

54. The four destroyers then formed an Anti-submarine screen and preparations were made to repel the attack of the twelve aircraft which were still in sight to the northward. This attack did not develop although IVANHOE reported being bombed on passage up the Fiord.

55. I ordered destroyers in company to be prepared to transfer wounded to WARSPITE under cover of darkness at 2230. At 2027 I made the following report:—

“Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet (Repeated) Admiralty from Vice Admiral Commanding Battle Cruiser Squadron.

My 1742. I am withdrawing with WARSPITE, PUNJABI, HERO, ICARUS, FOXHOUND and FORESTER when wounded are collected.

BEDOUIIN and KIMBERLEY remaining to assist ESKIMO and COSSACK. Have ordered HOSTILE and IVANHOE to support them.

Seven enemy destroyers and one submarine have been destroyed. There are now no enemy warships at Narvik. No shore batteries were observed but a Howitzer on the hill behind Narvik and a field gun on the foreshore were reported to have been firing. Thirteen merchant ships in the harbour, half appeared German. Our destroyers being in occupation of the harbour these were not sunk. Formations of twelve enemy aircraft approached about 1830 but no attack has as yet been made on WARSPITE, though IVANHOE was bombed while on patrol off Tjel Sundet. Damage to ships and casualties will be reported when received. Some German prisoners have been taken, details of which will be reported later.”

56. Reports which were received, however, indicated that a number of wounded remained in the destroyers at Narvik. Accordingly, at 2050 I ordered course to be reversed and signalled to COSSACK at Narvik:—

“All wounded are to be collected in PUNJABI to rendezvous with me in 17° East at midnight.”

57. At 2210 I made the following signal:—

“Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, (Repeated) Admiralty from B.C. One.

My impression is that enemy forces in Narvik were thoroughly frightened as a result of to-day's action and that the presence of WARSPITE was the chief cause of this.

I recommend that the town be occupied without delay by the main landing force.

I intend to visit Narvik again to-morrow Sunday in order to maintain the moral effect of the presence of WARSPITE and to accept the air and submarine menace involved by this course of action.”

In making this signal I knew that the troop convoys making for Vaagsfiord were at sea and envisaged them being diverted direct to Narvik.

58. Meanwhile I proceeded to the Narvik area. On arrival all destroyers in company having wounded were brought alongside WARSPITE in turn to effect the transfer while the remainder carried out A/S patrol in the vicinity.

59. Transferring the wounded took a very long time, and I was acutely aware of the possibility of submarine and air attack. As regards the former I felt that Ofot Fiord had become too unhealthy an area for a submarine, witness FOXHOUND'S attack and position of submarine. As regards air attack WARSPITE was ready to go ahead at any time and slip destroyers alongside, and if air attack did develop it did not matter where it took place. In any event WARSPITE was there to support the destroyers who had done such grand work, and I was not disposed to abandon them in their distress.

60. IVANHOE had, while proceeding up the Fiord, been intercepted by a Norwegian vessel on board which were survivors of HARDY* and British Merchant ships. The opportunity was taken to distribute these survivors numbering about 200 men to various destroyers.

61. Several large fires and explosions were seen in Narvik nine miles to the Eastward.

62. I received a report from COSSACK that the condition of some wounded was so serious as to make transfer by destroyer inadvisable and I therefore at 0250 closed Narvik to effect the transfer by boat.

63. During WARSPITE'S approach white Verey Lights were fired by a Merchant vessel in the harbour. This signal was presumed to be a warning to whatever shore defences were manned.

64. At 0326 COSSACK managed to draw clear of the wreck and was berthed alongside WARSPITE.

65. When all wounded were embarked I ordered withdrawal, the following dispositions being made:—

KIMBERLEY and IVANHOE to remain at Narvik.

ESKIMO accompanied by BEDOUIIN and COSSACK by FORESTER to proceed to Skjel Fiord.

WARSPITE and remaining destroyers to proceed to the westward.

66. At 1027 in reply to Admiralty message timed 0913/14th April asking for an estimate of strength of enemy in Narvik area the following reply was sent:—

“Admiralty (Repeated) Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, AURORA, SOUTHAMPTON from B.C. One.

Your 0913. Information from Norwegian sources estimate 1,500 to 2,000 troops in Narvik. German Naval Officer prisoner states that there are many more than this, but I think this statement was made with intent to deceive. He also states that guns on shore are being positioned with the main object of opposing a landing but COSSACK aground in Narvik Bay for 12 hours yesterday was not seriously molested.

I am convinced that Narvik can be taken by direct assault, without fear of meeting serious opposition on landing. I consider that the main landing force need only be small but that it must have the support of Force B or one of similar composition. A special requirement being ships and destroyers with the best available A.A. armaments.”

* Admiralty footnote: HARDY was lost in the first engagement at Narvik three days previously.