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NEWSLETTER



In this edition we have features on some areas of Coastal Forces history, which perhaps do not get sufficient prominence. The Allied Navies, who served alongside the Royal Navy during the Second World War, made a significant contribution to the success of the war at sea and we are delighted to tell a little of the role of the Royal Norwegian Navy and the Free Polish Navy. Also, we have an article on a little known area of clandestine operations, which was supported by Coastal Forces, that of the Levant Schooner Flotilla operating in the Aegean. This flotilla worked alongside Coastal Forces in achieving remarkable success in outwitting superior enemy forces amongst the Greek Islands. Our “Boats” section takes a slightly different slant than in previous Newsletters by reporting on some of the heritage boats which have previously had very little mention. In previous Newsletters we reported on the loss of MTB 655 in the Adriatic in 1944 and we are able to now give an account of the discovery of her wreck, which has been found by Croatian divers. Readers should look particularly at the Stop Press and the appeal being made by National Historic Ships UK for contact with descendants of World War I veterans in an effort to link these veterans with surviving World War I craft in which they may have served. Also in the Stop Press we are delighted to thank the families of two Coastal Forces veterans who have recently crossed the bar and whose families have donated to the Trust financial contributions made in their memory. This is a tremendous help which is greatly appreciated.

Captain Trevor Robotham Royal Navy – Editor

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CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

My first contribution to the newsletter gives me an opportunity to give you, our vital supporters, my perspective of where the Trust stands and what are our immediate priorities.

Thanks to the hard work of my predecessors and fellow Trustees over many years our reputation as the principal voice of Coastal Forces heritage matters is well established. We are the "go to" organisation for expertise and advice and we are the recognised leader in making the case for a permanent Exhibition dedicated to Coastal Forces. We are clear that the Exhibition must be at Portsmouth where the general public come to see their Navy's history – and we are clear that the lead organisation in setting up the permanent Exhibition must be the National Museum of the Royal Navy. Through our strong relationship with the NMRN we have received their unequivocal commitment to develop an Exhibition – though the project has to compete with other immediate priorities such as Jutland and is not yet top of their list. However, there is a building earmarked and MTB 71, now in the Museum's possession, will be the core exhibit in it.

My priority for the Trust is to get the Coastal Forces Exhibition project to the top of the NMRN "to do" list as soon as possible. To achieve that, we need to further strengthen and deepen our relationship with the Museum, to establish a

commonly agreed framework of support and activity and to continue to raise funds for the project, which enables us to punch above our weight and to keep the Museum's attention. Work on all these aspects is very much in progress.

One very recent example of the NMRN's positive attitude to Coastal Forces Heritage is their recent acquisition of RML 497, a Fairmile B. The Museum intends to restore the boat to its World War II glory and for it to operate around Portsmouth. Our Trust assisted in the purchase of the boat and we have an important role in advising on the restoration and supporting the vessel's operations.

The CFHT has flourished down the years thanks to the amazing support we receive from our many friends such as those who receive this newsletter. We still have important work to do in order to see a permanent exhibition delivered, so I ask for your patience, your continuing financial contributions for which we are most grateful and your continuing support. We are nothing without our supporters and so I end with grateful thanks to everyone for all you have done and will do in the future. Thank you.

Vice Admiral Sir Paul Haddacks KCB
Chairman of Trustees

BOATS ROUNDUP

We are happy report on one or two surviving heritage craft which have not had much visibility in the Newsletter. However, readers can see the summer programmes for the heritage boats with which we are most closely associated as follows:

HDML 1387 (HMS *Medusa*) www.hmsmedusa.org.uk

MTB 102 www.mtb102.com

HMS *Gay Archer* www.militaryboats.org/gay-archer

COASTAL MOTOR BOAT 9

A World War I heritage craft that still exists and which has received little prominence is CMB 9. This 40-foot Coastal Motor Boat was designed and built by John Thornycroft Co Ltd in 1916 and she is a sister boat to Augustus Agar's CMB 4, held by the Imperial War Museum, and certainly one of the very small number of such World War I craft remaining. Success in the restoration of heritage boats depends a great deal on the people undertaking the work and, with CMB 9, the driving seat is occupied by a very determined stalwart of boat restoration. Bob Morley has been involved in Coastal



Forces vessels most of his working life. At one time he owned MTB 331, a 55-foot boat, prior to her sale to Hampshire County Council. That boat still exists and is now privately owned. CMB 9, his current project, has a fascinating history, not only in harassing the German enemy from 1916 and then on to being a prototype Distant Control Boat (DCB1). This was a "state of the art business" involving sophisticated wireless, which was extremely advanced for that time. These British DCBs could be directed to a point of attack by remote control, hopefully hitting their target and blowing up. CMB 9/DCB 1's current home is Avonmouth and her presence can often be seen at various local events around Bristol and the West Country. In 2012 the team restoring the boat was awarded the Transport Trust Peter Allen Award for Restoration, presented to them by HRH Prince Michael of Kent at the Brooklands Museum at Weybridge. The boat was also selected to be part of the Queens Diamond Jubilee Pageant on 3 June 2012.

