

(Copy to A.C.O.S.)

To: Naval Officer-in-Charge
ABERDEEN.

H.M.S. Arab
ABERDEEN.
May 10th, 1940.

H.M.S. Arab arrived and anchored off Namsos town in company with the 15th A/S Striking Forces at 0200 Sunday 28th April, 1940. At 0245, "Arab" was ordered alongside H.M.S. "Carlisle" (C.S.20) to take off the remaining stores that the latter ship had brought from Scapa for the French. At 0400, cast off owing to air-raid.

0450 - Returned alongside and completed taking off stores.

0600 - Proceeded and made fast to Namsos wharf astern of French ammunition ship S/S "Saumur".

0730 - As no-one appeared to discharge these 40 tons of stores, I collected some British and French soldiers, who assisted my crew to discharge. At 11.45 High Bomber dropped 500 lb. bomb which exploded 50 yards from us abreast of S.S. "Saumur" on wharf, setting stores and ammunition on fire. Cast off from wharf at low water. At 1300 was ordered by "Carlisle" to take S/S "Saumur" in tow with H.M.S. "Angle" - the former had a wire around propeller and was aground. Before I got there, "Angle" had towed her off and did not need my help.

Proceeded to run my bows into burning wharf, left engines going slow ahead and ran two hoses over forecastle head to try and put out Ammunition Dump Fire. I signalled "Carlisle" that as "Angle" could manage the towing I would try and put out fire as "Arab" has good water pressure and no water was obtainable from the shore. "Carlisle" answered "Carry on".

1400. Heavy high bombing attack, 16 planes. 1500. No hope of putting out fire. I proceeded down fjord, put "Arab" alongside S/S "Saumur" as "Angle" had parted towing rope. Kept her in position while propeller was cleared. 1700 - "Brestois" (French destroyer) asked how long would "Saumur" be clearing propeller. 1715. Slipped "Saumur" when propeller was cleared. 1800. Another high bombing attack. Proceeded patrol in fjord. Reverberations from our A/S were coming back from the cliff side like shots from a gun.

Signalman Wiggins who was left on H.M.S. "Bittern" charging our Aldis batteries, returned via H.M.S. "Gaul". Returned Seaman Towers and Stratton to H.M.S. "St. Keenan". (These two men had been left on shore earlier on). Received message from H.M.S. "Carlisle" to put myself under French Destroyer "Brestois" orders. Order by latter vessel to embark French "Chasseurs Alpins" and put them on transport S/S "Aminois".

29th Monday 0300 - Finished embarking troops 0330 - Proceeded to find place under cliff at Hamnesshukken Mountain. (By this time my crew were exhausted through lack of sleep). H.M.S. "Aston Villa" was on patrol at Ornskaget, H.M.S. "Gaul" at Finsneset. 0430 - Heard German planes, got under way. 0500 - Attacked by high and dive bombers. 16 bombs were dropped, all near misses, mostly ahead and astern. Kept bombers on beam (this would be done as a rough idea could be obtained by watching the dive bombers diving from 10,000 ft. They usually flattened out at 3000 ft., and wheel was put hard over just before. Consider it was through only giving them the beam of the ship to aim at that saved "Arab". This attack damaged fan casting in engineroom, and also damaged rudder and propellor.

0700 - rejoined H.M.S. "Angle" and "Aston Villa" at Ormshaget. Attacked again. Ordered by Commander Congreve to relieve H.M.S. "Gaul" next morning. 1300 - Attacked again by divebombers. Proceeded up to Namsos. Sighted H.M.S. "Aston Villa" alongside wharf behind Hoo island, closed her and found most of her castings in the engineroom had been fractured by near misses.

Commander Congreve was busy, with the help of some Norwegians, in disguising "Aston Villa" with fir trees. Was ordered to proceed and find sheltered spot in the shadow of a cliff to give my men a rest as they had been on continuous watch for the last two days. Made fast alongside Kvarsodden cliff. 1600 - received message by launch from Army G.H.Q. that submarine had been sighted proceeding up Namsen Fjord towards Namsos. "Gaul" was bombed and a 15 ft. hole was blown in her bows, although her forward bulkhead was still holding. She had made fast in Kroken Bay. Cannot keep track of the number of air attacks made. They were coming over in flights of 6 to 9 every hour.

