

The sinking of ss Slammat, HMS Diamond and HMS Wryneck on April 27th 1941

'Operation Demon'



On April 27th, 1941, the Dutch passenger ship Slammat sank after severe German air raids. At that time she was sailing in Greek waters as part of "Operation Demon".

With "Operation Demon" 60.000 men of the British expeditionary army British, Australian and New Zealand soldiers were evacuated from Greece to the comparative safety of Alexandria (Egypt).

On April 26th a convoy-protected by the British war ships HMS Orion, HMS Ajax and the Australian war ship Perth arrived at the Bay of Nauplion. The convoy presented anchor in this bay, on the Greek island of Peloponessos.

At 4am, on April 27th, the Slammat, with 600 soldiers and 198 crew members on board, raised her anchor.

At 6.45, sailing off Leonidion, the convoy was attacked by German Stukas. The Slammat sustained a direct hit between her navigation bridge and first funnel. The crew tried to control the fierce fire, despite continuing Stuka machine gun attacks. Finally, the Slammat Captain, Tjalling Luidinga, gave the order to abandon ship. During disembark-

ation the men were under continuous, heavy fire sustaining many casualties.

The British destroyer HMS Diamond hastened to the rescue, later on assisted by the British destroyer HMS Wryneck. Together these two warships saved 650 men. Around noon both destroyers sank by heavy bombing.

Next day, at 11 AM British destroyer HMS Griffin appeared at the scene of the disaster rescuing a few survivors from the sea, amongst these was a Rotterdam Lloyd sailor. 983 crewmembers and allied soldiers lost there lives in "Operation Demon". The sinking of the beautiful, two funnelled passenger ship Slamet was the greatest and most dramatic disaster in Dutch Merchant Navy war history.

On April 15th 1941, the Commanders of the Navy (Admiral Cunningham); the Airforce (Commodore Longmore) and the Army (General Wavell) decided that the British Expeditionary Force should retreat from Greece. This operation was code-named Demon.

Responsible for the operation at sea was Rear Admiral Pridham-Wippell and for the embarkation Rear Admiral Baillie Grohman. The first evacuation took place on the night of April 24th to 25th (D1) at Port Raptis and Navplion. At Navplion the Ulster Prince ran aground and blocked the harbour. The next night April 25th to 26th evacuation took place at Megara. On the night of April 26th to 27th evacuation was planned for Navplion, Tolon, Port Raptis, Raphina, Kalamata.

Signal from FOAM to VALF, SNO Suda (R), C in C, RAL, GHQME T.O.O. 1336/25/4 T.O.R. 2044/25/4:

Embarkation points marked by three vertical lights. Ships should arrive off embarkation point at 22.00 26 April and leave no later than 27 April. Positions C and T must each be worked by craft of 1 Glenn ship, D by 1 A-lighter, S by boats of destroyers and 1 A-lighter and Z by ships alongside.

Signal from FOAM to VALF (R), SNO Suda Cin C, RAL, GHQME, PSTO Egypt T.O.O. 1103/26/4:

Correction to my 1336/25. Present situation requires that position S now be worked by Glen ship and landingcraft tonight 26th-27th. One A-lighter will be on position T. Possible caique may assist at S. RAL pos to GHQME and also my 1010

Signal from VALF To FOAM (R), Calcutta,Havock,NOIC Suda.T O.O. 1505/26/4 :

Your 1103/26 and 1151/26 not to Calcutta and my 0205/26. Have provided Glenearn and two destroyers for 2500 at T and two transports Calcutta and two destroyers at S. Inform Calcutta by WT if you want any change. Havock will arrive Myli (R) at 2230.

Telegram from VALF to Calcutta T.O.O. 1514/26/4:

Ships detailed for position S (Nauplia) harbour may have to go to position T (Tolon) and visa versa. If so FOAM will inform you

At about 13.00 on April 26th the convoy , AG14,sailed ,from near Creta ,westward and then split into 2 parts- one part was destined for Kalamata ; the other to the rest of the embarkation harbours. The Dutch ship Costa Rica was part of the convoy to Kalamata. After a few hours the convoy split again – one convoy destined for Navplion (S-beach)/Tolon(T-beach) and the other convoy to Port Raptis and Rafina. The Navplion /Tolon convoy consisted of the following ships: Slammat (Tjalling Luidinga), Khedive Ismail (?)

HMS Glenearn (Hill)

Anti-Aircraft cruiser Calcutta (Lees) Destroyer Diamond (Cartwright) Destroyer Griffin (John Lee Barber) Destroyer Hotspur (H.Hodgkinson) Isis (Casper B.Swinley) Havock (Watkins)

On the Glenearn were the landing craft needed for the embarkation. The Luftwaffe got a signal about the convoy by aerial reconnaissance. This was sent to the Jagdgeschwader JG77 situated at Almiros.

