

ENCLOSURE No. 27H TO DOVER LETTER OF 27th July 1940. *Enclosure*  
 CONFIDENTIAL

H.M.S. WILD SWAN

No C2/5.

OPERATION "XD" ONE AND EVACUATION OF BOULOGNE

23rd May 1940.

Sir,  
 I have the honour to submit the following report of proceedings for the operation "XD" One and for "Wild Swan's" share of the evacuation of Boulogne on 23rd May 1940.

(2) Initial orders for "XD" One were received at 0130/23 and operational signal at 0300. Demolition stores arrived at 0800 and personnel, Naval and Military, between 0900 and 1000. At 1026 I reported ready to proceed. Concerning demolition stores, insufficient primers were sent; I made good what I could and borrowed as many as she could spare from "Wolsey" at Dunkirk later.

(3) I had asked to see the Liaison Officer detailed in order to explain to him that I considered it advisable to return and to enquire about air escort on the way over.

My experience of the previous day in Dunkirk convinced me that my ship would be commandeered to evacuate parties, which I did not want to do without informing you.

(4) The passage to Dunkirk was uneventful with the exception of the sighting of about 15 German bombers just to port when off Gravelines. These were reported and did not attack. Visibility being poor they may not have seen us.

(5) I arrived alongside Monitor Quay at 1305 and disembarked stores. In addition I let Commander Banks have six depth charges in order to deal with lock gates.

(6) H.M.S. "Wolsey" and two Hospital ships arrived at 1400, "Wolsey" coming alongside me. Just after she arrived, an enemy aircraft was sighted low over the harbour mouth and was briefly engaged by both ships.

(7) Shortly after arriving the S.T.O. arrived with instructions that I should take some 75 R.A.F. and miscellaneous Army personnel to England. These I embarked and slipped at 1445 when the R.A.F. party had arrived. I did not like taking some of the Army Officers but they all appeared to have some authority for embarking and I had to leave it to S.T.O. A total of 162 including 8 civilians were embarked.

(8) I arrived at Dover at 1700, reduced visibility and heavy rain along the French coast slowing me down, and went alongside "Verity" at the Admiralty Pier to disembark passengers.

(9) The quantity of.....

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(9) The quantity of equipment and luggage caused this to be longer than usual and at 1820 I sailed in accordance with your orders to join Captain "D" (19) at Boulogne.

(10) I arrived off Boulogne at 1920. En route I had intercepted the signals concerning the heavy air attack, and the fact that Captain "D" personally was out of action. "Keith" was sighted returning. I was not certain who was in charge as "Whitshed"s 1850 reported her captain wounded. However, as I came up, "Whitshed" and "Vimiera" closed the entrance of the harbour and went in. By a peculiar mirage effect I actually thought at that moment that "Whitshed" was sinking and was beaching herself. "Venomous" and "Venetia" closed me and asked what was happening. I told them to keep to seaward until I could find out. I closed the entrance and "Vimy" who was just off it. "Vimy" told me that her Captain was seriously wounded, that she had some soldiers on board, and also some casualties. I ordered her to return to Dover at full speed and report the situation to you. At this time I was still under the impression that I was the S.O. and I could not get "Whitshed" to answer. However, at about 2000 W/T signals from "Whitshed" were intercepted from which I gathered she was in charge and that an evacuation was in progress.

(11) Shortly after 2000 "Whitshed" and "Vimiera" were seen to be backing out without apparent opposition. I asked her if any more destroyers were required to which she replied telling me to go in taking another with me. I told "Venomous" to follow me in and "Venetia" to wait, as I was not certain whether there was room for her at low water.

(12) I could see no signs of German troops or guns on the way in. Our own troops could be seen on the North Western spur of the Quai Chanzy with some stretcher cases on the low tide stage on the quays' south western face.

I decided to go alongside there, port side to; "Venomous" followed a few minutes later and berthed on the ~~south~~ <sup>North</sup> eastern face.

Owing to the very low water and lack of bollards I had great difficulty in keeping the bows alongside. I could not get hold of anything aft, my bows going aground when I tried to get my full ship's alongside.

(13) I then saw that "Venetia" had followed "Venomous" in. When she was about 300 yards astern of me, I saw her hit on the bridge and searchlight platform. At first I thought it was another air raid, but then saw tracer shell coming from the direction of Fort de la Creche and from the ridge below it and realised we were under field gun fire. My director was blanked by a crane and little could be seen from the bridge so I ordered "X" and "Y" guns to open fire on the ridge in "Quarters Firing". My T.C.O, Sub Lieutenant H.G.Vere, I sent aft to control them.

