

the 5 torpedo boats previously located in St. Nazaire had been located at Nantes p.m. 25th March. At 1718 I received Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth's signal timed 1704/27 stating that these torpedo boats had again been reported in the neighbourhood of St. Nazaire and might be met. This had to be considered as they constituted a superior force. As however, the submarine had apparently not as yet got a report through, and as we had not been sighted from the air it still seemed probable that our presence was unknown, and there seemed no reason for any change of plan due to the threat which these torpedo boats constituted.

12. At 2000 I stopped and transferred to M.G.B. 314 with the Military Force Commander*. The M.L.s and CAMPBELTOWN were formed up into Special Cruising Order No. 3 and were taken towards position Z at 12 knots, with ATHERSTONE and TYNE-DALE spread on either beam.

13. At 2200 STURGEON's† light was sighted right ahead and we passed within hailing distance at 2215. After passing STURGEON, TYNE-DALE and ATHERSTONE continued on their patrol. Mist came down and visibility became poor down to about 2 miles.

14. From about midnight gun flashes were seen in the distance to the north east. At about 0030 on 28th March when still 12 miles off it was obvious that considerable air activity was in progress as gun flashes extended over a wide arc together with a considerable flak.

15. No definite land was sighted until about 0045 when in the vicinity of Le Chatelier Shoal the northern shore could be dimly discerned. CAMPBELTOWN acting as guide was ordered to steer 050° and M.G.B. 314 thus freed was able to alter course freely to obtain ranges of the shore by R.D.F. and also to run off to either side to obtain soundings. A considerable northerly set was experienced so that the course of 050° was held until Les Morees Tower was passed about two cables to port at about 0125.

16. Up till our arrival at Les Morees Tower no searchlights had been used and we had obviously been undetected. But at this time one searchlight from No. 3 Heavy Coastal Battery was switched on down the Charpentier Channel. The warning had evidently been given and this was the signal for all the searchlights on both banks of the river to be switched on. From that moment the entire force was floodlit but for what seemed like five minutes no fire was opened.

17. During this time we made our bogus identity to the shore signal station at No. 3 Battery and signalled in German that we were "proceeding up harbour in accordance with instruction". On receipt of this signal some of the searchlights switched out but we were then called up from the south entrance and passed a similar message. While this was in progress, however, the force was fired on by light flak from one position so we made the signal for "a vessel considering herself to be

fired on by friendly forces". This stopped him for a bit. At this time we must have been recognised as definitely hostile as we were suddenly fired on heavily and the action became general. It is difficult to describe the full fury of the attack that was let loose on both sides, the air became one mass of red and green tracer travelling in all directions, most of it going over. It did not appear that any of the shore surface* batteries opened fire although the rear portion of the line may have been fired on by them. As soon as the fire was opened a flak ship was observed right ahead and she opened fire from her bridge with some small automatic weapon. Due to the very accurate firing by our pom-pom the flak ship fire was ineffective and was soon silenced although it was necessary to pass uncomfortably close to her.

18. We passed the Old Breakwater Light at about 1½ cables and then sheered off to starboard while the CAMPBELTOWN continued into her objective. We lost her for a while in the glare of the searchlights but at 0134 she struck the lock and we saw a burst of flame on her fo'c'sle, this however seemed to die away after a minute or two and we could only see her Oerlikons firing hard.

19. While M.G.B. 314 hauled round preparatory to going into the land M.L. 160 opened an accurate fire with her 3 pdr. on the flak positions to the east of CAMPBELTOWN and on her starboard bow and silenced them. The leading M.L. of the starboard column, M.L. 192, was the first to be hit and beached herself against the Old Mole ablaze from end to end. It is not known accurately what happened to those in the starboard column following her but some of them anyhow probably succeeded in landing their troops safely in the Old Entrance. At this stage it appeared that the situation was being got under control. Firing had temporarily decreased and was mostly confined to the flak positions on the house tops.

20. The port column, however, was less fortunate. The leading boat, M.L. 447, grounded while still ten feet off the jetty in the face of a withering fire from a pill box on the jetty and flak from the house tops. She attempted to go astern out of it but the M.L. was set ablaze almost at once. The soldiers and crew were most gallantly rescued by M.L. 160.

21. While this was going on we in M.G.B. 314 ran into the Old Entrance and landed Colonel Newman on the south side, who with his staff, hurried off to join his men. Finding one M.L. to be following us in we hailed her to go alongside CAMPBELTOWN's stern which she did and was seen to shove off with a considerable number of her crew. At the same time M.G.B. 314 turned round and secured by the north side of the Old Entrance and received on board some 20 to 30 men from the CAMPBELTOWN.

22. M.T.B. 74 then came in and reported for instructions. I had in mind using her to torpedo the CAMPBELTOWN if the latter's scuttling charges failed. On landing therefore I went and examined the block ship from the dock side and hailed her but she appeared to be deserted.

* Admiralty footnote: The Military Force Commander was Lieutenant Colonel A. C. Newman.

† The Submarine STURGEON was employed as a navigational mark vessel.

* Admiralty footnote: i.e. anti-ship guns as opposed to A.A. guns.