

SECRET

H.M.S. VENETIA.

30th May, 1940.

Sir,

I have the honour to submit the following report of proceedings of H.M.S. VENETIA for the period 21st to 25th May, 1940.

2. VENETIA sailed from Immingham at 1900 on 21st May, shaping course to follow the swept channels to Dover and adjusting speed so as to arrive as early as practicable

3. At 0254 on 22nd May, two darkened ships were encountered which were challenged. The correct reply was received and the ships identified themselves as H.M.S. GREYHOUND and the Polish destroyer BURZA.

4. VENETIA arrived at the eastern entrance to Dover harbour at 0745 and at 0800 secured alongside at the northern berth of the Eastern Arm to embark oil fuel. At the same time minor defects to boiler-room fans were taken in hand by SANDHURST.

5. At 1000 orders were received to raise steam for full speed and I reported ready at 1045, the Captain at that time being ashore on duty with Vice-Admiral, Dover. On the Captain's return, certain S.P's and C.B's were transferred to SANDHURST in accordance with Admiralty message 528AZ and VENETIA sailed at 1100 in company with KEITH (Captain(D), 19th D.F.) and WINDSOR, to establish 'O.C' patrols. Course and speed were adjusted as necessary and at 1130 Patrol 'O.C.2' was commenced at a speed of 15 knots. No event of importance or interest occurred.

6. At 2240, VENETIA shaped course for Calais in accordance with V.A.Dover's 2225/22, arriving off the entrance at 2315. The harbour was entered at 2335 after enquiries had been made of a French destroyer under way in the Roads. VENETIA secured alongside S.S. CITY OF CHRISTCHURCH at the North Wall of the Outer Port, and the Captain boarded the ship to make enquiries of the Master. WINDSOR secured outside VENETIA at 0001 on 23rd May, 1940. On his return, the Captain reported the results of his enquiries to the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. WINDSOR and WINDSOR's signal timed 0030/23rd May was originated. WINDSOR slipped at 0030 and VENETIA at 0045, passing the harbour entrance at 0055.

7. At 0118, acting on instructions from WINDSOR, VENETIA established a patrol off Sangatte Road. WINDSOR

parted company.....

parted company at 0600 to re-enter the harbour while VENETIA remained on patrol outside. No tank activity had been observed up to this time but it was reported to WINDSOR at 0548 that unidentified lorries had been observed proceeding down the hill to the south of Sangatte.

8. At 0935, course was set at 24 knots for Dover to comply with V.A.Dover's 0853/23, and VENETIA arrived off the harbour at 1004. At 1022, course was set at 24 knots to overtake S.S. AUTOCARRIER en route to Calais and escort was commenced at 1046. The entrance to Calais was reached at 1152, AUTOCARRIER entering harbour while VENETIA remained on patrol outside. While on patrol, VENETIA was joined by a French patrol boat which stated that the Germans had occupied Sangatte and that fire might be opened on the Calais road. This was reported to WINDSOR when he joined the patrol at 1240. At this time a French destroyer, 'T.41', and two patrol boats commenced bombarding the village.

9. At 1335, WINDSOR commenced bombardment of the coast road west of Sangatte, when all refugees were seen to be clear and a column of lorries about 20 strong to be proceeding down the hill towards Sangatte. At 1357, VENETIA took up position between the French destroyer and WINDSOR and opened fire. Several direct hits were observed and two lorries set on fire. At 1415 fire was ceased on instructions from WINDSOR, the road in front of the lorries appearing to be sufficiently damaged to prevent the lorries proceeding further.

10. At 1540, bombarding fire was opened on a further column of lorries proceeding towards Sangatte from the direction of St Omer. More direct hits were observed and fires started, and the tail of the column prevented from proceeding further. At 1550, fire was ceased and course was shaped for Boulogne at a speed of 24 knots to comply with V.A.Dover's 1538/23.

11. VENETIA arrived in Boulogne Bay at 1645 and, after identifying the target, opened fire at 1650 on shore batteries situated at the top of the cliff between Pte de la Creche and Basse Ville. Fire was ceased at 1655 and VENETIA retired to seaward to clear the range for the French destroyers which were also bombarding. Course and speed was set as requisite for remaining in the vicinity of Boulogne and in visual touch with WHITSHED.

