

mander F. H. Sandford, D.S.O., R.N., the staff officer you were good enough to lend me, who was mainly responsible for the smoke screen organisation; and to Lieutenant H. F. Witherby, R.N.V.R., my staff intelligence officer, whose knowledge of the enemy's coast and close association with air reconnaissance work of the 61st (Naval) Wing were invaluable.

9. The elements were, however, against us—for despite all these preparations, strong northerly winds, with rough seas, precluded all possibility of the enterprise up to a period when the conjunction of darkness and tide, in its turn, demanded postponement until the second week of the present month.

10. This enforced period of inaction was occupied in perfecting and testing the arrangements, and, above all, in the preparation of a second blockship, which on your representation, was ordered to be prepared and fitted out by His Majesty's Dockyard, Chatham.

11. The conjunction of darkness and tide made the night of the 9th-10th May the first favourable night of the new period. By good fortune the weather conditions on the 9th gave every indication of promise, and accordingly on the afternoon of the 9th the operations were put in progress, firstly by the passage of "Sappho" to Dover, and later by the passage of both blockships, with their supporting and escorting forces, from Dover to Dunkirk. It was at first doubtful whether "Sappho" could be completed in time, but Chatham Dockyard made great efforts, and "Sappho" arrived at Dover with several hours in hand.

12. For days preceding the operation, rain, cloud, and mist had prevented more than the scantiest air reconnaissances, but towards sunset on the 9th, *i.e.*, when the blockships were already steaming eastwards, an air reconnaissance announced that all the buoys off Ostend had apparently been removed. At considerable risk of having to land after dark, Squadron-Commander Ronald Graham, D.S.O., D.S.C., himself at once went out, returned safely, and confirmed the report.

This new move on the enemy's part had to be countered; we accordingly arranged to lay a special (calcic-phosphide) light-buoy of our own, which subsequently made a satisfactory departure point for the blockship and smoke screens.

13. The weather conditions as night advanced continued excellent, wind N. by W., sky clear, atmosphere good, both for air work and navigation, sea smooth enough for the small craft to operate, barometer steady, and conditions likely to remain stable.

14. "Vindictive" and "Sappho" arrived in Dunkirk Roads in good time, disembarked their surplus crews, and then proceeded with their escorts at the appointed time in the programme. "Sappho," however, had scarcely left the anchorage than a man-hole joint in the side of her boiler blew out, reducing her speed to about six knots, and therefore putting her participation that night out of the question.

15. This very serious reduction of blocking material required consideration whether or no it was advisable to proceed with the operation.

I decided to continue with "Vindictive," and signalled to Commander Godsall that I had every confidence he would do his best without "Sappho." I also informed you by W/T of my decision.

16. This done, I proceeded on board "Faulknor" (Commander Henry G. L. Oliphant, M.V.O., D.S.O.), leader of the off-shore supports, to overtake the other forces, who, in accordance with orders, were already well on their way to their various stations. Commander Clarke and Lieutenant-Commander Sandford accompanied me in "Faulknor" to carry out staff work, and were of great assistance to me in conducting the operations.

17. After the sudden removal of the buoys, and in the knowledge that nine enemy destroyers had been seen in the offing late that evening, I had fully expected enemy interference with our plan before reaching the place off Ostend where we should lay our buoy and spread the small craft. But no, nothing occurred. The enemy star shells and "flaming onions" fired intermittently from the coast during the approach were evidently only part of his new searching routine. Once again his preparations against surprise included no patrol craft in the offing.

By 1.30 a.m. all preliminary dispositions had been completed, and the (advanced) in-shore forces, *i.e.*, the C.M.B. and M.L. divisions, sent in to carry out their various duties.

18. One new feature of the present plan was that there should be no *preliminary* bombardments or air raid; we were to make no attacks until our sea force were discovered by the enemy.

19. At 1.35 a.m. there was still no firing from the shore, but a searchlight lit up, and commenced to search. The C.M.B.'s had arrived, and were running their smoke screens. The noise of their engines, and those of the M.L.'s approaching on their heels, was, of course, carried ashore by the breeze.

At 1.43 a.m. I gave the pre-arranged signal to "open fire," which was immediately responded to by the monitors, siege guns, and the air squadrons. Bombs and shells, whose bursts could be seen over the top of our smoke screen, were undoubtedly giving the enemy a warm time, and constituting a protection to the small craft inshore.

20. Shortly before this, I had noticed with some anxiety the gathering of light-drifting "clouds"—but good-sized gaps, through which stars shone, could be seen at 1.45 a.m., when the sky became completely overcast, and five minutes later we were enveloped in a thick sea fog which, for the next all-important hour, reduced our means of keeping in touch with events to sound alone.

21. I felt that we could hope for no more air or monitor bombardments, and that thus deprived of their valuable support, the small craft in-shore would suffer in proportion, but fortunately this was not the case. The fog proves to have been merely a local patch, not extending to the monitors to the westward, and was also sufficiently low-lying to enable the airmen to continue their attacks between it and the true cloud system at some 10,000 feet altitude.

To realise these conditions, and the darkness due to absence of moon, and to know that the Royal Air Force carried out its whole programme is, in itself, a very high tribute to the efficiency of the air squadrons, who, under the orders of Brigadier-General Charles L. Lambe, C.M.G., D.S.O., took part in the operations. All our aeroplanes eventually returned to their aerodromes; some landed well to the westward