

ENCLOSURE No. 7  
CONFIDENTIAL

TO DOVER LETTER OF 27<sup>th</sup> July 1940  
014/01080

Subject. Action off BOULOGNE on 23rd May 1940.

From.....The Commanding Officer H.M.S. "VENOMOUS"

Date.....26th May 1940

Ref No. 0130/54

To.....The Captain (D) 16th Destroyer Flotilla.

Copies to: Commander in Chief Western Approaches.  
Vice Admiral Dover.  
Commanding Officer H.M.S. "WHITSHED".

Submitted:-

*Return to M 01479 3/46*

In company with other British and French Destroyers, H.M.S. "VENOMOUS" was cruising off BOULOGNE at 1830 on 23rd May 1940, when this force was subjected to an intense dive-bombing attack by about sixty Junkers 87 dive bombers. This attack was delivered with the apparent intention of discouraging the bombardment of the coast.

2. The German aircraft opened out at a height of about 7000 feet, and then dived to deliver their attacks from about 1000 feet.

3. The telegraphs were put to full speed ahead in H.M.S. "VENOMOUS" and the ship was kept turning under full helm. Meanwhile the 4.7in guns had opened fire with barrage shell, followed by the pom-poms and Lewis guns when the aircraft came within range.

4. Ten attacks were made on H.M.S. "VENOMOUS" and in each case salvos of four 110 lbs bombs were dropped. The ship was closely missed on all sides, the nearest salvo being only ten yards off, and numerous splinters hit the ship's side and upperworks, in some cases penetrating. Mr Thompson Gunner (T) and three other ratings were superficially wounded during the attack.

5. At 1915, on receipt of orders from H.M.S. "WHITSHED", the remaining destroyers (in the order Wild Swan, Venomous, Venetia) proceeded into BOULOGNE Harbour to evacuate our military forces. A signal was received from H.M.S. "WHITSHED" to the effect that the enemy were holding the left bank of the harbour. On entering H.M.S. "WILD SWAN" proceeded alongside the south west side of the railway jetty but although Army officials called to H.M.S. "VENOMOUS" to secure alongside her, I decided to use The North East side in order to keep all guns bearing on the left bank.

6. As the ship secured alongside, fire was opened by the enemy from the park adjoining the left side of the harbour with machine guns and rifles; and with light field pieces from the French battery on the hill above the town.

town. H.M.S. "VENETIA" was entering harbour at this time and the heaviest firing ~~was~~ was directed upon her. She was hit almost immediately at point blank range, her cordite at "B" gun caught on fire, and there was a loud explosion.

7. At this juncture, an enemy troop detachment on motor-cycles and in cars appeared between the houses of the main street on the left bank at a range of 300 yards. As these troops deployed, Midshipman Esson R.N.R. at the pom-poms opened fire and his first shots blew the side out of the leading car and set it on fire; the remaining cars and motor-cycles were also disabled and abandoned. The enemy attempting to escape were picked off by the Lewis gunners and by Torpedo-men, stokers, Sub-Lieutenant Kershaw and Midshipman Esson who were using rifles; Infantry were now observed taking up position among the trees and bushes in the park and an intense fire from automatic rifles firing tracer was directed upon the bridge and gun's crews.

8. Meanwhile H.M.S. "VENETIA" was endeavouring to get out of harbour stern first, in order to leave the channel clear, as she was in danger of running ashore. She was continually under fire during this time, and H.M.S. "WILD SWAN" was also straddled.

9. Gun flashes were sighted in the direction of the French Battery above the town. Presumably enemy forces ~~eee~~ occupying the town had brought the French guns to bear - these would seem to have been about 3 inch calibre. All 4.7 inch guns were trained on this spot by director and the ship opened fire with Direct Action Impact Shell. The first salvo was over but the second blew away the whole side of the fort and part of the hill. Pieces of guns and mountings were observed falling down the hillside and in addition a number of field guns were shelled and destroyed by H.M.S. "VENOMOUS" as they were being placed in position by the enemy.

10. H.M.S. "WILD SWAN" now joined in the firing with her two after guns, directing them upon the road. An enemy tank followed by infantry attempted to enter the town from the westward, but received a direct hit from H.M.S. "WILD SWAN" and caught fire.

11. Another small field piece was throwing occasional shells amongst the troops gathered at the railway station, but it could not be located. The troops being unused to the noise of Naval gunfire, were difficult to handle and most of those who jumped onboard the starboard side of the flag deck caused a temporary jam there. The Navigating Officer SUB-Lieutenant Vaughan-Lewis took charge of the flag deck and organised the military, so that they were kept streaming down to the main deck.

12. The ship was only secured by one wire forward and it was necessary to make continuous use of the screws, to counteract a stern current and gun recoil, to keep the ship alongside. The passing ashore, handling and securing of this wire was done by Sub-Lieutenant Wells, singlehanded under

under heavy fire.

13. H.M.S. "VENETIA" had, by now, been taken well clear and was proceeding to sea. Troops were embarking steadily on board H.M.S. "WILD SWAN" but owing to the open expanse of jetty which had to be crossed in the face of strong machine gun fire, the troops were not moving very quickly on this side of the jetty. An enemy column was observed filing down a narrow wall-flanked pathway on the hillside and again Missipman Esson caught them with pom-pom fire and, in this case, blowing a wall and several houses down on top of them.

