

Robin Williams Films

wishes to express deep gratitude to Willem Pop for sharing an article entitled:

“TOWING THE AMMUNITION SHIP FORT CONFIDENCE OUT OF THE HARBOUR OF ALGIERS IN 1943”

Two books by Willem Pop, Dutch author

View from the Bridge is about his father

“VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE”

A portrait of a sailor in the first half of the 20th century.

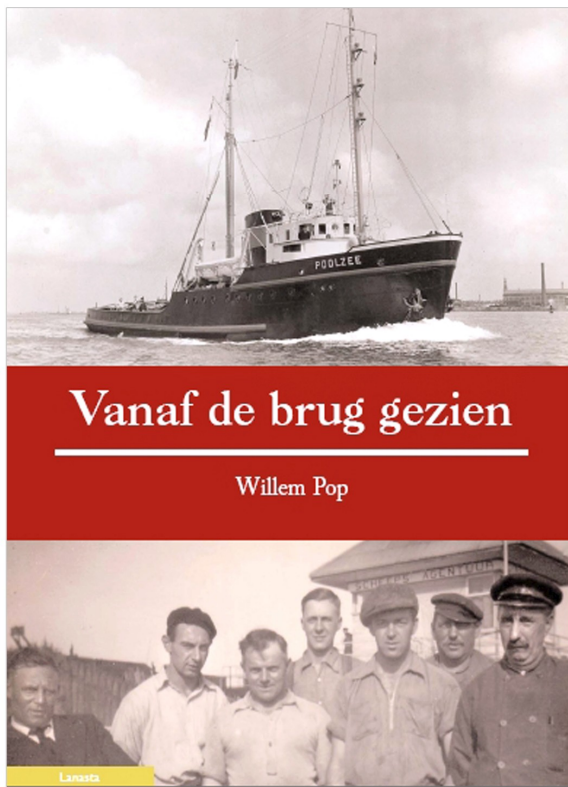
“CAPTAIN B. C. WELTEVREDEN” - a vivacious life

Nicknamed “Uncle Ben” he was one of the most famous commanders of deep sea rescue tugs and he was Master on the HUDSON during WWII.

From 1913 to 1954 he served on various tugs of
L. Smit & Co's Internationale Sleepdienst.

Enjoy!

Robin & Rosetta Williams



VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE



CAPTAIN B. C. WELTEVREDEN, a vivacious life

See Willem's books on www.lanasta.com category "Sleepvaart"

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TOWING THE AMMUNITION SHIP FORT CONFIDENCE OUT OF THE HARBOUR OF ALGIERS IN 1943



— Captain —
B.C. Weltevreden

When the Hudson with Captain B.C. Weltevreden (nicknamed "Uncle Ben") was stationed in Algiers, the crew accomplished one of the most courageous achievements in his history. After Algiers was occupied by the Allies, this harbour town became a place of supply for the troops. When on the 16th of July 1943 a convoy of ammunition ships was loading in the harbour an enormous explosion took place on the Norwegian ship Bjørkhaug that had a berth at the quay of Fedalah. The Bjørkhaug was loading 38 tons of German anti-tank mines from which the ignitions were not removed. After 32 tons was already loaded 2 enormous explosions took place, one after the other in quick succession. They split the ship in 2 parts. The second explosion took place near the mines on the quay. Captain Ole Sandvik of the Bjørkhaug and 9 men of the crew were killed.

The following explosions caused many fatalities in the area of the harbour. The amount which were published afterward differ from 300 to 1000 victims. Most of the people were dock-workers. Afterward it appeared that a load of mines fell out of the loading-nets into the cargo-space with fatal results. The loading instructions were not carefully followed which lead to the disaster.



-THE BJØRKHAUG AFTER THE EXPLOSION-

The Liberty ship, Fort Confidence, was among the numerous ships in the harbour of Mustapha in Algiers. The Fort Confidence had already loaded 2600 tons of fuel from a total of 5300 tons when the explosions nearby caught her on fire at 15.15 p.m. Explosions continued on board the ship and if the full cargo would explode it would mean the important harbour city would be totally destroyed.