26.4.41 Feldflugplatz Almiros, zeltlager

Gegen 12.00 uhr Aufklärungsmeldung Über einen Starken Geleitzug, etwa 6 Transporter mit 20.000 ton. Kampftagebuch JG77

(Airfield Almiros,

At twelve o'clock a reconnaissance signal about a large convoy, about 6 troopers of 20.000 tons)

And the headquarters of the VIII Fliegerkorps wrote:

Nach Unterstutzung greifen wir Englischen Truppen sudlich Theben an , und solche bei Argos, ferner Einzelschiff zwischen Piraeus und Kreta, dabei werden 2 Gleitzuge ausgemacht. Einer besteht aus 7 groszen Schiffe (15000-20000 ton) geschutzt durch 15 Kreuzer und Zerstorer und durch Blenheim Zerstorer in der Luft. Scheinbar sollen diese Schiffe bei Einbruch der Dunkelheit an Land gehen und die fluchtende Englischen truppen an bord nehmen.Leider scheitert erst mal ein Stuka-Angriff wegen zu starker Flak- und Jagd-Abwehr. Einzelne Schiffe werden noch in die Laufe des Tages beschadigt. Die Ju-88 Gruppe findet bedauerlicherweise die Gleitzuge nicht. Jedoch folgt noch abends ein erfolgreiche Angriff durch die Kampfgruppe Woldenga, wobei auf dreigroszen Schiffen 5 Treffer erzielt werden. Ein Schiff brennt. Etwa 40.000 t werden wieder erledigt.

Translation:

(After air support we will attack the English troops south of Thebe and those at Argos; furthermore single ships between Piraeus and Kreta. We spotted 2 convoys. One consisted of 7 large ships 15.000-20.000 tons, protected by 15 cruisers and destroyers and Blenheim planes. It is likely that these ships will embark the fleeing English troops at dark. Unfortunately a Stuka attack failed because of heavy gunfire and enemy planes. Some ships were damaged during the day. The Ju-squadron, unfortunately, cannot find the convoy. On the contrary, in the evening, the squadron Woldenga carried out an effective attack with 5 hits on three ships. One ship is burning. About 40.000 tons is again eliminated.)

Signal from Griffin to VALF (R), C in C, FOAM, SNO Suda, Calcutta. T.O.O. 2000/26/4 T.O.R. 2052/26/4: Glenearn in tow, position 37o04'N 23o07'E heading for Sudabay.

The *Khedive Ismail* got a near miss and some people were wounded. The *Slamat* was hit on the afterdeck near the 2nd Class Smoking room. On the Upper Deck nr A the motorsloop at starboard was destroyed and the sloop nr 12 at portside. Heavy damage was sustained on deck B on the children's deck and at deck C in the Smoking room. Only one person-a Chinese- was seriously injured. The Captain and Officers ascertained that the ship was seaworthy and continued their journey to Nauplia. In the evening the Cdt General von Richthofen ordered squadron JG77 to attack the convoy at Nauplia the next morning.

"Am Abend teilt das Kommodore eine eingesunde Lastwertung uber den Morgen Angriff fur den 27.4 aus den an marschierenden Geleitzug (Navplion) ab.

Kampftagebuch JG77.

The forced return of the *Glenearn* was a serious problem for the embarkation as the landing ships sailed with her. At 21.50 *Slamat* and *Khedive Ismail* reached the blocked harbour of Navplion. The *Ulster Prince* was still on fire in the harbour. They dropped their anchors far enough away from the harbour to prevent

beaching as the *Slamat* had no sea map at all and the *Khedive Ismail* only a small one. The *Salvia* had swept Navplion bay for mines- she found none and left for Monemvasia. The *Calcutta* sailed near the harbour and let down her motorsloop and several whalers for the embarkation of soldiers. In the port embarked a small caique *HMS Dolphin* the soldiers and brought them to the *Hotspur*. The wind was WSW4. A whaler of the *Calcutta* was drawn forward by the motorsloop. Due to the heavy swell the whaler capsized and the motorsloop got a rope in the propeller. A motorsloop of the *Hotspur* saved the drowning men and brought the motorsloop of the *Calcutta* in to safety. In a first run the caique *Agios Giorgos* brought 600 men to the *Calcutta* including several wounded soldiers. In Tolon the embarkation was started. The *A5* and the *Isis* were available. Two whalers and a motorsloop brought the soldiers to the ships. The rate was 80 soldiers an hour. But not for long as the motorsloop

broke down, one whaler collided with a caique and another damaged her rudder. Captain Lees from the *Calcutta*, who saw that the embarkation staggered, sent out a message to Pridham-Wippell on the Orion.

Signal from Calcutta to VALF T.O.O.23.45/26/4 T.O.R. 0001/27/4:

Very few light craft, my boats and boats from destroyers are bringing off all they can. A lighter is at T beach. Merchantship incapable of getting their boats themselves. Suggest Perth and Stuart go to T-Beach forthwith.

Reply

Your 23.45 Perth and Stuart are going.

At 23.40 the *Perth* and the *Stuart* anchored at Nauplia. At that time no soldiers were embarked on to the Khedive Ismail nor the *Diamond*. The last ship was on anti-submarine patrol. HMAS *Stuart* sailed to Tolon. The A5, which had embarked 600 fully equipped soldiers, was waiting. These soldiers were transferred to the *Stuart*. The *Stuart* then sailed to Nauplia where the soldiers were transferred to the Orion at about 0100/27. The *Perth* sailed at 00.50 away from Nauplia and anchored at 1.40 at Tolon where 300 men were embarked from the A5. The A5 was instructed that the next trip would be the last one so she had to take on the maximum load. At 2.40 the *Stuart* returned to Tolon. The A5 now delivered 911 soldiers to the *Perth* and 109 to the *Stuart*. The *Hotspur* got orders to relieve the *Diamond*. Unfortunately they could not raise the anchor, so they had to do it by hand. This took one hour, and because of this the *Diamond* could not embark any soldiers.