12. At 1800, VENETIA joined WHITSHED and VENOMOUS close to the entrance in order to be in position ready to enter harbour when evacuation of the troops was ordered, but at 1825 a very large force of aircraft, at least 100 in number, was observed over the town, which then proceeded to split up and attack the harbour and ships outside. Very heavy low-level and dive-bombing was experienced lasting about six minutes, and it was

estimated that.....

estimated that between 30 and 40 aircraft were engaged in attacking our group of ships. No damage was sustained and there were only two minor casualties from splinters. Full speed and full wheel were used during the attack for avoiding action and VENETIA separated from the other two destroyers. Several salvos fell between five and ten yards from the ship, and one particular salvo was observed to fall approximately fifteen yards on the port beam which exploded under water about 5 seconds later with the effect of a depth charge, shaking the hull considerably and lifting the stern out of the water. This may have caused slight leaks by springing plates and it was in fact discovered afterwards that the after oil fuel tanks were contaminated by water.

13. At 1840, enemy aircraft having withdrawn, VENETIA again closed the entrance with WHITSHED and VIMIERA, who started to enter the harbour. As VENETIA reached the entrance more aircraft were sighted and all three ships withdrew. At 1900, WHITSHED, who had assumed command of all destroyers present, ordered a general scatter to seaward and at 1907 fire was opened on enemy aircraft which at 1910 dropped a large number of what appeared to be 'Darts' at VENETIA. These fell in the water fifteen yards on the port beam without exploding. They were of small size and created an effect in the water of bullets but no sound of machine-gun fire was heard. Fire was ceased at 1915.

14. At 1920 VENETIA again proceeded towards the entrance and stood off in company with VENOMOUS and WILD SWAN.

15. At 2035, all three destroyers started to enter the harbour in the order WILD SWAN, VENOMOUS, VENETIA. VENETIA stood off just outside the inner breakwaters while the other ships were berthing, and at 2040 started to go alongside. At 2042, when the stem was abreast the Harbour-master's Office, shore batteries opened a heavy fire scoring direct hits immediately with high-explosive direct-impact shell. The fire was apparently concentrated on VENETIA presumably with the intention of sinking the ship and thereby blocking the channel to the other two destroyers. The enemy's fire was well-placed and directed mostly at the bridge, although some tracer was observed passing over the torpedo tubes and landing on the far shore. It would seem that the low level of the water in the harbour played a considerable part in saving the hull of the ship from damage. The guns firing appeared to be shore batteries which could not be depressed sufficiently.

16. Knowing that Sub-Lieutenant Herring, the Officer of Quarters of the after group, was forward in preparation for going alongside, under the direction of the Commanding Officer I proceeded aft. I put the guns on to the target and opened fire and several hits were observed very close

to the shore.....



to the shore batteries. I then proceeded to extinguish the fire which had broken out on the searchlight pedestal with the aid of the after fire party. It was found necessary at 2050 to release the four torpedoes from their tubes as they were endangering the after part of the ship and also the engine-room on account of their proximity to the fire. The two Carley floats secured either side of the searchlight pedestal were also jettisoned at this time as these were on fire and had caused the fire to spread upwards from the base to the painted canvas dodger around the searchlight platform.

17. Forward, it was about 2045 that a shell hit and passed through two cases of ready-use charges on 'B' gun-deck, setting them on fire. This was the cause of the majority of this gun's crew being lost, as they were blown over the side as they attempted to climb over the flare down to the forecastle. It is most fortunate that the painted canvas around the bridge structure was not set on fire at this time.

