn, high water."

T.O.O.* 1751/9/4/40.

No permission to attack was asked or further instructions sought. I submit that this message, made by the late Captain Warburton-Lee, should be given a place in our historical records.

8. The Admiralty replied as follows in message 0136/10 to Captain (D), Second Destroyer Flotilla, repeated Vice Admiral Commanding Battle Cruiser Squadron, and Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet.

"Norwegian coast defence ships EIDSVOLD and NORGE may be in German hands. You alone can judge whether in these circumstances attack should be made. We shall support whatever decision you take."

9. The plan for the attack was given by Captain (D) Second Destroyer Flotilla in the following messages to the flotilla:—

1430/9 as amended by 1955/9, with a final addition in message 2040/9. The gist of these messages was briefly as follows. Ships were to be at action stations from 0030/10 as enemy batteries were reported on both sides of Ofot Fiord near Ramsundet. On approaching Narvik, HARDY, HUNTER and HAVOCK were to attack ships in the inner harbour. HOTSPUR and HAVOCK were to engage batteries reported on Framnesodden and any ships seen to the north west. These two ships were also to cover the retirement of those in the inner harbour, with smoke. All ships were to be ready to send a small landing party in the event of opposition proving light.

10. The 50 mile passage from Tranøy to Narvik was made in continuous snowstorms with visibility seldom greater than 2 cables. Ships were twice separated owing to merchant vessels passing through the line and on the one occasion that land was seen the whole flotilla almost ran aground. The safe arrival of ships off Narvik at 0415 on 10th April, 1940, is a tribute to the skill of the navigating officer of HARDY (Lieutenant-Commander R. C. Gordon-Smith) and to the handling of the ships in rear.

11. HARDY immediately entered the harbour at Narvik. After backing and filling among the merchant ships at anchor she fired torpedoes, 3 at a warship and 4 more into the north-eastern corner of the harbour. One torpedo must have hit the warship, as there was a violent explosion and sparks came out of her. HARDY then used her guns on another warship seen at anchor and then withdrew.

12. Surprise had been complete and the enemy had not yet opened fire. HUNTER and HAVOCK now entered the harbour. HUNTER fired 4 torpedoes at a destroyer and 4 more at some other target but the result is not known. HAVOCK fired 5 torpedoes and secured hits on a destroyer with gunfire.

13. By this time the enemy destroyers and shore batteries inside the harbour had opened fire. The shore guns all used tracer ammunition, which appeared to be smaller than 4 in. and the shooting was not accurate.

14. HOTSPUR and HOSTILE saw nothing to the northward of Narvik though low visibility prevented a proper examination of Rombaks and Herjangs Fiords. These two ships covered the retirement of the other three from the inner harbour by putting up a smoke screen, which seemed very effective. HOTSPUR then fired 4 torpedoes into the harbour and hit two merchant ships, which sank. At least six torpedoes were fired by the enemy out of the harbour but all missed or ran under without exploding.

15. All five ships then approached the harbour entrance again and engaged any suitable targets they could see. This time a fairly intense fire was encountered from shore batteries and enemy destroyers but the flotilla was able to withdraw, practically undamaged, to a position off Skjomnes.

16. On board HARDY the position was then summed up as follows. The Flotilla had been off an enemy harbour for over an hour and were undamaged. A surprise attack had been made and 24 torpedoes had been fired into the harbour. HOSTILE still had her full outfit of torpedoes whilst HOTSPUR had 4, HAVOCK 3 and HARDY 1 torpedo remaining. There was no sign of enemy warships outside the harbour and those inside must have been either sunk or damaged. It was estimated that 3 or 4 enemy warships had been inside the harbour and that probably only 2 were somewhere outside and could be dealt with if met. Captain (D), Second Destroyer Flotilla, therefore, decided to make one more attack on the harbour.

17. At about 0520 HARDY led the Flotilla into the final attack on the harbour, ships forming astern of her in the order HAVOCK, HUNTER, HOTSPUR and HOSTILE. A speed of 15 knots was not exceeded and the line was snaked to keep guns bearing on the harbour entrance, now shrouded in mist. As each ship turned to port off the harbour entrance, shore batteries or any other targets visible were engaged. Whilst turning, HOSTILE fired 4 torpedoes into the harbour and one enemy torpedo passed harmlessly underneath her. She was also hit by a shell just abaft her starboard anchor but this did little damage.

18. Just after turning to port HARDY sighted enemy ships north of Narvik and Captain (D), Second Destroyer Flotilla, made an enemy report "1 enemy cruiser and 3 enemy destroyers off Narvik. Am withdrawing to the westward." T.O.O. 0551/10. At the same time he ordered the Flotilla to withdraw at 30 knots.

19. Whilst turning to port and withdrawing to the west, the Flotilla engaged these enemy ships at ranges between 6,000 and 8,000 yards. The enemy replied but did no damage.

20. When about half way along the Ofot Fiord HARDY sighted 2 more warships about 3 miles ahead crossing from port to starboard. At first she hoped they might be our own cruisers and made the challenge; but it was answered by a salvo. Captain (D), Second Destroyer Flotilla, soon identified the 2 ships as large German destroyers (Leberecht Maas Class) and engaged them.

* Admiralty footnote: T.O.O.—Time of origin.

