

13th. December, 1946.

Report of Proceedings
Landing Party of H.M.S. "Providence", on the Island of Sirina.

The whaler was lowered and slipped with a complete seaboats' crew under the charge of Sub Lieutenant G. Culshaw, R.N.V.R. with instructions to pull inshore until it could be taken in tow by the motor boat. The motor boat was lowered, with difficulty in a growing sea and swell and was unhooked. We proceeded inshore taking the whaler in tow; soundings of 22 fathoms were taken at the entrance to the cove, but it was found impossible to pass these to the ship as the "Aldis" battery had overturned in the heavy sea and semaphore was not possible owing to the violent motion of the boat.

The weather inside the cove was calm with a slight swell running; the cove itself was about 1000 yards long with steep hills on either side coming straight into the sea with numerous rocks. At the end of the cove there was a fairly sandy beach with a steep gradient of about 1 in 6.

The only landing place was on the right of the cove and that was only a flat rock about 4 feet by 2 feet. I decided to take the whaler alongside and so make contact with the First Lieutenant of H.M.S. "Chevron" who was already ashore.

On the landing place there were about 60 survivors sitting among their possessions with an air of indifference and not at all dejected as one would have imagined.

I soon contacted the First Lieutenant of "Chevron" who stated that he was in communication with his ship on type T.B.Y.

"Chevron" ordered all boats to remain inshore as the weather outside had deteriorated and boat traffic was impossible.

We anchored all boats as they could not be left alongside the landing place without being completely smashed, then took all available hands across the island to collect the two awnings landed by "Chevron" the previous day. These we gathered together with a few provisions and took them to the cove where we rigged a tent to provide shelter for the combined landing parties should we have to spend the night ashore.

At 1600 hours both whalers were hauled onto the beach and the motor boats re-anchored with one complete motor boats' crew remaining in them as boat keepers.

All remaining hands were sent to collect what firewood they could, brushwood was abundant.

The First Lieutenant of "Chevron" and myself then took a survey of the island to ascertain that there was water available and also that the survivors were as comfortable as the circumstances permitted.

The island was inhabited by 8 people; 4 of whom were between the ages of 30 and 60. They appeared to be a farmer and his wife with their married children. The farmer was known in the surrounding islands as the "King of Sirina" and paid a rent of £75 per annum for the privilege of sheep farming. He carried an excellent letter of recommendation from Viscount Alexander of Tunis for his co-operation with the Allies during the late war. His home was squalid and typical of the Greek islanders but he is known to be fairly rich, the corn he grows

paying the rent and all monies received for his sheep (of which he had about 300) being profit.

Water was available from two wells which the farmer allowed the survivors to use, he was rather worried later on in the evening when the wells were nearly dry. The water although rather discoloured appeared to be quite drinkable and after boiling the landing parties drank it with no after effects.

The survivors had made use of every available form of shelter ranging from caves to holes in the ground protected from the wind and rain by walls which had been hastily built.

Everyone on the island appeared to be quite happy and after the evening meal settled down for the night at about 1700. A few formed into parties and started an evening "sing-song" with such songs as "Roll out the Barrel".

All were deeply grateful for the supplies dropped by the R.A.F., the only food that was wasted being dried egg which was scattered around the countryside. The survivors did not appear to realize that it was food.

At 1630 the First Lieutenant of "Chevron" and I returned to the camp where a very good stew had been prepared by the Gunners' Mate of "Chevron" consisting of a bucket of local water to which he had added potatoes, cauliflower, corned beef and baked beans. Amid much playful sarcasm to the "Cook" we sat down to our banquet.

We were fully prepared at 1720 to remain the night with our only worry being the boats, which were at anchor. Boat keepers being relieved every 2 hours.

Rain was our next problem, for the torrential downpours wet us inside the tent as much as outside, but this did not deter the landing party from continuing their sing-song.

At 2130, "Chevron" signalled that she thought that at 2200 the weather conditions might allow the embarkation of the remaining survivors a total of 500. Over 100 had already been evacuated by "Chevron".

The First Lieutenant of "Chevron" boarded the caique which had come from Rhodes in charge of a Lieutenant B.M.A. who appeared quite indifferent as to the situation, but agreed to go out and see what the weather conditions were like. This he did and very promptly returned and anchored refusing to make any further move as he said weather conditions would not allow the caique to go alongside.