The *Havock* had picked up Baillie-Grohman (FOAM) and his staff at Myloi at the other side of the bay of Navplion. In the meantime in Navplion the *Agios Giorgios* brought 500 soldiers to the *Slamat* on its second trip. This took time as the *Slamat* lie on the road. At 2.08 Pridham-Wippell signalled to the *Calcutta*:

Signal from VALF to Calcutta T.O.O.:0208/27:

Convoy and escort are to sail at 3.00 promptly at maximum speed.

And the *Calcutta* sent a message to the *Slamat* to sail at three o'clock. At that time the *Slamat* was still taking on troops and it did not sail before 04.15. At 04.00 *Calcutta* and Khedive Ismail sailed away at a speed of 12 knots. The *Calcutta* had taken 1000 men on board; the Khedive Ismail none. At 04.05 the Orion sailed for Sudabay, the wind was NW4, temperature of the air 64oF, temperature of the seawater 50degrees F. At 04.15 the Orion had a speed of 24 knots. At 4.15 the *Slamat* departed and her speed was 16 knots. It is estimated that 700-2000 men were left behind. *Perth* weighed anchor at 04.05. At 04.30 she left with *Stuart* at a speed of 29 knots.

At about 5.15 *Stuart* got machine trouble and *Perth* diminished speed to give her assistance if necessary. But the problem was soon solved and both ships continued on their way. At 7.00 *Perth* and *Stuart* reached the Orion which was sailing at that time near Parapola. The convoy was 15 miles behind.

The convoy sailed at 06.45 on the 27th of April at 37 degrees North. The convoy consisted of : *Slamat* (500 men), *Calcutta* (1000 men), *Hotspur* (500 men), *Isis* (400 men), Khedive Ismail (0 men), *Diamond* (0 men). The convoy

sailed at a speed of 14 knots to the South. At 05.00, 60 German bombers from JG77 started from the airfield of Almiros. Their instruction was to destroy the convoys sailing south of Navplion and south of Akra Taineron.

27.4.41 Feldflugplatz Almiros

5.00 Uhr Start Stab/J.G.77 mit 4 Jabo, II/J.G.77 4 Jabo 6 Jager, III/J.G.77 3 Jabo 6 Jager, III St.G.77 21 Ju 87 III/St.G.2 23 Ju 87

Auftrag: Vernichtung

von feindlichen Geleitzugen sudlich Navplion und sudlich Akra Taineron. Kampftagebuch J.G.77

At 06.45 the convoy was attacked by Jagdgeschwader JG 77 and the attack continued till 10 o'clock. The *Calcutta* took the position between the two troopers. Captain Lees from the *Calcutta* saw three Me-109 planes attack the convoy. Next came planes of the type Ju-87, Ju-88, Me-109 and Do-17. The bombers concentrated their attack mainly on the *Slamat* as it was the largest ship in the convoy. First came in planes from Stab/JG77. who fired with machine and canon guns. Then the ship was bombed by planes of II/JG77. In the beginning the ship was not hit, thanks to anti-aircraft fire from *Calcutta*, *Diamond* and *Hotspur*. and the manoeuvring of the *Slamat*. At 7.10. the *Slamat* was hit by a 250 kilogram bomb behind the bridge and before the first chimney. The Captain's cabin, the control room and the bridge were set on fire. The ship was out of control. The *Calcutta* could avoid a collision. The fire extinguishers were damaged and fire swept through the ship. Captain Tjalling Luidinga gave the order to abandon ship. In the meantime the *Slamat* was continuously attacked and got another direct hit. The convoy sailed further on and the *Diamond* stayed behind for the rescue-operation because the *Hotspur* had troops embarking at Navplion. A few minutes later the *Diamond* came along side the *Slamat* to save the men. HMS Griffin sent a message to VALF Pridham- Wippell

Signal from Griffin to: VALF (R), C.-in C., Diamond T.O.O. 0710/27/4 T.O.R. 0743/27/4:

Slamat bombed and badly on fire in position 37'01" 23'10". Diamond standing by to take her troops on board. Number not known but not large.

Signal from Calcutta to VALF (R) SBNO Suda T.O.O. 0755/27/4 T.O.R. 1011/27/4:

Number embarked Calcutta 960, ISIS 408, Hotspur 500, Diamond nil, SS Khedive Ismail nil. Diamond embarked from Slamat number unknown.

