

Nine-Day Dunkerque Miracle Is Recalled After 25 Years

By JOSEPH MacSWEEN
LONDON (CP)—It started, as so many things did in wartime, on the BBC news at 9 o'clock. In bland accents on the night of May 14, 1940, this announcement came into British homes: "The admiralty have made an order requesting all owners of self-propelled pleasure craft, between 30 and 100 feet in length, to send all particulars to the admiralty within 14 days of today."

This was the first public whisper of what became, 25 years ago, the Miracle of Dunkerque, the fantastic story of how the Royal Navy and the "little ships" saved an army and inspired Britain and the free world.

Winston Churchill had just become prime minister on the promise of "blood, toil, tears and sweat" and Britain was in the depths of her darkest hour, her army soon to be hurled into the sea by Adolf Hitler's exultant troops.

France was falling before the onslaught and, as Churchill put it:

"Within a few weeks we were to find ourselves alone, almost disarmed, with triumphant Germany and Italy at our throats, with the whole of Europe in Hitler's power and Japan gloating on the other side of the globe."

That was the setting for Operation Dynamo, the Dunkerque evacuation which was signalled at 6.57 p.m. May 26, 1940, and

formally ended at 2.23 p.m. June 4.

During roughly nine days 338,226 men, including 139,911 French and Belgian soldiers, were rescued from a maelstrom of shells and bombs and the closing armored jaws of Hitler's trap—easily the greatest such escape in history.

It was drama on the grand scale and one of the strangest outcomes was the "Dunkerque spirit," still invoked by politicians as the stuff of victory, not defeat.

"We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory," Churchill warned June 4. "Wars are not won by evacuations."

Yet he later chronicled in *The Finest Hour*: "When it was known how many men had been rescued from Dunkerque, a sense of deliverance spread in the island and throughout the Empire. There was a feeling of intense relief, melting almost into triumph."

This feeling persists until today but it is deplored by some who saw the humiliation of the army at Dunkerque.

Field Marshal Earl Alexander, who was there—who was, in fact, the last to leave—spoke with reserve when he was asked for comment by *The Canadian Press* on the eve of the anniversary.

"Why on earth should we celebrate a defeat and a disaster? I think it's something in

the character of my countrymen. They love to celebrate defeats. After all, we awarded ourselves a medal for retreating from Mons."

There is no Dunkerque medal—although some such decoration has been proposed from time to time—to match the First World War's Mons medal and, anyway, the legend has been debunked that all men were heroes in the terrible days of the evacuation.

Alexander, former governor-general of Canada, says flatly: "The heroes were the Royal Navy and the little ships. The RAF did what they could but they were weak at that stage, as we (the army) were."

Then a major-general, Alexander commanded the 1st Division in tough, dangerous rear-guard action as the British Expeditionary Force fell back on Dunkerque, where he was placed in charge of remaining forces for the final four days of the evacuation.

The men of his division—which admittedly included superbly trained guardsmen—still carried their weapons after arriving in England.

"But I saw a lot of rifles and revolvers littered on the Dunkerque beaches," says Alexander. "Why would a soldier throw away his rifle? A soldier without his rifle is no good."

"It was not a happy time at all," the eminent soldier-statesman recalls with customary understatement. "However, I will say this:

After that awful disaster, which I personally would much prefer to forget, I did not think when I came back to England that we as a country would be defeated. But I didn't know how we would avoid defeat."

The Flanders disaster that led to Dunkerque came after Hitler had already mastered Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway and Denmark and, in a two-week period, conquered The Netherlands, most of Belgium and much of Northern France.

MISSING BY CANADIANS
Practically the whole of the British Army had been sent to join the French and Belgians in opposing the still advancing Germans. At the end of the fortnight, nearly all the BEF and the French 1st Army were virtually surrounded, except for the Dunkerque coastal strip, and the Belgian defence on the northeastern flank was collapsing.

After knifing through to the sea farther south at Abbeville, the German armor struck with dazzling speed up the coast, taking Boulogne, enveloping Calais and arriving within 10 miles of Dunkerque.

The 1st Canadian Division, based in England, missed by a whisker being drawn into the vortex. Part of its 1st Infantry Brigade had already been embarked at Dover and Gen. A. G. L. McNaughton, Canadian commander-in-chief, went by destroyer to Calais and Dunkerque to study the situation.

Col. C. P. Stacey, Canadian war historian, writes that what McNaughton saw and heard "produced in his mind the conviction that the Dunkerque area was already quite sufficiently congested; what the troops there needed was not reinforcement but organization."

Yet there was still talk among British military leaders of sending Canadians to the Dunkerque

area until May 27, one day after the general evacuation began. Angel Move, as the proposed Canadian operation was called, was finally abandoned.

By May 27, the vast surging movement into the Dunkerque perimeter, squeezed by the German encirclement, had begun, accompanied by a flood of terrified refugees.

There was no escape for the hapless civilian multitude but desperate efforts were being made in Britain on behalf of the soldiers.

The May 14 BBC broadcast, although couched in polite language, amounted to an order, not a request, but it was on a voluntary basis that an avalanche of letters descended on the admiralty's small vessels pool.

Many of the owners also offered their own services so that by May 26, when Vice-Admiral Bertram Ramsay, Dynamo commander, made an urgent demand for small ships the job of collection was already under way.

Almost at once it was realized, however, that motor yachts and small pleasure craft were not enough—boats were needed to go up on the Dunkerque beaches.

