

ENCLOSURE No. 2 TO DOVER LETTER OF 27<sup>th</sup> July 1940.

AN/D/1473

*Return to M 014793/40*

From ... THE COMMANDING OFFICER, H.M.S. "KEITH".

Date ... 24th May, 1940.

No ... 4/32

To ... THE FLAG OFFICER COMMANDING DOVER.  
(Copy to: Captain (D), 19th Destroyer Flotilla,  
H.M.S. "Sandhurst".)

WAR DIARY - 23RD MAY, 1940.

At 1334/23 May, Captain (D) 19 in "Keith" sailed from Dover for Boulogne at high speed to comply with Flag Officer Commanding Dover's signal 1315/23. H.M.S. "Whitshed" preceded "Keith" into harbour and was alongside Quai Chancy, Boulogne, on "Keith's" arrival at 1500.

2. At this time five French destroyers were observed bombarding the shore in the region of Cape d'Alprech lighthouse from seaward. Intermittent rifle and machine gun firing was heard in the town. About 250 soldiers were gathered in a body on the quay and a further considerable number of Welsh Guards in a small wood on the North quay. Small bodies of troops could be seen defending points in the town.

3. At 1500, Brigadier Fox-Pitt, commanding military forces, came aboard for conference with Captain (D) 19 and "Whitshed". It was explained that the troops (pioneers) on Quai Chancy were demoralised and of no fighting value. A military situation report was made by the Commanding Officer Troops as Buttercup's 1530/23 to War Office. In view of Admiralty's 1422 from War Office it was decided to embark no combatant troops in "Whitshed".

4. At 1515 "Whitshed" was ordered to proceed outside the harbour, to take charge there and remain in V/S touch, with wounded only on board. It was noticed that the French destroyers had shifted target to the ridge on the North side of the quay.

5. At this time Commander H.C.P. Welman in charge of demolition parties came aboard and reported that demolitions were already partially completed. A signal from Admiralty was received later giving instructions to carry out demolitions forthwith and this was passed to Commander Welman.

6. At 1526, a German army reconnaissance plane was seen overhead but our fighters did not see it.

7. At 1655, Admiralty's signal T.O.O. 1630 was received ordering embarkation of troops of non-military value but the Brigadier advised against this as it might undermine the morale of the fighting troops.

8. At 1700, a Belgian officer came aboard and reported that Captain S.E. Thomas (S.T.O. Boulogne) was lying dead ashore. Lieutenant C.R.G. Wilkinson, Royal Navy, and a party of four ratings recovered his body.

WAR DIARY - 23RD MAY, 1940.  
 (Commanding Officer, H.M.S. "Keith's" No. of 31st May, 1940.)  
 -----

9. At this time the situation appeared to have eased considerably. At 1730, a Royal Marine signal post was sighted and reported that it was in contact with outposts. An aldis lamp and morse flag were landed for use of Brigade Headquarters.

10. At 1745, "Vimy" was ordered to come into harbour and shortly after she secured alongside "Keith" and embarked wounded. At this time "Keith" had about 50 wounded on board: less serious cases were passed into "Vimy".

11. At 1749, a signal was received from Flag Officer Commanding Dover T.O.O. 1723 ordering evacuation of all troops: Brigadier Fox Pitt had returned to his headquarters. Accordingly efforts were made to commence an orderly embarkation of the troops on the jetty. This operation was seriously delayed by the fact that the men paid no attention to the orders of their officers and an attempt was made to rush the gangway: it was noticed that some officers and men were under the influence of drink and that the majority were demoralised. Some 60 men were however embarked, some of them during the action described below.

12. At 1820 a large number of twin-engined bombers were seen approaching from the North but these were at once engaged by about twelve British fighters who broke up this attack and prevented all but a few machines from reaching their target. At the same time 24 Junkers 87 dive bombers were seen forming for an attack from the sun which they delivered on "Keith", "Vimy" and the quay unopposed in any way except by "Keith's" gunfire. A further attack was delivered on French and British destroyers at sea by another large formation. Some machines later attacked "Keith". One bomb fell on the jetty within three yards of the ship and wounded soldiers who were embarking. One German aircraft was shot down by "Keith", probably by 'X' gun.

13. As the first attack was being delivered a mortar opened fire on "Keith" from over the shoulder of a hill at a range of about 1200 yards and during the ensuing action scored a direct hit on the port side of the fore-castle deck, splinters from which killed one rating under cover and seriously wounded another.

14. At the same time machine gun and rifle fire from the hill side and houses on the North quay was opened on "Keith's" and "Vimy's" bridges at short range. Captain (D) 19, who had gone to the compass platform with the First Lieutenant to order barrage fire, was killed by bullets early in the action and the latter wounded in the leg. Lewis guns on the searchlight platform engaged the snipers when they could be seen. This was very difficult.

Other guns were engaging aircraft or were masked by "Vimy".