In the diary of the JG77 the following was noted:

27.4.41 Feldflugplatz Almiros

Der Angriffe hatte folgenden Verlauf

- 1. Angriff Stab JG77 beschieszt Schiff mit MG und Kanon.*
- 2. Angriff II/JG77 Oblt Rahn erzielte einen Voll treffer mit S.C.250 Schiff stoppte und brennte.*
- 3. Angriff III/JG77. Oblt Huy erzielt einen Voltreffer. Explosion und Brand. 1 Zerstoror ging langstseit, um Truppen aufzunehmen.*

4. *Angriff II JG77 9.15uhr 2 Volltreffer SC250 Schiff zeigte nach Steuerbord, 2 Zerstorer waren langs seit. Die Besatzung ging in die Boote*

5 Erklärung durch Do 17 der 2.(F) 11Schiff gesunken Kampftagebuch JG77

Translation:

27.4.41 Airfield Almiros

The air attack gave the following result

1. Staff JG77 attacked the ship with machine gun and canon fire.
2. Lt. Rahn of II/JG77 hit the target with a 250 pounder. The ship stopped and is on fire.
3. Lt Huy hit the target. Explosion and fire. One Destroyer alongside to embark troops.
4. II JG77 attacks at 9.15 hour, 2 hits with 250 pounders Ship lists to starboard.

two Destroyers alongside. Men boarded the sloops.

5. Aerial survey by Do17 der 2. (F)11 Ship sunk Diary JG 77

Erklärung Bertold Jung II/JG 77 fuhrer 5/JG 77:

An dieser Tag flog ich fruh am morgen mit zwei Schwarmen meiner Staffel eine Jabo- Einsatz auf die englischen Schiffseinheiten vor Nauplion, die im Laufe der Nacht die Zuruckgehenden Truppen von den Stranden abgeborgen hatten. Ich fuhrte dabei den ersten Schwarm, wahrend der andere von unseren "Stuka"-Mann, Olt. Rahn, gefuhrt wurde.

Translation:

Declaration Bertold Jung II/JG77 cdr 5/JG77:

On third day I flew early in the morning with two units of our squadron on a bombing raid upon the convoy near Navplion, which had taken the retreating troops on board during the night. I led the first unit, while Oberleutnant Rahn ,our "Sturzkampf " man, led the other unit.

Wir suchten uns einen grossen, auf etwa 20.000 BRT geschätzten Dampfer- ich meine , es ware eine P&O Dampfer- heraus und griffen ihn an; Olt Rahn mit seinen Schwarm kam in Sturzflug aus der Hohe, wahrend ich im Tiefflug heranging. Ich kam dabei etwa fruher zum Wurf und musste zusehen wie unsere Bombe das Schiff samtlich verfehlten. In Abflug konnte ich dann erkennen, wie aus den Schwarm von Olt Rahn zwei Bomben als Volltreffer auf dem Schiff einschlugen. Aus der entfernung beobachteten wir dann noch, dasz der Dampfer seine Boote ausbrachten und man offensichtlich dabei war, da Schff zu verlassen.

Translation:

We selected a great estimated 20.000 BRT steamer – I think it was a P&O steamer- and attacked her: Olt Rahn with his unit attacked from above and I attacked from sea level. I dropped my bombs too early and saw my bombs missing the ship. When I left I saw that the unit of Oberleutnant Rahn made two hits on the ship. From far away we saw that the ship let down her boats and that the crew abandoned ship.

(Bericht Berthold Jung, 17.2.1990)

At the same time III/JG 77 was in the sky above the Gulf of Navplion 05.15- 6.30 Uhr: Jaboeinsatz einer Rotte der 7. Staffel mit Olt Huy und Uffz Pfeiffer gegen Schiffsziele vor den Griechische Kuste in Raume Nauplion. Erfolge: Olt. Huy und Uffz. Pfeiffer erzielten Volltreffer auf einen auf 20.000 BRT geschätzten Transporter; dabei handelte es sich offenbar um denselben Transporter der etwa zur gleichen Zeit von der 5. Staffel angegriffen wurde. Huy became short of petrol on the return journey. He landed on the airfield of Corinth, refuelled and flew back to Almiros.

II./JG 77 Bericht von Bertold Jung

Bei unseren zweiten Einsatz über der Bucht von Nauplion an diesen Morgen fanden wir auch den zuvor getroffen 20.000 Tonne wieder, um den herum eine ganze Zahl von vollbesetzten Rettungsbooten im Wasser zu sehen war. Ein oder zwei Flugzeugführer meiner Staffel griffen diese Rettungsboote im Tiefflug mit MG- feuer an; da ich selbst von der Marine kam , widerstrebte mir derartiges ganz grundsätzlich und ich habe es sofort nach unseren Rückkehr für die Zukunft unterbunden und meinen Leute vor Augen geführt, daß, wer im Rettungsboot als Schiffbrüchiger treibe, schon an sich ein "armes Schwein" sei, den es zu schonen gelte."

Translation:

II/JG 77 Message from Bertold Jung

On our second raid above the sea of Nauplion on this morning we found the stricken 20.000 tons ship again and we saw a great number of fully laden sloops around the ship. One or two pilots in my command fired on the sloops with machine guns. As I was enlisted in the navy, I do not like this from the bottom of my heart and when we were again on the airfield(that in the future this should not happen again) I said to my colleagues, that if shipwrecked sailors are in the sloops , they are already poor fellows (poor pigs) who you have to spare.