Naval officers stripped ships in the port of London of lifeboats, tugs were requisitioned. The strangest armada in history converged on Dover and began the gallant ferry job, some times an 80-mile round trip under the German guns at Calais, sometimes as long as 170 miles in the hope of eluding attack.

Destroyers and channel steamers sped past barges, cockle boats, drifters, trawlers and tugs.

There were minesweepers, paddle steamers, hospital ships, Clyde passenger vessels, Isle of Man ferries, colliding in the darkness, easy marks for the Stukas, the Junkers and the Messerschmitts. Sometimes sol-

diers reached England after two and even three sinkings. The exploits of the little ships, more than 600 of them, gave rise to such vivid tales that many readers formed the impression they did the job virtually by themselves.

This was one of the myths of Dunkerque. More than two-thirds of the stranded soldiers were lifted by the Royal Navy and larger vessels.

The rescuers found Dunkerque, France's third largest port, bombed to ruins, its five miles of quays devastated.

Yet most of the soldiers were rescued not from the beaches, as is popularly supposed, but from the harbor's East Mole, a wooden breakwater 1,400 yards long and five feet wide which had never been intended for embarking passengers.

"Where is the RAF?" was the enraged cry of the soldiers under the dive-bombing Stukas.

"Many of our soldiers coming back have not seen the air force at work," Churchill said. "They say only the bombers which escaped its protective attack. They underestimate its achievements."

On June 1 alone 31 ships were sunk and 11 damaged at Dunkerque but in the over-all Dynamo period 394 German planes were destroyed for the loss of 114 RAF aircraft.

Soldiers were frequently strafed as they waited neck-deep in water for boats, and incidents of panic are recorded in a book, *Sands of Dunkirk*, published to severe criticism in 1961. It tells of drunkenness, debauchery and fights at pistol-point for places in the boats.

So fantastic was the scale of the evacuation that the question has been asked through the years whether Hitler deliberately stopped his Panzer divisions—they did pause for three days outside Dunkerque—to allow the British Army, for some deluded reason of his own, to get away.



SHAH AT EXPO SITE

The Shah of Iran explains a model to Expo Commissioner General Pierre Dupuy and to his wife, the Empress Fara, while viewing model of proposed building for the 1967 World's Fair at Montreal. The royal couple left Montreal for Toronto Tuesday. They visited Ottawa earlier. (CP Wirephoto)

Potato Growers Are Urged To Attend County Meetings

Potato growers were urged last night to attend the meetings being held in three provincial centres this week to select growers' representatives on the new Potato Marketing Board that will be set up. The release from J. L. Dewar on behalf of the P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture executive said that "in the long term interest of the industry all growers should attend their respective meetings and take part in the election of board members who they feel will be active and progressive in their thinking on behalf of the industry."

The first meeting was held last night in Montague to select two grower members for Kings County. A meeting in the Vocational Institute near Charlottetown will name two members for Queens tonight, and one at the Vocational School in Summerside will name members for Prince on Thursday night.

"At the moment," the federation emphasizes, "the Potato Board is the most important and most effective instrument which growers have for exerting influence on the industry, the most practical way to measure up to this responsibility is to attend the county meetings, see that persons are nominated with desirable qualifications and then have them elected."

These elections are important if growers take them seriously and exert influence in the elections, then a foundation is

being laid for progress and desirable development related to the province's most important cash crop," the statement emphasizes.

Growers of the province can take a great deal of pride in the tremendous contribution their industry has made to the economy of the province during the past 18 months, the executive observed.

"All our citizens are sharing to some extent in the greatly increased income resulting from fine crops and good prices. The growers themselves after a number of difficult years are profiting from their determination to stay in business and from improved efficiency in production."

"During the month of April," the executive recalled, "the growers voted to continue the plan under which a potato marketing board can operate. The powers given under this plan are quite broad and are of such a nature as to enable a potato board to plan policy, promote and regulate the industry in an effective manner. Since the first potato board was established in 1950 the powers under which these boards operate have changed very little and presently provide a satisfactory measure of legal authority for working on behalf of the industry."

The farm organization statement concluded.

Electronic Age May Speed Benefit From Cuts In Taxes

By JAMES NELSON
OTTAWA (CP)—The electronic age may mean quicker benefit for taxpayers from any future cut in income tax rates. A revenue department source says it took the department's electronic computer just five minutes to churn out new tables of tax deductions at source to be made starting July 1 by all employers as a result of Finance Minister Gordon's April 26 budget.

The new tables, now being printed, will be mailed to employers June 5. To compile them, 28,500 calculations were needed. This would have kept several clerks busy with pencil and paper for many weeks before the computer age.

In fact, since introduction of payroll tax deductions during the Second World War, any major change in income tax rates—except for a flat-rate imposition of a surcharge or its withdrawal—has had to be delayed several months from the date of announcement.

HAVE DELAYED
Budgets usually are brought down early in the spring, but because of the calculations re-

quired for new tax deduction tables and the added simplicity of making changes effective at mid-year, new rates have generally become effective at July 1.

The 10 per cent cut in basic income taxes, up to a maximum benefit of \$600 a year, announced April 26, will become effective July 1. Employers will have new tax tables about three weeks before the change in payroll deductions is to be made.

Since income taxes are still being paid at the old rate until mid-year, the tax cuts amount to a five per cent reduction in basic tax and a limit of \$300 for this calendar year.

LAUNCH SPACECRAFT

MOSCOW (Reuters)—Russia Tuesday launched another unmanned spacecraft in its Cosmos series. Tass news agency reported. The new craft is the 67th in the series and is intended to continue studies of outer space.

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