

Lieutenant Billyard-Leake and of Mate (E) Sydney Greville West ("Benbow"), who throughout the preparations and operation worked his department in an admirable manner.

98. "*Brilliant*" and "*Sirius*."—I regret that the effort to block Ostend did not succeed. The "*Brilliant*" (Commander Alfred E. Godsall, "*Centurion*"), with "*Sirius*" (Lieutenant-Commander Henry N. M. Hardy, D.S.O. ("*Patrol*"), in her wake, was approaching the charted position of the Stroom Bank Buoy, but did not sight it as expected. Deducing from the positions of other navigation marks already passed that the ships were to the northward of their supposed position, they continued on their original course for an extra two minutes, sighting the buoy to the north-eastward. They steered to pass to the northward of the buoy, at which time they first came under fire from the enemy's batteries, and then shaped a course for the deduced position of Ostend. No marks were visible owing to smoke, which made it necessary for "*Sirius*" to keep very close station on "*Brilliant*." When the Ostend Piers should have been seen by "*Brilliant*," breakers were observed on the starboard bow, and though the helm was starboarded, the ship grounded. "*Sirius*," observing this, immediately put her helm hard over and her engines full speed astern, but the ship being already badly damaged by gunfire and sinking, did not answer the helm, and collided with the port quarter of the "*Brilliant*." In the end, both ships being practically fast ashore, "*Brilliant*," with her port engine immovable, and "*Sirius*," in sinking condition, were blown up where they stranded, as observation has since shown, about 2,400 yards east of the canal entrance. Lieutenant A. C. Crutchley ("*Centurion*"), Sub-Lieutenant Angus H. MacLachlan ("*Temeraire*"), and Engineer Lieutenant Wilfred Long ("*Dublin*"), all serving in the "*Brilliant*," were reported by their captain as having set a fine example to their men. Commander Godsall also mentions Petty Officer Joseph J. Reed (O.N. C230360), who behaved with conspicuous coolness.

99. The rescue of the crews by motor launches which had been standing by under heavy fire of every calibre, was carried out in the gallant manner which distinguished the work of the crews of the motor launches and coastal motor boats throughout the action. Commander Ion Hamilton Benn, R.N.V.R., attempted to go alongside in Motor Launch No. 532, but owing to thick smoke she was damaged by collision with the ship. Lieutenant Roland Bourke, R.N.V.R., in M.L. 276, repeatedly went alongside "*Brilliant*" in the difficult circumstances of her starboard engines still going astern, while M.L. 283, under the command of Lieutenant Keith R. Hoare, D.S.C., R.N.V.R., embarked practically all the men from the "*Sirius*," and sixteen from the "*Brilliant's*" whaler, sunk by gunfire.

100. After leaving the "*Sirius*," Lieutenant-Commander Hardy found that Engineer Lieutenant William R. Maclaren ("*Iron Duke*") and some men were missing. He therefore hailed C.M.B. 10 (Sub-Lieutenant Peter B. Clarke, R.N.R.), and with Lieutenant Edward L. Berthon, D.S.C. ("*Viceroy*"), went alongside the ship under a heavy and accurate fire from 4.1-inch and machine

guns to search for them, but found no sign of life in either ship. The officer and men were subsequently picked up by the "*Attentive*" in a boat, in which they had pulled thirteen miles out to sea after the sinking of their ship.

101. Their Lordships will share with me and the commanding officers of these ships the disappointment due to the defeat of our plans, as we may believe, by the legitimate ruse of the enemy in shifting the buoy. As the Commodore at Dunkirk remarks in the despatch to which their Lordships will refer for details on this point, the location of buoys by aircraft is a high art, and can only be done with accuracy in relation to closely surrounding land or shoal features, but aerial photographs have since established the fact that had the buoy been in its original position the vessels would have made the entrance accurately.

102. Both Commander Godsall and Mr. Hardy immediately and repeatedly asked me for other ships, to be allowed to try again. They report that all their officers and Petty Officer Joseph Reed have volunteered to make another attempt, sanguine that with the experience gained it would succeed.

#### IX.—THE RETIREMENT.

103. The viaduct explosion having duly taken place, and the blocking ships having been seen proceeding shorewards, the main object of storming the Mole had been accomplished; and the only reason for prolonging the operation till the programme time for retirement was that of continuing the work of demolition. On the other hand, the only guns in "*Vindictive*" bearing on the Mole had been put out of action; the upper works of the ship and men in exposed positions were presenting an easy target to the shore guns, while, in view of the failure of the Mole anchors, the storming parties would be unable to embark if the "*Daffodil*" should be disabled. Captain Carpenter, regarding the "*Daffodil's*" escape up to this time as being almost a miracle, therefore decided to give the order for the retirement, and in this I consider he acted with good judgment; in fact, I had given orders for the "*Warwick*" to close the "*Vindictive*" so that I might inform Captain Carpenter that I had seen the blockships proceeding in, ascertain the conditions on the Mole, and decide on further action, when I saw that she was hauling off.

104. The searchlights, by which twenty minutes' warning was to be given, having been destroyed, as well as the "*Vindictive's*" siren, by which the executive signal was to be made, the "*Daffodil*" made the latter signal at fifty minutes past midnight, and the retirement commenced. About fifteen minutes later it was reported to the Captain that officers and men had ceased coming on board, a large number having already embarked by the same means as they had originally used for storming the Mole. To make doubly sure, Captain Carpenter waited till ten minutes past one, and after repeated assurances from officers and his own observation that no more were returning, he ordered "*Daffodil*" to tow "*Vindictive's*" bow away from the Mole, the port cable was slipped, and towing commenced. The hawser parted almost at once, but the ship's head was clear enough to allow her to proceed at full speed with helm hard-a-port under cover of her own smoke screen. A large bumpkin made of her own mainmast, rigged out