

keepers to swim or to wade out to the drifting boats which had been cast away by the soldiers on disembarkation.

101. By the night of the 30/31st a considerable number of collapsible boats and pontoons had been received from the Royal Engineers of the B.E.F. These were of great assistance and paddled off about 10 men in each trip, but again, in spite of all efforts, in the vast majority of cases the soldiers left these craft when they arrived at the offshore ship.

102. Much of the most meritorious work of lifting off the beaches was done by the offshore warships' own boats, who were tireless in their efforts. All small pulling boats and small power boats were lowered and were lent from ship to ship when their own parent ship left the coast to unload at a United Kingdom port. In addition, H.M. Ships seized drifting and abandoned boats as opportunity offered and manned them up with boat keepers. Owing to the physical exhaustion of these boats' crews after hours of work, relief crews of stokers were frequently provided from amongst the many volunteers that came forth.

103. A typical example of dogged work by a ship's boat was afforded by the action of JAVELIN'S and JAGUAR'S boats off Bray beach in the afternoon of 28/5. When their two motor cutters and two whalers first grounded offshore they were rushed and swamped by soldiers. Order being restored the boats had to be baled out and the wet engines restarted, following which 700 troops were embarked by these few boats in a short time during continuous bombing attacks.

104. Of the power boats available by far the most useful and suitable were the A.L.C.s, M.L.C.s* and the small type of R.N.L.I. lifeboat. The high speed service motor boats such as DOLPHIN'S and EXCELLENT'S boats and the R.A.F. Seaplane tenders proved unsuitable for work in shallow waters on a lee shore owing to the vulnerability of their propellers and rudders and their poor manoeuvring powers at low speeds.

105. Of the civilian manned craft one of the best performances was that of the London Fire Brigade fire float MASSEY SHAW. All the volunteer crew were members of the London Fire Brigade or Auxiliary Fire Service and succeeded in doing 4 round trips to the beaches in their well-found craft. Reference should also be made to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution crews of the Ramsgate and Margate lifeboats who took their boats over to Dunkirk.

106. Locally, at both Ramsgate and Dover a number of civilian volunteers came forward to man the boats and to drive their engines. These men did good work.

107. At both Ramsgate and Dover when the business of manning these civilian power boats was set about the same difficulties were experienced:—

(i) of obtaining drivers with knowledge of the very varied types of internal combustion engines;

(ii) of making the engines of these boats run, most of them having been laid up since the previous summer.

Throughout the operation all engines continued to give trouble. Many engines were old and almost all were of different types. Several boats could not be used as they had diesel engines and no stokers or civilians trained in these were available. Each engine, especially the older ones, required careful nursing, and signs of distress from the engines were not understood. These difficulties were partly overcome by obtaining engine drivers from Chatham and by the provision of cadet ratings, and Sub-Lieutenants, R.N.V.R. from KING ALFRED who claimed knowledge of I.C. engines, but many engines were of types unknown even to these.

108. Fresh water for the motor boats was difficult to supply in sufficient quantity, owing to lack of water tanks in most boats, especially those of the open type. Large supplies were required as the troops were reported to be suffering severely from thirst. Both at Ramsgate and Dover the Base Staff provided as many galvanised iron cylinders and tanks as could be found and made serviceable, and these proved most satisfactory.

109. On two occasions skoots and small boats approaching the coast were turned back through false information. On the first occasion on the afternoon of 28th May, at least 6 skoots, who were without definite orders where to proceed, encountered a returning skoot when about 10 miles off the coast. This skoot stated that Dunkirk had already fallen into German hands and that the evacuation had ceased. As a result of this ill-judged comment, the arrival of at least 6 skoots was delayed at over 24 hours, until this situation had been cleared up.

The second occasion occurred during the night of 1st June, and has been referred to in paragraph 72 of the narrative. On this occasion although the services of a number of small craft were lost to the coast, it transpired that sufficient were already there to cope with the troops available.

110. An important flotilla was formed by 40 Dutch motor coasters, referred to in this report as skoots, 21 of whom were commissioned at Tilbury and Sheerness, and 19 at Poole. All these vessels ultimately made the Flanders coast and operated with a varying degree of success, usually governed by the reliability of their strange engines when handled by Naval stoker ratings. Too large to be used as beaching craft except under the best conditions, they were mainly used as intermediaries between the small boats and the offshore warships to reduce the distance the pulling boats had to traverse and periodically returned to U.K. themselves fully loaded when beach work ceased, or the supply of reception warships temporarily decreased.

Some of these skoots handled more than 1,000 troops during the course of the operation.

111. It is of interest to note that on the final night after the last two destroyers had left at 0340 a number of the larger power boats continued to work in Dunkirk Harbour and only left when they came under small arms fire from German troops who had penetrated into Dunkirk at certain points.

112. About 30 Naval Officers and 320 ratings were employed for varying periods in pier parties and at shore signal stations in Dunkirk and as beach parties. A great number worked

* Admiralty footnote: M.L.C. = Mechanised Vehicle Landing Craft.