21. Captain (D), Second Destroyer Flotilla, then made to the Flotilla "Keep on engaging enemy." T.O.O. 0555/10. This was the last signal he made as shortly afterwards a shell burst on HARDY'S bridge and he was mortally wounded. Everyone on HARDY'S bridge and in the wheelhouse was now either killed or wounded. The ship, not under control and on fire forward, was making at high speed for the south shore of the fiord. The Captain's Secretary (Paymaster Lieutenant G. H. Stanning) was wounded, but struggled down from the bridge to find an empty wheelhouse. He took the wheel himself for a short time but on relief by an Able Seamen returned to the bridge. By this time the ship had practically lost steam and the Captain's Secretary directed her to be beached. The torpedo officer (Lieutenant G. R. Heppel), thinking that bridge steering was out of action, had gone aft to connect tiller flat steering but finding the bridge still controlling had returned there in time to agree to the beaching of the ship. The action taken at a critical time by Paymaster Lieutenant Stanning may well have resulted in saving many lives. Whether it was right or wrong, he showed great initiative in an unaccustomed role.

22. Shortly after HARDY had been hit, HUNTER was seen to be on fire and her forward torpedo tubes were missing, indicating some explosion. She was seen to lose steam just ahead of HOTSPUR at the same moment the latter's steering and all bridge communications were put out of action. Whilst not under control HOTSPUR collided with the damaged HUNTER and these two ships, locked together drew all the enemy's fire. By means of verbal orders to engine room and tiller flat, given from "X" gun deck, HOTSPUR was able to extricate herself from this predicament but the combined effects of the collision and the damage done by the enemy caused HUNTER to sink.

23. The enemy, however, must have received considerable punishment. One destroyer appeared to have been struck by a torpedo and seemed to be aground whilst others had been hit by gunfire. HOTSPUR and HOSTILE had fired torpedoes at the enemy who had replied with four, which passed close down HOTSPUR'S starboard side.

24. When withdrawing after her collision HOTSPUR was still under fire from at least 4 enemy ships. HOSTILE and HAVOCK had got clear to the westward practically undamaged. Quickly taking in the situation, they immediately turned back into the Fiord and covered HOTSPUR'S retirement. This was a bold move, skilfully executed in narrow waters and it probably persuaded the enemy from following up his advantage.

25. As HOTSPUR was being conned from aft and had no signalling arrangements HOSTILE took charge and escorted her to Skjel Fiord. When about 18 miles west of Narvik, the German ammunition ship RAUENFELS was seen steaming up the fiord. Mistaking us for German destroyers she continued her course and was then stopped and blown up by HAVOCK.

26. HARDY had last been seen aground and on fire with men clambering over the side. One gun was still firing and it seemed likely that the enemy would close and finish her off. In the event, however, the enemy held off and

160 men got ashore. The epic story of how most of these men reached the village of Ballangen and were rescued by IVANHOE 3 days later, has been told elsewhere.

27. About an hour after landing, HARDY's torpedo officer made his way back on board and with a 9 lb. T.N.T. charge from the detonator tank blew up the steel chests in the Captain's Cabin. He was also able to rescue the Navigating Officer, who had been too badly wounded to abandon ship. The action of Lieutenant G. R. Heppel in returning to the ship, which was still on fire forward, is most creditable.

28. The results of the raid are difficult to assess and time alone will show the full effect. It is probable that 2 or 3 enemy destroyers were put out of action and 7 or 8 merchant ships sunk. One ammunition ship was blown up. Some damage was done to wharves and jetties by gunfire. On our side, HUNTER was sunk, HARDY put out of action and HOTSPUR severely damaged. The appearance of the flotilla in a snowstorm must have given a shock to the Germans on the day after their occupation. Any plans which the enemy had for blocking the approaches must have been interfered with and the way was paved for our subsequent attacks. Some encouragement must have been given to the Norwegians by the prompt appearance of our warships in their occupied waters.

29. Finally, on behalf of those who took part in the raid, I would like to pay a tribute to the initiative and fine fighting spirit shown by our leader, Captain B. A. W. Warburton-Lee, whose conduct was an example to us all.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Sgd.) H. F. LAYMAN,
Commander.

*The Rear Admiral Commanding
Home Fleet Destroyers.*

H.M.S. HAVOCK,

27th April, 1940.

H.M.S. HAVOCK was in company with Captain D.2 in HARDY, HOTSPUR, HOSTILE and HUNTER during the night of April 9th-10th and was the fourth ship in the line during the passage up the Ofthord.

2. The weather was overcast, with frequent squalls of snow and the visibility varied between 5 and 2 cables.

3. The passage up the fiord was without incident except that touch was lost once due to a sudden alteration of course.

4. At 0426 the snowstorm cleared and the south side of the harbour of Narvik and some merchant ships were disclosed.

5. Captain D. entered the harbour between the British s.s. NORTH CORNWALL and the remainder of the merchant ships, and opened fire with guns and torpedoes. HUNTER followed and as soon as she was clear HAVOCK followed her. Fire was opened with the guns at a destroyer alongside a merchant ship whose gun-flashes could be seen, and with torpedoes at merchant ships and a destroyer at anchor. Three torpedoes only were fired as HUNTER appeared to have hit all the merchant ships in

sight, and a second destroyer was not seen until the sights were past. All torpedoes were heard to hit and the destroyer vanished. As the enemy gun-fire was getting hot and they had the advantage of the light I increased speed and cleared out.

6. Just before entering the harbour two columns of water were seen ascending just inshore of the HUNTER, and it is thought that they were caused by badly aimed torpedoes from an enemy destroyer.