-USS SAVANNAH AND BURNING SHIPS WITH THE FORT CONFIDENCE AMONG THEM-

The Canadian hospital ship, the Lady Nelson, was moored at the quay of Lalais – and the American troopship AP24 (s.s. Orizaba) was berthed nearby and both ships were in serious danger. The deep sea rescue tug Hudson with Captain Weltevreden was instructed to tow this burning bomb far outside the harbour.



-TROOPSHIP AP 24-

Within half an hour at 15.45 the Hudson was in position and fastened to the troopship AP 24. This ship was towed to safety and dropped anchor in the Algiers Anchorage.



-HOSPITAL SHIP LADY NELSON-

The Hudson returned to the harbour and fastened to the Lady Nelson and towed the ship safely to the pier. At 16.22 the hawsers were detached.

Uncle Ben was also ordered to tow away the Fort Confidence that was burning from bow to stern; a very dangerous mission, as constant heavy explosions were heard. At 16.35 the admiral – the commanding British officer of the harbour, came on board and everybody would act according to their instructions. After the 3 bow hawsers were detached from the burning ammunition ship the Hudson could fasten.

Further axes were brought ashore to cut the spring and the hawsers from the stern. With 3 hawsers the tug towed - with great risk for the ship and the crew – the Fort Confidence at 16.40 from the quay toward the open sea.

Before the Hudson was outside the pier, all hawsers were burnt away. The ammunition ship floated against the boom. The English destroyer, Paladin, that was in the harbour, succeeded in fastening a wire-rope on the starboard-anchor of the Fort Confidence. She started towing her away from the boom and other oil tankers. When the anchor-chain slipped its connection the Hudson came closer again, after which sailor Fillekes and the Danish oilman Hansen jumped over from the tug onto the burning ship, while ammunition exploded continuously. They succeeded in fixing a hawser but this one also caught fire and was consumed by fire.

After this Ben Weltevreden ordered to fasten the Hudson to the Paladin so that they together could tow the burning monster out of the harbour. At 17.15 after approximately 13 minutes towing, things went wrong again. Both the hawsers of the Hudson and those of the destroyer Paladin broke. At a certain moment the British tug, Empire Fred, appeared, fixed a hawser on the anchor of the ammunition ship and carefully tried to tow the burning ship out of the harbour. The Empire Fred could not hold the tow. She was dragged along and had to cut the towing-connection to free itself.

Now it was the Hudson's turn again, which fixed a hawser onto the anchor chain of the Fort Confidence. The crew grew anxious over the many explosions on board the burning ship. At 18.20 the hawser broke and fouled in the Hudson propeller and the job could not continue.

With many difficulties the crew were successful in removing the hawser rather quickly out of the propeller and at 18.30 the tug could fasten for the third time to the Fort Confidence that was still ablaze.

At last after so many reversals, the Hudson succeeded to tow the burning bomb a number of miles outside the harbour of Algiers in the direction of the beach of Hussein Bay. There the hawser was cut rapidly at 19.30 in view of the continuous explosions and the splinters of shells flying about. The tug sailed - badly damaged – back to the harbour where she arrived at 19.40. Twenty minutes later the Fort Confidence blew up.

Thereafter the wreck of the Fort Confidence belched smoke for 3 weeks. The ravages in the town of Algiers were terrible. The roofs of the houses and the shop fronts were terribly damaged.



-IMPRESSION OF THE DISASTER IN ALGIERS 16-7-1943-

Captain Weltevreden was decorated with the Honorary Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (5-4-1944), Lloyds Silver Medal for Meritorious Services (9-11-1944) and the Kruis van Verdienste met gesp (13-1-1944).

Sailor Fillekes and oilman Hansen were decorated with the British Empire Medal and also Lloyds Silver Medal.