1700 - Bittern arrived. 2000 - "Bittern" cruising around Namsos Bay, joined her. Reported on board to her commander and placed myself under his orders. He suggested that "Arab" should lie off Maevraneset Point which is the west point of Namsos Bay, keeping a steady bearing with A/S Transmission. This day we had repeated attacks by high bombers and dive bombers as no other ships except trawlers were in Namsen Fjord until "Bittern" arrived at 2000. Was told by "Bittern" that in the morning when bombing commenced I should place "Arab" about 400 yards to the west of Bittern to get the best angle of fire for Lewis guns and Oerlikon as the dive bombers flattened out over "Bittern".

30th, Tuesday 0700 - Heavy dive bombing raid, 16 planes mostly attacking "Bittern". We were in a very good position to give them all our guns after they had dropped their bombs at "Bittern". These planes all attacked from the sun in the east. Could see Oerlikon shells bursting on planes. 0740 - Ordered by "Aston Villa" to close and assist her. Asked permission from "Bittern" who told me to carry on. 0915 - Close "Aston Villa" and embarked Commander Cogreve, who wanted to look at "Gaul". Proceeded down fjord. 1130 - Sighted "St. Goran" alongside cliff at Hamneshuken Mountain. Bomb had exploded on bridge killing Captain, Coxswain and two ratings. Crew had taken to boats. Proceeded alongside her life-boat in which were her wounded, her Carley floats contained the rest of her crew. Picked up wounded while heavy bombing was going on. Sergeant of the Royal Marines (who was only on board to supervise the transferring of Medical supplies from storeship to shore) badly wounded, shrapnel in back and losing blood and two ratings with slight wounds. Attempted to do as much as possible to dress the seriously wounded man with the limited supply from our medical chest. Proceeded and lay alongside 200 ft. cliff at the south side of Kroken bay. 1300 - Signalled destroyer "Janus" as she entered that urgent medical aid was required. Surgeon and Sick Berth Attendant arrived. Sent back two slightly wounded men. Commander Congreve also joined Janus for passage back to "Aston Villa". Surgeon remained in "Arab" with badly wounded Royal marine.

1500 - "Carlisle" arrived, signalled for boat to transfer Surgeon and royal Marine. Sent message to Admiral C.S.20 stating "Aston Villa" and "Gaul" disabled. "Arab"'s castings broken and propellor damaged. Would send my men to assist in shoring up "Gaul's" forward bulkhead. Received V/S message stating: "Enemy ships and submarines expected, keep a good look out day and night, and prepare to engage enemy".

1600 - Heavy bombing raids. Commenced to take Lewis guns up to top of cliff, land food, blankets etc. by boat to Kroken Bay, where a large cave was found. Decided to make this cave the lower base. Machine gunposts were built at cliff head, which commanded the entrance to Namsen Fjord and also Kroken bay, where "Gaul" was lying. Further machine gun positions were made 100 yards further in and up, overlooking the cliff. This is where I had the crew. As I still had some French stores on deck which were never landed, I took the liberty of opening same, finding automatic rifles and ammunition, a 60 m/m bomb-throwing mortar with bombs and detonators complete. When posts were finished, I had 6 Lewis guns, 2 Automatic Rifles and one bomb-thrower, the latter capable of throwing bombs 1500 yards. Also the 4 inch gun was loaded and put on a bearing covering the fjord entrance, the Oerlikon likewise. 2000 -

