

Hello friends,

today (April 26, 2003) I will report about a German midget submarine of the former Kriegsmarine, which has been brought to its probably final berthing in the Museum of Coastal Defence, the so called "Fort aan den Hoek van Holland" in The Netherlands.

On February 26, 2003 a truck of Leemans a salvaging and transport company in Vriezeveen in East Netherlands arrived at the entrance gate of the museum with its unusual cargo: a small two-man submarine of the former German Kriegsmarine type SEEHUND. For the more advanced readers of this short article I would like to add: SEEHUND is the German midget submarine class XXVII B5 or 127.

The boat is probably one of a total of fifteen still in existence. As with most surviving SEEHUNDE we cannot state with full certainty the pennant number of this vessel. All commissioned SEEHUNDE had been given a pennant number following the system used in the German U-boat-arm. The letter U with one to four digits following. According to the former skipper of this boat it might have been U 5097 or as the boats were called within the respective flotilla: KU 097. Not much of the story of U 5097 has come to know to our days. She certainly was not the luckiest boat of the flotilla based at IJmuiden in The Netherlands from about the turn of 1944/45. But her CO a very young ensign was one of the bravest of all during those last four month of WW II in the European theatre. He survived a total of four sorties during that time together with his mate a engineer petty officer who was certainly highly skilled otherwise both would not have returned four times. The petty officer who passed away a couple of years ago had never known that his boat had at least been found on a sandy beach after being buried under a layer of beautiful white sand off the village of Egmond aan zee a small resort in the province of Noord Holland just a couple of miles north of the former naval base of IJmuiden. This gets us back to some cold, foggy, grey days in mid February 1945 when ensign Hans Wachsmuth and petty officer Erhard Feine in U 5097 put to sea on their second mission. As to the report of her skipper U 5097 was heading for the port of Oostende. Her mission was to sink a ship at a suitable position to block the locks, which had to be passed to reach the inner docks of Oostende. At the time Oostende's role as a major port for the support of Allied troops heading for Germany was still increasing. D-Day lay about little more than one half year ago. And several different Allied headquarters were about to be established in liberated parts of Belgium. From here the most western part of the European Delta called the Wester-Schelde was to be secured as the only way to reach the huge docks of Antwerp. Plans of cause do not always run the way they were intended. U 5097 barely made it into the port of Oostende. Leaving IJmuiden the crew faced a dizzy cold weather with a relative calm sea. On a position not far from Oostende approach whilst on the surface her skipper spotted a blinking light. He then turned into that light to explore it and may be having the opportunity to get a precise position. From that moment on things got confusing. Instead of the blinking light seen earlier they suddenly approached a big buoy. It was considered that they had indeed reached the shipping line between South-East-England and the Scheld estuary. But now things developed rapidly. All of a sudden two smaller vessels may be MGB's or similar launches came in sight from the fog approaching at high speed and firing heavily with machineguns on the SEEHUND. Fortunately they scored no hit and U 5097's crew probably carried out their fastest crash dive ever. Within a few seconds U 5097 was submerged and gently hit the ground at a depth of about 100 feet. From that position the crew was able to listen what was going on on the surface. And that was by far not promising. There were noises of different propellers and of sonar gear from all directions telling them that they were spotted again. Depth charges splashing into the water could be heard and the flashes could be seen through the perplex dome as they detonated and the big bangs scattered almost the sailor's souls out of their bodies. Sometimes the explosions were so close that the swell caused in the relatively shallow water would toss the boat over the seafloor. From time to time the attacks seem to stop. Vessels moved away and seemed to be exchanged. That were the moments for the lonesome

submariners to try to get away. But for several times it was to be only an attempt. Their adversaries would hear any movement of the little submarine or just pumping the trim cells or starting the electric motor and again they attacked with numerous series of depth charges. Due to the strong current in the English channel U 5097 was sometimes not able to stay at the spot on the ground but was driven away and turned around causing scratching noises to be heard by the enemy. And again they would come and hammer on them with uncounted depth charges. Even the noise of the air cleaning device would be considered to be suspicious and therefore shut off during periods of time. But there had to be removed carbon dioxide and added oxygen to the breathing air inside the cramped boat otherwise the crew would finally be killed by carbon dioxide poisoning. After almost a whole day activities on the surface seemed to be seized and one after the other the depth charges throwing monsters probably sailed away. Whether they were exhausted thinking they had destroyed the little submarine or just run out of depth charges will never be known. Anyway U 5097 escaped severely damaged from the scene and headed for Ijmuiden. There was a small chance to reach the base. But the leaking Boat was not fully clear for diving because she made water through a tiny split in her pressure-tight hull off the electric motor which could not be tightened because it could not be reached from the inside. So U 5097 limped home and was lucky not to be detected again. The worst problem was that they had no compass any more and had been chased around for at least two nights and a full day in an area where mighty currents ran and orientation in that dizzy whether was almost impossible. There were however a few things which could give them at least a close up to a real course. During the first night of the return passage ensign Wachsmuth was able to observe for a few moments the stars of Great Bear and the small Bear and so getting a general direction towards he thought to be the best way to reach the coast of north Holland. At daylight when the fog got less dense he orientated himself by determining the direction from which the light came more intensively. So he followed a northeasterly course and all of a sudden he thought he was heading against a stonewall coming up out of the fog and had rapidly to alter course to port to avoid a direct hit. If that incident was due to the fact that he and his shipmate had taken some pervitin-pills or that they had just come back to the piers of Ijmuiden so stated later, was not very clear to ensign Wachsmuth at that time. He was not certain whether he had had hallucinations or faced reality. Anyway U 5097 got clear of that obstacle and altered course again now heading northeast. After what must have been two or three hours in the fog with sometimes hearing the surf the boat hit the sandy shore at full speed. The time was probably late afternoon. As to the time and being at the coast of North Holland they had run ashore at high tide. Exhausted with very low fuel, low battery capacity almost no pressurized air no oxygen no food and no drinking water left the two submariners considered their situation most desperate. Decision was taken to abandon ship try to go ashore and to blow up U 5097. Due to the fact that only one of the two one-man-rubber boats intact whilst the other probably being sabotaged before they had left port it was a rather difficult job to take a few things out of the boat which were brought ashore by petty officer Erhard Feine. The skipper did what was thought to be the final act in U 5097's short period of active commission. He started the time fuse of one of the two demolition charges carried on board - just in case. Then he left the boat fighting his way through the ice-cold high going surf to the beach. Reunited with his comrade both walked onto the dunes, which were close by where they found stairs to enter up the steep dunes. In the roaring of the surf they suddenly heard a mighty explosion and they knew U 5097 was blown to pieces. Just coming over the ridge of the dunes they faced a person coming out of the dense fog looking like a German soldier with the typical helmet and a rifle with attached bayonet. But this guy was hardly able to speak German and looked like having split eyes. Lucky enough the German soldier was as frightened as the two submariners were. So it was arranged that the two submariners were to walk in front of the soldier and were brought to the command post. This was located in a concrete bunker further inside the dunes and belonged to a navy artillery unit posted there to protect the coast-

