

WAR DIARY

ADMIRALTY.

NOTE:

The War Diary was established in accordance with a letter of 15th September 1939, C. Longhurst (Cabinet Offices), at the request of Sir Edward Bridges to Captain E.D.B. McCarthy R.N., D.T.S.D., with regard to arrangements for keeping a Diary to provide the ground work of an Official History (copy attached).

Ref. No. 7/2/2.

15th September, 1939.

WAR DIARIES.

Dear McCarthy,

At the request of Bridges, I enclose a draft of a letter for any observations you may wish to make. Subject to the approval of the Chairman of the Control of Official Histories Sub-Committee, he proposes sending it to the Permanent Heads of all Departments concerned.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.) C. LONGHURST.

Captain E.D.B. McCarthy, R.N.,  
Admiralty.

DRAFT OF LETTER TO PERMANENT HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS.

At the moment, your Department, in common with others, is, I am sure, far more concerned with the steps to be taken to win the War than with thinking about the record of the War. It may, indeed, seem a little incongruous to start thinking about the History of the War, but I suppose we must assume that in course of time an Official History of the War will be written.

If no steps are taken now to make sure that the essential material for a History of the War is collected and preserved in convenient form, Departments will be put to a great deal of trouble later on. The object of this letter is, therefore, to suggest certain simple arrangements which it is hoped will not involve any appreciable trouble, and may, indeed, be of convenience to Departments for their own purposes.

I assume that most Departments are arranging, or will arrange, to keep a simple diary of the most important events. This diary, which will no doubt often be a catalogue of the principal happenings on each day, with references to the documents in which those events are chronicled or set out, would alone go a long way to providing the groundwork of an Official History. The suggestion is that copies of all such diaries, together with copies of all important announcements, orders to Commanders, summaries of operations or situation reports, communiques made to the public, and so forth, should be set aside day by day, with a view to their being handed over later on, in such manner as may be agreed with Departments, to the Historians appointed to write the History of the War.

If an arrangement on these lines commends itself to your Department, I should be glad if the person who is deputed to take charge of your diary and to select the documents to be preserved with it, would be good enough to get into touch with Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds, Audit House, Embankment (Telephone No. Central 8901), who will be very glad to call and see him at any time.

*(A) Captain A. C. Dawson was deputed to do this*

THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPH FOR THE ADMIRALTY, WAR OFFICE AND AIR MINISTRY ONLY.

General Edmonds would at the same time inform himself as to the destination of the War Diaries\* and Logs/ and when they would be available for the Historians.

\*For the War Office and Air Ministry.

/For the Admiralty.

1.

WAR DIARY (NAVAL).

S.S.A. - Special Secret Acquaint.

August 22  
Tuesday

The situation was becoming acute. Orders were issued for taking up ships as Fleet Auxiliaries.

*(Continuation of 23<sup>rd</sup> August P.E.)*

*Naval and air bombardment policy (see page 2)*

August 23  
Wednesday

The East Indies Squadron was ordered to take up its War Stations (What were its War Stations?).

The Defence Preparedness Committee approved of the following measures:

Twenty five ships to be taken up as Armed Merchant Cruisers (list in S.S.A.26).

Imposition of postal censorship.

Evacuation of non-combatants from Hong Kong.

Trawlers, 200, to be taken up for minesweeping.

The Admiralty in consultation with the Foreign Office and Board of Trade to adopt compulsory control of movements of merchant shipping.

August 24  
Thursday

The Board of Trade suspended export licences for war materials.

A base was constituted on the Humber and a flag officer i/c Humber appointed (Rear-Admiral A.F. Pridham).

Rear-Admiral Colin Cantlie was appointed Admiral Superintendent, at Rosyth.

*(to page 3)*

War Diary.



2

22.8.1939,  
Tuesday.

GENERAL.

Naval and  
Air Bom-  
bardment.

Policy agreed between the three Services and approved by the Government and communicated to Allies respecting conduct of all forms of bombardment. Object of these instructions not to define legitimate military objectives, but to lay down course of action in accordance with the agreed policy which it may be expedient to adopt at the outset of war. Effect will be to restrict bombardment more severely than is required by a reasonable interpretation of existing international law. (Head of M., 2240/22/8/1939).

