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# NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 22, APRIL 2018



*Heritage British Power Boat MGB 81 underway in the Solent*

This edition of the Newsletter has a particular emphasis on people, with a fuller than normal “Lives in Brief” section, particularly featuring our recently departed Trustee and long-standing chairman Sir Derrick Holden-Brown. We report on our most important activity, that of the Coastal Forces Exhibition project, and its encouraging progress. In our Boats Roundup we report, once again, on the impressive activities of the 1st Patrol Boat Squadron and this is accompanied with a narrative on MTB 102, the impressive heritage boat which gets less visibility than other craft. Our articles in this edition also have a degree of continuity. We tell the history of Hubert Scott-Paine, the boat-builder whose enterprise and skills were so influential in developing the British Power Boats and also the early US PT boats. His British Power Boat Company was to produce boats which became the nucleus of early World War II Coastal Forces. This relates to a great degree to our accounts of the fate of those first British Power Boats which formed the early MTB flotillas, based in the Mediterranean and Far East, as war commenced. We follow on from an article in our last Newsletter about the enemy Schnellboote, with a continued account of the effectiveness of the German force. We have included one feedback letter relating to our previous article about the WRNS Centenary and such feedback is encouraged and always of interest. Regrettably, the wealth of material included in this edition has not allowed us to include our article on “Prominent Veterans”.

Article author?

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## CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

It is with great sadness that we must mark the passing away of Sir Derrick Holden-Brown on 6 March 2018. A distinguished Coastal Forces veteran and founding Trustee of the CFHT, Sir Derrick was for nearly 20 years the driving force behind the Trust. As a long serving chairman he placed the Trust on a sound financial footing and mandated many commemorative activities such as establishing memorial plaques at former WW2 Coastal Forces Bases. Thanks to his foresight, drive and intimate knowledge of the Naval Heritage scene he was instrumental in preparing the ground for the establishment of our permanent exhibition. We are very sorry he will not be with us at its opening late next year. More details of Sir Derrick's remarkable career are elsewhere in this newsletter. Top of the Trust's in tray remains the Exhibition Project. In school report terms, it is "steady progress" thanks to the

continued and vital engagement of our two partner organisations, the NMRN and the PNBPT. This is an extensive newsletter, full of interesting topics and I must once more pay tribute to the Editor, Captain Trevor Robotham who continues to be one of our most dedicated and pro-active Trustees. Readers may not be aware that he is also the coordinating Trustee of the Exhibition project, ensuring our partners and other stake holders work together seamlessly in our common cause. We are all greatly indebted to him. Finally, I hope that very soon some warmth and sunshine will visit our shores. It has been a long and cold winter. If you are around the Solent this summer watch out for MGB 81, which with its new engines just being fitted, should make a magnificent sight.

Vice Admiral Sir Paul Haddacks. KCB, Chairman

## THE EXHIBITION PROJECT

The Exhibition project reached an important stage in the early part of the year. Our partner, The Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust, submitted its application for Heritage Lottery funding for the restoration of the remaining undeveloped area of the Priddy's Hard ex-armament depot site on the Gosport side of Portsmouth Harbour. The results of their submission should be known by June and, hopefully, that will be the key to work commencing on the site and thus advancing the project in a major way. As followers of this project will be aware, our Trust secured the funding for the restoration of the designated Exhibition building on the site and for producing the Coastal Forces Exhibition, but development of the surrounding area of

Priddy's Hard is important to us for both the appearance of the site and for visitor safety. Combined with that, the Trust was involved with our other partner in the selection of a designer for the Coastal Forces Exhibition. There were eight contenders for this prestigious project and applicants presented exciting ideas and plans. A contract has now been placed with the selected Exhibition designer. The project programme is therefore proceeding to schedule and, once the restoration work on our Exhibition building has progressed through the later part of this year and early months of 2019, the Exhibition installation will then follow, with a planned completion of the project late next year.

## NEWS AND FEEDBACK

### VETERANS

Since the decommissioning of the Coastal Forces Veterans Association the majority of the Branches through the country have closed, although London Branches are still operating and extremely active, albeit with depleted numbers. The following pictures display just some their wide activities.

#### *Queen's Birthday Party at Buckingham Palace, Summer 2017*

*HRH The Duke of Edinburgh (stooping) talks with veteran Jim Barnes, with Peter Bickmore and family looking on.*







Veterans Jim Barnes, Tex Baseley and Peter Bickmore.



ABOVE Veteran Peter Bickmore, second from left, receives the BEM from the Lord Lieutenant of Essex for his work in organizing the veterans return to the Croatian island of Vis over many tears. This is Peter's second BEM, his first being awarded for his actions in the Bari Harbour disaster. Our Congratulations to Peter.



LEFT Commodore Laurie Hopkins LVO Royal Navy talks with David Carter son of veteran.



RIGHT Veteran Ken Gadston gets a helping hand.

**FEEDBACK**

We were delighted to hear from Alan Ward, the nephew of Wren Irene Jones, mentioned in the article celebrating the Centenary of WRNS in our last Newsletter. Edited aspects of his letter follow:

*I was pleased to see my late aunt, Irene Jones, mentioned in the above article. Rene too would have been delighted to see the article as she was an ex-Wren who certainly held great affection for her time in Coastal Forces. She was a long-time member of the veteran's association and attended many reunions and commemorations. As the article suggests, she was at*

*sea onboard a Coastal Forces boat during sea trials while based at Midge as a Wren Writer. The boat was in fact MGB 313 and not an MTB as the article supposes. For about four months while at Midge she kept a hand-written diary of day-to-day events there. I'm also attaching page 7 from that copy which talks about that trip on MGB 313 and the bombing of the Wrens quarters also mentioned in your article. It also mentions the BBC's John Snagge, a senior BBC announcer at that time, and the actor Patrick ("Pat") Troughton, who played "Dr Who" and whom she knew at Midge.*



The following are extracts from her wartime diary.

