

NORWEGIAN M.C. FOR BRITISH SOLDIERS

This morning, at the Norwegian Embassy, King Haakon conferred the award of the Norwegian Military Cross with Sword on 24 officers, N.C.O.'s and men of the British Army and R.A.F., for bravery and devotion to duty during the Norwegian Campaign - April-May 1940.

-----

The award of Norwegian Military Cross with Sword to 24 officers, N.C.Os and privates of British infantry regiments, Royal Engineers, R.A.M.C. personnel, and officers and N.C.Os of the R.A.F., for bravery and devotion to duty during the Norwegian campaign, recalls the heroic fighting retreat which was conducted by the small British Expeditionary Force fighting alongside the hastily mobilised Norwegian forces.

The place names mentioned in the records of the deeds for which these decorations have been awarded - Lillehammer, Dombaas, Aandalsnes, Steinkjer, Namsos, amongst others - were for a short period during the second half of April 1940 as well known as are today the names of Voronezh, Maikop and El Alamein.

The first British forces arrived at Namsos, north of Trondheim, on 14th April, and at Aandalsnes, south of Trondheim, on 17th April. The first force worked its way round to Steinkjer, on the northern part of the Trondheim Fjord, but were caught in the flank by a surprise attack from German troops landed from arships, and although they managed to extricate themselves from this difficult position they eventually had to withdraw from Namsos on 2nd May.

The second force, which was a larger one, advanced down the Gudbrandsdal Valley towards Lillehammer. A small body of men actually reached the latter town, only to find it already occupied by the enemy.

One of the British officers who has been decorated, Lieutenant (Acting Captain) R.G. Coleman of the Leicesters, actually succeeded in entering Lillehammer with two lorries after it had been occupied, collected 60 men and rushed them through and out of the town to safety before the enemy could recover from their surprise.

Other deeds of gallantry mentioned in these records recall how small bodies of men, and even individuals acting single handed, frequently held up large enemy forces for many hours by deeds of reckless courage in face of heavy fire from the ground and the air. Especially important was the work of demolition - the destruction of roads and bridges in order to delay the advance of the enemy up the narrow valley.

A remarkable story from Steinkjer comes to light for the first time. After Steinkjer had been reduced to a flaming mass of ruins by continual air action, volunteers were called for to enter the town at night and collect supplies from the main Brigade Supply Dump, which was at Steinkjer goods siding. 2nd Lt. (now Captain, acting Major) A.S.T. Godfrey of the Royal Engineers volunteered to lead the party to the goods siding, where, at great personnel risk, he marshalled a train of four trucks. It was then found that the only engine was damaged. Finally, however, a Diesel Engine was found, and it was eventually made to work. The train had to be driven over an iron railway bridge which had a wooden floor. The wood was burning furiously, and it was impossible to tell whether or not the bridge had been rendered unsafe by bombing. Moreover, it was reported that the line had been cut further up by bombing. Nevertheless, the officer calmly drove the train over the bridge through the flames and brought the supplies to Snasa - 30 miles away.

/The

The decorations which have been awarded to eight officers and N.C.Os of the R.A.F. relate to the whole period of the Norwegian campaign from the middle of April until the evacuation of Northern Norway on 7th and 8th June 1940. The small Norwegian Air Force, composed of a few largely obsolete machines, had been shot out of the skies in the early days of the campaign. The assistance given by the R.A.F., although of enormous value, was unfortunately limited by the fact that all the available airfields in Norway had been occupied by air-borne enemy forces during the first day or two of the invasion. In face of almost insuperable obstacles, however, many deeds of gallantry were carried out, as these awards testify.

One of them - to Acting Group Captain Kenneth Cross, D.F.C. - recalls the sinking of the Aircraft Carrier Glorious during the evacuation operations on 8th June. Captain Cross was responsible for leading his squadron of Hurricanes to H.M.S. Glorious, and although this type of plane was not considered suitable for deck landing, and although none of the pilots had previously landed on a deck while flying Hurricanes, all the aircraft were landed safely. Later, after the Glorious had been sunk, Captain Cross showed great resolution and courage in keeping up the spirits of 29 survivors who were on a raft in the North Sea for two days and three nights.

Another story tells how Warrant Officer W.J.Pond, M.M., remained at his work at the R.A.F. Wireless Station at Sandalsnes although the station was surrounded by flames from woods which had been set on fire by incendiary bombs. The Wireless Station was the only means of communication between the R.A.F. and Great Britain, and Warrant Officer Pond continued to send messages of vital importance until the flames had spread right to the hut in which he was working.

The following is the list  
of awards

Lieutenant-Colonel (Acting Colonel) A.J.Beveridge, O.B.E., M.C., M.B., B.Ch., D.P.H.,  
R.A.M.C.

Major (temporary Lieutenant-Colonel) M.R. Jefferis, M.C., R.E.

Major (temporary Lieutenant-Colonel) A.D. Clinch, K.O.Y.L.I.

Captain (temporary Major) P.G.J.M.D. Bulfin, Green Howards

Captain (temporary Major) C.J. Deedes, K.O.Y.L.I.

Captain R.O.S. Dimmock, Y. & L.R.

Captain W.M. Burgess, M.B., Ch.B., R.A.M.C.

Lieutenant (temporary Captain) H. FitzG. Boswell, R.E.

Lieutenant (acting Captain) R.G. Coleman, Leicester R.

Second-Lieutenant (now Captain, acting Major) A.S.T., Godfrey, R.E.

Platoon Sergeant-Major (now Lieutenant) C.J. Rowlinson, Leicester R.

Sergeant C. Peacock, M.M., Green Howards

Lance-Corporal W.A.L. Wilkinson, Foresters

Private (now Corporal) A. Neal, Leicester R.

Private J. Mountford, K.O.Y.L.I.

Private E. Monkman, Y. & L.R.

Acting Group Captain Kenneth Brian Boyd Cross, D.F.C.

Flying Officer H.H. Kitchener, D.F.M.

550433 Sergeant T.L.Humble

747996 Aircraftman 1st Class R.B.Coomber

Warrant Officer W.J. Pond, M.M.

Acting Wing Commander J.C. Mayhew

937423 Flight Sergeant N.W. Kemp

520583 Flight Sergeant A.P. Reen, D.F.M.

-----oOo-----

ROYAL NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT INFORMATION OFFICE