18. On the bridge, the majority of casualties including the Commanding Officer, Lieut.Cdr. B.H.de C. Mellor, R.N., and Navigating Officer, Sub-Lt. M.E.L. Maunsell, R.N., were probably caused about 2045 by shrapnel sweeping across head-high, although I had observed that the personnel on the starboard flag-deck had been put out of action just as I was going aft, probably by the first hit, which struck the foremost funnel. It was at this time 2045 that Sub-Lieutenant Jones, R.N.R., who was in the charthouse, realised that the engines were not moving and that no orders were being passed. He left the charthouse about a minute before it received a direct hit. Having ascertained from the Engineer Officer that the engines were manoeuvrable, he proceeded to con the ship from the wheelhouse and at 2048 went astern to get the bow, which was aground on the north-west corner of the Quai Chanzy, clear. In doing this, the starboard propellor touched aground on the corner south-east of the Britannia Monument, but he was able to clear this and proceeded out of the harbour stern first at 2100 turning when he was well clear of the outer breakwater, and setting course for Dover. The shore batteries had ceased firing on the ship at about 2052.

19. I returned to the bridge at 2108, and finding the Commanding Officer seriously wounded assumed command. I had felt the engines going astern at 2048 and watched the ship leaving the harbour and had been satisfied that the ship was under full control from the bridge. It was most unexpected to me to find Sub-Lieutenant Jones in charge, and this officer's conduct is worthy of the highest praise in his handling of the ship under the most adverse conditions and in a very difficult harbour.

20. The Navigating.....

20. The Navigating Officer, Sub-Lieutenant Maunsell, had been killed and I appointed Sub-Lieutenant Jones in his place. The Engineer Officer reported that a speed of 16 knots could be maintained. The ship was steered by main engines as the forward wheel had jammed shortly after leaving the harbour. I had the steering changed over to the after position and organised a 'human chain' for passing orders as all communications throughout the ship had been shot away. The forward telegraphs were in action.

21. At 2130, I was joined by WILD SWAN who led the way to Dover, where I arrived at 2250 and lay off the entrance. Tugs secured alongside at 2350 and I entered harbour at 0005 on the 24th May by the eastern entrance. I secured alongside SANDHURST in the Submarine Basin at 0040.

22. Ambulances and Sick Berth staff were awaiting the ship and all wounded were disembarked. The ship was cleared of all dead and wounded by 0230.

23. The principal damage caused by the action consisted of

- Demolishment of W/T Office by direct hit.
- Demolishment of Chart House by direct hit.
- Damage to both funnels by three direct hits.
- Fire at base of searchlight platform caused by direct hit.
- Damage to port after quarter of bridge caused by direct hit.
- Piercing of deck above engine rooms and boiler rooms by shrapnel bursts.

24. Repairs within the capacity of SANDHURST were taken in hand forthwith.

25. During the forenoon I identified the dead onboard H.M.S. SANDHURST and reported to Vice-Admiral, Dover.

26. At 1325, I slipped from SANDHURST and with the assistance of tugs secured alongside South Wall, reberthing alongside SANDHURST outside WILD SWAN at 1425.

27. At 1920 I slipped from WILD SWAN, proceeded out of the Basin and secured to No.8 buoy.

28. At 1945, I received orders from Vice-Admiral, Dover, to sail forthwith to Devonport for repairs.

29. I slipped.....

29. I slipped at 2100, after a delay caused by the necessity of awaiting two signalmen who were being lent from KEITH and also to embark libertymen. (I had only one V/S. rating surviving and all W/T was out of action).

30. After leaving harbour, I shaped course at a speed of 15 knots which was the maximum available to pass down the searched channel to Dungeness, altering course to pass three miles South of Dungeness Light and the Royal Sovereign Lightvessel, and thence to a position nine miles south of Start Point. The Royal Sovereign Lightvessel was abeam at 0025.

31. At 0700, I altered course and adjusted speed as requisite to come alongside Trawler 'T.12', requesting her to pass my 'time of arrival' to Commander-in-Chief, Western Approaches.

32. I sighted Prawle Point at 0950, and at 1015 reduced speed to 12 knots to fire fitted demolition charge. These were fired at 1045 and at 1100 I resumed speed of 15 knots.

33. Start Point was abeam at 1043, and at 1210 I altered course to North up the searched channel leading into Plymouth.

34. I passed through the Breakwater at 1315 and secured alongside H.M.S. WITCH at No.2 wharf at 1340.

35. The conduct of H.M.S. VENETIA ship's Company during the action at Boulogne is deserving of the highest praise. Their steady bearing and courage in the face of heavy enemy shellfire was magnificent and in the highest traditions of the Service. A list of officers and rating deserving especial mention is attached as enclosure No.1.