Sunday 14 March

*Went to Base to do one or two letters then went to sea in 313. Didn't know until afterwards that John Snagge, the BBC commentator was onboard. It was a glorious trip. Olive Swift was also onboard and got around Ralph (the P.O. Motor Mechanic) to take our photographs and this he did. We*

*stood against the guardrail in the stern. Came ashore at about 1.00 pm.*

Thursday 18 March

*Crash warning at about 6.30 am then bombs. Part of the Wrennery, houses 48 Queen Road and 8 Nelson Road South hit. Sailors, A.R.P. and soldiers and airmen feverishly digging to rescue girls. Went to Masonic Lodge in Albert Square for breakfast, after which we helped collect*

*blankets, pillows etc. for casualties. Fire broke out. Liz and I flew for stirrup-pumps which we gave to sailors who dashed into houses. Buckets of water were passed from hand to hand. Injured girls being carried out on stretchers. can't tell who they are. Hear later in the morning That our Quarters Officer, 2/Officer Jago-Brown has been killed and four other Wrens, Anne Drummond, Aillen Kilburne, Ging Powell and Helen Regan.*

## BOATS ROUNDUP



*MTB 102 underway*

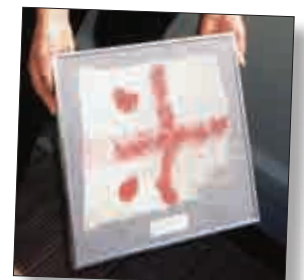


*MTB 102 in 1942*

### MTB 102

MTB 102 gets small mention in our Newsletters and, residing at Lowestoft, she is often out of our immediate line of vision. Nevertheless, many of our readers will see her at various maritime events around our coasts through the summer months and her impressive appearance attracts many visitors. She is a Coastal Forces boat with an illustrious and quite fascinating history. Owned by the MTB 102 Charitable Trust, she is operated by Richard Basey with his small crew of volunteers. She is in a remarkable condition considering that, despite some refurbishment at various times, she nevertheless has had no major restoration since her original build and she still contains much of original fabric.

Designed by Commander Peter Du Cane RN CBE, Managing Director of Vosper Ltd., she was built by the company as a prototype and she was to be the first of many others of a similar design. In 1940 she made seven crossings to the Dunkirk beaches, under the command of Lieutenant Christopher Dreyer RN, in that epic rescue adventure, Operation Dynamo. She was mainly being used as a Dispatch Boat between Dover and Dunkirk and around the beaches and harbour. In the fairly disordered conditions it was important for Flag Officer Dover, Vice Admiral Bertram Ramsay, to be able to get messages to the Naval Officer in Charge (NOIC) of the maritime operations, Captain William Tennant and the Flag Officer Afloat Dunkirk, Rear Admiral William Wake-Walker. MTB 102 carried Admiral Wake-Walker on several occasions and, the torpedo rating Leading Seaman Peter Dawkins, made an Admiral's flag for him out of a pusser's dish cloth and with the use of red paint. The flag was flown whenever he was aboard and it was presented to him on completion of the Dunkirk operations.



*MTB 102  
The Admiral's "Flag"*





*MTB 102 at Dunkirk 2005*

Captain Christopher Wake-Walker RN, the Admiral's son, presented the Flag back to the crew of 102 some years later and it survives as a cherished relic in a glass frame. Her wartime service Post war MTB 102 had a number of differing lives and in 1944 she again assumed an important role; carrying the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and General Eisenhower to review the assembled invasion fleet before Operation Overlord. Post war she was first sold to be a private yacht and in 1973 she was bought by Norwich Scout Group as their training ship. In 1976 she was partly re-furbished to play a role in the film, *The Eagle has Landed* and then the Dutch film, *Soldier of Orange*. She played an important role in the Thames Pageant for Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee. Her engines have changed through the years. Her original Isotta Fraschini engines were replaced by the donation of two engines by Perkins Ltd, in 1985, and then

by the donation of Cummins engines in 1996 and again in 2002. In 1996 she was acquired by enthusiasts led by Richard Basey who established the MTB 102 Charitable Trust which continues to own, maintain and operate the boat so successfully to the present day. She was privileged to lead the procession of Heritage Craft taking part in the Queen's Golden Jubilee on the Thames in 2002 and she played herself in the recent film *Dunkirk*. Her Patron is Admiral Sir Jonathan Band GCB DL, the former First Sea Lord and Chairman of Trustees of the National Museum of the Royal Navy.

### **MEDUSA (HDML 1387)**

*Medusa* is in good shape and has started her operational year with a sea-day for Charterhouse School Combined Cadet Force. There will be further CCF sea-days, which help considerably towards the £15,000 a year which it takes to keep *Medusa* operational.

The boat had her annual slippage in early April this year in readiness for a busy summer. Her future programme includes visits for events at Bucklers Hard (26-28 May), then to France via Weymouth, Dartmouth, Alderney and Cherbourg, the Henley Traditional Boat Festival (20-22 July), Gosport Heritage Open Days (13-16 Sep) and sea days in the Solent working with both the Royal Navy and the Maritime Volunteers. In addition to the many visits *Medusa* is increasingly supporting both Sea Cadet and Royal Naval training activities, which says much about the professionalism of the crew and adds considerably to her prominence.