At 2200 we started the evacuation of the Jews who had formed a queue 4 or 5 deep and about 350 yards long, along the rocks. A whaler was brought alongside to be used as a landing stage.

By this time the swell in the cove was quite large and it took 5 of us to keep the boats from being completely wrecked.

We landed the first party into "Chevron's" motor boat and whaler closely followed by "Providence's" motor boat and whaler, each boat containing 15 to 20 persons.

smashed This ferry service continued until 0045 when "Chevron's" whaler/her rudder on the rocks due to the growing swell, men handling this whaler were completely soaked, being continually up to the waist in the sea and the continual squalls of rain.

At 0100 it was reported that "Providence's" whaler had capsized alongside "Providence". The First Lieutenant of "Chevron" and myself considered that this would seriously affect the evacuation so we decided to board the caique and if necessary take charge of it. After much argument the caique agreed to commence ferrying if responsibility for damage was taken by us. With the concurrence of "Chevron" this was accepted.

We commenced to load up the caique with "Chevron's" whaler and she sailed with about 70 to 80 refugees onboard with the First Lieutenant of "Chevron" onboard acting as liason officer.

Whilst caique was absent I continued ferrying with the two motor boats and whaler.

On return of the caique I took over from the First Lieutenant of "Chevron" in the caique, we re-loaded and I sailed for "Providence" leaving about 15 refugees to be evacuated by "Providence" motor boat. I decided not to return ashore considering it unnecessary.

Notes:- The First Lieutenant of "Chevron" kept perfect liason and control with his ship.

- 2.. The behaviour of the comparatively small party ashore was excellent considering adverse conditions under which they worked they, being almost continually in the water from 2200 until 0300.
- 3.. The signalman of "Chevron" never failed in his job of keeping shore ship contact.
- 4.. Officers of boats were completely in charge of their craft and did their work well under adverse weather conditions with boat loads of women and children.
- 5.. Morale of the Jews was excellent, words of appreciation were continually being made but never one word of complaint.
- 6.. The greek sailors landed from the Greek destroyers were completely useless, they never gave any assistance in the evacuation and never even prepared themselves for the night. During the evacuation they remained by the fire built by the landing parties of "Chevron" and "Providence".

A. F. Wilcocks

(A. F. Wilcocks.)
Lieutenant, R.N.
Officer in Charge of Landing Party.

Appendix No. 2.

Commendations.

Although the behaviour, bearing and attention to duty of all my officers and ships' company was exemplary, I consider the undermentioned to be worthy of special commendation.

As Whaler's crew - Supporting survivors in the water when boat capsized.

Jordan. J.J.	Able Seaman.	C/JX 182012.
Ellett. S.	Able Seaman.	P/JX 631524.

Assisting in recovery of survivors inboard.

Mills. R.	Stoker. 1.	D/KX 711066.
Yearley. C.J.	Able Seaman.	P/SSX 33783.

Disregarding own safety and although an indifferent swimmer plunged into the sea to support a woman.

Webster. R.	A/L/Seaman.	D/JX 161644.
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Outstanding Service Ashore.

Lieutenant A. Wilcocks, R.N.		
Bennett. T.	Able Seaman.	P/JX 555385.
Brown. K.C.	Signalman.	P/JX 292972.
McCutcheon. J.	Able Seaman.	D/JX 153462.

Outstanding Service in Charge of Motor Boat.

Temporary Sub Lieutenant G. Culshaw, R.N.V.R.

Outstanding Service Onboard.

Temporary Sub Lieutenant (E) I.R. White, R.N.V.R. (In absence of the First Lieutenant, this officer was completely responsible for the reception of all survivors onboard).

Hayter. E.H.	Act. Ch. P.O.	C/JX 140181.
Reavill. J.	P.O. Cook.	P/LX 20299.
Blyth. P.J.	Cook.	C/MX 750558.
Ferris. A.	Cook.	P/MX 737728.
Cunningham. G.	Able Seaman.	C/JX 656120.
Beddard. H.L.	S.B.A.	D/MX 762870.
Parry. J.	Stoker. 1.	C/KX 740645.



William E. Messinger
(W.E. Messinger.)
Lieutenant, R.N.
Commanding Officer.