For additional information contact:
www.nationalhistoricalships.org.uk/register
www.worldnavalships.com

MOTOR TORPEDO BOAT 655

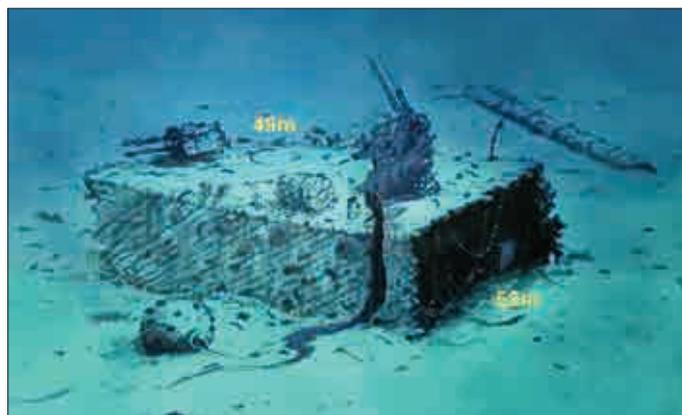
In Newsletter 17, under the title of *Vis revisited*, we related the loss of MTB 655 and the return of her commanding officer, Sir Derrick Holden-Brown to *Vis*. We are now able to report the finding of the wreck of 655 by the two very experienced Croatian divers, Danijel Frika and Jasen Mesic.

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. The Commanding Officer Derrick Holden-Brown was dozing on the Bridge, with the First Lieutenant and 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, which were initially afloat quickly disappeared and Derrick Holden-Brown found himself in the icy sea with a broken leg. Other boats saved the survivors although seven of the crew were lost.

The wreck of MTB 655 was found at a depth of 52 metres in the middle of the Kvarneric channel off the northern Croatian



MTB 655 – Fairmile D 115 feet long, 21 feet wide, weighing 102 tonnes. Armed with one 2 Pounder Pom-Pom gun foreword, two twin 12.7mm machine guns in turrets each side of the Bridge, one twin 20mm Oerlikon aft and two 21 inch torpedo tubes.



The midship section of MTB 655 on the sea-bed with a torpedo tube close by

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 but much information is available through the publication of Danijel Frika and Jasen Mesic.

See "Treasures of the Adriatic Sea", A divers guide to the wrecks of the Croatian Adriatic. Publisher Adamic d.o.o., Rijeka, Zvonimirova 20a. ISBN 978-953-219-479-1
 See www.adamic.hr

POLISH MOTOR GUNBOAT S-3 ('WYZEL'/'POINTER'), EX-MGB 45

Recognising that it is impossible to save all the remaining World War II Coastal Forces boats, we see many craft with a credible history disappear to the scrap-yard. A latest loss is the Polish Motor Gunboat S-3, which features in this Newsletter article about the Polish naval involvement in Allied Coastal Forces.

Ex-MGB 45 was transferred to the Polish Navy in World War II, re-numbered 'S-3' and given the unofficial Polish name of 'Wyzel', meaning 'Pointer'. The 'S' in the title was short for *Scigacz*, meaning hunter/pursuer. She had a chequered war history including running aground on the Goodwin Sands and later sustaining damage outside Fowey Harbour, Cornwall, when an acoustic mine exploded nearby. Post war S-3 had been



MGB S-3 being towed away

moored at the boatyard on the Medway for many years and known as 'MV Freelance'. In June 1977 she took part in the 'Royal Silver Jubilee Thames River Pageant' with her former Polish Commanding Officer Andrzej Jaraczewski and his wife Jadwiga Pilsudski. The boat was moved from her moorings on the River Medway, at Port Werburgh, on 16 November 2015, after sustaining hull damage and having been kept afloat by pumps. As she was towed away to be scrapped, her current owner, Helen Smith and two other former owners were there to see her sad departure as she moved away from the quay.

See one of our main features in this Newsletter, the Free Polish Navy.

RESCUE MOTOR LAUNCH - RML 497

The National Museum of the Royal Navy has purchased the World War II RML 497 and CFHT has provided financial support to secure the purchase. The boat had run as one of the Western Lady ferries operating across Torbay since 1947 (Western Lady III). The boat was built in 1941 and launched in 1942. She saw service operating from Portland, Dartmouth, Appledore, and Felixstowe and undertook clandestine operations, supporting a commando raid to the Channel Islands. The NMRN intend to restore the boat to its former World War II appearance, with the help of our Trust, and keep her afloat as a visitor attraction. We are delighted to support this purchase and welcome another Coastal Forces heritage craft being saved.



RML 497 operating as Western Lady III

THE FREE POLISH NAVY – COASTAL FORCES



When Poland was invaded in September 1939 those naval personnel who could escape rallied to the call of the Polish General Wladislaw Sikorski,

who had quickly established himself in London.

He formed the Free Polish Armed Services of which the Free Polish Navy became a significant element. As men and ships arrived in the UK the Admiralty agreed to hand over one



of two Samuel White built 75ft boats which had previously been ordered for the Polish Navy. This was MASB 48 which became the Polish Navy's S-1, but this was only the start. More Polish naval crews became available and two 63 ft craft were handed over, MASB 44 and 45, originally built for Norway, and then being designated the Polish Navy's S-2 and S-3.