Statement D.M.Lees, Captain Calcutta:

At 7.00 three Me 109 aircraft skimmed out from the lee of the land flying very low and from this time, for the next three hours, the convoy was continuously attacked by a mixture of Me 109, Do 17, Ju 87 and Ju 88. It is very difficult to compute the number of attacking aircraft as several attacks were beaten off by gunfire before bomb release and the same aircraft probably came in again later. A conservative estimate is 30. At 7.10 the *Slamat* was hit by a large bomb just before the bridge and an extensive fire broke out. *Diamond* who had been doing A/S patrol during the night, and had no passengers aboard, was told to go to the rescue.

During the rescue operation the air attacks continued. Hodgkinson of the *Hotspur* saw four bombs falling on the *Slamat*. Hendrik Rijnbergen, second officer of the *Slamat*, was in command of boat 4 at the portside and succeeded in lowering the boat into the water. There were about 60 soldiers in the boat. When Rijnbergen looked at the destroyer *Diamond* he saw about 20 Dutchmen on deck.

At 8.15 *Diamond* asked for assistance.

Signal from Diamond to VALF T.O.O.0815/27/4 T.O.R.0851/27/4:

Am constantly being dive bombed. Request assistance to pick up survivors. Boats in position 37'00"N 23'10"E.

At 9 o'clock Rijnbergen tried to come alongside the destroyer but there was another air attack and the *Diamond* had to give full speed to evade the bombs. As a result boat no. 4 capsized and several people drowned. Rijnbergen succeeded in seizing another boat. Boat no. 10 was commanded by sailor Jasper de Jong. Mr Trijsburg, A. Lokkerbol and about 60 soldiers were sitting in the boat. Because of too many people the boat capsized after two hours. Several people drowned. But after a while one succeeded in turning the boat. Then for a second time the boat capsized and again someone turned the boat. Trijsburg, de Jong and 30 soldiers were still in the boat. At 9.25 the *Diamond* sailed away with 600 survivors from the *Slamat* aboard. Unfortunately they had to leave several people behind on floats. These people were machine gunned in the water.

Signal from Diamond to VALF T.O.O. 925/27/4 T.O.R. 0938/27/4:

Have picked up most of the survivors. Am proceeding to Suda bay. Remaining boats might make shore. At 9.16 three destroyers from Suda bay- Wryneck, Waterhen, and Vendetta- approached the convoy.

Wryneck was ordered to assist the Diamond.

Signal from Calcutta to VALF (R), Diamond 09015/27/4 T.O.R.:1124/27/4:

Wryneck proceeding to help Diamond

Waterhen and Vendetta changed positions with Isis and *Havock*. These last two destroyers went with full speed to Suda bay to deliver their troops. Cdt Swinley saw from the Isis that the burning *Slamat* was still being attacked. Aboard the Isis there was only one third of the anti-aircraft ammunition and 17 % of the 3" ammunition left. The convoy sailed at 12 knots. The *Coventry* would relieve the *Calcutta* and the convoy would sail for Alexandria instead of Suda bay because of the risky situation.

Signal from VALF to Coventry, Calcutta(R0, N.O.I./C Suda T.O.O.0900/27/4 0957/27/4:

My 1811/26. Coventry sailing to relieve Calcutta escorting Khedive Ismail. Last position 37'00"N 23'10"E at 0720 steering 155 at 12 knots. Calcutta to proceed to Suda, disembark troops, fuel if necessary and rejoin convoy.

Signal from VALF to C in C (R), NOI/C Suda, FOAM TOO 0917/27/4:

My 1811/26 Although ships are only partially loaded, intend to sail tonight. The convoy re- routed to Alexandria. There is no room in Suda and changing situation makes further delay hazardous. Reported ARGOS aerodrome now in enemy hands.

At about 10 o'clock the *Wryneck* reached the *Diamond*. At 10.25 the *Wryneck* asked for immediate air support. Both ships sailed together to the disaster zone and reached this place at 11 o'clock. People from *Slamat* boat no. 10,

Trijsburg, de Jong and about 30 soldiers were picked up. Also *Slamat* boat no. 4 was found and 2nd officer Rijnbergen and several others were rescued. Then the burning, but still floating,

Slamat, was torpedoed by the *Diamond*. The torpedo hit the *Slamat* at portside near the engine room and the ship sank at 37'01"N 23'10"E. The air attacks were finished now. The convoy, commanded by Captain Lees, had no further damage sustained. The *Calcutta* fired more than 1200 4" grenades and several thousand rounds with pom pom and machine guns. At 12.00 Coventry and Vampire relieved *Calcutta*. *Calcutta* arrived at Suda bay at 14.30 on the 27th. Pridhamm-Wippell had asked for fighter protection for the convoy.

Signal from VALF to NOI/C Suda (R), Carlisle, Calcutta:

Request fighter protection for convoys in following position-

A 7 minutes East of Shalconer at 1000

B 23 minutes South of Belo Palo at 10.00

Also for convoy G.A.14 assembling 20 miles North of MALAME at 15.00.