(14) "Venomous" had opened fire immediately with all guns bearing, and although numbers of shell of field gun size continued to fall round "Venetia" and down my starboard side I do not think any more direct hits were obtained. As "Venomous" had a clear view and my personal one was somewhat obscured, I should prefer her report to be taken for the effect of gunfire and the opposition.

(15) "Venetia" had come.....



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(15) "Venetia" had come to a standstill with bows ashore against the jetties on my starboard quarter. All guns left with crews were firing; a stirring sight in view of the state of the ship. To my intense relief she gathered sternway and backed out and down the channel, getting clear.

(16) I was having difficulty holding the bows alongside, so as my director was useless to me and communication with the after guns out of action, I sent Lieutenant Lee, my First Lieutenant down to the fo'c'sle to see if he could secure her in enough forward to get the wounded on board. On working engines to do this a spring ported and the ship surged ahead and grounded again. A timely shell burst under the starboard bow lifted us off, and we managed to get as I wanted her, close in forward, with the stern out to allow "X" and "Y" guns to fire. Engines had to be worked the whole time as the recoil of "X" and "Y" sent the ship bodily out.

(17) While all this was going on the noise was terrific in that confined space. Six 4.7" guns were going full blast in addition to Pom Poms and enemy shell fire. A shell hit the edge of the jetty abreast my bridge and another carried away my main aerials. Neither caused any casualties. Very fine work by my W./T. staff had us in communication again in one minute. As far as I could gather the ship had not been hit and no casualties had occurred.

(18) Loading was proceeding now. In this I should like to mention the Brigade Major of the Guard Brigade landed. Without his control loading operations would have been complete chaos. One or two men had shown signs of jumping from the top on to the fo'c'sle, a drop of about 20 feet.

The last soldiers in the immediate vicinity had been embarked and I saw "Venomous" leaving. As near as I could judge we had about 300 on board and I had to leave room to fight the ship. I therefore slipped at 2127 and went astern out. It was now dead low water and the ship was deep.

As "A" and "B" guns started to bear fire was opened in Director Salvoes at the Fort. And fire was kept up with all guns that could bear until the ship was clear of the outer breakwater. Just before reaching the inner pier heads the ship took a slight cant to starboard, both engines were put to full ahead, and, after a momentary grounding she came off. I straightened her up and backed out.

(19) Having found out from "Venomous" that she was all right, I went on to "full" to catch up "Venetia", who seemed to be steering rather a dangerous course over the banks, and probably had no charts. Came up with her at 2200 and led her back to Dover, arriving at 2255. I eventually secured alongside "Whitshed" at No. 1. berth Admiralty Pier and started unloading. Four hundred and three soldiers were counted off the ship.

(20) Regarding the effects of our own gunfire .....

(20) Regarding the effects of our own gunfire, I should prefer, as previously stated, that the report of "Venomous" should be taken as he ~~EXX~~ could see and I could not. However, the following has been gathered from Officers, gun's crews and my observation.

"X" and "Y" guns opened on the houses on the other side of the harbour. The gunlayers stated that they saw machine gun fire and tracers coming from several houses up the hill. This did not last for long! "Y" gun saw a "tank" coming down on the quay opposite. The second shot was a direct hit and the tank vanished. The port Pom-Pom had an effective burst at snipers on the front before it had to cease fire due to proximity of the quay. On the way out the Starboard Pom-Pom saw some men with machine guns hiding in the trellis work of the southern inner pierhead. The Pom-Pom got in a burst before fire became effective.

"X" and "Y" guns fired mostly at suspected gun positions up by the fort, when not taking shots at suspected machine guns concealed in houses.

I sincerely hope that there were no civilians left in this district for the destruction wrought was extensive, and we left the place in flames. To this I think we can attribute our escape.

I did not notice any shells or rifle calibre fire on the way out, but my attention was fully occupied with the ship.

It may be interesting to note what a two-edged weapon tracer ammunition is. Both field and machine guns were given away by using it; when they might not have been spotted without.

(21) Frankly I never expected that any of the three ships would get out, and I attribute the main reason why we did to the magnificent gunnery effort of "Venomous".