It was in these first three boats, S-1 chart (Greyhound), S-2 Wilczur (Alsatian) and S-3 (Wyzel) that the Polish Navy established their formidable reputation. Of the Allied Naval personnel whose countries had been occupied, those who escaped from Poland were most conscious that their families and fellow men remaining in their homeland were suffering an appalling loss of life. The hatred that the Poles felt for the German enemy motivated them to fight alongside the Royal Navy in Coastal Forces with the most extremes of bravery and ferocity. Their hatred of the enemy was such that a clear understanding existed with their Royal Naval counterparts

*General Wladislaw Sikorski with
Prime Minister Winston Churchill – 1940*



*Polish MGBs S-3 and S-2 in Ramsgate Harbour in WW2
(Photo: Michael Bray collection)*



Polish MGB S 2

that, should enemy survivors need to be picked-up following a naval engagement, this would not be undertaken by the Polish naval boats which would never allow Germans onboard. An example of this was witnessed when a Polish boat was diverted to pick-up enemy survivors of an aircraft ditching off the Goodwin light-ship. There were survivors seen most clearly from the shore. The Polish boat obeyed its order and remained on task, standing-off from the aircraft wreckage. Nevertheless, on completion the boat returned to harbour only to report that there were no survivors.

The Polish manned boats joined the 3rd MGB Flotilla operating firstly out of Fowey and then Ramsgate. The senior officer of the 3rd MGBs Polish division, Lieutenant Wcislicki, was known to all as *Captain Whisky* and was a character of "independent nature". This is best witnessed by an incident in June 1942 when Lieutenant Wcislicki, in command of S-2, was on Night Patrol off Dungeness escorting a convoy with S3. However, S-3 suffering engine problems was ordered to return to harbour and Wcislicki in S-2 was ordered to accompany. At the same time the movement of E-Boats were being plotted as

they left Boulogne and Wcislicki was well aware of the opportunities this offered. He therefore chose to disobey the order to return to harbour and he remained at sea to engage the E-Boats. This he did in a daring solo action, engaging several E-Boats with such intensity that the E Boats became so disoriented that they were firing at each other thus adding to their damage. Not only did he inflict severe damage on several boats but he prevented the damage that they were planning to inflict on the Allied convoy. His disobedience in not returning to harbour as directed, was noted by Flag Officer Dover, Admiral Ramsay, who chose to view the situation with a Nelsonian eye. *Captain Whisky* was subsequently awarded a Distinguished Service Cross for his actions that night. In the early part of the war more Polish crews became available and the number of Polish naval boats was to increase steadily to six. Later they formed the 8th MTB Flotilla based at Felixstowe in 1944 where they operated alongside the Royal and other Allied navies with extreme gallantry until D-Day. After the war, like a number of Polish Naval Officers Lieutenant Wcislicki joined the Royal Navy, changing his name to

Westlake and finishing his service as a Captain Royal Navy. A Bronze Plaque in memory of all the Officers, men and ships of the Polish Navy who served in World War II can to be found at The Belvedere Remembrance Gardens on Plymouth Hoe, Devon. It mentions MTBs/MGBs S-1 to S-10.

