

MASHOBRA. These boats were, however, reported as unfit for action—a common complaint among all power boats during the expedition but perhaps excusable in this particular case, seeing the hard work the MASHOBRA had recently carried out.

It had been decided to land the French troops of the First Flight on a small beach east of Orneset.

The actual attack upon Narvik was to be supported by a Polish advance on the Ankenes Peninsula in the direction of Beisford, through which ran the one road affording a line of retreat to the enemy.

6. The operation began at the appointed time of 2340 on May 27th. My Flag was flying in the CAIRO, the CURLEW in which I had intended it to be worn having been sunk the previous afternoon. General Auchinleck and General Bethouart accompanied me. The ships proceeded independently to their stations, effort being made to conceal the intention of concentrating off Narvik until as late as possible. The bombardment preceding the landing by ships' fire and that of 75 mm. battery ashore was effective and the troops landed from the A.L.C.s and M.L.C.s without meeting the serious resistance so many had thought inevitable. The landing took place practically at one point, the training of the soldiers enabling them, as at Bjervik, to open out and obtain cover without apparent difficulty. The subsequent transportation of troops was carried out as fast as the limited means available allowed, local craft being used to a limited extent in the later stages. Two tanks were landed at Taraldvik from M.L.C.s but when ashore found the sand and mud too soft and were immobilised for some time. By soon after midnight, a battalion of the Foreign Legion and one of the Norwegian Infantry (the Narvik Battalion) with two tanks were ashore and had made good progress. The first detachment of the second Battalion of the Legion had been landed, and the remainder were being embarked and ferried across. A considerable rifle and machine-gun fire could be heard which marked the development of a counter-attack by the enemy which, however, was held by the French troops.

7. At 0420, the enemy aircraft put in their first appearance, some determined dive bombing attacks being made upon the ships. This was followed up in quick succession by high and dive bombing attacks, lasting from 0420-0626, the former by aircraft working singly and in formation. Ships for a considerable time escaped damage but only by manoeuvring at high speed in such a way as would have seriously reduced the effectiveness of bombarding and covering fire had the attack been delivered earlier. The success of these attacks, however, was largely due to the unfortunate fact that our fighters, most conspicuous and assiduous in the patrol work until 0400, were after that time fogbound on the Bardufoss Aerodrome, some 50 miles distant from the scene of battle. At 0620, CAIRO was hit by two light bombs of a pattern which fell all round her. One hit was just abaft "B" mounting, penetrating the deck and bursting among the supply party; the other hit the starboard .5 machine gun just abaft the signal deck, setting fire to the ammunition and gear in the vicinity of the gun. As a result, 8 were killed and 25 wounded. Of CAIRO's arma-

ment, only one mounting remained fully effective, two being out of action owing to the dangerous prematures being caused by the state of the guns owing to continuous firing. The ship also had considerable superficial damage to contend with and, incidentally, smartly dealt with by her fire and repair parties. I therefore determined to send her away and called a destroyer alongside to take off General Bethouart and Staff. It was also my intention to shift my Flag to STORK.

8. I had previously asked General Bethouart to let me know when he was satisfied that his troops were established and could dispense with naval aid, so that the number of ships in a confined area could be reduced. Before leaving the ship, General Bethouart told me that he was quite satisfied and that if he were allowed to retain two destroyers that was all he asked for. On this, I ordered C.S. 20 in COVENTRY and 2 destroyers to remain in support of the French forces and the remainder of the ships to withdraw to the westward.

9. After repelling the German counter-attack, the French continued their advance throughout the day and after a few somewhat doubtful messages had been received reports became reassuring until, by a message timed 2200, General Bethouart reported that Narvik, Fagernes and Forneset were in his hands, together with some 200 prisoners, a number subsequently increased to between 350-400.

10. The attack of the Poles on Ankenes had, after an initial setback, progressed well—a result largely due to the support received by the fire of the SOUTHAMPTON which was gratefully acknowledged.

11. That the carrying-out of this operation proved more simple than had been expected does not in my view detract in any degree from the credit due to General Bethouart for the soldierly way he had undertaken and carried out this attack, following that of Bjerkvik. He was good enough to give much credit to the naval assistance he had received. That, however, would always have been forthcoming to any force that had attempted the task.

SECTION VII.

THE EVACUATION.

1. On the night of 24/25th May, orders were received for the evacuation of Northern Norway and were contained in following message:—

"Naval Message to F.O., Narvik, from Admiralty.

Following from Chiefs of Staff.

His Majesty's Government has decided your forces are to evacuate Northern Norway at earliest moment. Reason for this is that the troops, ships, guns and certain equipment are urgently required for defence of United Kingdom. We understand from military point of view, evacuation operations will be facilitated if enemy forces are largely destroyed or captured. Moreover, destruction of railways and Narvik port facilities make its capture highly desirable.

Nevertheless, speed of evacuations once begun should be of primary consideration in order to limit duration maximum naval efforts.

2 Officers will be sent at once from United Kingdom to concert Evacuation plans with