

Coastal Motor Boat Operations

June – August, 1918

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C.M.B.1

The orders for this operation provided that the Large America should be used for locating the enemy and for assisting to recover the coastal motor boats at the conclusion of the operations. The operations were to be done by the Harwich Force under Rear Admiral Tyrwhitt. On the scheme being submitted to the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Beatty suggested that he would like operations with the Furious in the northern part of Heligoland Bight to synchronise with the coastal motor boat scheme. He proposed that the Fifth Battle Squadron, and the Seventh Light Cruiser Squadron, should be in support to the north-west of the Furious and the First Light Cruiser Squadron, which it was proposed should operate in the vicinity of Lodbjerg.

Rear Admiral Tyrwhitt, in his report stated “that a kite balloon was taken out with the supporting force and proved to be useful as a mark for the coastal motor boat to find the supporting force on their return. Otherwise I was disappointed with the results of the coastal motor boats reports. These were few, vague, and generally misleading, probably due to the inexperience of the observer..... I am of opinion that these seaplanes were overloaded, and that it is most important that the weights they carry should be carefully revised and considerably reduced. On the three occasions they have been taken out, only one of the three in each case has succeeded in getting up”.

The coastal motor boats were launched at 0100 hours on the 30th June, 1918. The six boats, each carrying one torpedo, were organised into three sub-divisions. It was arranged that No.2 sub-division should sweep to the north-west, and Nos. 1 and 3 should sweep to the south-east. No.2 sub-division sighted ten large minesweeping trawlers steaming in line ahead and steering south-east. The two boats of this sub-division attacked at 0300 hours with torpedoes, and one is reported to have scored a hit. The second torpedo is stated not to have 'run'. The first and third sub-divisions meanwhile had sighted a considerable quantity of smoke and gave chase. By 0325, however daylight broke with good visibility and the chase was broken off, the boat returning to the supporting force. On the way back at 0345 a raft was sighted by the first sub-division and a shipwrecked Norwegian sailor was picked up from it. At 0400 the smoke from the Harwich force was sighted and simultaneously a seaplane, which had got off, approached the boat and directed them back to the ships. At 0440 the coastal motor boats arrived back and were hoisted on-board the light cruisers. During the course of the sweep two submarines were sighted, but these dived before attack could be made. Furthermore, the coastal motor boats carried no depth charges with which to attack the submerged U-boat. In view of this fact, the admiralty proposed that on the next occasion half the boats should carry torpedoes and the other half depth charges for use against any submarines that might be sighted. The C.in-C, however, did not entirely agree. In his opinion the operations were designed purely against surface craft and any attempt to attack submarines would only confuse the original idea.

However, on the next occasion only four of the coastal motor boats were fitted with torpedoes and two were equipped with depth charges.

With regard to aircraft operations, the kite balloon was towed by a destroyer Ulleswater. The large Americas were to fly at 0300 and quarter the course taken by the coastal motor boats. They were to start from position Lat. 54° 38'N. Long. 40° 7'E. and proceed for sixty miles, returning by course 283°. They were ordered not to proceed more than 60 miles and were to return if they saw the coastal motor boats returning. They were to signal by w/t if any enemy craft were in sight, and if anything appeared amiss with the coastal motor boats. They were also to guide these back to the cruisers. They were to return to base as soon as the coastal motor boats had sighted the cruisers. The leader and three T.B.D.'s with the seaplanes' barges were ordered to return to their base directly the seaplanes had taken the air.

C.M.B.2

There were no results from this operation which was carried out on the 7/8th July, 1918. The swell was found too heavy for the seaplanes and they were sent back to their base at daylight.

C.M.B.3

This was undertaken on the 17/18th July, 1918. It was carried out at night. Owing to the unsatisfactory state of the weather no seaplanes were taken up. A kite balloon was towed aloft, but it was struck by lightning and burnt.

C.M.B.4

1st August, 1918. During the operation, the force was attacked by a zeppelin which made good shooting. A long well was sufficient to prevent the British

seaplanes from getting off the water. The kite balloon proved useful as a guiding mark. The orders on this occasion provided that the seaplanes should fly at 0600 and cruise on the same course and ahead of the coastal motor boats with which they were to keep in touch. The flying boats were ordered to point out any enemy vessels they sight and were to assist the coastal motor boats in any way possible, and to guide them back to the cruisers after their sweep. It was stated that the seaplanes were to make use of W/T or the Aldis Lamp according to circumstances. Using W/T for report of enemy movements or if the coastal motor boats were in trouble.