Carlisle and "Janus" left Namsen Fjord. Signalled former and reported, stating what a strong position I had ashore. Reply came back from Admiral C.S.20 - "Well done. Carry on". Set A/S Watch and W/T Watch on 1579 KCs as ordered by "Carlisle". Crew slept at machine gun posts, look-outs on duty. Wednesday 1st May - "Bittern" passed and asked if we were keeping A/S watch. Answered yes. 0500 "Angle" passed and gave verbal orders to destroy all A/S gear, dome and oscillator and land all on deck ready to be destroyed. Commander Congreve and his crew from "Aston Villa" had changed over to "Angle" to give the latter a rest (not much of a rest, as it turned out later.). "Angle" proceeded to sink "St. Goran" by gunfire [*Forbes: According to Lieutenant Alan Reid R.N.V.R. this was done by the "CAPE PASSARO"*] and then carried on with patrol outside fjord. 0530 - "Aston Villa" made fast about 100 yards south of "Arab". (The former had now the "Angle's" crew). Continuous bombing and machine gunning by High and Dive bombers who came over in flights of 6, 9 and 12 planes - 1200 - Bombs dropping all around. "Gaul" commenced to sink. The planes were now machine gunning our position and the valley. 1330 - "Gaul" sank. 1600 Called conference with Captains of "Gaul" and "Aston Villa". Decided that the three crews would man "Arab's" position ashore. 1700 - "Aston Villa" set on fire by direct hit from dive bomber. Luckily only a few of her crew were aboard. (H.M.S. "Bittern" hit by bomb and set on fire after being attacked all day). Rescued the wounded and transferred them to top of cliffs by means of stretchers made out of fir trees. Sub-Lieut. Burt, R.N.V.R. and three ratings wounded. 2000 - Jettisoned all A/S gear in 250 fathoms. "Aston Villa" on fire still, considered her magazine might blow up and damage "Arab". Requested permission from Commander Congreve to board but answer was: "Keep away, it is too dangerous". Decided to take Sub-Lieut. Lees, R.N.V.R., J. Nicholson and myself and try to save "Arab". Cut lines and proceeded to move. Had moved 100 yards when "Aston Villa" blew up. Proceeded alongside Kroken Bay. Destroyer "Griffin" had landed Surgeon to attend wounded. 2300 - Commenced embarking wounded, stores, guns and the three crews on board "Arab". Was told to do same with all despatch.

Thursday 2nd May 0200 - proceeded up Fjord, met fleet leaving, transported wounded, Aston Villa's and Gaul's crews, to H.M.S. "Griffin" proceeded down fjord, ordered to proceed to England. Decided I would keep well north as I was on my own and my speed was about 5/6 knots. 0500 - Clear of Namsen Fjord. 1000 - Speed 3 knots. Attacked by Heinkel 115 who signalled by V/S in plain language " Go east or be sunk". (Had sent out W/T message half an hour before reporting a friendly or captured cargo ship about 8 miles north was being escorted by sea plane, heading S.E.) Could not intercept her owing to lack of speed. A suitable answer was sent in reply. The pilot of this machine seemed a novice or else thought we had no ammunition left as he circled us closing towards us each time. He was keeping up a continuous fire with his two guns but I decided to hold my fire until he was closer. He banked at 800 yards just forward of the beam so opened fire with all Lewis guns and Oerlikon. Could see the H.E. Oerliker shells bursting on him. The Heinkel 115 came down about 2 miles astern of us but I did not attempt to save the crew. Proceeded well north, then south and west of Shetlands, arriving Scapa 1700 May 6th, Monday. Reported to Chief of Staff, watered and stored - 1930 - left Scapa.

Tuesday, May 7th 0800 arrived Aberdeen.

Report on A/S.

It was very difficult for efficient A/S work to be carried out in Fjords. (1) The reverberations come back very strong from cliff side: (2) Numerous false echoes owing to quick change in depth of water: (3) The best way to maintain a watch was by keeping the ship in a fixed position, the oscillator on a steady bearing, recorder running, and this gave steady

lines of non-subs; as soon as anything else crossed, it could be easily seen amongst the false echoes. This was proved by the use of service launches.