7. While leaving the harbour I passed close to NORTH CORNWALL, and one of the guards there fired on the bridge with a revolver. He was silenced by a Lewis gun.

8. Firing now increased from the harbour and HAVOCK was straddled but not hit. Fire was returned by the after group and an explosion seen in an enemy ship, while the foremost group bombarded the shore with H.E. shell, from which quarter a hot fire from rifles and machine guns was arriving.

9. Once clear of the harbour HAVOCK passed backwards and forwards across the entrance engaging ships inside with gunfire at 3,000 to 4,000 yards. Spotting was almost impossible owing to smoke but blind ladders were used and success hoped for.

10. At 0507 a number of torpedoes were seen approaching from the harbour and were avoided by going full speed ahead or astern. One torpedo appeared to pass underneath the ship, and if it was fitted with a magnetic pistol the de-gaussing circuit undoubtedly saved the ship. I then withdrew out of torpedo range and as ships were interfering with each others fire formed astern of Captain D. who made a signal "Follow Round" at 0514. By this time we were 6,000 yards from the harbour.

11. At 0535 we passed the harbour for a second time but were not fired at and then HARDY led towards Rombaks Fjord.

12. At 0540 three German destroyers were sighted bearing 350 degrees apparently coming from Herjangs Fjord. Captain D. ordered 30 knots and withdraw to the westwards at the same time opening fire on the second ship. I turned to follow him and engaged the leading ship at 10,000 yards. HARDY made an enemy report of a cruiser and two destroyers and in the bad light this looked possible. The enemy however appeared to turn away under our fire.

13. At 0558 two more enemy destroyers appeared ahead and opened fire. HAVOCK was slightly to port of HARDY and I engaged the left hand ship but as soon as I saw that the leader was not fired at shifted to her. The range was about 3,000 yards, and fire soon took effect, the third salvo hitting aft and caused a violent explosion. She ceased fire with her main armament but continued to fire machine guns, an incendiary bullet from which set fire to a ready-use cordite locker at A gun.

14. As we passed her I ordered the remaining torpedoes to be fired but they unfortunately passed astern due to an underestimation of the enemy speed.

15. Just before HAVOCK fired torpedoes enemy torpedoes were seen approaching on the surface and easily avoided by combing the tracks. HARDY however who was steering more to port appeared to be hit by one as

there was a high column of smoke from her after boiler room and much flame from the funnel. Actually from accounts afterwards this was a salvo of shell, and she rapidly lost way and passed astern.

16. As I was now at the head of the line and no enemy appeared to be to the westward of us, I turned to starboard 180 degrees and closed the enemy astern, opening fire at 10,000 yards.

17. During this run I passed HUNTER who was on fire and losing speed and HOTSPUR whose steering gear seemed to be out of action.

18. Unfortunately the order to open fire could not be complied with as both foremost guns were out of action, and having no torpedoes I decided that it would be folly to close the range any further, and turned to starboard passing close astern of HOSTILE who was making smoke.

19. At this moment the two leading enemy appeared to be unhit and were firing well placed salvos, while two in rear were very ragged. HAVOCK was again straddled but not hit except by splinters. While withdrawing the after group continued the engagement, until the enemy was lost in smoke.

20. While running to the west HOTSPUR was observed to collide with HUNTER who appeared to be in a bad way, but the former got clear.

21. Once clear of the smoke I drew up alongside HOSTILE and both foremost guns being reported again in use, followed her back into the action to relieve the pressure on HOTSPUR. Fire was opened at 10,000 yards and continued until HOTSPUR was out of range when all ships withdrew. The leading enemy appeared to be still untouched and were straddling effectively while we were turning. They made no attempt however to close the range, after we had slowed to HOTSPUR'S speed.

22. On the way down the fjord a merchant ship was sighted which proved to be the German S.S. RAUENFELS, and HOSTILE stopped her with a shot and ordered me to examine her. I fired another round into her bow and she stopped and her crew hurriedly abandoned ship. I stopped and picked them up while the ship slowly drifted to the beach. I sent an armed boat over but she was burning furiously and I was uncertain as to whether she had used her W/T to call her friends, I decided not to risk the loss of my party and ordered their return. When the boat was hoisted I fired two H.E. into her to hasten the fire and went ahead. The result was certainly startling, as the German literally erupted and a column of flame and debris rose to over 3,000 feet as testified both by HOSTILE and HARDY'S survivors to the west who saw it over the mountains that height. Fortunately no casualties were sustained in HAVOCK but some damage to the hull was done. Judging from the fragments picked up she contained all the reserve ammunition and torpedoes for the destroyer flotilla, and also the Narvik mine-field.

23. HAVOCK then joined HOSTILE off Tranoy Light.

24. From the evidence of the crew of the NORTH CORNWALL there were four destroyers in Narvik harbour when the attack

commenced, two alongside the oiler, one alongside the ore pier and one at anchor. Two of these were hit by torpedoes from HARDY, HUNTER or HAVOCK and sank immediately. The other two were hit by gunfire and set on fire. They never left the harbour. One of the five met outside was driven ashore and two more damaged. The former were seen ashore by HARDY survivors. The number of merchant ships sunk cannot be stated.

(Sgd.) R. E. COURAGE,

Lieutenant-Commander.

The following Despatch by Vice-Admiral W. J. Whitworth, C.B., D.S.O., Vice-Admiral Commanding, Battle Cruiser Squadron, was submitted on the 27th April, 1940, to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty by the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet.

