

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 Tranoy 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.