*HDML 1387 off Portsmouth*



*HMS Ranger fighting heavy weather*



*HMS Ranger underway*

## THE 1<sup>ST</sup> PATROL BOAT SQUADRON HMS RANGER

Winter for the First Patrol Boat Squadron (1PBS) is usually a quiet period, during which the ships undergo annual maintenance and the Ships' Companies complete professional courses. For *HMS Ranger*, however, winter has been unusually busy. The ship was slipped in Gosport from the end of October, re-entering the water just before Christmas leave, after a busier than expected period and an unanticipated Starboard engine change. More importantly, a full hull-clean and re-paint was conducted, adding a vital 0.3 knots to the *HMS Ranger's* top speed. Successful post-maintenance trials were undertaken in January were followed by a solo cross-channel trip to visit the

small fishing village of St Vaast La Hougue, located on the Eastern side of the Cherbourg Peninsula. The ship was met at the berth by a contingent of uncharacteristically friendly locals who took berthing lines and assisted in setting up shore services. This trip was used to train the new URNU Cadets in the basics of life on board to prepare for future, longer engagements. It also had the added benefit of coinciding with a celebratory Burns Night, which was marked with haggis, neaps and tatties and, of course, whiskey. A second crossing to France in company with *HMS Blazer* was undertaken in February with the aim of making it to Brest to conduct a Defence Engagement in the form of OOW Manoeuvres with the Marine Nationale. Departing on a particularly windy morning, the journey to Cherbourg was rather lumpy, sadly depleting *HMS Ranger's* supply of Sick Bags. On leaving Cherbourg in the shadow of the "Beast from the

East" the two boats made it safely to St Malo where they remained, storm-bound and avoiding icy Easterly winds. After three days a weather window allowed a dash from St Malo to Cherbourg, in more pleasant, sunny and relatively calm conditions in the lee of the Cherbourg peninsula. However, the temperatures had plummeted and the sea spray was freezing in mid-air with the superstructure and upper deck becoming clad in a layer of ice. Ship stability was luckily unaffected, and both units crawled their way into Cherbourg, travelling head-on into 50 knot winds. Both *HMS Ranger* and *HMS Blazer* remained in France for a further three nights before a second weather window opened, allowing them to return home to Portsmouth.

On her return from France, *HMS Ranger* took part in a "cyber trial" assisting in the development of future offensive and defensive cyber capabilities, in conjunction with the US Navy. The boat is also currently a trials platform for the new navigational radar which will eventually be introduced to every unit in the fleet. The ship has now departed for her Easter deployment, which will take her back across the channel to Boulogne, Schevenigen, Amsterdam and Antwerp, before returning to the UK via London and Southampton. Many in the Navy scoff at P2000s for being small, plastic boats used to train University Students and question why they haven't yet been cut to save money. Whilst *HMS Ranger* is undeniably small and plastic, she and the other boats of 1PBS continue to demonstrate their unequivocal flexibility, as the Coastal Forces did, proving themselves as indispensable units to the Royal Navy. They will continue to fly the flag for "boats" of and continue to do our Coastal Forces predecessors proud.

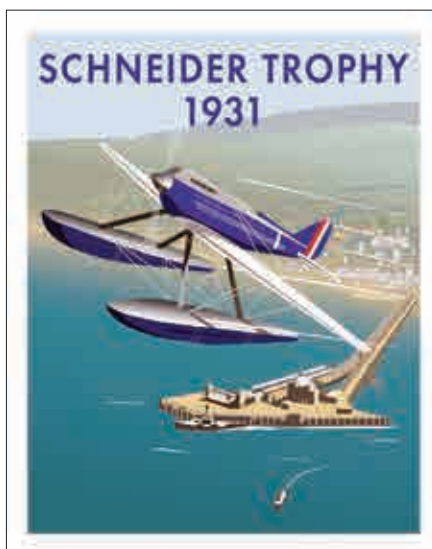
With thanks to Lieutenant Sam Cresdee CO *HMS Ranger*



## HUBERT SCOTT-PAINE

In addition to those who made their names in Coastal Forces by engaging the enemy there were others whose contributions were made in less dangerous circumstances but which were, nevertheless, a major influence. Hubert Scott-Paine was such a person. His initiatives in the development of fast marine craft and his persistence in getting the Admiralty to accept these craft as fast attack boats was one of the most significant factors in the development of the Royal Navy's Coastal Forces.

Hubert Scott-Paine was a man with a passion for speed and with an ardent interest in engineering. His skills and enthusiasm were recognized by the wealthy entrepreneur Noel Pemberton-Billing and, with Pemberton-Billing's funding and Scott-Paine's skills and knowledge, they formed the Supermarine Company in 1913, dealing in yachts throughout Britain and the Continent. In 1916 Scott-Paine bought the company and renamed it Supermarine Aviation Company. With his principle interest being in aviation, he hired the young R.J. Mitchell, of Spitfire fame, as his personal assistant and it wasn't long before Scott-Paine recognized his talents, promoting him rapidly to chief engineer and designer. The company's principle activity was in the development and operation of flying-boats but Scott-Paine's love of speed was never far from the surface. With the help of R.J. Mitchell, this led to the entering of his fast flying boats in an attempt to win the prestigious Schneider Trophy for Britain, the Coupe d'Aviation Maritime. After failed attempts, he was to achieve success in 1922 with Sea Lion II and the small Supermarine Aviation Company became an instant success with a much increased reputation. However, in 1923 Scott-Paine sold his interest in the company and became a director of the first British international airline, Imperial Airways an appointment which he retained until 1939. Nevertheless, his entrepreneurial



*Hubert Scott-Paine*

spirit remained and in 1927 he bought a boatyard at Hythe on Southampton Water, which he named the British Power Boat Company. He then ventured into the mass production of a wide range of boats and, with the valuable experience and knowledge that Scott-Paine had gained from working in the boat industry, success shortly followed.