H.M.S. WARSPITE.

25th April, 1940.

SIR,

I have the honour to forward the following report of the attack on the enemy Naval Forces and Shore Defences at Narvik on Saturday, 13th April, 1940.

2. Force "B" which was placed under my orders for this operation, was composed of the following of His Majesty's Ships:—

WARSPITE. — Captain V. A. C. Crutchley, V.C., D.S.C. (Flying the flag of Vice-Admiral Commanding, Battle Cruiser Squadron).

BEDOUIN.—Commander J. A. McCoy.

COSSACK. — Commander R. St.V. Sherbrooke.

ESKIMO. — Commander St.J. A. Micklethwait, D.S.O.

PUNJABI.—Commander J. T. Lean.

HERO.—Commander H. W. Biggs.

ICARUS.—Lieutenant-Commander C. D. Maud.

KIMBERLEY. — Lieutenant-Commander R. G. K. Knowling.

FORESTER. — Lieutenant - Commander E. B. Tancock, D.S.C.

FOXHOUND. — Lieutenant-Commander G. H. Peters.

3. The following instructions for the conduct of the operation were received from you.

"Operation D.W. will take place Saturday 13th April.

(i) Object destruction of German warships, Merchant ships and defences in Narvik area.

(ii) Ships of Force "B" are to rendezvous with WARSPITE flying the flag of the Vice-Admiral Commanding, Battle Cruiser Squadron, in position 67° 44' North 13° 22' East at 0730.

(iii) HOSTILE and HAVOCK to protect Skjel Fiord.

(iv) Remaining destroyers are to rendezvous with Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, in position 68° 00' North 11° 20' East at 1030.

(v) After arrival of other Destroyers, HERO, FOXHOUND and FORESTER will be detached to get out T.S.D.S. Destroyer of the 20th Destroyer Flotilla is to get out

Bow Protection gear* and is to form ahead of leading T.S.D.S.* Destroyer when latter is in station on WARSPITE. The four destroyers working their Asdics as far as practicable. Other destroyers form Anti-submarine screen as ordered by the Vice-Admiral Commanding, Battle Cruiser Squadron. The force will proceed up Vest Fiord in this formation and it is suggested a destroyer should be detailed on each side to throw a depth charge in any likely inlet that could harbour a submarine.

(vi) On reaching Baroy Island which is the suspected Minefield area, the A/S* screen should as far as practicable swing into the swept waters until past the Island.

(vii) The force will proceed into Ofot Fiord engaging shore defences in passing, making full use of short range weapons as well as heavier guns. Non-T.S.D.S. destroyers and WARSPITE covering advance of sweeping destroyers with gunfire. It is specially important that destroyers sighted should be engaged before they can fire torpedoes at WARSPITE.

(viii) T.S.D.S. sweeping is to be continued up to longitude 16° 55' East. Sweeping destroyers are then to haul clear of WARSPITE recover or cut their sweeps and assist the non-T.S.D.S. destroyers. Failing other targets they may drop back and destroy shore defence guns on Baroy Island or elsewhere. WARSPITE will proceed to a position 5 miles from Narvik depending on circumstances and from there cover the advance of the destroyers into the harbour and adjacent waters where enemy ships may be located.

(ix) Destroyers are normally to make smoke if required by Vice-Admiral Commanding, Battle Cruiser Squadron.

(x) The force will withdraw as ordered by the Vice-Admiral Commanding, Battle Cruiser Squadron.

(xi) FURIOUS is to arrange Air Attacks on the following enemy positions. All forces to synchronise with WARSPITE'S approach.

Attack (a) Baroy Island defences about 1215.

(b) Romness Point, longitude 16° 31' East and opposite shore about 1300.

(c) Warships in Ballangen, longitude 17° 00' East, and Narvik harbour and Herjangs and batteries at Narvik about 1345.

Vice-Admiral Commanding, Battle Cruiser Squadron, will signal exact times at which these attacks are to commence.

(xii) FURIOUS is to provide Anti-submarine patrol for WARSPITE from 0830 vide paragraph (ii).

Time of origin 1909/12th April.

4. The following information in regard to the Operation was contained in your signal 1547/12th April:—

(i) Minefield reported 68° 24' North 15° 59' East.

(ii) U-Boat in Vest Fiord area.

* Admiralty footnotes: T.S.D.S.—Two Speed Destroyer Sweep. Bow Protection Gear—Paravanes. A/S—Anti-Submarine.

(iii) Five or six LEBERECHT MAAS class some damaged and six Merchantmen sunk inside harbour.

(iv) HARDY beached 68° 23' North 17° 06' East.

(v) Baroy Island 68° 21' North 16° 07' East has Military Defences including possibly magnetic Torpedo tubes.

(vi) Three 12 or 18 pounder guns on hill North of Ore Quay, Chart Number 3753, facing North-west. Four inch calibre guns both sides of fiord near entrance to Ranchet 68° 26' 30" North 16° 29' 30" East and 68° 24' 30" North 16° 29' 30" East.

(vii) One or two unidentified aircraft were sighted in Vest Fiord on 12th April.

(viii) Two friendly Norwegian submarines are in vicinity of Sommersoet 68° 27' North 15° 29' East.