Having seen the somewhat shattering effect of our fire on our own troops on the quay, I can understand what it must have been like at the business end of our guns. All ashore thought we were being bombed. However, once on board and realising that the noise was being made by us, various soldiers helped our ammunition supply party forward, for which we were very grateful.

(22) "Wild Swan" had only one serious casualty Ord Sea P.S. Middleton ~~ESDX~~ 1874, who was sight setter at "X" gun. A piece of shell which burst to starboard entered the gun shield from the rear.

(23) As far as structural damage was concerned, bursting shell made a series of holes in the starboard side with no internal damage. The cutting of the gunnery voice pipe to "X" and "Y" guns was a severe handicap. There was a lot of miscellaneous damage done to circuits and fittings but none beyond ship's staff capacity. The exhaustion of the personnel was the most serious aftermath.

(24) This brief action was.....



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(24) This brief action was as divorced from the text books as anything could be. Officers had to be given jobs on the spur of the moment. They all acted magnificently and in the true traditions of the Service. Below is a summary of their work.

Lieutenant M.J. Lee R.N., First Lieutenant and G.C.O. As the director was useless and V/P communication to aft had gone, I sent him on to the Fo'c'sle to secure the ship and embark the soldiers. On leaving he managed to clear the crowd from "A" gun getting it into action with the minimum delay, finishing up as a loading number to keep it going. In between had done finely going round the ship getting things square.

Sub. Lieutenant Vere R.N. T.C.O. Was sent aft to take charge of the after group. Did first class work getting the guns crews going on to various targets, maintaining a very creditable rate of fire over a long period.

Sub. Lieutenant Satow R.N. N. Had to be used for any purpose from the Fo'c'sle to pointing out targets to the director on the way out.

Has done first class work in the tricky navigation of the Straits.

Mid. Green R.N.R. Was in charge of "X" gun. Did exceptionally well in getting his gun on to machine gun posts and getting his crew together under machine gun fire. In the change round caused by the sight setter being wounded, he took over trainer and carried on the action.

This lad is full of guts and initiative and is well worth considering for early promotion.

Surgeon Lieutenant Couchman R.N. In addition to his effective work with casualties of all sorts, his rapid decyphering work was invaluable.

Commissioned Engineer Derbyshire. As usual the Engineer's Department had all the anxiety and none of the excitement.

Mr Derbyshire's department produced what was required accurately and quickly. One small slip on their part would have meant the stranding of the ship, there was so little room for error.

(25) I should like also to mention the following ratings, whose conduct I observed or was reported to me specially by my Officers.

C.P.O. Fletcher.....



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(25) C.P.O Fletcher T.C. O/N J55657. For a long period had to deal with a continuous string of wheel and telegraphic orders. He never made a mistake under appalling conditions of noise. A very worthy upholder of the true tradition of Destroyer T/C's.

C.E.R.A. Pullen O/N ~~AX57148~~ For general good service.

For coolness, steadiness and initiative under fire.

Bridge

C.W.G. Burton A./ Yeo. Sig. O/N P/JX 134134 —  
M. MacRae O.Sea O/N X 21693 A—  
H. Patchett A.B. Lewis Gunner O/N JX 125243

"A" Gun

J.E. Weston A.B. Gunlayer O/N JX 156937 —

"B" Gun

A. McLeod A./ L.Sea No.2. O/N JX 134063

"X" Gun

A.J. MacDonald A.B. Trainer O/N J 98930 —

"Y" Gun

J. Noble A.B. Trainer O/N J 18567  
J. MacDonald A.B. Loading Number O/N X10355B

Pop-Pom

G.A. Morgan A.B. Layer Port O/N J 24882  
J. Callaghan L.Sea. Layer Starboard O/N —  
—D/JX 169337

After Supply Party

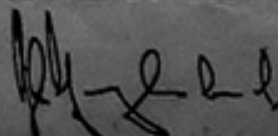
H.W. Morgan P.O. Steward O/N L 14753  
W.J.R. Wells Ldg. Steward O/N LX 20191

W./T. Staff

R.C.E. Clement Ldg. Tel. O/N J 80581 —  
R.F. Anstey Tel. O/N P/JX 140666.

Staff

I Have The Honour To Be,  
Sir,  
Your Obedient Servant,



Lieutenant Commander,  
In Command.



The Flag Officer, Commanding Dover.

ables to  
tain "D", 19th D/F, H.M.S. "Sandhurst".  
tain "D", 18th D/F, Plymouth.