He developed fast boats and, firstly, his Miss England II and then Miss Britain II broke all records as the first single engine boats to exceed 110 mph. Scott-Paine battled through the 1930s to get the Admiralty to accept his new boat designs as potential fast attack craft. However, he wasn't the only designer working in this field. He had competition: Peter Du Cane at Vospers and the boat builders Thornycroft were also developing fast coastal craft. Marine design and development was at an exciting stage and there was considerable commercial interest in these boats. The Admiralty however were not interested in purchasing these high-speed boats at that time although interest was shown in using the craft as rescue launches. By 1931 and with still no interest from the Admiralty, he approached the RAF and the Air Ministry agreed to trials of his boats, which were then undertaken by Senior Aircraftsman 1st class T. E. Shaw, who had achieved fame as Lawrence of Arabia. The two became close and, by 1935, the RAF had bought these boats for support use with their flying boats. Finally, the Admiralty were to show some interest in the purchase of some fast attack boats and they took delivery of their first boat, MTB 01 in the mid 1930s.

By 1937, the reputation of MTBs was spreading. Commander in Chief Mediterranean had seen that the Italian Navy were also using small attack craft and he was impressed. He demanded a flotilla of MTBs and six boats sailed for the Mediterranean, with two more to follow. By late 1938 Scott Paine had developed larger and faster boats, but the Vosper Co. had also been developing their own MTBs. After extensive



*Hubert Scott-Paine with Aircraftsman Shaw, Lawrence of Arabia.*



*Scott-Paine PT boats of the US Squadron 1 in New York harbour.*



*Elco/Scott-Paine 70 foot PT Boats.*

trials, the Admiralty were giving preference to the Vosper designed and a prototype, MTB 102, was manufactured as a possible model for their future use. They considered that it could carry more weapons and it had two torpedoes which were fired from the front and not from the back, as had been the previous design. However, by the early days of the war there became an urgent need for Britain to acquire boats; the Germans had been developing small fast attack boats for a considerable time. Additionally, there was a fear of enemy submarines getting close into Britain's coasts and therefore putting coastal conveyances in danger. To meet this threat Scott-Paine developed Motor Anti-Submarine Boats (MASBs), powered by three Napier Lion engines, and his 70 foot Motor Gun Boats also became the nucleus of the early Coastal Forces. The first MTB flotillas were based at Malta and Hong Kong at the start of the war. Scott Paine's designer, George Selman, refined the 70 foot design of boat by incorporating many improvements, heavily influenced by Robert Hichens, whose experience as an early Gunboat commander was invaluable in determining future designs and the weapon fit. This led to the introduction of the successful 71ft. 6" British Power Boat and later in the war,

to the conversion of MGBs to also carry torpedoes. As the war developed the British Power Boat Company became the largest and most advanced boat-building establishment in the world, employing 1500 people at Hythe with a further 500 at Poole. At the start of the war some boats were fitted with Isotta Fraschini Italian engines. Knowing that Italy was an Axis power, Scott Paine suggested that all small craft should be fitted with the American Packard engine and he made arrangements for them to be and they become standard throughout Coastal Forces. Scott Paine was by then having a close relationship with boat building in America and the U.S. Navy liked his design. Many years of patient endeavour were about to come to fruition as Scott-Paine climbed the steps of the White House in October 1939. He had been invited by Charles Edison, Acting Secretary of the United States Navy, to meet the President, Franklin D Roosevelt. The Navy Department wished to add to the arsenal of weapons with which to fight the war in the Pacific, that it was sure would be forced upon the United States. The outcome of that meeting was to be of considerable significance to America in a war that most peace-loving people thought would never happen. His design was to become the standard for the Elco Company construction of the early US PT boats. He moved to America permanently in 1939 and took American citizenship. Although he never returned to the UK, he kept contact with his British Power Boat Company until it closed in 1945.

Hubert Scott-Paine was an important figure in both British aviation and marine development. There is no doubt that his vision, flair and enthusiasm, along with that of Peter DuCane of Vosper Ltd., contributed in a major way to the British and the US preparation for war. Two boats built by Scott-Paine's British Powerboat Company exist today and are owned and operated by The Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust. They are MGB 81 and HSL 102 and these boats can be seen by the Public at the Heritage Dockyard, Portsmouth.



*Caption needed for additional pic.*



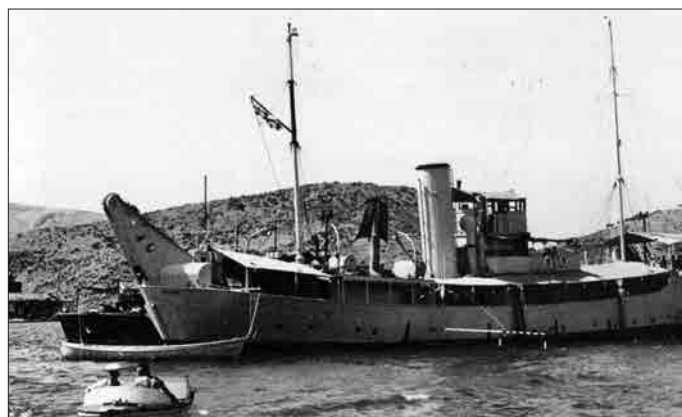
## THE FIRST MTB FLOTILLAS

After a long period of haggling with the Admiralty in the early 1930s Hubert Scot-Paine secured for his British Power Boat company a contract to build MTBs. Numbers 01 to 06, built in 1935, were to be the original 1<sup>st</sup> MTB Flotilla while numbers 07 to 12 were to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> MTB Flotilla based in Hong Kong. Numbers 14 to 19 (there was no unlucky 13) were originally destined for Singapore, but by early 1939 they were added to join the 1<sup>st</sup> MTB Flotilla at Malta. The two MTB flotillas, the 1<sup>st</sup> based in Malta and the 2<sup>nd</sup> based in Hong Kong, comprised the nucleus of Coastal Forces.

