

After waiting some ten minutes and seeing four of the scuttling charges go off I considered that all was well. I, therefore, returned to M.G.B.314 and told Sub. Lieut. Wynn in M.T.B.74 to take six of CAMPBELTOWN's crew, torpedo the lock gates at the Old Entrance and proceed back independently.

23. While in the Old Entrance we could hear the military demolition parties doing good work with surprising rapidity. Close by us the building containing the lock working mechanism was blown up, the debris wounding two men on board. This was followed by the pumping house and another shed in the vicinity which was set ablaze. The flames from this shed cast a lurid glow lighting up the adjacent waters and silhouetting craft in the river to the batteries on the opposite bank.

24. Having seen M.T.B.74 torpedo the lock gates at the Old Entrance and leave at high speed I proceeded in M.G.B.314 to see how the assault on the Old Mole was progressing. On leaving the Old Entrance, however, I could see that matters had fared badly there. The approaches were floodlit by searchlights from all directions and a deadly fire was being poured on the M.L.s still gallantly attempting to go alongside.

25. With accurate fire from our pom-pom M.G.B.314 twice silenced the pill box but it came to life again; we also tried to knock out some of the positions on the house tops but these were extremely difficult. At one stage the firing showed signs of decreasing and if only I could have rushed in a force reserve at that moment we might well have carried the positions that were so vital for our withdrawal. As it was I had to realise that at both the landing places the opposition was now getting the upper hand.

26. All this time M.G.B.314 was lying stopped about 100 yards off the Old Entrance and although fired on fairly continually by flak positions and hit many times she was by the Grace of God not set ablaze. On looking round the harbour, however, I counted about seven or eight blazing M.L.s and was forced to realise that M.G.B.314 was the only craft left in sight. In consequence of this a more concentrated fire was directed upon her so she dropped a naval smoke float while I called a council of war. No withdrawal signal had been sent and no contact made with the shore by W/T. There was still at least another half an hour before one could expect any of the landing party to reach the point of evacuation. I would have returned to the Old Entrance but I could see a heavy cross fire across this inlet and it appeared that enemy forces on both banks were shooting at each other. It was clearly impossible for M.G.B.314 to return. With some thirty to forty men on board and her decks piled with seriously wounded I decided at 0250 that she was in no position to take off the soldiers we had landed. It was unlikely that M.G.B.314 would survive another five minutes with the fire that was then being concentrated in her direction and so I left at high speed.

27. When abreast of the southernmost Mole M.G.B.314 passed another surviving M.L. and I instructed her to follow and laid smoke for her. During their withdrawal both craft were

floodlit by searchlights and subjected to intense cross fire from both banks of the river. On passing Les Morees Tower the coastal artillery opened fire on them and continued to straddle them with near misses until in the vicinity of Le Chatelier Shoal about four miles off the land. Splinters from a nearby shell caused further casualties on board M.G.B.314, killing her pom-pom gunlayer.

28. Just when we were beginning to get out of the searchlights M.G.B.314 came upon an armed trawler which opened an uncomfortably heavy fire upon her but fortunately she did no serious damage.

29. After another ten minutes I came across M.L.270 who was steering from aft. She seemed capable of doing 15 knots so we went on together. After a further ten minutes a short action was seen to take place to the north westward between what appeared to be a small vessel firing tracer and a larger vessel, but I altered to the southward to keep clear.

30. At about 0330 a further action was seen to take place to the south westward between heavier forces.

31. I passed position Y at 0430 and continued towards position T at 12 knots in view of possible interference by the 5 enemy torpedo boats.

32. When it got light I reduced to 8 knots and M.L.270 opened out to 3 miles. With the daylight the atmosphere seemed to clear, and the visibility again becoming extreme, I saw another M.L. some way astern. I therefore stopped and altered round to close her. A few minutes later ATHERSTONE and TYNEDALE appeared over the horizon. I had several very seriously wounded on board and more than a dozen less seriously wounded, so I immediately went alongside ATHERSTONE to transfer them and make up the M.G.B.'s crew, of whom only four seamen remained, with volunteers from the ATHERSTONE.

33. M.G.B.314 had been holed in the starboard side of the fore peak and the water was gaining slowly but it seemed probable that this could be kept in hand.

34. ATHERSTONE and TYNEDALE had with them two other M.L.s Nos. 446 and 156. As soon as all the wounded had been transferred I proceeded with these two, M.G.B.314 and M.L.270, transferring myself to ATHERSTONE.

35. At about 0745 a Heinkel 115 appeared and stayed with us for about 20 minutes—as soon as he had gone a Beaufighter made contact which considerably improved the situation. However, a quarter of an hour later a Junkers 88 arrived; he was at once attacked and rammed by the Beaufighter.

36. At 0906 H.M.S.s CLEVELAND and BROCKLESBY* joined and I placed my force under the command of H.M.S. CLEVELAND who was the senior officer present.

* Admiralty footnote: H.M.S.s CLEVELAND and BROCKLESBY were allocated as reinforcements for the return passage.