HMS VIMIERA - Memorial Commemoration Speech

Ms Mayor, Honoured Guest, Sirs, Ma'am, Ladies and Gents I am honoured to be invited here today, to represent the Naval Regional Command and Royal Navy in the poignant re-dedication and commemoration of the 81st anniversary of the sinking of HMS VIMIERA.

HMS VIMIERA was a V-Class destroyer launched on 22 June 1918 and was assigned to the 13th Destroyer Flotilla of the Grand Fleet. In April 1925 the Flotilla was renumbered as the 1st Destroyer Flotilla and transferred to the Mediterranean Fleet.

VIMIERA was later chosen for conversion to an escort destroyer with an enhanced anti-aircraft and anti-submarine capability as part of the naval rearmament programme preceding the outbreak of war.

In January 1939 she joined the Nore Command for coastal convoy duty in the North Sea and English Channel. The ship's company contained many men from the Clyde Division, of the Royal Naval Reserve, HMS GRAHAM.

In April 1940 she was transferred to Dover Command to support military operations in France, providing additional air defence at Dunkirk, assisting in the evacuation of allied personnel, providing naval gunfire support at Escault, and rescuing the survivors of HMS WHITLEY.

On 22nd May she escorted ships taking 20th Guards Division to reinforce Boulogne, and on the 23rd and 24th, with six other ships of the 19th Destroyer Flotilla, evacuated the Guards and supporting troops from Boulogne.

The VIMIERA made two trips to Boulogne, bringing out a total of 1955 troops. On 24th May, while operating off Calais she was damaged by a heavy air attack.

After repairs VIMIERA returned to convoy defence and patrol in the North Sea. In 1941 she shot down at least three planes attacking the convoys and Lt W.R.M. Murdoch - Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) was awarded the

Distinguished Service Cross and AB Benningfield the Distinguished Service Medal.

On 6 August 1941 while escorting Convoy F.S 559, eight ships ran aground on the Haisborough Sands off the Norfolk Coast and VIMIERA once again distinguished herself by rescuing many of the seamen. In December 1941 HMS VIMIERA was adopted by Sandbach, Cheshire, following a successful Warship Week National Savings Campaign.

On 9th January 1942 at approximately 1415 HMS VIMIERA was sunk by a mine off Sheerness in the Thames Estuary with the tragic loss of 93 hands with only 34 survivors. Her bell was salvaged after the war and presented to HMS GRAHAM in 1956 by her first wartime Commanding Officer, Captain RBN Hicks DSO, as a memorial to the men who died.

81 years ago, to the day this tragic event unfolded, and I am honoured to be standing here as a serving member of the Royal Navy at the unveiling of this tremendous plaque in commemoration of those that made the ultimate sacrifice.

HMS VIMIERA… Lest We Forget.

Lt Antonio Valente
Assistant Naval Regional Commander – Northern England & Isle of Man
HMS EAGLET