Signal From Wryneck To Suda Bay W/T T.O.O. 1025/27/4 T.O.R.1128/27/4:

Request immediate fighter protection

Aboard the *Diamond* about 600 men stood packed together. Captain Luidinga was below deck with boatswain Philip Sluyter drying their clothes. Afterwards they went upstairs to give food to the men and to relieve them up. Stoker petty officer H.T. Davis was relieved at one o'clock. He was just sitting at the deck near the torpedos when he saw a plane coming in from the direction of the sun with motors stopped. As far as Davis could see the *Diamond* and the *Wryneck* were attacked by two planes each. The plane dropped two bombs- one was a near miss at portside and caused a hole in the hull at the foredeck. The other bomb hit the engine room. and caused the engines to stop. The mast, the telegraph mast and the chimney came down. Davis let the steam escape from boiler no. 3 by opening the valves. Both sloops were destroyed and three carley floats were thrown over board. 30 men were in each. Then Davis jumped in the sea from the nearly perpendicular standing *Diamond*. The *Diamond* sunk in eight minutes. The plane machine gunned the men in the rafts. Most people died during this action.

The time was Sunday 13.30 on April 27th.

Waldron was warrant engineer aboard the *Wryneck* and gave medical assistance to an Australian officer, who was saved from the *Slamat*, when the destroyer was attacked. As far as Waldron could observe the destroyers were attacked by 9 Ju-87. First there was machinegun fire and in a second attack the planes dropped bombs.

It was a surprise attack and the sailors at the 4" guns were killed immediately and no guns could come into action. The first bomb fell on the port side and crushed the hull, causing many deaths and wounded men. The second and

third bombs hit the engine room and the bridge. Waldron shut down the boilers and brought the Australian Officer to the deck and took him down on a float. The *Wryneck* capsized over on to its portside and went down within approximately 10 to 15 minutes after the air attack. ERA 3d class S.J. Gordine R.N.R. of the *Wryneck* was told in the morning by the Cdt that air support had been asked for but this support did not show up. At 13.15 he heard the alarm bells and saw how the *Wryneck* was hit at the portside and in the engine room. The sloop of the *Wryneck* could be let down in the water. Also the Carleyfloats were dropped in the water. Petty Officer H.T. Davis of the *Diamond*, who sat on a float, saw how Commander Cartwright, who was on the float too, let himself down into the water and so made a place for another sailor. Commander Cartwright was not seen later. The sailor Broos who was aboard the *Diamond* could save himself on a float. On this float was Brand, the ship's doctor from the *Slamat*, a comrade and 20 soldiers. During the day the ship's doctor and his comrade died. The Commander of the *Wryneck*, R.H.D. Lane, two sub-Lieutenants, Jackson and Griffiths, and midship man Peck came aboard a float and were assisted by Able Seaman Taylor. Because of their serious injuries, and the heavy swell, they drowned. Waldron, Warrant Officer of the *Wryneck* came aboard the sloop of the *Wryneck*. Two Carley floats were towed by the sloops. In the evening the total crew consisted of: - Waldron, Fuller, Gordine, 49 sailors and eight sailors. Among the sailors were three Dutch namely: Hendrik Rijnbergen - Second Officer, Marinus Trijsburg - Assistant Purser, Jasper de Jong - Sailor and Sebastias Cavelho - Servant on the *Slamat* with Goanese nationality. They all were sitting in the sloop. Two holes in the sloops were repaired. With the aid of four oars the sloop sailed in an easterly direction. On the evening of April 27th, VALF Pridham-Wippell became uneasy about the whereabouts of the *Wryneck* which should be assisting the *Diamond*.

Enquiries to the *Phoebe* and the *Perth* did not clear up the situation. So *HMS Griffin* was sent to the place where the *Diamond* and the *Wryneck* were seen for the last time. *HMS Griffin* with Commander John Lee Barber left Suda bay at 22.30 on April 27th. The 250 sailors of the *Glennearn* had to stay on board.

Signal from VALF to Phoebe, Carlisle T.O.O. 2004/27/4:

A Was Wryneck at 27 with G.A.14

B How many destroyers went on with convoy?

Signal From CarlisleTo VALF (R), Phoebe. Your 2004:

Regret I did not observe WRYNECK and on instructions from D10 I left for Suda before convoy was formed. Decoy and Hasty were detached later to proceed to assistance of Costa Rica.

Signal from Phoebe to VALF T.O.O.2231/27/4 T.O.R. 2235/27/4:

Your 2004 Destroyer was too distant to be individually noticed but it is thought that six destroyers were on with the convoy

Signal from VALF to Griffin T.O.O. 2136/27/4:

Proceed towards Nauplia at 25 knots order follow by W/T

Signal from Griffin to VALF T.O.O. 2250/27/4 T.O.R. 2250/27/4:

Have on board 150 men from Glenearn. Should these be landed before proceeding, please?

REPLY: NO

Signal from VALF to Griffin (R), Ajax, NOI/C-in C:

Proceed forthwith to position 037'01"N 023'10"E where Diamond was reported being bombed at 815/27 while picking up SLAMAT survivors. She reported at 9.25 that she was proceeding towards Suda. Wryneck who was sent to her assistance asked for fighters shortly afterwards. Return to Suda by 900/28.

Signal from VALF to NOI/C Suda T.O.O. 2344/27/4:

Request you will arrange flying boat reconnaissance of area within 20 miles of 37'03"N 23'15"E at daylight tomorrow Monday. Object: to locate destroyer Diamond which has not been in communication since being bombed in that neighbourhood at 0800/27. Transport boat Slammat may be in that vicinity.