line from being invaded by the enemy or by special command operations. After having explained who they were and how they had come there, their opponents seemed to be losing their suspicion the two sailors in their heavy black leather packs may be British Special Forces or something like that. Ensign Wachsmuth was allowed to phone his base in IJmuiden and report to Commander Brandi that they had lost their boat but were unharmed and alive. In the base of the 5th K-Division the operational SEEHUND-unit everybody was very happy to hear that this crew had survived whilst the three other crews who had sailed the same day for the Channel had failed to return. They are still on patrol. This seemed to be the end of the story. U 5097 was photographed by Allied reconnaissance aircraft begin April 1945 and that was the last sign of her for the next more than fifty years. She slowly disappeared in the sand of the beach for what was thought to be her final rest.

In the late nineties of the last century history-interested people members of the local society "Historisch Egmond" found a small metal structure, which was considered to belong to a special forces device or a midget submarine. In order to find out what it really was they contacted numerous institutions in The Netherlands and in Germany. Amongst those were the Uboatarchives and the German submariners association VDU. Through the latter they got into contact to the author of this article who was able to not only to determine that the steel structure they had found belonged positively to a German SEEHUND midget submarine but was also able to uncover the whole story of U 5097. In many years of research in that type of midget submarine in Germany France, Great Britain the United States and in The Netherlands he had discovered almost the entire history of the SEEHUND and their military deployment during the war. So he had also laid contacts to almost all of the surviving crew and thus knew the former commanding officer of U 5097 who became a close friend of him in the meantime. Through interviews and statements of the retired public prosecutor Hans Wachsmuth the whole story was revealed as I have told it here.

But that was by no means the end of it. Due to the fact that we knew that U 5097 had run ashore with both her torpedoes intact it was about time to have the Dutch authorities think about danger being present on a beach which is frequented by thousands of holiday making people walking the beaches at almost all times in the year. It took almost three years before the authorities made up their mind and finally came to the conclusion that the wreck or at least the explosives had to be removed for safety reasons. Thus the Royal Dutch Navy was called in was briefed by the author about the details of the torpedoes as the salvage company which was given the job to clear the beach from that obstacle. The demolition team of the Royal Dutch Navy did its utmost to salvage the torpedoes but had to come up with a compromise. The warheads had to be removed completely because parts of the ignition systems had deteriorated so badly that there was no chance to keep them. So the warheads were successfully removed and detonated later some ten miles off the shore. The wreck was taken away from the scene begin May 2002 and set away for further consideration. As the society of "Historisch Egmond" were not able to fund a restoration Dutch authorities finally decided turn the boat over to the Museum of Coastal Defence which is located in the old sea fortress at the mouth of the river Maas at Hoek van Holland. There U 5097 arrived on that grey rainy day of 26 of February 2003 being welcomed by press and TV and a small number of people interested in military history. The handing over of U 5097 by Mr. Leemans of the transportation company to the chairman of the museum association was signed in a short ceremony after everybody had been invited to a fine lunch inside the fortress. Being put down in the yard of the fortress U 5097 now in two pieces was covered with a big sheet of canvas for the first time since being delivered as a submarine to the German Kriegsmarine. The reason: it started raining.

The future will see U 5097 to be examined intensively. She will be cleaned and preserved as much as possible although the idea of rebuilding her as far as to have her look like a complete midget submarine has not finally being decided. In any case the writer of this article will be

taking pride to contribute at least by technical assistance to all efforts to preserve U 5097 for as long as possible.

The photograph taken by me shows U 5097's bows being lifted from the truck, which brought her to Hoek van Holland on April 26, 2003.

Klaus Mattes

Dokumentation SEEHUND