August 24  
Thursday  
(contd.)

Orders were issued for 44 ships in the reserve to be commissioned and completed to full complement. (S.S.A.13).

Orders were given to the Home Fleet and to all ships at Home ports to proceed to their War Stations. (Admiralty Signal 24/1045).

Anti-Submarine defences in Forth, Portsmouth and Portland to be brought to an immediate state of readiness and to be manned as soon as ready.

Orders for 6 minesweepers at Singapore.

Esk and Express to convert and embark mines (Portsmouth).

9th Cruiser Squadron to complete with fuel and proceed to Gibraltar.

Suez - Vice Admiral Liaison Officer, Canal Area assumed duties. (S.S.A.57).

*CiC Africa became CiC South Atlantic.  
CiC Plymouth became CiC Western Approaches.*

August 25  
Friday

Preparations were being made for laying Dover Barrage and two train ferry ships were ordered to Portsmouth for conversion as minelayers.

The following vessels were taken up by the Director of Sea Transport:

200 trawlers as minesweepers and 35 for anti-submarine work.

Air patrols started over the North Sea from Montrose and other bases.

Coast defences were placed on a war footing.

Officers for the Naval Control Service were ordered to their posts and vessels were requisitioned for this service

August 25  
Friday  
(contd.)

viz at Kirkwall - 2 Guardships and 1 armed boarding vessel.

Downs - 2 Guardships and 4 armed boarding vessels.

Trawlers were requisitioned, 18 for the Northern Patrol Kirkwall and 6 for Gibraltar.

Two ships were taken up as hospital carriers.

Control Service abroad - Arrangements were made for Control Service at Port Said, Bombay and Haifa.

7th Cruiser Squadron to proceed to Scapa.

Defensive armament - 10 merchant ships to proceed to Clyde for defensive armament, to be due to sail Sept.3-4.

Initial War Station of Courageous and Hermes to be with Channel Force. (Adm.Sig.24/1946).

French Naval Attache Capitaine de Vaisseau de Rivoire, working in Admiralty.

The following dispositions were ordered for ships of the 9th and 11th Cruiser Squadrons:

To Cape of Good Hope - Despatch, Danae, Durban.

Cape Verde Force - Dauntless to join.

Gibraltar - Colombo and Capetown.

West Indies Force - Ceres to join

7th C.S. Caradoc to join.

Ceres and Caradoc to remain with Channel Force during passage of Expeditionary Force.

7th Destroyer Flotilla to proceed to Dover.

5th and 6th Submarine Flotillas to proceed to War Stations.

Rear-Admiral L.E.Holland to be R.A.3 B.S. to date Aug.25. (flag in Resolution).

Rear-Admiral H.E.C.Blagrove to be R.A. 2 B.S. flag in Royal Oak.

August 26  
Saturday

H.M.S. Furious to proceed to Rosyth.

Portland - Rear-Admiral Drummond became Naval  
Officer in Charge.

August 27  
Sunday

East Indies - 5 ships of Royal Indian Navy placed  
at disposal of C.-in-C., East Indies, viz. Indias,  
Hindustan, Cornwallis, Clive and Lawrence (S.S.A.55).

Decided to evacuate Armament Depots by rail  
(S.S.A.48, 62).

Admiral Commanding Orkney and Shetlands (Admiral  
Sir William French) hoisted his flag in H.M.S. Iron  
Duke.

*(It was decided to send 4 "H" class destroyers (2nd Flotilla)  
to Freetown. (H.S.M.)*

August 28  
Monday

South Atlantic - S.S. Edinburgh Castle to be base  
wireless ship at Sierra Leone (S.S.A.56).

H.M.S. Neptune, flag of C.-in-C., South Atlantic  
sailed for Freetown.

Home Waters - various commands mentioned.

Vice-Admiral, Reserve Fleet <sup>Sir Max Horton</sup> becomes Vice-Admiral,  
Northern Patrol, (V.A.N.P.) with flag in Effingham and  
commanding -

7th Cruiser Squadron Diomedes, Dragon, Calypso, Caledon,  
and Caradoc (detached in Channel).

August 28  
Monday  
(contd.)