*With thanks for material supplied by
Tim Deacon*



Polish MGB Crew

A WAR ARTIST – 70 YEARS ON

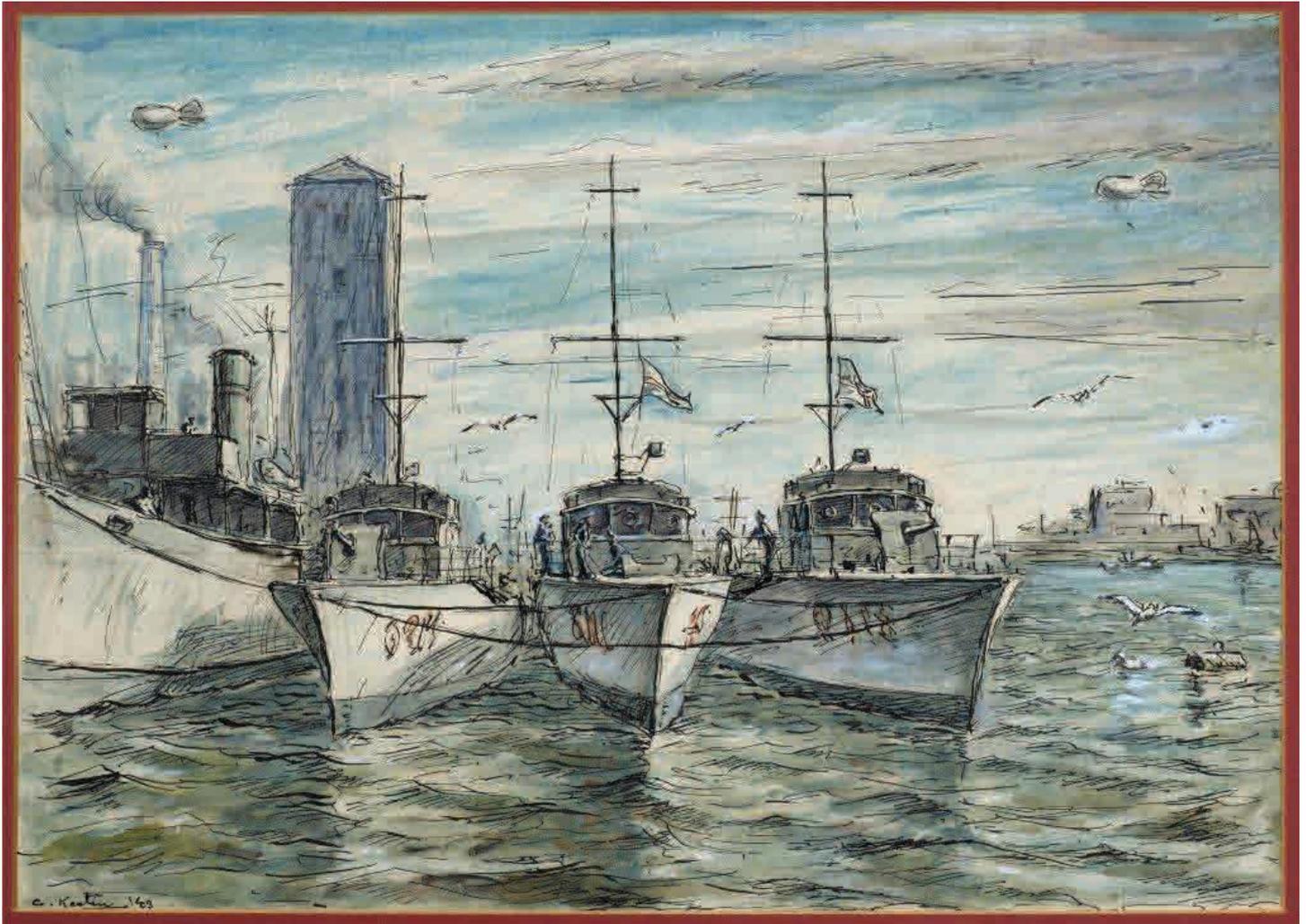
It was 73 years ago that Colin Scott-Kestin sat in an army truck by the harbour side at Felixstowe, where he was stationed with the Royal Corp of Signal. It was a breezy day in early summer and a trio of Wrens were engaged in towing an MTB with tractors. Something in the scene took the eye of the young man, who had studied as an artist before the war. He kept his watercolour box and sketching material close at hand and was therefore able to catch some unique scenes. He sketched and painted from within his vehicle as he painted military scenes of a sensitive nature, which were unlikely to get approval of the Official Censor. Colin Scott-Kestin's war art was, initially, entirely for his own consumption and to generate a bit of spare cash. He used to do portraits of young officers for 10/6d a time! Later he wrote to the War Artists Advisory Committee, submitting examples of his work and the

committee made an initial purchase. At the tender age of 21, he was to become the youngest artist to be paid for wartime art-work. Colin Scott-Kestin went on to achieve distinction as a miniaturist, becoming a member of the Royal Society of Miniaturists with his keen eye for detail burning brightly. At the age of 94 he is still painting and able to recall those distant days of war with wry clarity. His work can be seen in the Imperial War Museum and the Royal Signals Museum at Blandford Camp.

This article is by courtesy of Sim Fine Art through whom many works of wartime art are available. www.simfineart.com. "The Art of the War Years 1939 – 45". Contactable at simfineart@btinternet.com and Tel No 07919 356150. Catalogues available at a cost of £5.



Wrens on tractors towing an MTB – 1943 at Felixstowe



ABOVE MTBs in Felixstowe Harbour – 1943



LEFT Lieutenant-Commander Robert Hitchens crew in Ordnance Hotel Bar, Felixstowe – 1942. Now in the possession of Antony Hitchens, son of Robert Hitchens DSO*, DSC**

NORWEGIAN COASTAL FORCES



The resistance to the German invasion of Norway in World War II lasted for two months and when it came to an end in June 1940 most of the small and aging Norwegian Navy was mostly sunk or put out of action. What was left was ordered to sail for England to take part in the war against Nazi-Germany. At this early stage of the war Norway gave a vital contribution to the war effort through her possession of one of the world's largest and most modern merchant fleets. After the occupation of Norway this fleet was mostly in foreign ports and at the disposal of the Allied powers. The income from it naturally strengthened the financial independence of the Norwegian government in exile. Political, financial and military agreements between the Norwegian and British governments were the formal platform for the building-up and organisation of a new combatant navy. All the Norwegian naval units operating from Britain flew the Norwegian ensign but were under British operational control. The Norwegian naval units were to make a vital contribution in the whole range of operations, including the Battle of the Atlantic, convoy escorts, the sinking of the German Battleship *Scharnhorst* and, eventually, the re-occupation of their homeland.

The two Norwegian MTBs, 5 and 6 were actually the first combatant naval vessels commissioned for the Royal

Norwegian Navy in Britain. The MTBs operated in the Channel from early summer 1940 as part of the 11th MTB Flotilla and saw extensive action. After 1941 five Thornycroft MTBs formed the Norwegian MTB Flotilla at Portsmouth. But the force grew and by midsummer 1942 these were replaced by the more capable Fairmile Ds. Eight boats formed the 30th MTB Flotilla (later the 54th Flotilla) which by late 1942 was deployed Lerwick in the Shetland Islands. From this base very daring but successful offensive operations started against German shipping along the western coast of Norway. Their main targets were German convoys. Operations were faced with the problem of stormy and rough weather encountered in the winter months in the North Sea. Nevertheless, the success of operations depended on using the dark season and the long light summer nights brought their own problems. Very often Norwegian MTBs would lie for days in camouflaged positions in the inner-leads waiting for a suitable target to attack. From 1942 until the end of the war a total of 161 operations off the coast of Norway were carried out, resulting in the sinking of 20 merchant ships and the destruction of 7 enemy warships.

