

S.N.O.(L) that Windsor Castle had been captured with negligible opposition,* that enemy native troops were surrendering, that the advance was continuing and that own troops were mopping up in this area. This was followed by a further report at 0640 that the Commando was reorganising in Windsor Castle area preparatory to advancing on Diego Suarez North. At about 0615 landing craft from ROYAL ULSTERMAN proceeded towards Blue Beach, and when close off shore machine-gun fire could be heard but no flashes were seen. Shortly afterwards troops were seen landing, and communication was established at 0705 by Aldis, and I was informed that the landing craft had been machine-gunned on the way in, but that Army units were now moving inland. S.N.O.(L) was informed at 0723 that landing had been effected.

17. During this period LAFOREY was anchored ready to give any bombardment support required.

18. DEVONSHIRE's signal reporting ROMNEY cutting mines and that the anchorage could not be safe until 1000 was received at 0653. From my appreciation of the mine situation, I informed DEVONSHIRE at 0745 that mines were unlikely South West of line Nosi Famaho to Mangoaka, and that the Southern part of the anchorage was clear of mines. This signal was passed to S.N.O.(L) by DEVONSHIRE at 0805.

19. At this time KEREN was seen to be entering harbour astern of minesweepers. When the sweepers reached the area Nosi Famaho to Mangoaka Point a number of mines were cut, and LAFOREY weighed and proceeded to sink mines by machine-gun fire.

20. At 0901 I closed KEREN to the South Westwards of the mined area and reported the situation by loud hailer, informing F.O.C. Force "F" of the existence of the minefield, that at least six mines had been cut in the last sweep, and that operations were continuing. There was, however, a narrow channel through the minefield marked by yellow and black dan buoys which I was confident was clear.

21. At 0817 I had ascertained from Blue Beach Signal Station, which had been set up 7 cables from Basse Point, that the beach was suitable for landing M.T., S.N.O.(L) being informed; and at 0849 I offered to take BACHAQUERO through the minefield to the vicinity of JJ, preparatory to her being swept in to Blue Beach. S.N.O.(L) however replied at 0910 that no beach was yet suitable for her, and told me to anchor, which I did at 0920.

22. About 1030 minesweepers were widening the channel in the minefield, and cut at least 18 mines within a few minutes. As some of these were drifting towards BACHAQUERO and ROYAL ULSTERMAN, LAFOREY weighed and helped to sink them using 2 four-barrelled machine-guns and rifles. Several were sunk but none exploded. At 1138 AURICULA struck a mine and was holed forward.

23. At this time all mines still floating had drifted clear of ships, and LAFOREY was proceeding up channel to a suitable bombardment position close to JJ where I anchored at noon.

24. At 1215 AURICULA was still drifting out of control and down by the bows, with 2 minesweepers standing by. She informed me that her First Lieutenant was in command and her Captain wounded and disembarked.

25. At 1232 I asked AURICULA if she had all the assistance she required, to which her reply was "No, think tow stern first possible". As LIGHTNING had been ordered to complete with fuel at 1315 I instructed her to close AURICULA before oiling and assist, and that if she was salveable she should be towed to a lee anchorage.

26. At 1300 three enemy Potez 63 twin-engined reconnaissance bombers appeared over the anchorage but remained at a respectful distance without attacking any ship, flying off in the direction of Windsor Castle.

27. During the period 1100-1330 the Commando had been advancing steadily with little opposition and at 1335 informed S.N.O.(L) that they expected to reach Diego Suarez soon.

28. BACHAQUERO proceeded through the minefield swept channel about 1330 and went inshore to Red Beach with a minesweeper ahead of her.

29. At 1408 and 1424 two large explosions, which were definitely not mines, were seen half a mile North East of the ship. It is now suspected that they were large shell fired from some shore battery using Windsor Castle O.P. as observer.

30. At 1330 I was informed that machine-gun fire from the observation tower on Windsor Castle summit was being a nuisance, and at 1526 29 rounds were fired at the O.P. which then hoisted the white flag. A signal was sent by light "Descendez ou nous continuerons" and I ask the Beach Station whether the French were coming down, to which the reply was "Yes." However they changed their minds and returned, and at 1658 F.O.O.3 asked me to re-engage, and a further 36 rounds were fired; a direct hit was made on the living quarters just below the summit. The crew of the tower was seen to come out and disappear over the lee side. LIGHTNING took over the shoot at 1732.

31. LAFOREY then proceeded to the main anchorage and fuelled from EASEDALE. On completion at 0120/6th, anchored in the South West of the anchorage and set A/S watch.

32. At 0600 returned to the bombardment billet close to JJ, and was informed that a French sloop in English Bay was firing on our troops advancing on Antsirane; F.O.O.2 could not see this target and F.O.O.1 was in Diego Suarez, and it was not until 0804 that he obtained transport to take him to observe.

33. At 0843 he was in position and informed me that the fires caused by INDOMITABLE's air attack were out and the battle ensign still flying. At 0855 LAFOREY opened fire and fired 86 rounds at the sloop. A number of these were reported very close, one hit was seen, and at 0930 F.O.O.1 was asked for general effect. He reported that the bridge was on fire and the ammunition exploding, but that there

Admiralty footnote —

* It ultimately transpired that the complete eviction of the defenders of Windsor Castle was not accomplished until the morning of D 2.