14. An incendiary shell from a light field gun pitched short of the ship abreast "B" gun. Signalman Mayland reported the flash to come from the right of the fort from the trees in the garden of a house. Target was accordingly shifted to that point and the first salvo blew down all the trees in the garden and set fire to the house beyond. Enemy were observed running from the spot.

15. From this time all larger calibre gunfire ceased and only rifle and machine gun fire were kept up from the shore. The ship maintained a continuous barrage until H.M.S. "WILD SWAN" cleared harbour.

16. After thirty five minutes alongside when H.M.S. "VENOMOUS" approximately 500 troops I decided to leave harbour. To get out astern as quickly as ~~quickly~~ possible 18 knots was ordered. Soon after slipping the wheel jammed at hard-a-starboard and for the remainder of the passage out through the narrow channel, the ship had to be steered by the engines. H.M.S. "WILD SWAN" followed H.M.S. "VENOMOUS" out of harbour.

17. It seems evident that the German forces on shore intended to disable the last ship of the line on entering, in order to block the channel and hold the remaining destroyers at the jetty. This plan was frustrated by:-

(a) The Cool handling and withdrawal of H.M.S. "VENETIA".

(b) The position in which H.M.S. "VENOMOUS" had been laid, which gave an all round view and enabled all the guns to bear.

(c) The manner in which the Ship's Company of H.M.S. "VENOMOUS" performed their duties in the face of point blankfire.

(d) The effective manner in which the pom-poms kept off close range opposition.



opposition.

(e) The promptitude with which the Gunner Control Officer summed up the situation and the deliberation and accuracy with which the guns were controlled.

18.

*Wm. Seath*

Lieutenant Commander

In Command.



III.

Whilst the behaviour, under fire, of all my Officers and ship's company was exemplary, I particularly wish to bring to your notice the following Officers and men.

Lieutenant A.A.MACKENZIE. R.N.R. - the First Lieutenant and G.C.O. - who, by his keen appreciation of the situation and accurate placing and control of the ship's gunnery armament under heavy fire, undoubtedly made possible the entire embarkation by both ships. It is also considered that the wholesale destruction of German field guns etc. was the main reason for the comparatively unopposed entry of subsequent ships.

Acting-Gunner(T). THOMPSON. R.N. - who, although wounded in the bombing attack, took charge of the after part of the ship whilst alongside, organising the supply parties and encouraging the guns' crews. He was also responsible for controlling the after anti-snipers rifle party organised from the Tubes' crews.

Midshipman ESSON. R.N.R.

I particularly wish to emphasise the magnificent conduct of this young Officer. His courageous behaviour under heavy fire was an inspiration, not only to his Pom-Pom crews but to all who saw him. His quick decisions and selections of targets were entirely responsible for the prevention of the German close range weapons being used effectively. Between giving orders to direct and control his guns he was using a rifle to good effect against snipers in nearby cranes and houses.

Sub-Lieutenant W.R.WELLS. R.N.

This Officer courageously worked alone on the forepart of the F.X., under heavy fire, and it was entirely through his efforts that the bows of the ship were secured alongside. He passed and secured the bow wire single-handed and his conduct in the most exposed position in the ship was outstanding.

*W. H. Nicholls*



III (Contd.)

Petty Officer M.J. O'Sullivan D/JX 132003

for the cool and deliberate manner in which he performed his duties during both the dive-bombing barrage fire, and the subsequent bombardment and destruction of enemy land forces. This Petty Officer normally performs his duties in an exceptional manner and his bearing in action, under heavy fire, was an inspiration to his director's crew and all who saw him. I particularly wish to bring this rating's conduct to your notice.

A.B. H. Knopon D/JX 151137 A.B. J.G. Hendersen D/JX 149499

Both these very young ratings performed their duties throughout the action in a manner which is deserving of the highest praise.

Signalman O.G. MAYLAND. D/IJ 31639

who kept the Control informed of the positions of enemy field guns by observation of gunflash in an extremely able and efficient manner.

Ordnance Artificer III. H.H. McGeeney D/MX 47358

maintained a continuous round of all the guns throughout the action, maintaining their efficient working and clearing several pom-pom jams - all under heavy fire.

Q/RM Officer. L.W. Dagley D/JX 127574.

quickly rectified an electrical failure at "A" gun, and after No.3 of "B" gun's crew had been wounded by shrapnel, he efficiently performed the duties of that number - although he is a Torpedoman.

A.B. E.R. Stollard. D/JX 142935

Gunlayer of the Port Pom-Pom for extreme coolness and efficiency under heavy fire. This Rating's handling of his gun was mainly responsible for the collapse of the enemy's close-range opposition in Boulogne harbour. His bearing and manner during the air attack were exemplary. I strongly commend the conduct of this rating.

A.B. J. Edwards. MD/X 2534

Port Pom-Pom Loading number who efficiently performed loading duties at both guns after his opposite number had been incapacitated

A.B. W.H. Nickless D/J 100855

for coolness and efficiency in performing his duty as Telegrapher during the action in harbour. He formed a link between the .N. Commar

Commanding Officer and wheel to pass telegraph orders when the noise of action and embarking military prevented voice-pipe orders being clearly heard. (Telegraphs were continually in use in order to keep the stern alongside the jetty by screw action).



*W. Leath.*  
Lieut. Commander  
in Command.

No. 191.

1 June 40

*II*

*[Signature]*

*From now*

*The Vice Admiral  
Dover*

*Smalley  
Capt D16*