In addition to these highly successful operations another independent Norwegian naval unit, the 4th Motor Launch Flotilla, was operating in the Channel. Their operations varied

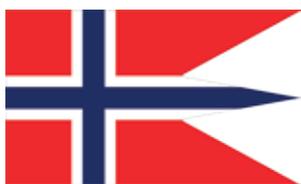


King George VI inspects ratings of the Royal Norwegian Navy – 1941

from escort duties to offensive minelaying along the enemy occupied coasts, eventually, playing a role in the Normandy landings in June 1944. Thirteen of the boats carrying out clandestine operations off the coast of Norway were lost and about 25 percent of the men manning Norwegian vessels lost their lives. The very last torpedo to sink a Norwegian naval vessel did so on the 7 May 1945, some hours after the declaration of the end of the war in Europe. On that date a newly commissioned Norwegian minesweeper, in a group of four such new, modern vessels, which were sailing through the English Channel bound for Norway via Rosyth when one was torpedoed by U-boat U1023 and 22 of the complement of 33 were killed. This loss of life is even more regrettably knowing that the German Grossadmiral Donitz had sent a signal to his U-boats as early as 4 May ordering them to stop all hostilities and sail for harbour. Additionally, it had already been broadcast by General Eisenhower in the early hours of 7 May that an unconditional surrender had been signed. The Message was either not received by the U-boat or ignored.

The close links between Norway and Britain were founded on the common aim of the war. However, the very close cooperation which developed between the two navies was first and foremost based on mutual professional respect and confidence. Much can be said about the contribution the Royal Norwegian Navy made to the naval success of the war and many tales of heroism remain to be told.

A NORWEGIAN SACRIFICE



Lieutenant Andersen of the Royal Norwegian Navy was an officer of boundless energy and unique optimism who was typical of that country's naval forces operating from Britain.

He had a plan to use a Thornycroft 55 foot MTB to penetrate the fjords of the Norwegian coast and inflict damage to the enemy. These small MTBs were equipped with 2 x 18 inch torpedoes and two powerful main engines giving a speed of up to 40 knots. This boat could also glide soundlessly under the power of a small auxiliary motor. It needed only a seven-man crew and this had many advantages if it was to lie in hiding off the Norwegian coast. His plans passed many Admiralty committees and eventually Lieutenant Andersen found himself at Portsmouth with his crew ready to be transported to Shetland. His boat, MTB 345, wholly manned by Royal Norwegian Navy, except for the Telgraphist, eventually reached Lerwick via Inverness. On 9 June 1943 she departed for her mission off the coast of Norway, astern of MTBs 653, which carried additional fuel. MTB 345 would be unable to cross the north sea twice so was refuelled on arrival off Norway to enable her to operate and then, eventually, return to the

UK. It was a difficult journey in a thick mist across the North Sea and MTB 345 lost contact with MTB 653. Now dangerously light, they anchored in a little creek in Outer Solund after an immensely dangerous journey with no mechanical or technical navigation equipment. They were soon camouflaged and totally blended into the surrounding landscape. The crew even went ashore to stretch their legs having been 14 hours closed-up for action.

An anxious period followed about the lack of fuel and the lost contact with 653. In fact MTB 653 had also reached the Norwegian coast but it was to be several days before a rendezvous could take place and fuel transferred. MTB 345 stayed off the Norwegian coast for a further 12 days, conducting difficult operations under dangerously light night skies. Returning to Shetland on 23 June 1943 they carried much information that was to prove priceless for later operations.

MTB 345 returned to the Norwegian coast on 25 July for similar operations, this time accompanied by MTB 620 with Lieutenant Prebensen as the Commanding Officer. This operation started by being far from uneventful. Twice during the day's passage they had been seen by enemy aircraft and the crew remained tense for action. In addition, a signal rocket had been fired from Holmengra. On arrival off the Norwegian coast at night the two MTBs came alongside each other for the fuel transfer, albeit with clatter from manhandling petrol cans in the dark. Twenty minutes into the task, as dawn was breaking, they saw a German seaplane, a Blohm and Voss 138, approaching. MTB 620 cast loose and engaged the seaplane which took several hits and which withdrew on fire with a long back tail of smoke. Although the fuel transfer was not completed, Lieutenant Anderson, the senior CO, ordered MTB 620 to withdraw and she quickly headed westerly at high speed. MTB 345 was now alone and the whole coastal area had been alarmed. MTB 345 reached the relative safety of the inner coast cove at Olderoy, assisted by the silence of her auxiliary engines. From that stage of her operations there were no reports from the boat as to its brutal fate. Reports that do exist came from the Norwegian resistance contact on Solund who supported these MTB operations.