On the evening of the 27th the wind rose from the West. The floats struck against the sloop. Warrant officer Waldron had to take the difficult decision to loosen the floats from the sloop. In the sloop were 4 sailors from the *Slamat*, eighteen men from the *Wryneck* and a Sergeant Major from the embarked troops. On board were four oars, a damaged compass, some food and a contaminated barrel of drinking water. Most people were wet and to warm themselves they had to row & slap themselves to stimulate blood circulation. The sloop floated eastwards. Leading Seaman Fuller had bullet wounds in his belly and thigh. Waldron was nursing him. At 02.00 in the early hours of the 28th, the *Griffin* arrived at the place of the disaster. Twelve hours had passed since the attack on the *Diamond* and *Wryneck*. Screaming was heard from the sea and two Carley floats were found from the *Wryneck*. Fourteen survivors were picked up. During the morning some more floats were found. Four men were sitting on one of the floats- one of them was Broos, the Dutch sailor from the *Slamat*.



There were originally 23 men on this float. Stoker Petty Officer H.T. Davis of the *Diamond* was picked up at 07.00 by the Griffin. HMS Griffin asked to VALF if they could continue to search. The answer was negative. So Griffin returned to Suda bay at 07.10. At that time the sloop of the *Wryneck* was not found. The survivors aboard the *Griffin* were landed at Crete. On that island sailor Broos met four Goanese servants of the *Slamat*. The five of them were then transported by hospital ship to Alexandria.

Signal from Griffin to VALF(R), C.-in C, Ajax, ABNO Susa. T.O.O. 0230/28/4 T.O.R. 0436/28/4:

Your 22.50. Have recovered 14 survivors from Wryneck on two Carleyfloats in position 036'30"N 34'E. Both ships sank immediately at 13.30 about one mile apart. Only boat to get away, one whaler not yet located. Am searching area. Shall I continue search after daylight or comply with your 22.50.

Signal from VALF to Griffin T.O.O. 0532/28/4:

Your 0230 Comply with my 2250/27.

On the morning of April 28th the sloop from the *Wryneck* drifted about 30 miles off Milos. It was decided to reach that island. After a while the Ajax and a Destroyer passed within 6 miles of the sloop but did not pick up on her distress signals. Both ships came from Port Raptis where they had helped in the embarkation of troops on the night of 27/28th. Some time later three destroyers- *Kingston*, *Kimberly* and *Havock*- passed the sloop and there was a fly-over of three Blenheims. None of them noticed the sloop. On April 28th, at 12.00, Ananes Rock was seen and it was decided to land there as everybody was exhausted. A Greek caique was hidden in the bay. Aboard this caique were Greek fugitives and English soldiers. They came from Piraeus and were on their way to Crete. They sailed only at night so they would not be discovered. The survivors from the sloop were able to come aboard the caique. In the evening all but five boarded the caique and sailed for Crete. The remaining five boarded the sloop which was towed by the caique. De A6 (Waters and Sutton) a small landingcraft was on his way back from Port Raptis where they had helped in the embarking of the troops on the night of 27th/28th. On the morning of April 29th they were called by people in a full-packed caique. In the caique were the survivors of the *Slamat*, *Diamond* and *Wryneck*.

The survivors boarded the A6 and the next day they arrived at Suda bay. On the island they were interrogated and brought to an internment camp. Leading seaman Fuller was praised by everybody for his courageous attitude. Despite serious injuries he stayed at his post and in the sloop his attitude and cheerfulness was a support to all. The *Hotspur* had taken back fugitives from Milos to Suda bay. After a short stop at Suda bay the survivors from the *Diamond*, *Wryneck* and *Slamat* came aboard and they sailed for Alexandria. As the harbour was blocked by mines they sailed to Port Said, where they landed on May 1st. There the survivors were interrogated again and sent into quarantine. On May 6th they were released. They contacted the agent of the

Slamat, the English Mining company and the Consul of the Netherlands. Neither in Port Said nor in Alexandria was anything known about the fate of the rest of the crew of the *Slamat*. Also after questions to the British Marine authorities and the Dutch Embassy in Cairo no clarification could be acquired regarding the other crew members. On May 16th, at Port Said, a reunion took place between Marinus Trijsburg, Jasper de Jong, Hendrik Rijnbergen and Sebastius Cavelho, on the one hand and Broos and 4 Goanese servants on the other. From the crew of the *Slamat* only 4 Dutch sailors and 5 Goanese survived the disaster. The others were missing in action. The body of third Officer G. van der Woude washed ashore on the beach at Alexandria & was buried in that city. He was identified by means of the buttons of his jack. On these buttons were engraved the name of his ship's company- Rotterdamsche Lloyd. The body of lamp trimmer Jan v. d. Brugge washed ashore at Gaza (Palestina) & was buried there in the cemetery. His family was informed on September 1st, 1943. The body of Apprentice Officer Jan Pille, washed ashore at Stamperia – a Greek island. It was buried there by a fisherman. After the Germans were defeated in Greece the body was re-entered in Athens. Every year on May 4th there is a small memorial service at his grave organised by the Dutch War Graves Commission. The sailor Broos gave evidence in front of the Consul at Alexandria on 11th May 1941. On May 12th, Hendrik Rijnbergen, Marinus Trijsburg and Jasper de Jong gave evidence in front of the Consul of the Netherlands, Pierre Credy, at Port Said.