12th Cruiser Squadron, Effingham, Emerald, Cardiff,  
Dunedin and eventually Enterprise  
and Delhi.

(total of 11 cruisers, for Interception work?).

Instructions for taking over accommodation for  
naval purposes. M/C.E.9706/39. (S.S.A.58).

Railhead established at Invergordon.

Various commands in operation.

C.-in-C., Home Fleet.

Channel Force.

C.-in-C., Western Approaches (Plymouth).

Dover Patrol - Naval Officer i/c Dover.

North Atlantic-Flag Officer, North Atlantic.

C.-in-C., South Atlantic.

Instructions issued to man Examination Service  
for category 'A' ports. (S.S.A.65).

*A patrol was ordered in the Straits of Dover (H.S.M.)  
One division of destroyers was ordered from China to  
the Mediterranean (H.S.M.)  
Shipping through the Mediterranean was stopped  
Possibility of enemy S/M's in South Atlantic (TSD 4145/40)  
(page 9)*

August 29  
Tuesday

The order to mobilise the fleet went out at  
4.38 p.m. Scapa boom gates were in operation in the  
evening. A close watch was being kept in the  
Admiralty on movements of German merchant ships.  
Cape - H.M.S. Danae to proceed to.

South Atlantic - 4th Destroyer Flotilla to proceed  
to Freetown to act under C.-in-C., South Atlantic.

Cumberland to join Commodore, S.America.

China and Mediterranean - 1 China Destroyer division  
to join C.-in-C., East Indies, and 1 Mediterranean  
division now in Red Sea to rejoin C.-in-C.,  
Mediterranean.

August 29  
Tuesday  
(contd.)

Home Waters.

15th Destroyer Flotilla at Rosyth to be Rosyth Escort Force.

Dover - Dover Force to have 4 destroyers from 19th

D.F. viz. Basilisk, Brazen, Boadicea, Blanche.

Channel Force - Hermes to sail for Portland and join R.A., Channel.

H.M.S. Sheffield left Bergen with Russia Naval Mission due Thurso August 30.

August 30  
Wednesday

Rear-Admiral (S) to leave Fort Blockhouse for Headquarters at Aberdour.

The French 5th Cruiser Squadron under Admiral Moreau was constituted at Dakar.

August 31  
Thursday

On August 31 in view of indications of German forces having left Wilhelmshaven in the afternoon of August 30 or early on August 31, orders were given for all forces including 7th C.S. and 12th C.S. to be disposed to intercept them.

At 2.26 p.m. C.-in-C. ordered all forces to raise steam. *At 1800 the Scapa force (except RANILLIES) proceeded to sea to patrol in the area between Shetlands and Norway. (M08457/40)*

18th C.S. constituted - H.M.S. Sheffield, Belfast, Edinburgh, to join R.A.(D) Home Fleet, H.M.S. Aurora, constituting 18th C.S.

Mobilisation - Admiralty Telegram of August 29. Mobilise in accordance with instructions for war with

August 31  
Thursday  
(contd.)

an/ European Power. This does not include calling up Naval Reserves. (S.S.A.83).

Government authorised the mobilisation of naval reserves. All Royal Fleet Reserves (Class B and D) at home not already called up ordered to report forthwith.

The Ajax (South Atlantic) was ordered to proceed to investigate a report of a submarine in 0°35'S., 0°51'W. (West Africa off Lagos).

War Diary.

28.8.1939,  
Monday.

FOREIGN STATIONS.  
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Mediterranean.

Withdrawal  
of  
Destroyers.

Possibility of enemy submarines operating in South Atlantic. Essential to have some destroyers there. Regret necessary to provide this force at your expense. To make up in time for withdrawal of 4th Division from Eastern Mediterranean, a division from China is to join C. in C., East Indies to relieve one of the half flotillas now there. H.M.S. KELLY being sent you. (1st S.L., 1722/28).

9(a).

War Diary

29.8.39.

GENERAL

Aug.29  
PILSUDSKI

Re Polish S.S. PILSUDSKI to proceed to Kirkwall.

German  
Naval  
Unit.

To C. in C. German Naval Unit located in approx.  
56° 30' N. 3° 30' E. Aug.29, 1838 (North Sea  
opposite Firth of Forth)

Azores and  
Cape Verde.  
Possibility  
of German  
S/M raiders  
using  
anchorage.