Lieutenant Anderson wanted help to get hold of twenty-one cans of fuel, which the brother of the resistance contact had been holding from a previous operation. A rendezvous was arranged to pick-up the fuel but after much confusion and searching, the fuel, was eventually located sunk and what was recovered was the wrong type. During this feverish activity a German Motorboat passed just 50 metres from the MTB, albeit with no sign that they had been seen. As dawn broke the peace was broken by three German planes flying towards the MTB's hiding place. Although well camouflaged the planes began to circle and hemmed them in to their hiding place, which made retaliation difficult for the MTB. Several small

German vessels then appeared at full speed, further hemming the MTB into its hiding place. The crew fought against overwhelming odds with small arms, killing sixteen Germans with three of the MTB crew injured by hand grenade splinters. Lieutenant Anderson and his crew were taken to Bergen where they were interrogated. All the crew wore the uniform-brown battledress with the insignia of the Norwegian Navy, although the radio operator was, of course, English. When this had been completed, the Reichkommissar Terboven sent the following message to Hitler's headquarters in Berlin:

"The commander of the KDS (Gestapo) reports that seven commandos have been taken prisoner from a British MTB. I suggest that these people should not be treated as ordinary prisoners of war but as saboteurs and that the matter be treated by the KDS Gestapo."

A reply was quickly received, which read:

"The Fuehrer is satisfied with your proposal. Further orders regarding this matter have been sent to Wehrmacht Norge. Signed Keitel"

It was almost a year before these events, on 18 October 1942, that Hitler had declared that Commandos should be considered as operating outside the Geneva Convention and should be shot. The fate of the MTB crew was sealed and they

were handed to the Gestapo. However, records seen after the war indicate that there was severe disquiet and hesitation about carrying out this order, amongst the senior German military in Norway. The Admiral commanding the Bergen area and thus the Gestapo in that area, questioned the order. The Obergruppenfuhrer in Oslo re-stated that the order should be carried although he refused to put this in writing. The crew members were kept in individual cells and in total isolation as though the authorities were embarrassed by what was going to take place. It is believed that the MTB crew assumed that they were to be treated as prisoners of war as evidenced by Lieutenant Anderson, who wrote on the wall of his cell: *"Taken as prisoner of war on 28 July 1943. Anderson"*. Despite further indecision by the local senior military about following out the orders, the executions were carried out at 0400 on 30 July 1943 and the bodies taken out to sea for disposal. After the war a memorial was built to the crew of MTB 345 at Ulven army camp, south of Bergen, where an annual memorial service is held. The inscription on the Memorial reads:

"This stone is raised to the memory of the crew of the Norwegian Motor Torpedo Boat 345 who in battle were taken prisoner, and outside the law and without sentence executed by German criminals here at Ulven on 30 July 1943."

THE LEVANT SCHOONER FLOTILLA OPERATIONS IN THE AEGEAN

MOTTO – "STAND BOLDLY ON"

Among the forces, which operated under the command of the RN Coastal Forces in the Eastern Mediterranean in 1942- 1944, were the caiques and schooners of *The Levant Schooner Flotilla (LSF)*. This flotilla was formed early in 1942 under the command of Lieutenant-Commander Adrian Seligman DSC, RNVR, after the fall of Greece. The Royal Navy was tasked with supporting the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the Army raiding forces in their clandestine warfare against the German and Italian occupation of the Greek Aegean Islands.

The Royal Navy operational base was at *HMS Martial*, the naval base at Beirut in Lebanon, attached to Coastal Forces Eastern Mediterranean under Commander Ralph Courage DSO, DSC, RN. The job of the first arrivals was to find and fit out any suitable single-masted caiques in and around Beirut and Cyprus, as well as larger schooners to act as headquarter and supply vessels. The caique was the most common vessel in the Aegean, used by all nations for fishing and trading and

could pass as such if challenged at first sight. Secluded anchorages were found in coves and inlets in South West Turkey for use as start points for operations, where schooners also were set up to act as an advanced base for the smaller raiding caiques. Two Harbour Defence Motor Launches (HDMLs) armed with Bofors and Oerlikon were added also to the flotilla for firepower. Deremen in Southern Turkey was found to be as good a natural harbour as anywhere in the world for a secret advanced base, where the many inlets gave shelter for caiques to provision and maintain themselves. Turkey at that time was still in a state of neutrality and, although allied ships were able to use their waters, the Turkish coastguards and army were openly hostile to Britain; great care had to be taken over concealing movements which might be passed on to the enemy. The Special Boat Service (SBS) under Lord Jellicoe and the Special Air Service (SAS) formed from the Long Range Desert group (LRDG), also entered the battle with their own supply schooners, which joined forces with the

ABOVE *A Typical Caique*BELOW *Aegean Sea and Islands*

flotilla for raids against the Axis held islands. Then, in 1943 the Greek Sacred Squadron (GSS) also joined the attacking forces. This historic Greek unit, which traditionally was formed only when the country was in dire military peril, had been fighting alongside the LRDG in the desert and was a commando style force, comprised mainly of Greek officers, who had escaped from Greece after the invasion.

Early in 1943, this mix of clandestine forces was amalgamated to become *The Anglo-Hellenic Aegean Raiding Force* under the command of Colonel Bull Turnbull DSO, whose task was to 'create a reign of terror' against the Axis powers in the Aegean. The *Levant Schooner Flotilla (LSF)* by then had gained considerable experience in moving and landing raiding parties around the islands and became the means to transport all these forces during this secret war. Eventually joined by Greek manned caiques, over 300 raids were carried out, keeping the islands supplied and attacking Axis garrisons. By mid 1943, many islands were in a desperate state and some with near famine conditions.