Aircraft

The old idea of only attacking from the stern is completely misleading. They attack from any direction, preferably from the sun. The High Bombers did not even bother about that: they dropped the bombs at 10,000 ft. The Dive Bombers made all their attacks from the sun, generally coming over at 12/15000 ft., passing away as if they had not seen us, and then coming down in a dive of about 800 to a height of about 3000 ft. dropping their bombs just before flattening out. These are the most difficult attacks to fend off, giving a very small target, and after flattening out they are over and past like a flash. The best position in a Fjord to withstand an attack by air is the shadow of a steep cliff, preferably at right angles to the sun, keeping the ship moving. 80% of the attacks were made from ahead and 20% from the stern: they never attacked from the beam, which I assume is because there is only the width of the ship to aim at. A mistaken idea is that zig-zagging is of no use with a speed below 13 knots. I consider that it was the saving of the "Arab". By carefully watching the dive bombers and putting the wheel hard over after they had commenced to dive, it is very hard for them to hit a small ship even at a height of 2000 ft. After the first plane has dropped her bombs (generally 2 only) which can be seen leaving the plane, bring the wheel hard over the other way. Bringing them on the beam also gives the chance of all guns to bear. Another way is to make fast in the shadow of a cliff so that no water is showing between ship and shore. This is a good hide out for the ship, and attacks can be made on planes before they suspect you are there. I found that the best thing to do in Namsen Fjord was to lie under the shadow of the cliffs on the east side in the morning and the west side in the evening, remaining on the latter side till the daily reconnaissance plane had been over at about 0300 and viewed everything: then we knew we had one hour before the bombers arrived, steamed across to the east side and remained under way there. The planes never attacked over high cliffs, generally down a valley or over the water. I noticed that the dive bombers were very poor shots, they seemed to pull out of their dive far too quickly, as if the A/A fire was too hot for them and their bombs were sometimes falling 50 to 100 yards away. This was especially noticed during attacks on the Bittern. About 25% of the attacking planes seemed to be old hands at the game as after pulling out from their dive they banked and varied height a great deal while the other 75% kept flying straight. I noticed it was the 25% who had the nearest misses. The bullets from their machine guns (Heinkel 115) are S.A.P. steel nosed capped, copper elsewhere with a slug inside.

The Arab was moored alongside cliffs frequently without danger of hitting rocks. The large 2½ diameter hazel fender fenders were used about 3 feet below water line, ropes fast fore and aft to trees. The ship lay like this perfectly, no surging or bumping taking place.

Damage:

Superficial deck work by machine gunning, mainmast rigging shot away, a few rivets leaking. The near misses that dropped astern about 6 feet have damaged either the propeller or stern posts, as speed was very much reduced after that.

Armament and Defence.

The Pill Box fitted to the Bridge is useless, impossible to see when the planes commenced to dive bomb. Also when shrapnel hits against the pill box, it acts as a sound box and deafens anyone in it. Ships that are fitted with a 12 pounder protection on the aft side of

Gun platform with the opening ahead. Anyone sheltering in this would be wiped out by attacks anywhere for'd of the beam. This box would collect any ricochets.

The Steel Box fitted in the wheelhouse for protection of helmsman is very good. The helmsman has complete control over the wheel from this position.

Lewis Guns.

The 18" circular pillars are protection enough and fitted on top bridge as in Arab cover both sides at the same time, only one place where they are blanketed and that is an arc of 15 each quarter but one mounting always covers each side that double Lewis gun aft covers all except 10 ahead where funnel and mainmast are.

After the first attacks I had Lewis Gun pans loaded with 1 tracer to 2 ordinary. Hose pipe firing as sights could not be maintained on target. No stoppages occurred while firing 3000 rounds. Guns were stripped and cleaned during darkness.

Oerlikon. This gun is the most effective weapon against low flying. Hose pipe firing was used. Pans loaded 1 tracer, 1 H.E. These shells could be seen exploding on aircraft. Would like to see two more Oerlikons fitted. Would then keep one ready to fire while pans were changed.

1100 rounds fitted and no stoppages. Spring tension released at dark and gun cleaned. Consider a 3' protection screen could be fitted around Oerlikon more for the protection of men reloading pans. This reloading was carried out under protected For'cals Head which is too far away.

Suggest that no more funk holes etc., except the Oerlikon protection, should be fitted in my ship as they interfere with the fighting efficiency. Consider that too much attention is being paid to shelters etc. which tend to induce the feeling in everyone that the only thing to do when attacked from the air is to get inside or behind something instead of fighting it out.

Two Officers always manned Oerlikon and Double Lewis Guns. The third officer was supervising reloading pans under protection and was therefore ready to take over in case of accident to C/O and other two officers.

Attacks made in 4 days - 31

24 by dive bombers (2000/3000 ft.)

7 " High " (8000/10,000 ft.)