### THE 1<sup>st</sup> MTB FLOTILLA AT MALTA

The 1<sup>st</sup> MTB Flotilla of twelve boats were then based in Msida Creek, Grand Harbour, in Malta, supported by *HMS Vulcan*, an ex-Icelandic trawler. All the MTB Commanding Officers were Royal Navy Lieutenants and they were enjoying a relatively halcyon life, driving their 60 foot British Power Boats with their three 600 horse power Napier Lion engines giving them speeds of up to 36 knots. It was clear that war was looming and the Malta flotilla put greater urgency into their training. By September 1939 the boats were fully prepared for war, with torpedoes and ammunition loaded and, on 3 September 1939, the inevitable news of the declaration of war arrived. It was fully expected that Italy would throw in its lot with Germany and thus make the flotilla's presence in Malta more vulnerable. The flotilla renewed its training with vigour but in November it was decided that they must return to England. Additionally, there was a growing concern for the safety of merchant ships at sea off the East Coast where Britain had inadequate defences to prevent the Germans laying mines in the busy shipping routes and the merchant ships being easy targets for German E-boats. The first plan was to ship the flotilla back to England as deck-cargo.. However, there was only deck-space on a freighter for two boats to be shipped directly from Malta to Portsmouth so the Admiralty decided that the remaining nine should return through the French waterways. On 11<sup>th</sup> November 1939 seven boats set sail from Malta with three others, which were not ready to sail, being freighted to Marseille. No-one could have envisaged the problems that were to confront the flotilla on its unique journey.

After hectic preparations the flotilla sailed soon after midnight on Armistice Day, 11 November 1939 on a filthy night with the wind and the sea as adverse as it could be for the boats. These were not particularly good sea-keeping boats even in moderate conditions. Their hard-chine hulls would thump into the seas, drenching anyone on deck or on the bridge. Three boats were not ready to sail and were freighted to Marseilles and two boats were shipped as deck cargo direct from Malta to Portsmouth. The afloat flotilla was to enter the French waterways through Marseille but there was a formidable



*HMS Vulcan support vessel for the 1st MTB Flotilla.*



*First MTB Flotilla escort the Royal Family down the Thames for the opening of the National Maritime Museum.*

journey to be undertaken before they reached that port. The first leg of the journey was to Bizerta where they were welcomed warmly by the officers of the French naval base. However, the journey had already taken its toll and several boats were damaged. *MTB 14* (Lt. Dennis Mason) had its wheelhouse smashed and lost several items of deck equipment in heavy seas. Repairs needed to be undertaken and, fortunately for *MTB 14*, the planned departure was delayed due to predicted bad weather. Before leaving Bizerta the 1<sup>st</sup> Flotilla's Senior officer, Lieutenant Commander Monty Donner conferred at length with the local meteorological officer and with the CO of the destroyer *HMS Dainty* who was to escort the flotilla. All agreed that an easterly gale that was predicted would not reach them before the flotilla could make it to Sardinia and place themselves in the lee of the island. Regrettably the weather forecast was hopelessly inaccurate. The weather quickly freshened and the flotilla was soon butting into head seas which, in addition to the attrition of the weather, reduced their speed considerably. Communications between the boats was by Aldis lamp, which was almost impossible on the buffeting boats. Navigation and station-keeping were equally difficult with soggy charts and the main concentration being on the need to throttle-up as the boats



*MTBs enter canal lock.*



*French pilot on the Bridge of MTB during French passage*

negotiated the high crest waves. When dawn came on the second day of passage *MTB 06* (Lt. Harpy Lloyd) was low in the water and awash. *MTB 04* was also leaking badly and it was decided to lighten the boats by transferring weight – torpedoes, additional fuel and stores – to *HMS Dainty*, which, although being a difficult evolution in heavy seas, did prove to be a help. Despite being taken in tow continuing foul weather further damaged the boat and she had to be rammed and sunk while the remaining flotilla assembled in Ajaccio for repairs. The remaining journey was undertaken in appalling weather and, when *MTB 06* developed serious leaks West of Sardinia, she had to be rammed and sunk by *HMS Dainty*. Of the original flotilla six had survived the Mediterranean voyage and they were joined with the three freighted boats, making nine for the passage from Marseille through the canals. Ten days after leaving Malta, the then remaining six boats left Marseille for the entrance to the Rhone River. Then commenced a journey which was not without difficulties. The MTB crews attempted to manoeuvre their fast attack boats through the narrow waterways at slow speeds, for which their boats were not designed. The broad and comparatively slow flowing mouth of the Rhone presented little problems. However, the speed of the stream increased to a wicked pace which presented the flotilla with its first problems at the renowned Pont d'Avignon with its narrow arches. Lyon was reached by dusk

on the second day which was navigationally treacherous by the confluence of the Rivers Soane and the Rhone. It is a local saying that if a man falls in the water there he would travel half a mile underwater before surfacing. Pilots were taken onboard for various legs of the journey and the crews noticed that they had two noticeable qualities: a delightful vagueness and a distinct dislike of interior lavatories! Chalons-Sur-Saone and St. Jean de Loan came and went without any great mechanical difficulties with the boats. From here they entered the Burgundy Canal system which was in parts only 60 feet wide and extremely shallow. The boats were therefore towed, in pairs, by tractors on the bank and masts and guns were unshipped and stowed in order to clear bridges of only four metres in height.