Turnbull's force became known as "the men who never slept", as most of their work was done at night and this clandestine fighting involved use of the knife, garrote and timed explosive devices – rather than gun versus tank. These constant attacks

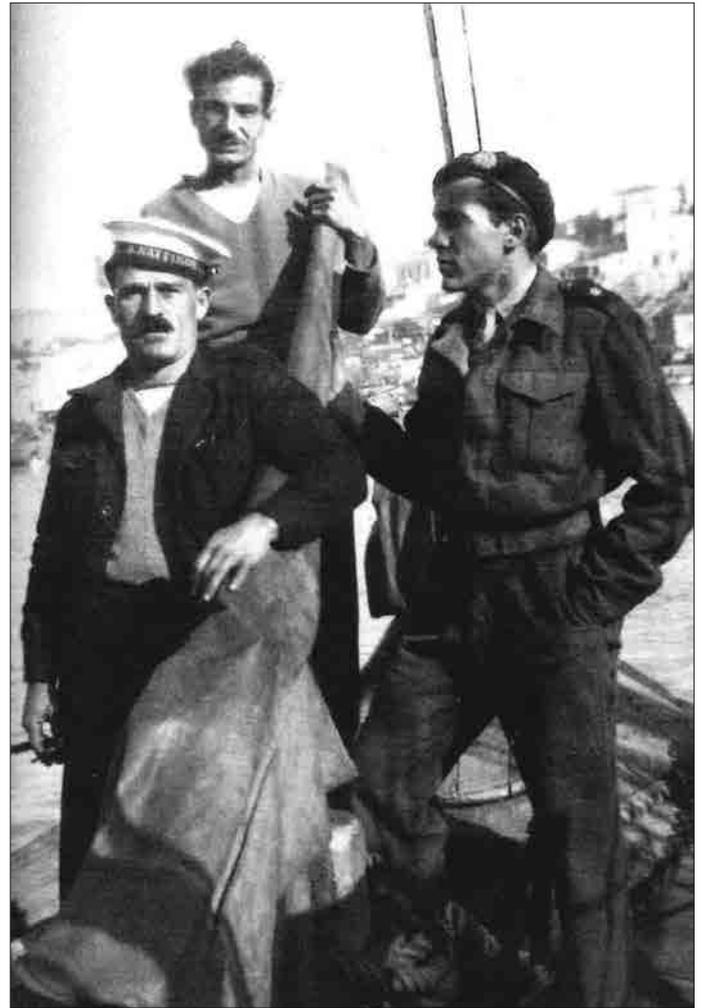
tied down a considerable occupying force of some 40,000 German and Italian troops who were needed elsewhere and Turnbull's raiding forces produced outstanding results.

The main problem which faced the LSF was the necessity to operate only at night, because the the *Luftwaffe* air superiority ruled out daylight operations, with little Allied air cover available in the Aegean. Also, the Mediterranean Fleet was down to so few ships in 1942 that it could not provide support. Most caiques were fitted with Bolinger diesel engines, which in fine weather were audible for many miles, so these had to be replaced by 90 H.P. Matilda tank engines lying spare at Haifa. These engines could be run at half throttle to give the same speed, so were relatively quiet. Regular naval officers and ratings were in short supply in the Mediterranean and crews had to be found from volunteer reservists with the officers in command aged between 19 and 23. Passages of up to 80 miles or more over open water to an exact navigational spot had to be made, at night and often in complete darkness. Accuracy and seamanship were required against a background of unlit rocky shores, with patrols being landed never knowing whether an ambush lay in wait. The biggest problem of all, however, was to find a means to remain undetected in daylight as the *Luftwaffe* flew regular daylight patrols all over the Aegean. This limited the boats' radius of action with little room for error or breakdown. A solution was found in a chance conversation at the Beirut base with the officer commanding an Army camouflage unit! The idea was developed of making nets and cloth patterns held out by poles to cover and disguise a caique's shape. These would be rigged over the caique having first stepped the mast, to blend it in with rock or foreshore where the caique was lying secured with anchor and grapnels. A caique thus camouflaged was able to remain undetected at a suitable island during the whole of daylight, before proceeding onwards the next night. This enabled the *LSF* to operate at greater range from its base all over the Aegean and the scale of operations was transformed at a stroke.

In October 1943, Commander Andreas Londos of the Greek Navy collected together numerous fishing boats and cargo vessels lying in Alexandria and other ports, and



Caique camouflaged



*Crew members Michail Zervas, Charilaos Manolikas
and George Paspatis*

commissioned these with crews from the Greek Navy and Army who had made their escape from mainland Greece. These vessels amalgamated with the *Levant Schooner Flotilla* as an Anglo-Hellenic force, together with commandos from the Greek Sacred Squadron. Among their skippers notably was George Paspatis, who became captain of the caique *Merano*, who tells his remarkable story of escape and actions in his book 'Dead Reckoning'.

George Paspatis recounts how, on one particular mission when he was carrying an SBS patrol to man observation posts on islands in the Sporades, 'camouflage' saved his caique and crew from almost certain destruction and capture by German patrol boats. Having been delayed on passage overnight by a gale, he found himself approaching an unscouted island in broad daylight. Suddenly, his crew spotted two large patrol boats following them, sending up clouds of spray, with the sinister swastika flapping at their masthead.