It was reported to "Keith" by First Lieutenant of "Vimy" that their Captain was dead. "Vimy" was ordered to slip and proceed out of harbour.

Machine gun fire on "Keith" rendered the compass platform untenable and penetrated deeply into the wheelhouse wounding officers and men taking cover from bombs.



WAR DIARY - 23RD MAY, 1940.  
(Commanding Officer, H.M.S. "Keith's" No. \_\_\_\_\_)

of 31st May, 1940.)

15. Under these conditions it was decided to leave harbour and at 1843 this was done by parting the forward wires and conning the ship from the chart house.

16. By this time bombing had ceased and all guns engaged the houses that appeared to be occupied by enemy forces on the North bank. It is believed that one machine nest was wiped out and the trench mortar put out of action. This bombardment in conjunction with "Whitshed" and "Vimy" appears to have had considerable effect and assisted subsequent operations enabling Commander Conder, who later gallantly took "Whitshed" alongside, to carry out further withdrawal without serious loss.

17. The ship made a starboard direct to the eleven fathom line as her degaussing cable had been severed in several places and the harbour was known to have been mined. She returned to Dover by the South Colbart route at high speed, easing to slow speed in the Folkestone Gate to bury Captain D.J.R. Simson, Royal Navy, Captain S.E. Thompson, Royal Navy, Able Seaman Charles Busby and five soldiers. The ship secured on "Vimy" at No.1 berth, Admiralty Pier, Dover at 2110.

18. In addition to the soldiers and wounded noted above "Keith" had aboard ten civilians, mostly women and children in possession of British papers and two officers and nineteen men of the demolition party who were having tea on board prior to the bombing.

19. Damage sustained included the following items:-

- (1) Degaussing cable severed.
- (2) Both masthead V/F lanterns smashed.
- (3) Forecastle deck split and dented in one place (between 60 and 61 Stations Port).
- (4) Many circuits broken by splinters.
- (5) Bridge superstructure, funnels, waste steam pipes, sanitary tank and port W/T insulating trunk holed in many places by explosive bullets and splinters.
- (6) Fore stay badly stranded.
- (7) Sounding boom smashed by bomb.
- (8) Log register smashed.
- (9) Engineer room autophone smashed.
- (10) Guard rails on starboard side of fore-castle bent.
- (11) Starboard flag lockers riddled: flags useless.
- (12) Hand rails of ladder severed.
- (13) Fore-castle fairleads smashed.
- (14) Wire hawsers badly cut.
- (15) Both mechanical semaphores damaged.
- (16) Both 10 inch signalling projectors need repair.
- (17) Boats' falls cut and boats holed.

20. Behaviour of Personnel.

Lieutenant G.J.A. Lumsden, Royal Navy, the Navigating Officer, shewed considerable courage, coolness and skill in piloting the vessel out of the harbour stern foremost at low

water .....

WAR DIARY - 23RD MAY, 1940.  
 (Commanding Officer, H.M.S. "Keith's" No. \_\_\_\_\_)

of 31st May, 1940.)

water under most trying conditions being still under machine gun fire 1000 yards from the shore.

Midshipman H.B. Poustie, R.N.R., was active in fighting with 'Y' gun's crew and showed considerable coolness and initiative in letting go and hauling in the sternwire.

Chief Yeoman of Signals Frederick Laister, C/J.62665, was conspicuous for his initiative, courage and devotion to duty during the withdrawal under fire. He assumed duty on the revolution telegraph in the early part of the withdrawal.

Able Seaman Walter Bowering, C/J.29837, and Able Seaman Ronald Chalk, C/SSX.28140, both acted in a cool and efficient manner as port telegraphman and quartermaster respectively whilst the ship was withdrawing with bullets continually bursting in the wheelhouse.

Able Seaman William Marshall, C/SSX.28196, was conspicuous for the way in which he continued to tend casualties in the wheelhouse and on the flag deck under the same conditions.

Able Seaman Thomas Cassidy, C/SSX.22123, was conspicuous for his leadership and energy in keeping his gun in action.

Able Seaman Robert Macaulay, C/J.24491, was conspicuous for his initiative in choice of target and his power of leadership in fighting his gun.

Able Seaman Thomas T. Asprey, C/J.114945, acted with courage and great devotion to duty whilst under fire in clearing the pom poms of jams and fighting his gun whilst other members of the crew were benumbed.

Able Seaman David Fossey, C/JX.148554, acted with considerable resource and energy in assisting the doctor throughout with the casualties.

Ordinary Seaman William Moore, C/JX.171200, took charge of his gun in his layer's absence and shot down one enemy aircraft.

The W/T Department under Chief Petty Officer Telegraphist Yuille carried out their duties efficiently in spite of the disturbance of heavy explosions.

The behaviour of personnel generally was excellent and was in no small measure due to the influence of their late Captain who took a great personal interest in their service and private lives: no cases of nerves or shell shock were noticed.

*B. Miller*

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER, R.N.R.