5. At 0200 on 13th April, 1940, having with considerable difficulty, owing to heavy swell, completed the transfer of my flag to H.M.S. WARSPITE at sea, I proceeded with H.M. Ships COSSACK, HERO, FOXHOUND and FORESTER to the rendezvous in position 67° 44' North 13° 22' East, where H.M. Ships BEDOUIN, PUNJABI, KIMBERLEY and ICARUS joined my flag. H.M.S. ESKIMO was at this time on patrol in the vicinity of Tranoy Light.

6. Force "B" proceeded up Vest Fiord. The weather was overcast, heavy melting snow clouds producing intermittent rain, wind South-west Force 3-4*, visibility, 10 miles. Snow lay thickly on the mountains surrounding the fiords, down to sea level.

7. At 0747 a signal was made ordering H.M.S. FURIOUS to commence air attack at the times stated in the orders for the operation (vide paragraph 3 (xi)).

8. At 0915 I made the following signal to Force "B".

"We are proceeding to attack the defences of Narvik and any German war or merchant ships met. I am sure that any resistance on the part of the enemy will be dealt with in the most resolute and determined manner. I wish you all every success."

9. At 1009 I made the following signal amplifying the operation orders issued by you.

"Operation D.W. paragraph (vi). Any sign of enemy activity on Baroy Island is to be destroyed by gunfire. Paragraph (vii). If a guide to fire distribution is necessary odd numbered destroyers take south side and even number take north side. Enemy warships take precedence over shore targets.

Paragraph (viii). On arrival east of 17° East destroyers may use high speed but should not lose the support of WARSPITE'S fire. Any enemy warship in the fiord to the north of Narvik is to be provided for before the harbour to the south is entered.

Paragraph (x). If ordered to withdraw, the signal D.B.O. by V/S and W/T will be used."

10. ICARUS, HERO and FOXHOUND in that order sweeping directly ahead of WARSPITE while the remaining five destroyers

(including FORESTER, her T.S.D.S. sweep having failed) formed an A/S screen on her—one ahead and two on each bow.

11. At 1058 Force "B" was approaching ESKIMO off Tranoy Light. ESKIMO signalled "Submarine bearing 240° from me." This submarine was on the surface and flashed "U" to ESKIMO presumably thinking she was friendly. On ESKIMO turning towards the submarine dived. Although contact was not obtained depth charges were dropped by destroyers in the vicinity.

12. The area between Tranoy Light and Baroy Island had been reported dangerous due to mines. As the Force approached this area screening destroyers closed ready to form astern of the sweep.

13. At 1152 in position five miles westward of Baroy Island WARSPITE'S aircraft was flown off with instructions:—

(a) To carry out reconnaissance for Force "B" advancing up Ofot Fiord with particular reference to the presence of German vessels in side fiords, the movements of German forces and the position of shore batteries.

(b) to bomb any suitable targets;

(c) to return to Skjel Fiord.

14. On reaching Baroy Island the screening destroyers moved to the van; BEDOUIN, PUNJABI, ESKIMO to starboard, COSSACK, KIMBERLEY and FORESTER to port.

15. A "Swordfish" aircraft from FURIOUS was sighted approaching from the starboard quarter. It was believed to be that allocated to Task A in the operation orders, namely, the bombing of Baroy Island defences. Inspection of the Island however showed no sign of enemy activity and a signal was made to the aircraft "I see nothing to bomb on Baroy Island", in which the observer concurred and reported that he was returning to his ship.

16. At 1203 WARSPITE'S aircraft reported "German destroyer in position one mile north of Hammesholm (67° 25' North 16° 36' East), steering west." At 1229 BEDOUIN reported sighting the enemy bearing 073°. Fire was opened by destroyers in the van. The enemy retired at long range and fire was intermittent owing to the poor visibility and smoke.

The blackened bow of the ammunition ship RAUENFELS blown up by the 2nd Destroyer Flotilla during their retirement on 10th April, was passed in position 68° 24½' North 16° 28' East.

17. At 1240 the aircraft reported that two enemy destroyers were off Framsk (68° 24' North 16° 49' East) and at 1250 that these destroyers were hiding in a bay five miles ahead of the screen, and were in a position to fire torpedoes. The number was later corrected to one destroyer.

18. The action became more general. Enemy destroyers sighted in Ofot Fiord were engaged at long range and WARSPITE opened fire with main armament.

19. The enemy destroyer reported by WARSPITE'S aircraft, believed to be one of the Roeder class, had manoeuvred into the small bay in a position 68° 24½' North 16° 48' East,

* Admiralty footnotes: Refers to the Beaufort scale of windforce. Force 3—Gentle breeze (7-10 m.p.h. at sea level). Force 4—Moderate breeze (11-15 m.p.h. at sea level).

at the head of which lies Djupvik. Her bows pointed to the eastward, and her torpedo armament bore across the fiord. She was hidden from the approaching destroyers.

20. The warning conveyed by the aircraft was therefore invaluable. The leading destroyers turned their guns and torpedo armament on the starboard bow, and before the enemy could fire more than one salvo, she was heavily engaged. Two torpedoes, one from BEDOUIN and one from ESKIMO struck the ship and in three minutes she was on fire forward and aft. A report was received, however, that a figure was seen standing by the torpedo tubes and her destruction was completed by salvos from WARSPITE'S main armament. Torpedoes fired by the enemy but passed clear of our destroyers.

21. Meanwhile more enemy destroyers had appeared in Ofot Fiord. In the smoke and haze the targets were not clear, but at least four ships were observed. The enemy steamed to and fro across the Fiord bringing guns and torpedoes to bear and turning as the limit of the run was reached. Our destroyers, with the exception of those sweeping, adopted a loose formation from one to three miles ahead of WARSPITE altering course as necessary to bring armament to bear and avoid shell fire. From this point Force "B" advanced up Ofot Fiord at a mean speed of 10 knots.