Consider that the ideal craft for A/S work in Fjords would be the new cutters. They have the speed to reach all small fjords, small enough to get under shelter and hidden, do not through up a lot of smoke. Bases could be made in any secluded spot to refuel from. Disadvantages of "Arab" class, no speed, too large, can be seen by planes before getting into HA range owing to the enormous amount of smoke from funnels. Advantages of Arab Class - can stand a lot of near miss bombs without serious damage. The Arab was often lifted 6 ft. by explosions. The first attacks were made by delayed action bombs which exploded about 5 seconds after hitting water and acted like a depth charge (believe these bombs were never meant to hit). These did all the damage in engine room. The other attacks were made with direct action bombs which did very little damage on exploding when hitting water.

Morale.

Most of my crew have been with me since the beginning of the war, therefore I was in a better position than other ships. It was the continuous stand to at "Action Stations" during daylight hours and the embarking and disembarking troops and stores during darkness (which meant they had no rest whatsoever) that rather got the crew down. Except for three ratings I

can say they stood it very well. Would like to see trawler crews sent to barracks for a few weeks to stiffen them up. Practically all crews have never seen what a parade ground is like.

Conditions while maintaining machine gun posts ashore.

This was very trying as only once could we have a fire. During the day it was quite warm but from 1900 onwards, very cold. Men suffered from a kind of trench feet caused by wearing rubber sea boots in the snow which seemed to make the boots continually wet inside through condensation.

Clothing. We were very well off as we had the original issue of clothes which were issued to us for the Petsamo affair. Lammy coats, woollen helmets and wind proof coats. After Aston Villa and Gaul had been sunk we were not so well off as I shared everything with these two crews. Special attention had to be given to the wounded. As no hot water bottles were available we built a small red ash fire and heated stones which acted very well. This fire was put out 4 times before we finally had the stones heated (machine gunning).

Medical Stores.

The medical stores fitted to the Arab were totally inadequate; they consisted of one imitation No. 5, holding 6 bottles, Cascara, Black Draught, sweating mixture, castor Oil, Liniment, Condy's fluid, in fact everything which was of no use. I had to dress 20 wounded (4) with one bottle of iodine (small) and 12 small bandages. (Used Officers' sheets for this purpose). Small pieces of shrapnel were removed with a small pair of long pliers and canvas sewing needle. I had one box containing 16 pieces of morphia which were dissolved under the tongue (this was on board by a lucky error). Whisky was used for cleaning purposes. Rum watered to 6 parts was very useful and seemed to put spirit into the crews. The "Gaul" had one case of Ryvita biscuits which made a welcome change from bully beef and hard biscuits. Tinned milk and tinned soup drunk cold were good. The few Norwegians we met did what they could to help us. One small house supplied us with enough fresh milk for a cup all round.

Bombing and machine Gunning Ashore.

It is dangerous to take shelter under cliffs as bombs dropped near set massive boulders rolling down. The side of a sloped hillock on top of the cliffs was the best place, under trees and in large 15 to 25 ft. holes of which there were many, the east side in the morning and west side in the afternoon, planes always attacked from the sun. Only one man was hit during all the attacks while ashore. Attempted to keep men from walking in snow as tracks were easily visible.

Losses.

A certain amount of stores were destroyed by bombs, these were for use in emergency and were landed to assist in case of having to take to the lifeboats.

Two pairs of binoculars.	1 Lewis Gun.
1 Sextant.	300 rounds of ammunition.
1 chrometer watch.	1 bayonet.
2 Norway pilots, part 1 & 2	1 Aldis Lamp.
108 lbs. Of preserved meat.	2 torches.
48 tins of milk.	
48 lbs. of tinned sausages.	

56 lbs of biscuits.

Stores condemned and thrown overboard.

5 Mattresses and 6 blankets (unfit after being used for wounded).

4 Officers' sheets used for bandages.

Personal effects of a number of Arab's crew which were given to "Aston Villa" and "Gaul's" crews (list separate).

GAIN

2 Lewis Guns.

1 complete lifeboat, sails, etc.

1 Carley float.

4 Rifles.

1 Aldis lamp.

Number of blankets.

Saved from H.M.S. "Gaul" and brought to Aberdeen.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant

Lieut. in Command

H.M.S. "Arab"