

for inshore work off the beaches. Very few of such inshore craft could be available during the day and the main effort was concentrated on maintaining the flow of Personnel Vessels to Dunkirk at the rate of 2 every $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours. After a good start during the night 26th/27th the effect of enemy action against these transports was felt. Between sailings timed 0300/27 and 1500/27, no less than 5 transports were shelled and returned to United Kingdom without making the trip. In addition MONA ISLE was damaged by shell fire and QUEEN OF THE CHANNEL was bombed and sank during the early hours of the 28th. As a result the Vice-Admiral, Dover, reported to the Admiralty that the normal channel, Dover to Dunkirk, was impracticable in daylight owing to fire from shore batteries extending from Les Hemmes to Gravelines. Zuydecoote Pass had to be used instead and consequently the distance run for the round trip increased from 80 miles to 172 resulting in a general slowing up of traffic. This route had to be used before it could be swept. Work was also commenced to sweep a channel from the North Goodwin to the Ruytingen Pass and thence into the Dunkirk Roads, thus shortening the round trip from 172 miles to 108.

4. The S.N.O. Dunkirk, with naval beach and pier party of 12 officers and 160 ratings, plus communication staff, left Dover in WOLF-HOUND at 1345, and were attacked by dive bombers at half-hour intervals between 1600 and 1800, on the voyage to Dunkirk.

5. During the day preparations were advanced for embarkation from beaches in the La Panne-Dunkirk area, as such matters as crews, fuel and general organisation were taken in hand. Five Personnel Vessels routed to start in daylight completed the round trip during the 27th and lifted a total of 3,952. In addition 17 drifters of the Dover Command sailed from Dover for the Malo Beach, and during the night lifted 2,000 troops from the beach by ships' dinghies. During the day destroyer patrols had been established to the Northward to cover the passage of merchant ships between Dunkirk and the Downs, and the Admiralty asked Western Approaches to reinforce the Dover destroyers.

6. Commander-in-Chief, Nore, sailed 6 small skoots for the South Downs to co-operate in Dunkirk, and sailed 4 skoots loaded with Army stores direct to Dunkirk. In the evening Naval Officer-in-Charge, Ramsgate, was asked to take over the fuelling and despatching of all small power boats with the attendant pulling boats forming the inshore flotilla. Some unnecessary delays occurred at this stage as the majority of Naval Authorities were directing the small craft for Dunkirk to be routed to Dover, although the Vice Admiral, Dover, had asked for the Downs to be their destination. Once despatched by the Authorities no communication with these vessels was possible until they arrived at their destination, and so the requirements of assembling these craft at the Downs or Ramsgate were in many cases delayed by as much as 24 hours or more since during the night misfortune befell many tows that came adrift due to moderate weather or collisions and the business of rounding them up could not be effected until daylight.

7. The Vice Admiral had intended to maintain a destroyer at Dunkirk as a W/T link, but

the S.N.O., on arrival, decided that conditions at Dunkirk made this impossible.

8. At 2025 the Vice Admiral, Dover, received a Most Immediate message from the S.N.O., Dunkirk, who had just reached his station, as follows: "Port consistently bombed all day, and on fire. Embarkation possible only from beaches East of harbour A.B.C.D. Send all ships and passenger ships there to anchor. Am ordering WOLF-HOUND to load there and sail. T.O.O.* 2005/27." Meanwhile Vice Admiral, Dover, had asked the Commander-in-Chief, Nore, to send every available shallow draught power boat, capable of ferrying from beaches to ships lying off the beaches Eastward of Dunkirk, stocked with fuel and provisions for two days; this move being made with a view to saving time by cutting out the passage to, and subsequent reorganisation, at Ramsgate, prior to proceeding to the French Coast. It should be noted at this time (2000/27) there were no pulling boats, cutters or whalers immediately available for attendance on Power Boats. A further signal: "Please send every available craft to beaches East of Dunkirk immediately. Evacuation tomorrow night is problematical. T.O.O. 1958/27" was received from S.N.O. Dunkirk.

Later that evening a report was received from 2 Military Officers from G.H.Q. which suggested that the situation of the B.E.F. was precarious and it was possible that the enemy might succeed in cutting off this force from Dunkirk. This report appeared to confirm the results of air reconnaissance, which indicated that German armoured units were operating to the south of Dunkirk. Since it appeared that evacuation might well be strictly limited, both in regard to numbers and time available for the operation, it was decided to concentrate every effort in sending over as many craft as possible to the beaches without delay. Had the situation appeared to be less critical, an organised flow of large and small craft working in reliefs would have been arranged.

9. On receipt of these signals from S.N.O. Dunkirk, all available forces were diverted to the beaches, the Personnel Ships to the beach, code letters A.B.C. and D., the destroyers on patrol being diverted to La Panne. Destroyers that were working off Dunkirk were ordered to divert the Personnel Ships going into Dunkirk to lay off the beaches and the smaller craft such as drifters and motor boats were ordered to be used for ferrying troops from the beach to the larger ships. Two important strings of boats being towed by a tug were lost in the night through the tows being run down and cut in half, the boats being scattered.

10. As a result of the above action there were assembling off the beaches 2 transports, 9 destroyers, 4 minesweepers, CALCUTTA, 17 drifters and a few skoots, and all the ships were ordered to use their own boats for ferrying as none of the inshore flotilla had arrived. From signals received it appeared that the situation was desperate, that little could be lifted direct from the Port of Dunkirk and that the maximum effort must be made from the beaches. Commander-in-Chief, Nore, at this stage provided additional reinforcements of minesweepers and paddlers. During the

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