36. A list of casualties is attached as enclosure No.2.

37. Lieut.Cdr. D.L.C. Craig assumed command of H.M.S. VENETIA at 0900 on 26th May, 1940.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF,  
THE NORE.

(Copies to:-  
Vice-Admiral, Dover,  
Captain (D), Plymouth.)

*Rudolph W. ...*  
LIEUTENANT, R.N.





The following recommendations are forwarded as  
a result of the engagement...

Officers

Sub-Lieutenant Denis Hervey JONES, R.N.R.

Very strongly recommended for his initiative,  
courage and coolness in taking control of H.M.S. VENETIA  
while the bridge was under heavy enemy shell-fire and when  
all the remaining bridge personnel had been put out of  
action. His handling of the ship under the most adverse  
conditions and in a very difficult harbour is deserving of  
the highest praise.

Sub-Lieutenant Edwin Arthur Owen Glynn HERRING, R.N.

Strongly recommended for his courage, coolness  
and devotion to duty while under heavy enemy shell-fire in  
keeping the forward group of guns firing. His energy and  
encouragement, especially after 'B' gun had been put out of  
action by a cordite fire, were largely responsible for the  
putting out of action of the shore batteries.

Mr. Stanley Samuel VINCENT, Commissioned  
Engineer, R.N.

Deserving of special mention for his coolness  
and devotion to duty while under heavy enemy shell-fire  
in maintaining the engines and boilers, steering and  
telegraphs, in working order, thereby enabling H.M.S.  
VENETIA to withdraw from the harbour and avoid blocking  
the channel.

Mr. Douglas HONEY, Gunner(T)

Deserving of special mention for his coolness  
and initiative while under heavy enemy shell-fire in  
releasing from their tubes the torpedoes, which were in  
close proximity to a fire and which would have seriously  
endangered the ship had they exploded.

Ratings

James Frederick WAGNER, Acting Chief Petty  
Officer, O.N. D/J102707, Torpedo Coxswain

Deserving of special mention for his coolness  
and devotion to duty while under heavy enemy shell-fire  
in returning to his post in the wheelhouse, which he had  
left in order to assist the firing of the forward group  
of guns.....

of guns.....

(Enclosure No. 1 to H.M.S. VENETIA's Report of Proceedings  
dated 30th May, 1940.) (Continued)

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of guns when he thought the bridge to be out of action, as soon as he realised the ship was under way, thereby enabling H.M.S. VENETIA to withdraw from the harbour and avoid blocking the channel.

William Henry LEECE, Petty Officer, O.N. D/JX  
134292.

Recommended for his courage, coolness and devotion to duty while under heavy enemy shell-fire in transferring to and taking charge of 'A' gun after his post, 'B' gun, had been put out of action by cordite fire, thereby assisting to put the shore batteries out of action.

Jeremiah Vincent BURKE, Petty Officer, O.N. D/J  
115014.

Recommended for his coolness and devotion to duty while under heavy enemy shell-fire in taking charge of the after group of guns and the after fire party, his rangefinder being out of action, thereby assisting to put the shore batteries out of action.

Arthur Herbert HAMPSON, Acting Yeoman of Signals,  
O.N. D/J 112753.

Recommended for his great courage when severely wounded, in shouting encouragement to the wheelhouse personnel who were under heavy enemy shell-fire, and in refusing treatment until others had been treated first.

Adam HENDERSON, Able Seaman, O.N. D/J 36746.

Recommended for his courage, coolness and devotion to duty in the wheelhouse which was under heavy enemy shell-fire and which appeared to be in imminent danger of destruction, thereby enabling H.M.S. VENETIA to withdraw from the harbour and avoid blocking the channel.

Preston Owen DENNY, Acting Petty Officer,  
O.N. D/J 111903.

Thomas Edmund WATTS, Able Seaman, O.N. D/J 113108.

Bernard Craven CHAPMAN, Able Seaman, O.N. D/J  
90057.

Deserving of special mention as members of 'A' gun's crew, for their coolness and devotion to duty in keeping their gun firing while under heavy shell-fire thereby assisting to put the shore batteries out of action.

Robert ROBERTSON.....