22. At 1318 WARSPITE'S aircraft sighted five torpedo tracks approaching from ahead. These passed clear to port and subsequently an explosion was observed at the water's edge on the port beam.

23. WARSPITE'S main armament engaged the enemy when a target presented itself. But owing to the smoke of the destroyer engagement fire was intermittent. Speed was adjusted to maintain support of the destroyers but to keep WARSPITE clear of the torpedo danger as far as possible.

24. At 1341 FURIOUS'S aircraft were sighted on the port quarter approaching to the attack.

25. A further torpedo exploded on the fore-shore bearing Red 20°.*

26. At 1345 sweeping destroyers hauled their sweeps and subsequently proceeded in support of the Destroyers of the Striking Force.

27. At 1350 COSSACK reported yet another torpedo approaching. WARSPITE was manoeuvring to present the smallest target but the track was not seen.

28. At 1352 WARSPITE'S aircraft reported no destroyers in Skjomen Fiord.

29. Meanwhile the engagement with the enemy manoeuvring to the North of Narvik had become closer and another destroyer was seen leaving the harbour distant 12,000 yards from WARSPITE. She was engaged by destroyers on the starboard wing and by WARSPITE'S main armament and was soon severely damaged. The enemy's fire was becoming ragged and shots were falling round WARSPITE.

30. Gunfire was then observed in Narvik Harbour and was thought to be from a shore battery. At 1402 I ordered the destroyers to engage enemy destroyers while WARSPITE engaged the shore battery.

31. At 1417 PUNJABI passed WARSPITE withdrawing from the action owing to hits which had put the main steam pipe and all guns temporarily out of action.

32. At the same time a heavy explosion shook WARSPITE: the cause was not ascertained.

33. At 1421 WARSPITE ceased fire on the target in Narvik Bay owing to our own destroyers fouling the range. This target had proved to be a destroyer alongside the quay and not a shore battery.

34. The situation then developed as follows:—

One enemy destroyer badly on fire, ran ashore at Herjangen (68° 33' North 17° 33½' East) and was struck by a torpedo from ESKIMO.

The destroyer, which had just left Narvik Harbour, broke out in flames forward and aft, and was abandoned by her crew close to the shore northwest of Narvik.

An unknown number of destroyers retired up Rombaks Fiord, under cover of smoke from funnels and floats and were followed by ESKIMO, FORESTER, HERO, ICARUS and later BEDOUIN.

The destroyer alongside in Narvik Harbour continued to fire. COSSACK and FOXHOUND entered the harbour supported by KIMBERLEY, and under their combined attack the enemy caught fire. FOXHOUND approached to board but was received with Machine gun fire from the shore. Then the destroyer blew up and resistance in the harbour ceased.

While carrying out this attack COSSACK drifted on to a submerged wreck.

35. Until defensive action in Narvik ceased WARSPITE lay off the entrance and at 1450 I signalled to the Commander-in-Chief:—

"Three enemy destroyers still up Rombaks Fiord. No enemy opposition in Narvik Bay. Four enemy destroyers destroyed. Am investigating possibility of occupying the town."

36. At 1500 I proceeded up Rombaks Fiord to clear up the situation there. Two enemy destroyers were reported at the head of the Fiord by the aircraft and ESKIMO was leading five destroyers to the attack.

ESKIMO passed through the narrow neck in Rombaks Fiord followed closely by FORESTER and HERO and engaged two enemy ships in sight. The enemy replied with gun and torpedo fire and at 1450 ESKIMO was struck by a torpedo which removed the bow of the ship. Of the two enemy ships, one, after firing torpedoes, ran aground at Sildvika where she was destroyed by gunfire and abandoned. The other retired under cover of smoke to the top of the fiord.

37. Difficulty was then experienced owing to the congestion in the narrow neck of this fiord. ESKIMO was trying to get clear stern first assisted by FORESTER, the remaining destroyers were endeavouring to enter and continue the chase.

38. At 1520 I ordered all available destroyers to concentrate in Rombaks Fiord.

At 1530 a report on the situation was received from BEDOUIN as follows:—

"One aground out of action (this was at Sildvika). Two more round the corner out

* Admiralty footnote: Red 20° = 20° on the port bow.

of sight. If they have torpedoes they are in a position of great advantage. HERO and BEDOUIN ammunition almost exhausted. BEDOUIN "A" mounting out of action. 1520."

I thereupon signalled BEDOUIN:—

"The torpedo menace must be accepted. Enemy must be destroyed without delay. Take KIMBERLEY, FORESTER, HERO and PUNJABI under your orders and organise attack sending most serviceable destroyer first. Ram or board if necessary. 1540."

39. Meanwhile WARSPITE'S aircraft was recalled and hoisted inboard and preparations were made to carry out an indirect bombardment of the ships at the head of the fiord, should this be necessary. On its return WARSPITE'S aircraft reported sinking a submarine anchored off Bjerkvik, in Herjangs Fiord, by bombing. This sinking was accepted as a fact.*

40. While I was in communication with BEDOUIN, HERO, ICARUS and KIMBERLEY proceeded up Rombaks Fiord and, as soon as the targets could be observed in the smoke, opened fire on the destroyers at the head of the Fiord. No reply was made, however, and fire was checked. The enemy had abandoned the ships, of which there proved to be three. One was already scuttled, one sank forthwith and HERO and ICARUS sent away a boarding party to the one remaining. BEDOUIN, on arrival, ordered boarding parties to return, and the enemy was sunk by a torpedo from HERO. HERO states the boarded destroyer was the HANS LUDEMANN.