To N.A. Lisbon. Re security of cable  
communications in Azores - Cape Verde and  
possibility of German S/MS, raiders and supply  
ships making use of anchorages.  
What Portuguese are likely to do.

Mobilisation  
Order.

Mobilise in accordance with Mobilisation  
instructions for war with a European Power. 4.38.

S.S. GROVE  
Oiler.

Las Palmas. Italian Oiler GROVE left southwards.  
1806.

Force A.

Force A under R.A.(D) H.F. AURORA-SHEFFIELD  
18th C.S.

Scapa -  
Boom gates.

Scapa Boom Gates in operation.

German S.S.  
SCHWENFELS  
AND S.S.  
BALTIC.

German S.S. SCHWENFELS sailed St. Vincent for  
Canaries.  
Arrived Panama S.S. BALTIC, German crew.

IMMEDIATE.

Serial No.68.

SECRET.

SPECIAL SECRET BRANCH ACQUAINT.

Reference Secret Branch Acquaint No.67 of 29th August,  
S.S. "Cambrian Coast" has been requisitioned as A.S.I.S. No.  
110. Vessel is due Southampton for fitting out P.M. 29th  
or A.M. 30th. August.

M08268/39.

*A. Bellini*

For Head of H.  
29th August, 1939.

GENERAL.

- German ships diverted. German ships carrying Diesels for Turkish Govt. diverted into Sicily. 0630.
- Australian Commonwealth Forces at disposal of Gt. Britain. From Aust. Comm. Naval Board. Commonwealth Government placed Govt. Naval Forces at disposal of Gt. Britain stipulating that no ship except PERTH was to be removed from Australian waters without approval.
- Spanish Ship VULCANO Minelayer. Spanish Minelayer VULCANO left Ceuta for Algeciras 11.35.
- ASHANTI Destroyer. Destroyer ASHANTI scrutinising suspicious merchant ships. 1940.
- R.A. Invergordon. R.A. Invergordon has taken up appointment. (Potts)
- Italian S.S. with troops. Italian S.S. ARBOREA, CINEO, CITEADE left Tripoli 26 Aug. with troops and much equipment.
- 5th C.S. 5th C.S. being formed under Admiral <sup>Moyeau</sup> ~~Morace~~ based on Dakar.
- German Forces. Three German S/Ms sighted steering N. the Great Belt. Large numbers of S/Ms in Kattegat and line of S/Ms and trawlers from Skaw to Norway. 0700.

GENERAL

S.S.  
HUGO STINNES.

Las Palmas - HUGO STINNES left.

Wilhelmshaven  
German ship  
left to be  
intercepted.

Some indication that German large ship left  
Wilhelmshaven p.m. 30 or a.m. 31.  
All forces including 7 C.S.-12 C.S. to be  
despatched to intercept them.

10th C.S. constituted.

HMS. SHEFFIELD, BELFAST, EDINBURGH, to join R. As<sup>m</sup> (D) Home Fleet  
HMS. AURORA constituting 18th Cruiser Squadron.

All forces  
to raise  
steam.

To C. in C. All forces raise steam. 1426.

Mobilisation.\*

Admiralty Telegram of Aug. 29/39: Mobilise in accordance with  
Instructions for war with an European Power. This does not  
include calling up Naval Reserves. (S.S.A. 83).

AJAX  
Cruiser

To H.M.S. AJAX.  
Proceed to investigate report S/MS in position  
0° 35' S. 0° 51' W. (West Africa off Lagos).

TITANIA.

H.M.S. TITANIA connected to Admiralty by teleprinter.

\*. Government authorised the mobilisation of Naval reserves -  
All Royal Fleet Reserves (Class B & D) at home not <sup>at</sup> ready called up  
to report for the war.



War Diary.

31.8.1939,  
Thursday.

FOREIGN STATIONS.  
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Mediterranean.  
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Anglo-  
French  
Staff  
Talks.

Problem of transportation of a French military force from Syria to Salonika. You are authorised to get into touch with General Caillaud, G.O.C., French Forces in the Levant, for preliminary examination. My 1330/3/8 refers. (D.C.N.S., 1322/31).