The tractor and its French army driver gave them concern. The driver wore thick glasses, grinned inanely and spoke not a word of English. He had never seen either a canal or an MTB before. The approach of each lock was a nightmare. The boats drifted considerably and were constantly running aground. A tunnel of three kilometers, only 14 foot in height and 20 foot wide, presented its own problems. The boats navigated this under their own power and in total darkness. The noise from the boats engines inside the tunnel was deafening and communication between boats, who could not see each other, was impossible. The River Yonne was reached and thus the gate way to Paris. Before entry to the River Yonne it was decided to undertake engine trials in preparation for the eventual passage through the River Seine and the Channel. Inevitably, the results showed considerable vibration of the shafts and varying degrees of propeller damage, such that major repairs had to be undertaken. *MTB 02* (John Eardley-Wilmot) had damaged propellers whose vibration had broken the supporting P bracket and the propeller had carved through the bottom of the boat, resulting in some very necessary temporary repairs. By now there were four boats running and these were ordered to advance through the maze of bridges and bends of the Seine through Paris. However, the state of the boats was so bad that they had to be slipped at Meulan, about thirty kilometres west of Paris, where the flotilla spent a very welcome ten days. All the disparate groups of boats were then gathered at Rouen for one night before reaching Le Havre and the onward passage to Portsmouth, arriving in two groups, on 19 and 20 December in a snow storm. Two weeks later some of these boats sailed for Felixstowe to form the first Coastal Forces operational base on the East Coast. In the following two years every one of the 1<sup>st</sup> Flotilla Royal Navy COs was commanding a flotilla of MTBs or MGBs leading the RNVR officers who made possible the rapid expansion of Coastal Forces. It is interesting to note that Germany sent two flotillas of Schnellbooten (E-boats) southward through the French canals and rivers from northern Germany to the Mediterranean later in the war.



### THE 2<sup>nd</sup> MTB FLOTILLA AT HONG KONG

Commissioned into the China Station in 1938 initially under the command of Lieutenant D G Clark RN. Clark, however, along with most of the younger RN officers, was recalled for action in the European theatre at the start of the war. He was relieved by an experienced Coastal Forces veteran from World War I, Lieutenant Commander John Boldero. He had served with distinction in the famous CMB attack on the *Bolshevik Fleet* in Kronstadt harbour in 1919, for which he was awarded a DSC. He had retired in 1922 taking a position with the Shanghai Water Company but was mobilised in 1939 as war in the station became a very real threat. With his past experience and being resident on the China Station, he had had experience with the Shanghai Navy, he was well placed to follow Clark as Senior Officer commanding the flotilla on the China Station with which he was familiar. During an exercise on night manoeuvres, Boldero's boat was in a high speed collision with an accompanying destroyer, severely injuring Boldero's upper body. His right arm was amputated and his left arm severely damaged requiring much continued surgery. Lieutenant Commander GH Gandy RN, who had experience Commanding River Gunboats, then took over command of the flotilla. The Japanese invaded Hong Kong on 8 December 1941, the morning after the Pearl Harbour attack. This was not unexpected and the fate of Hong Kong had been sealed well before the first shot was fired. On 21 October 1938 the Japanese had occupied Canton and, with overall control of Haian Island, French Indo-China and Formosa, Hong Kong had virtually been surrounded for a long period. Winston Churchill had resisted



ABOVE *Caption needed for this pic of MTB 10.*

LEFT *Admiral Chen Chak (right) of the Chinese Navy, at Ku Kong*

pressure to send reinforcements and two of the three destroyers based in Hong Kong had been diverted to reinforce Singapore. That left one destroyer, *HMS Thracian* and the 2<sup>nd</sup> MTB Flotilla as the only credible naval force. The flotilla found itself in the thick of the action with heavy air attacks, before the arrival of Japanese naval units. Two boats were lost in action and, on the surrender of Hong Kong on 25 December, four boats were scuttled.

An officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Flotilla along with the crews of the scuttled boats and a one-legged Chinese Admiral, escaped via China into Malaya and thus to safety. John Boldero had remained on the China Station, being awarded a bar to his DSC for his spirited actions defending Hong Kong. He subsequently spent nearly four years as a Japanese POW.

## THE GERMAN SCHNELLBOOTE (CONTINUED)

Our previous Newsletter, 21, described how the German Schnellboote was stealthily brought into service by the Germans whilst still under treaty restrictions for the development of armaments and their capabilities. For much of the war, the prize of capturing one of the much-admired E-boats intact would elude Coastal Forces. MGBs led by Robert Hitchens were responsible for only one E-boat casualty (S41) in 1941 and throughout the whole of 1942 Germany lost only two boats in the Channel and the North Sea, S53 mined off Dover and S111 sunk by *HMS Guillemot*. A distinct change in fortunes came in 1943 when as many as 19 E-boats were lost, some in engagements with Coastal Forces, some to mines and others to the RAF. With so many commitments the German Navy found itself struggling to maintain a reasonable strength of boats operating in the Channel and the North Sea. Their 6<sup>th</sup> Flotilla had left Ijmuiden for the Baltic and some of the remaining E-boats were

frequently required in a defensive role, to protect the increasing number of German coastal convoys due to the destruction of their road and rail systems. Unlike the British convoys, Germany's merchant ships would travel in twos and threes, mostly by day and making only short passages between ports, escorted by as many as a dozen heavily armed escorts. Those in Coastal Forces had a certain admiration for the German Schnellboote but their commanders frequently gave the impression that they wished to avoid head-on confrontation with the British opposition. Their numbers were dwindling and they were operating under restrictions on the size of British vessels that they could attack. The E-boats were becoming just too valuable to risk unnecessary battles and many instances were seen of E-boats making a hasty departure from potential confrontations. Nevertheless, there was an unusual familiarity between some of the E-boat commanders and the Coastal



*German E-boats surrendering  
at HMS Hornet Gosport.*



*Kapitanlieutenant Karl Muller.*



*Schnellboote 100 coming alongside  
at HMS Hornet May 1945.*

Forces Commanding Officers (COs) and Senior Officers (SOs) The enemy became known by the names they used to communicate with each other over RT (Radio Telegraphy), being not very security minded. In some Coastal Forces boats a German speaker dressed as an RNVR officer was carried to translate the German communications and often to re-transmit in German to confuse the enemy. It is recalled that one unfortunate E-boat commander was constantly getting lost and breaking radio silence to seek directions to rejoin his flotilla. Peter Scott, on the staff of Captain Coastal Forces initiated a system of logging detected details of E-boat personnel in order to use this information against them. This was not a one-way system and many Coastal Forces SOs and COs were well known to the enemy.