41. As the destroyers had successfully dealt with all enemy forces at the top of the Fiord, indirect bombardment by WARSPITE was not necessary and it was decided to return to Narvik Bay to investigate the state of affairs there.

42. COSSACK was still grounded on a wreck and had been under spasmodic fire from a shore gun of small calibre. Although not definitely located, the COSSACK silenced it by retaliatory fire in its direction.

FOXHOUND, standing by, had sent her Medical Officer to COSSACK and was picking up survivors from the German destroyer abandoned on fire off Narvik.

43. At 1742 I made the following report of the situation.

"WARSPITE, COSSACK and FOXHOUND in Narvik Bay. Little opposition. All German destroyers sunk, three of them after retiring up Rombaks Fiord. One submarine sunk by WARSPITE'S aircraft. Parties of men, possibly soldiers retreating over hills. One field Howitzer silenced by COSSACK. Enemy aircraft have been sighted. Damage to own ships so far reported:—ESKIMO bows blown off by torpedo. COSSACK damaged and ashore in Narvik Bay. PUNJABI one boiler out of action. 1742."

44. I thereupon considered the landing of a party to occupy the town as the opposition had apparently been silenced.

With the force available only a small party could be landed and to guard against the inevitable counter-attack it would be necessary to keep the force concentrated close to the water-front and to provide strong covering gunfire. In fact I considered it would be necessary to keep WARSPITE off Narvik.

45. A signal was then received from FOXHOUND that the Officer prisoners taken had reported the presence of several German submarines in the Fiord.

46. At 1800 twelve enemy aircraft were sighted approaching from the westward.

47. Apart from the above considerations I felt, that, to place, at the end of a long and strenuous day, a party of less than 200 tired seamen and marines in the midst of a force of not less than 2,000 professional German soldiers, would be to court disaster, even allowing for the moral effect which the day's engagement must have had on the enemy.

48. The cumulative effect of the roar of WARSPITE'S fifteen inch guns reverberating down and around the high mountains of the Fiord, the bursts and splashes of these great shells, the sight of their ships sinking and burning around them must have been terrifying to the enemy. But such an effect cannot be of a lasting nature to the soldiers on shore, and I felt that to be taken full advantage of, it would have required a trained, organised military force, ready to land directly the Naval engagement had ceased. If such a force had been present, I believe that they would have succeeded in establishing themselves so strongly in Narvik that its eventual capture would only be a matter of time and reinforcements.

49. I thereupon decided against keeping WARSPITE stopped in the Fiord off Narvik, subject to submarine and air attack.

50. At 1832 I signalled:—

"General from BC. One.* Am withdrawing. KIMBERLEY is to guard COSSACK withdrawing her if possible from Narvik harbour. PUNJABI to guard ESKIMO."

51. HOSTILE (Commander J. P. Wright) and IVANHOE (Commander P. H. Hadow), based on Skjel Fiord, had been placed at my disposal by your signal. I ordered these destroyers to proceed to Narvik and reinforce those to be stationed there. IVANHOE had been ordered to patrol the entrance to the Fiord and was therefore in the vicinity.

52. I proceeded down Ofot Fiord with FOXHOUND ahead. BEDOUIN, HERO and ICARUS followed withdrawing from Rombaks Fiord. FORESTER was delayed embarking the majority of ESKIMO'S crew.

53. At 1840 when close to Hamnesholm Light (67° 25' North 16° 36' East) FOXHOUND obtained a submarine contact and counter-attacked. This submarine was apparently escaping out of Ofot Fiord. A later report received from the Hamnesholm Lighthouse keeper confirms this. I have since come to the conclusion that a submarine navigating submerged in the narrow waters of a fiord would find himself in a not very enviable position with Anti-submarine destroyers operating overhead and his desire to get out of it is therefore understandable.

* Admiralty footnote: It has since been confirmed that this submarine was sunk by WARSPITE'S aircraft.

* Admiralty footnote: A signal to all ships present from V.A.C., 1st Battle Cruiser Squadron.

54. The four destroyers then formed an Anti-submarine screen and preparations were made to repel the attack of the twelve aircraft which were still in sight to the northward. This attack did not develop although IVANHOE reported being bombed on passage up the Fiord.

55. I ordered destroyers in company to be prepared to transfer wounded to WARSPITE under cover of darkness at 2230. At 2027 I made the following report:—

“Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet
(Repeated) Admiralty from Vice Admiral
Commanding Battle Cruiser Squadron.

My 1742. I am withdrawing with WARSPITE, PUNJABI, HERO, ICARUS, FOXHOUND and FORESTER when wounded are collected.

BEDOUIN and KIMBERLEY remaining to assist ESKIMO and COSSACK. Have ordered HOSTILE and IVANHOE to support them.

Seven enemy destroyers and one submarine have been destroyed. There are now no enemy warships at Narvik. No shore batteries were observed but a Howitzer on the hill behind Narvik and a field gun on the foreshore were reported to have been firing. Thirteen merchant ships in the harbour, half appeared German. Our destroyers being in occupation of the harbour these were not sunk. Formations of twelve enemy aircraft approached about 1830 but no attack has as yet been made on WARSPITE, though IVANHOE was bombed while on patrol off Tjel Sundet. Damage to ships and casualties will be reported when received. Some German prisoners have been taken, details of which will be reported later.”