The Kanselier der Nederlandse Orden in 's Gravenhage decorated Uncle Ben posthumous with the Bronzen Leeuw on the 23rd of March 2006.



-DIRK, THE SON OF CAPTAIN B.C. WELTEVREDEN WITH THE DECORATION THE BRONZEN LEEUW-

Piet Weltevreden a younger nephew of Captain Weltevreden was in 1943 during 5 months member of the crew on the Hudson. He wrote the following about the apocalypse in Algiers:

For young men like me the most spectacular stunt was the towing away of the Fort Confidence out of the harbour of Algiers. This ship was loaded with ammunition and other implements of war and was burning heavily. At first we had to tow a hospital ship and a troopship to safety.

I stood at the wheelhouse when after a lapse of time the commanding officer of the harbour of Algiers, a British vice-admiral, came on board. He tried to organize the salvage-work by giving instructions. Laconic and imperturbable as usual, Uncle Ben, dressed in a singlet and khaki-shorts put the engine-telegraph on stop with the words, "Sir, here is the telegraph and there is the wheelman and pointed to me; I am going to the chartroom."



Piet Weltevreden

It lasted only half a minute before the commander realized that he had gone too far and made a major mistake. You can never, never, deprive a captain of his command, unless a very urgent reason gives rise to that purpose.

It gives evidence of high English gentleman-mentality that such an exalted navy-officer, offered his apologies. The next day when the work was finished entirely, Captain Weltevreden received a letter with an expression of thanks. Later on Uncle Ben and various members of the crew received decorations in London. A great honour for the whole crew.



**Machinist De Vries & Captain Weltevreden
in London 1943**



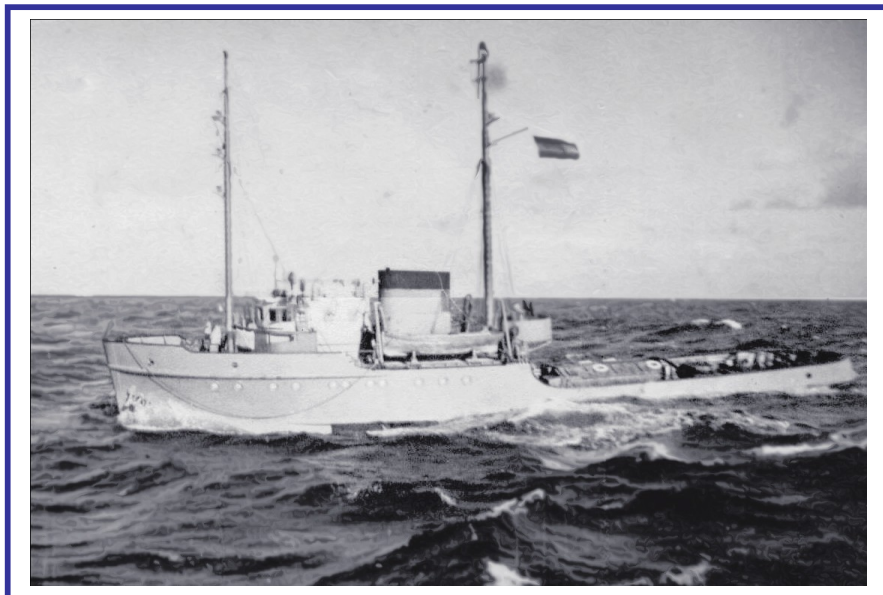
-FROM LEFT TO RIGHT CAPTAIN WELTEVREDEN, ENGINEER DE VRIES AND MATE SMIT-

STORY by WILLEM POP, Dutch author

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TUG HUDSON

THE LAST SURVIVOR OF THE WWI DUTCH TUG HUDSON CREW

Adriaan van Katwijk

HE WAS WITH CAPTAIN WELTEVREDEN THROUGH IT ALL.

Photo taken in 2004 by Willem Pop