C.M.B.5

11th August, 1918. The force sailed from Harwich at 2100 on the 10th August, 1918. Orders were given for the seaplanes to fly at the same time (0600) as the coastal motor boats started, but, unfortunately, owing to the absence of wind, the latter were unable to get off the water. "This was a calamity", said admiral Tyrwhitt, "That had never crossed my mind as I considered the "conditions ideal. Knowing, however that the Yarmouth "seaplanes were due, I had no misgivings regarding the "coastal motor boats which were already beyond recall".

At 0614, four enemy planes were sighted to the eastward. These were engaged by the Squadron and retreated to the northward. Later, they were seen to the westward. At 0710 the Yarmouth flight of three Americas arrived at position X. Admiral Tyrwhitt endeavoured to point out the enemy seaplanes, but apparently his signal was not understood although acknowledged as the flight proceeded to the northward. Tyrwhitt endeavoured to point out the enemy seaplanes, but apparently his signal was not understood although acknowledged as the flight proceeded to the northward.

At 0816 the three flying boats returned. The following signal was made and acknowledged: "Meet" "coastal motor boats which should be returning steering "west by north". Once again it did appear that the signal was understood as the flight remained in the vicinity and was generally in sight of the Squadron until it was necessary for it to return to the base.

At 0824 when steering north-east, a Zeppelin which had already been reported by W/T from the Admiralty, as being in the vicinity was sighted. Lieutenant Cowley flew off a lighter in the camel at 0845. His flight was reported by the Admiral "to be most inspiring although he was soon lost in the clouds in which he manoeuvred to get the sun behind him". The Zeppelin was in sight until 0930 when she was seen to rise rapidly and was then lost sight of. At 0940 a burst of flame was seen in the sky, followed by a cloud of white smoke, and debris which fell rapidly, leaving no doubt that it was caused by the destruction of the Zeppelin. Both pilot and camel were picked up at 11.40.

It is interesting to note that the last report made by the Zeppelin was at 9.40- the exact time of her destruction. Her position at this time was reported by W/T from the Admiralty in the message J.23 as being Lat. 53° 45'N. Long. 5° 47'E., which appeared to be perfectly correct. The motor boats which should have been back at 8.30 had not returned and admiral Tyrwhitt proceeded to search the area. At 1106 he asked the admiralty by wireless that a new flight of seaplanes should fly off from Yarmouth. This flight arrived at 1615 and were asked to sweep to the eastward and carry out their orders

Returning by Terschelling light. At 1730 the flight returned, reporting they had seen nothing and returned to base. Vain endeavours were made to point out five hostile seaplanes which were clearly visible to the cruisers flying on the parallel course to the Squadron. "This signal has failed to get through, and" said admiral Tyrwhitt, "confirms my opinion that the "means of communication between seaplanes and ships leave "a great deal to be desired". Later, however admiral Tyrwhitt reported that he had learned that all signals from curacao to the aircraft were taken in and was due to pilots being unable to see from above. It was stated that the visibility from the surface was extreme during the day, but apparently from any altitude entirely the reverse. This phenomena was corroborated by the fact that the Zeppelin was visible from the Squadron for approximately fifty miles, by the camel on returning was only able to see the Squadron at a distance of two miles.

Admiral Beatty, commenting on the report of this operation, stated "the enemy appear to have command" of the air in this locality. A very serious loss of "material and personnel temporarily. I understand they "have been picked up"

BBB

Operation F.3. 30th May, 1918

The object of this operation was

- (a) To support the Harwich Force to carry out reconnaissance of the Heligoland Bight.
- (b) To attack enemy minesweepers, lighter forces, and aircraft.
- (c) To demonstrate in the Bight with a view of drawing enemy forces.

It was arranged that a reconnaissance by three Large Americas should start from lighters at 1100 on the 1st June. At the same time, three Large Americas, if available should fly direct from Yarmouth.

Operation N.B 13th June, 1918

The object of this operation was to attack enemy torpedo boats and trawlers marking the route for submarines with a view to obtaining their confidential books.