

OPERATION ARCHERY

An asymmetrical WWII Scenario for 1-48TACTIC

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*To go with the free cards on the front cover, Bauda have supplied a scenario but here's an extended historical introduction plus bibliography! **Ed.***

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Operation Archery (also known as the Måløy Raid) was a British Combined Operations raid during World War II against German positions on the Norwegian islands of Vågsøy and Måløy, on 27 December 1941.

The raid was conducted by British Commandos of No. 3 Commando, two troops of No.2 Commando, a medical detachment of No.4 Commando, a demolition party from 101 Troop (canoe) of No. 6 Commando and a Royal Norwegian Army detachment under the command of Captain Martin Linge. The action was supported by Royal Navy gunfire and Royal Air Force bombers and fighter-bombers providing air cover.

The objective of the raid was to harass the German defences destroying a number of military objectives, and, by doing so, force the enemy to deploy larger numbers of troops in Norway than they would have otherwise.

The small island of Måløy is less than 500 metres by 200 metres. It had a battery of coastal defence guns (4), ammunition stores, barracks for the troops oil tanks and oil factories, canned fish factories and a power station. It was known that enemy convoys assembled further north in the fjord, offering the possibility of further opportunity targets.

There were German troops on both Islands and significant coastal defences to overcome. Intelligence sources indicated that 150 men from the 181st Division, a solitary tank and 100 construction workers were billeted in the town. Four squadrons of fighters and bombers, totalling 37 planes, were operating in the area from bases at Herdia, Stavanger and Trondheim. However no enemy warships were thought to be in the area.

Lessons had been learned from earlier operations and substantial air support was integrated into the raiding plans from the outset. The naval bombardment opened at 8:48 AM with the Light Cruiser H.M.S. Kenya firing a salvo of illuminating rounds over Måløy, both to mark the target for the other warship's gunners (who quickly obliged by landing some 500 shells in 10 minutes upon a space not more than 250 yards square) and to show the HP.52 Hampden medium bombers where to drop smoke bombs. These were placed with great precision and, as there was practically no wind, created an ideal screen to obscure the path of the advancing troops as they landed on the beaches; as a result the landing on Måløy was unopposed. However one of the seven Hampden that, showing great skill and dash, came in at very low altitudes to drop their smoke bombs, was hit by AA fire and a white phosphorus munition he dropped most unfortunately struck one of the landing crafts, setting it afire and causing some 20 casualties from hideous burns.

The Commandos were formed up into 5 groups. The 1st group landed at Hollevik, about 2 kilometres west of Måløy, to disable a German stronghold there. The 2nd group landed just south of the town of Måløy itself, while the 3rd group landed on Måløy Island to mop up after the naval bombardment. The

4th group was held as a floating reserve and the 5th group was to pass by Måløy on the destroyer HMS Oribi accompanied by HMS Onslow, and land to the north of the town to prevent German reinforcements getting through from the North.

The 1st group soon accomplished its task and was ordered to act as a reserve. The 2nd group quickly silenced a machine-gun post then started advancing into the town itself, but they were immediately met by strong opposition. The Germans were fully alerted at this point and defended every buildings with extreme resolution. To make matter worst a Gebirgsjäger (mountain rangers) unit of experienced troops from the Eastern Front happened to be there on leave. Some of them were armed with scoped semi-automatic rifles and had quickly taken up position on the hillside west of the town. These troops experience in sniping and street fighting caused the operation to develop into a bitter house-to-house battle. The 1st and 4th groups were soon called up to reinforce the attack.

The 3rd group was led by no others than Major John "Mad Jack" Churchill, well known for his motto: "Any officer who goes into action without his sword is improperly dressed." Standing at the front of the landing craft he played "March of the Cameron Men" on his bagpipes, before jumping onto the shingle beach waving his Scottish broadsword. The group very quickly gained control of Måløy Island, where those enemy troops who had not been killed by the Naval bombardment were so demoralized and dazed by its effect that quickly surrendered. At 0920 all guns on the Island were under control.

The 5th group landed without opposition and blew craters in the road to prevent enemy reinforcements from North Vågsøy joining the battle. They then moved southwards so as to close on the rear of the enemy in town.

By 1100 the situation in South Vågsøy was as follows: the original troops of Group 2 had suffered heavy casualties and were operating in small parties, very determinedly and often under the leadership of junior N.C.O.'s, but making only slow progress against the German infantry posts and snipers from the hillside. Groups 1 and 4 had arrived and had been sent forward into the town as reinforcements. Meanwhile a small party from the 2nd group entered the canning factory close to their landing place and discovered the most prominent Quisling of the town hiding in the cellar. Another party climbed the hill to the west of the town and, from the top, cleared the area as far as the dam which supplies power to the electric light station.

The Norwegian troops under Captain Linge, back in their homeland, were eager to get into the fight. They were tasked with rounding up collaborators and seizing documents from the German HQ in the Ulversund Hotel which had become a stronghold of German resistance. Also the offices of the Naval Harbourmaster were to be seized and searched. Speed was of essence to prevent the Commanding Officers to destroy all the paperwork. Several bloody frontal assaults eventually managed to brake the German resistance, however, in the action, Linge was killed.

The Germans had an old but still formidable PzKpfw II tank in a garage near the Ulversund Hotel, Sergeant Cork managed to reach it and blow it up before it could weak havoc among the Commandos, but unfortunately he was caught in the explosion and died of his wounds.

The fighting was confused and intense. The assault was made even more difficult by having to ensure that Norwegian civilians did not end up as collateral casualties as the Commandos poured fire and tossed grenades into windows and doorways.

Despite all, at 12:30 resistance was nearly overcome, the majority of the industrial targets had been destroyed and it could be seen that landing craft were becoming considerably dispersed in their work

of ferrying wounded prisoners and loyalists back to the assault ships. This work was made more difficult by the intermittent air attacks which were taking place and by the necessity of holding off from the ships while they manoeuvred. Thus at 12:50 signals were made to begin withdrawal. Before leaving the Commandos managed to set the Firda Factory ablaze before returning through the town, and at 13:30 demolished the Seternes Lighthouse before beginning the re-embarkation of the last remaining parties.

The Commandos sustained 17 killed and 53 wounded, for at least 120 defenders killed, and returned with 98 prisoners and a complete copy of the German Naval Code, captured from a German armed trawler. Captain O'Flaherty was hit by sniper fire and lost an eye, later wearing an eye-patch as a brigadier. Several Quislings and over 70 loyal Norwegian volunteers were also brought back. The raid was enough to persuade Adolf Hitler to divert another 30,000 troops to Norway and to build more coastal and inland defences.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & FURTHER READING

A newsreel coverage of the raid and a copy of a supplement to The London Gazette of Friday the 2nd of July 1948 with plenty of details on the operation are freely available online.

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