56. Reports which were received, however, indicated that a number of wounded remained in the destroyers at Narvik. Accordingly, at 2050 I ordered course to be reversed and signalled to COSSACK at Narvik:—

“All wounded are to be collected in PUNJABI to rendezvous with me in 17° East at midnight.”

57. At 2210 I made the following signal:—

“Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet,
(Repeated) Admiralty
from B.C. One.

My impression is that enemy forces in Narvik were thoroughly frightened as a result of to-day's action and that the presence of WARSPITE was the chief cause of this.

I recommend that the town be occupied without delay by the main landing force.

I intend to visit Narvik again to-morrow Sunday in order to maintain the moral effect of the presence of WARSPITE and to accept the air and submarine menace involved by this course of action.”

In making this signal I knew that the troop convoys making for Vaagsfiord were at sea and envisaged them being diverted direct to Narvik.

58. Meanwhile I proceeded to the Narvik area. On arrival all destroyers in company having wounded were brought alongside WARSPITE in turn to effect the transfer while the remainder carried out A/S patrol in the vicinity.

59. Transferring the wounded took a very long time, and I was acutely aware of the possibility of submarine and air attack. As regards the former I felt that Ofot Fiord had become too unhealthy an area for a submarine, witness FOXHOUND'S attack and position of submarine. As regards air attack WARSPITE was ready to go ahead at any time and slip destroyers alongside, and if air attack did develop it did not matter where it took place. In any event WARSPITE was there to support the destroyers who had done such grand work, and I was not disposed to abandon them in their distress.

60. IVANHOE had, while proceeding up the Fiord, been intercepted by a Norwegian vessel on board which were survivors of HARDY* and British Merchant ships. The opportunity was taken to distribute these survivors numbering about 200 men to various destroyers.

61. Several large fires and explosions were seen in Narvik nine miles to the Eastward.

62. I received a report from COSSACK that the condition of some wounded was so serious as to make transfer by destroyer inadvisable and I therefore at 0250 closed Narvik to effect the transfer by boat.

63. During WARSPITE'S approach white Verrey Lights were fired by a Merchant vessel in the harbour. This signal was presumed to be a warning to whatever shore defences were manned.

64. At 0326 COSSACK managed to draw clear of the wreck and was berthed alongside WARSPITE.

65. When all wounded were embarked I ordered withdrawal, the following dispositions being made:—

KIMBERLEY and IVANHOE to remain at Narvik.

ESKIMO accompanied by BEDOUIN and COSSACK by FORESTER to proceed to Skjel Fiord.

WARSPITE and remaining destroyers to proceed to the westward.

66. At 1027 in reply to Admiralty message timed 0913/14th April asking for an estimate of strength of enemy in Narvik area the following reply was sent:—

“Admiralty (Repeated) Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, AURORA,
SOUTHAMPTON from B.C. One.

Your 0913. Information from Norwegian sources estimate 1,500 to 2,000 troops in Narvik. German Naval Officer prisoner states that there are many more than this, but I think this statement was made with intent to deceive. He also states that guns on shore are being positioned with the main object of opposing a landing but COSSACK aground in Narvik Bay for 12 hours yesterday was not seriously molested.

I am convinced that Narvik can be taken by direct assault, without fear of meeting serious opposition on landing. I consider that the main landing force need only be small but that it must have the support of Force B or one of similar composition. A special requirement being ships and destroyers with the best available A.A. armaments.”

* Admiralty footnote: HARDY was lost in the first engagement at Narvik three days previously.

General Remarks.

67. The safe return of ESKIMO and COSSACK to Skjel Fiord was a fitting conclusion to an operation which I consider was an unqualified success.

Seven or eight enemy destroyers and one submarine—the total German Naval Forces present—were sunk without the loss of a British ship.

(The enemy destroyer “already scuttled” in Rombaks Fiord vide paragraph 40 may have been abandoned after the attack by the 2nd Destroyer Flotilla on 10th April, 1940.)

68. Our casualties also were comparatively small—28 killed, 55 wounded, while the casualties amongst enemy destroyers with their complement of 280 each must have been very heavy.

69. I cannot speak too highly of the vigour and determination with which our destroyers went into the attack—they had to bear the brunt of the enemy's defence, and it was only by the skilful handling of their ships that they avoided receiving heavy damage from gunfire and torpedo.

70. Our destroyers enjoyed a tactical advantage in their ability to fire a heavy armament on forward bearings.

71. The enemy reports made by WARSPITE'S aircraft were invaluable. I doubt if ever a ship-borne aircraft has been used to such good purpose as it was during this operation. In addition the aircraft bombed and sank an enemy submarine.

72. Apart from the effective fire developed by WARSPITE her presence undoubtedly gave great confidence to our own destroyers and put fear into the hearts of the enemy, who must have realised that they were caught like rats in a trap.

73. The precision and coolness with which WARSPITE was handled during the approach, and when both main and secondary armament were engaging the enemy was typical of the Commanding Officer—Captain V. A. C. Crutchley, V.C., D.S.C.

(Sgd.) W. J. WHITWORTH,
*Vice-Admiral Commanding.
Battle Cruiser Squadron.*

*Commander-in-Chief,
Home Fleet.*

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