Official comments about the cause of this war tragedy:

Commander Lees HMS Calcutta

According to the previous description of the embarkation at Nauplia, *Slamat* departed at four o'clock in the morning of April 27th. According to Commander Lees of *HMS Calcutta*, all ships were given the instruction to depart at three o'clock. At 2.08 Pridham-Wippell sent a message to the *Calcutta* that the convoy and the escort had to leave at three o'clock. At three o'clock the *Calcutta* signalled to the *Slamat* but, because there was no reaction, *HMS Isis* was sent to the *Slamat* to give her an order for departure. The reason for the late departure was, according to Lees, that a great caique was unloading hundreds of soldiers on to the *Slamat*. It was the last chance for these men to escape German imprisonment. According to Lees, the *Slamat* had to interrupt the embarkation and sail away. Because of the dramatic end of the *Slamat* was the late departure a contributory factor to the loss of the ship.

Sir Winston Churchill

Sir Winston Churchill wrote in his book "The Second World War": "At Navplion there was disaster. The *Slamat*, in a gallant but misguided effort to embark the maximum number of men, stayed too long in the anchorage. Soon after dawn, when clearing the land, she was attacked and sunk by dive bombers."

K.W.L. Bezemer, Dutch maritime historian

Bezemer dealt with the question in his book about the Dutch Merchant Navy in the Second World War. He wrote that if the convoy had departed on time they would not have been open to attack by German planes, in other words if the delay was a causal factor in the sinking of the *Slamat* Bezemer meant that in one hour and a quarter the convoy could have been about twenty miles more to the south and this was still in the range of the German planes. Also the fact that the fast sailing *Diamond* and *Wryneck*, at the moment they were attacked, were tenths of miles further to the South were still found by the Germans and destroyed. This surely gives no evidence that the delay was a causal factor.

Maritime Writer Bran James Crabb

British Maritime writer Brian James Crabb had a clear point of view about British and Dutch accusations and wrote in his 2021-book named: 'Operation Demon' the following words about the cause of this war tragedy: "Neither the fact that reaching the 37 degrees latitude would bring protection because of the umbrella of the British planes. The air support asked by the *Wryneck* at 10.25 in the morning of April 27th could not be given three hours later and many miles more to the South. From the recently found data of the Luftwaffe and especially the Jagdgeschwader 77, it is clear that the Nauplia convoy was discovered on the 26th and escaped total destruction as a large number of German bombers could not find the convoy. The Germans knew that the convoy set sail for Nauplia. On the evening of April 26st, General von Richthoven, Commander of the 8th Fliegerkorps planned an attack on the Nauplia convoy for the 27th and gave orders for this attack. Fighting on the land was strongly diminished and support from the Luftwaffe to their own groundtroops was no longer necessary. Support at the paralanding near the Channel of Corint on the 26th was the last operation for the Luftwaffe. From the afternoon of the 26th the Luftwaffe could give their maximum attention to destroying the convoys. The conclusion is that the Nauplia convoy arrived in such serious circumstances that it could only lead to a disaster. The one hour delay of the *Slamat* could not be seen as a casual factor in the sinking of the *Slamat*. Neither could the blocked harbour by the Ulster Prince or the non-participation of the landing craft of the *Glenearn*. *It only contributed to the delay in the embarkation of the soldiers*. The convoy was always in range of a large number of German aircraft. The convoy was trapped and the only question was how large would the damage be. It is remarked that Baillie-Groman (FOAM) had predicted the catastrophe on D3 on the 24th of April in a reaction to C- in C Cunningham. He founded this on the arguments that the British airforce at Argos was destroyed (therefore the lack of air support) and the large number of aircraft the Germans had at their disposal. It was clear that the *Slamat* was the victim. It was a large ship with less firepower, less manoeuvrable and not as fast as the escort ships. We think that in these circumstances only the Navy and not the Merchant Navy, should have participated in the embarkation. The marine ships had a better chance to defend themselves because of their speed and firepower and the skill of their crews. The fact that *HMS Diamond* and *HMS Wryneck* sank that day, at least

proves the great danger of the situation. About the courageous crew of *HMS Diamond* and *HMS Wryneck* much gratitude is in order. In spite of the many victims who lost their lives, with the heroic efforts of the British Navy men still saved many precious lives!

Another undeniable hero is Tjalling Luidinga, Master of the biggest ship *ss Slamet* in the British convoy and therefore the biggest prey. In Nauplion he tried to save as many allied soldiers he could by taking them safely on board. Nobody could imagine before that Allied troops had more chance to survive if they had stayed in Nauplion, even as a German prisoner of war. To count Tjalling Luidinga on that is a very big mistake, even from Sir Winston Churchill!

Sources

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Postscriptum

A second revised edition of "Het scheepsjournaal (...)" is published in 2011. During the 'Great Slamet Commemoration' the first revised book was handed over to Eduard van Lierde, Founder and Chairman of Royal Rotterdam Lloyd Museum Foundation.

Author: Frans Luidinga - The Netherlands (deceased: December 24th 2018).

Corrections, supplements and added pictures: Ed van Lierde - The Netherlands.

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