There was much information to be gleaned from German prisoners, some willing to give much more than their name, rank and number. In September 1944, three E-boats were sunk in an action with Coastal Forces, two by colliding with each other. Sixty prisoners were taken, including the much decorated Senior Officer of the 10<sup>th</sup> Schnellboote Flotilla, Kapitanlieutenant Karl Muller, known to the British as "Charlie Muller". Muller was interrogated by Peter Scott who spent many hours with him, mostly talking about the technical aspects of the E-boats. Muller indicated that he was happy to talk about anything as long as it did not endanger the lives of the E-boat crews still at sea and their interrogation became wide-ranging. With Muller in his POW camp, Scott sent him a first draft of his book, *Battle of the Narrow Seas*, a classic account of Coastal Forces. Scott asked Muller to check through the text for

accuracy from a German viewpoint. The publication had been commissioned by the Admiralty, who had yet to read the draft for any contents which may have had to be censored. One can only imagine the embarrassment of those in Naval Intelligence when, within a matter of weeks, *Kapitanlieutenant* Karl Muller was back in the war, on the staff of the *Fuhrer der Schnellbooten*, for the few remaining E-boat actions in the North Sea. He had been on the point of being shipped to a POW camp in the United States when a volunteer had been requested for repatriation to Germany in exchange for an important Allied politician who had been captured. Karl Muller had been only too pleased to volunteer.

The state of the German E-boat fleet was reported in our previous article in Newsletter 21. With much diminished flotillas, demoralised crews while still carrying an air of arrogance, and filthy boats, by the end of the war the fleet was an expended force.



*German E-boat crews disembarking as prisoners at HMS Hornet.*



## LIVES IN BRIEF

### SIR DERRICK HOLDEN-BROWN

Derrick Holden-Brown joined the RNVR in 1941 and after initial service was appointed to Coastal Forces with his great friend, the late Leonard Reynolds, author of several post war books on the Royal Navy's Coastal Forces. Holden-Brown served in Fairmile D boats, commonly referred to as Dog Boats. Heavily armed and over 110 foot in length these were formidable minor war vessels, which despite their wooden construction, attacked the enemy with great success. He served exclusively in the Adriatic and he was the First Lieutenant of MGB 663 until her loss by mines off Maestra Point in the Adriatic in September 1944. He then commanded MTB 655 which was also struck by a mine in the Quarnero Gulf, with the boat breaking into two halves. MTB 655 had set out from Zadar on the northern coast of Croatia on the evening of 21 March 1945, on a patrol route to the eastern coast of Istria. No enemy had been encountered and in the early morning they were returning to Zadar before they could be sighted by enemy aircraft. The Germans had laid thousands of mines in the northern Adriatic in order to block the approach to the enemy stronghold of Kvarner and the harbours on that Croatian peninsula. The Allies, through Partisan connections, had charted the minefields although unknown to them, additional mines had been laid to cover the move north of the German frontline. MTB 655 thought that they taking a safe route, which unknown to them was no longer the case. Derrick Holden-Brown, as Commanding Officer, was on the Bridge, with the First Lieutenant as the helmsman steered their course through the difficult waters. A tremendous explosion erupted which lifted the whole central part of the boat. Fuel from broken tanks quickly spread over the surface of the sea, which immediately caught fire. The fore and aft sections of the boat quickly disappeared and Derrick Holden-Brown found himself in the icy sea with a broken leg. Survivors swam away with the sea engulfed in flames. MTB 643 picked-up twenty-three survivors, including Derrick Holden-Brown, who had broken his femur, and the First Lieutenant. Seven of the crew were missing that night and Derrick had to finish his war in hospital in Italy. He felt particularly deeply the loss of his Coxswain, Petty Officer Laurie Nicholl who had been in Coastal Forces since 1941 and had been Mentioned in Despatches and had been awarded a DSM and Bar. He had served with Derrick Holden-Brown in 663 and, through loyalty, he had followed him when he took command of MTB 655. That he should lose his life in a second mining so near to the end of the war, as a result of such loyalty, was a bitter blow for Derrick. The



*Derrick Holden-Brown, on the right, with his fellow officer Tony Marriot.*

wreck of MTB 655 was found in recent years by divers, at a depth of 52 metres in the middle of the Kvarneric channel off the northern Croatian coast and the main sections of the boat and individual weapons are quite clearly distinguishable. A torpedo tube can be seen with the torpedo still in place. Access to the wreck is only possible by professional divers. Derrick Holden-Brown was Mentioned in Despatches in January 1945 for actions in the Adriatic in August and September 1944 while serving in MGB 663. During the same period he was recommended for the Distinguish Service Cross but this was never Gazetted.

Post war, he qualified as a Chartered Accountant and commenced a very successful career in the food and drinks business. By the early 1960s he was Director of Ind Coope, then Director of Victoria Wines, followed by Chairmanship of Allied Breweries and then Chairman of Allied Lyons. His business interests spread further afield and he was Deputy Chairman of Sun Alliance Insurance, a Director of Midland Bank and President of the Food and Wine Federation.

Commemorations of the wartime activity on the Croatian island of Vis are held annually and are attended by Coastal Forces veterans and their families, strongly supported by both the British Embassy in Zagreb and the Croatian Navy. In June 2015 Derrick Holden joined the veterans and for the first time since the war he revisited the port of Komiza on the island of Vis, where the Royal Navy's Coastal Forces were based in wartime.

His affection for his wartime services continued after the war, despite his busy career in commerce. He became the Chairman of the Royal Navy's White Ensign Association, an organisation guiding and supporting naval personnel in financial and employment matters during their transition into civilian life. He then served in the early 1990's as Chairman of the Portsmouth Naval Base Heritage Trust, the organisation established by the Ministry of Defence to oversee and coordinate the activities of the various heritage organisation in the then newly formed Heritage Dockyard at Portsmouth. Perhaps his most fulfilling role was as a founding Trustee of the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust in 1994 and subsequently its long-time chairman. The Trust supported veteran activities and Derrick Holden-Brown was the driving force behind the pursuit of a Coastal Forces Museum which is now coming to fruition.

**Sir Derrick Holden-Brown**

14 February 1923 to 6 March 2018



*Sir Edward DuCann KBE, PC.*

### **SIR EDWARD DUCANN KBE, PC.**

Edward Du Cann served in Coastal Forces in the war and was the Navigating Officer of MTB 758, a Fairmile D MTB, which was part of the naval force liberating Norway in May 1945. The boat was under the command of Owen Aisher one of the founding Trustees of the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust. Edward DuCann maintained strong association with the post war Coastal Forces Officers Association and could always be seen at their gatherings. He also maintained strong connections with our Trust and he played a part in several of our commemorative events at former Coastal Forces bases, particularly at Great Yarmouth, *HMS Midge*, where he had long served. Post war he was an MP for more than 30 years and served as a minister in the Governments of Harold Macmillan and Alec Douglas-Home in the early 1960s. In addition to his ministerial posts, he became the Conservative party chairman under Ted Heath when the party entered opposition after their 1964 defeat.

He also led the influential 1922 backbench committee for 12 years and a meeting of MPs he chaired in 1975 sparked a leadership contest which saw Margaret Thatcher defeat Edward Heath. After leaving full-time politics in 1987, he returned to his extensive business interests, becoming chair of conglomerate Lonhro under its buccaneering and controversial boss Tiny Rowland. Among those to pay tribute after his death was announced were Tory MEP Daniel Hannan who tweeted that Sir Edward had been “from World War II torpedo boats to Parliament a model of decency and patriotism”. Sir Edward represented the Somerset constituency of Taunton between 1956 and 1987.

*Sir Edward Du Cann 1920 to 2017*

### **CAPTAIN PETER GRINDAL CBE, ROYAL NAVY**

Peter Grindal, who died in February this year, joined the Royal Navy in 1961. While still a midshipman under training, he saw action during the Brunei rebellion in 1963 in a motorised launch on the uncharted rivers of Borneo. His first command was *HMS Brave*

*Swordsman* in 1969-70, a fast patrol boat capable on her three gas turbines of more than 50 knots. In 1971-72 he was training officer to the Prince of Wales, then serving in the destroyer *HMS Norfolk*. On one occasion Prince Charles complained at lunch about the bread-and-butter pudding. When Grindal challenged him to make a better one the Prince demurred, claiming that he would need ingredients, including brandy. Grindal told him he could have them, but he would have to pay for them. The ensuing royally made and served pudding was reputedly one of the best. In 1975-76 Grindal specialised as a gunnery officer, and he commanded the frigates *Zulu* in 1977-79 and *Ariadne* in 1986-87, as Captain of the First Frigate Flotilla. His reputation as a fire-eater preceded him in *Ariadne*, where he took command at the beginning of Operational Sea Training (OST) and he ensured that the standards achieved were maintained in the ships subsequent deployments to the West Indies and the Gulf. He commanded *HMS Raleigh* extremely successfully and with great style, between 1987 to 89 and his last appointment in 1990-92 was as Commodore Amphibious Warfare.

He was appointed CBE on retirement when, an admirer declared, he became “the best admiral we never had”.

For eight years from 1992 he was Captain, Sea Cadet Corps, then its chief executive and finally development adviser. He settled in Bath and soon became involved in the Abbey’s mission to young people, chairing a working group that set the terms of reference for the new position of youth officer at the Abbey.

He was chairman of Bath Abbey Music Society, playing an effective role as negotiator between the society and the Abbey clergy. He also visited Zambia on behalf of the Abbey’s missionary work to assess the Street Children project of the Anglican Cathedral of Kitwe, a brief that he completed with his usual thoroughness and efficiency. He believed that the Royal Navy’s efforts to abolish the slave trade in the 19th century had been under-appreciated and in 2016 he wrote a book, “Opposing the Slavers”. His book was extremely well received and was admired by the naval historian Professor Andrew Lambert as a major revision of the existing literature that would transform the study of abolition and the history of the 19th-century Navy.

*Peter Grindal, 6 August 1943, to 26 February 2018*



*Peter Grindel.*



## IN MEMORIAM

### WE SAY FAREWELL TO:

Stanley Champion		Leonard Jones	CFVA 2241
Sir Edward Du Cann KBE PC		Gerald Lee	CFVA 3
M Francis		William (Bill) McAngus	CFVA 159
Peter Grindal CBE		Kenneth John Penning	CFVA 3160
Ray Hammond		E Phillips	CFVA 3163
K Harrison		K Ross	CFVA 1782
B Hetherington		Alfred Solomon	CFVA 2684
Sir Derrick Holden-Brown	CFVA 727	Percy Robert Tutt	CFVA 3282
Ioan Telford Hughes	CFVA 2501		

### WE WILL REMEMBER THEM



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