At *Merano's* full speed of just 7 knots there was no chance to escape, but Paspatis was closing the shore in an early morning haze and he felt that his vessel blended well with the grey uncertain contours of the island even with his dark exhaust smoke. He recounts in his own words how he decided on an emergency ploy:

“We began the tricky task of lowering the mast. This done, we opened up the camouflage nets and covered ourselves completely under a gigantic mosquito net. As if by magic we had changed ourselves into a small mobile rock, vanished under the eyes of the Germans and slid into a miniature creek, checking our speed and bringing the caique to a standstill by throwing out grapnels which bit into the rock and held firm. The enemy was closing so rapidly that we could now discern their formidable 75mm guns. For about ten minutes, which seemed a relative eternity, we lay low. It is difficult to believe the enemy cannot see us and that they could pass by at a distance of no more than 300 yards. As the first boat loomed into sight behind the promontory, its razor like bow cutting a crystal furrow through the dark blue swell. What we saw was like a dream. The vision of the unreal immobility of the crew as if frozen in place at their action stations and the sullen German faces, so short a distance away we could make them out in minute detail. They were blankly peering at us over their gleaming guns, looking through unseeing eyes like a crew of blind sailors. For a

while, we watched with quick almost audible heartbeats while the EMS boat moved smoothly past the entrance to the bay towards an invisible line on the horizon. The other boat must have gone further down the coast.

This was doubtless my strangest war experience, also ranking among the most nerve racking; for even when you are dead sure of your camouflage, after the enemy has passed you are left with a weakness in the knees. And even then you are amazed at having seen the enemy so clearly without having been seen, a sensation you never get used to.

George Paspati went on to carry out many more missions and attacks, at one stage staying in enemy waters for over a month. He ended the war by being one of the first to enter liberated Athens on 24th October 1944. He was the recipient of the Greek Military Cross among other decorations and named an honorary Rear Admiral by the Greek Ministry of Marine

[With thanks to Commander Rodney Agar RN](#)

LIVES IN BRIEF

DAVID J P WATSON

David Watson, who died in November 2015, had been a Founding Trustee of the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust in 1994 and he remained a Trustee until illness overcame him late last year. Although he served his National Service in the Royal Navy he did not serve in Coastal Forces. His involvement arose out of his interest in the World War II MTB 71, whose significance he recognized when he sighted it being used as a houseboat on the Chichester Canal. He acquired the boat and took care of her with a passionate interest up to the present day. He traced the naval veterans who were then still alive and who had served on MTB 71 in the war. For one veteran in particular, Petty Officer Horrocks who had been killed in the war, his widow had never received her husband's wartime medals and David set about acquiring these from the Ministry of Defence. They were presented to Joan Horrocks, his widow, in the presence of Flag Officer Portsmouth and a large group of World War II prominent Coastal Forces veterans. Because the boat had originally been ordered for the Norwegians prior to the start of the War but then taken over by the Royal Navy, he built-up a strong personal relationship with those senior people in the Royal Norwegian Navy who were still operating fast attack craft. His relationship was so strong that the Norwegians sent a large support ship, *Valkyrien*, to Portsmouth in order to transport MTB 71 to Bergen for what turned-out to be extremely successful commemorative events.

David's career had been, firstly, as a very successful racing driver and then as a Technical Director within the film industry. He worked on several of the James Bond films and, as a result of him undertaking the roll of stuntman in these films, amongst many others, he formed the Union which looks after the interests of stuntmen up to the present day. In saving MTB 71 David made a very significant contribution to naval heritage.

WILLIAM THOMAS STANLEY HALL BEM, MID

A Leading Telegraphist in a whole range of Coastal Forces boats, including MASBs 63, 15, 25, and MGB 15. He was awarded his Mention in Despatches for operations in the Aegean from September to November 1943 in ML 349. During that period, after the fall of Sicily, Coastal Forces were able to move further east and ML 349 was heavily involved in operations to secure strategic positions amongst the enemy occupied islands of the Aegean Sea. His Mention in Despatches reflects his service in some of the most intense and dangerous Coastal Forces operations of the war.

JOHN LAMBERT

The joint author of the publication of two volumes of, "Allied Coastal Forces of World War II" died in early January. John was not a Coastal Forces veteran but had served in the Royal Navy as a Petty Officer ME and then had a long career in the Metropolitan Police. How his interest in Coastal Forces

developed through his drawing plans of Royal Navy warships for model boat magazines. However, very few individuals have developed a deeper knowledge of the details of Coastal Forces craft than John. His publications, Volume I covering Fairmile Designs and US Submarine Chasers and Volume II covering Vosper MTBs and US ELCOs became well respected, definitive reference books on the details of these boats.. He achieved success by collaborating with his joint US author, Al Ross, who contributed his knowledge of the US PT boats. John was a great supporter of the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust, always ready to undertake research and who supported the Trust with displays at Navy Days and Festivals of the Sea at Portsmouth.

MAURICE G BOWYER MID

In Coastal Forces from 1940 until July 1945, serving in eleven different boats, far more than most other officers. His first appointment was as First Lieutenant of MTB 102 and then in the same role in MASB 52, MGB 100 and MGB 15. Following these appointments he served as Commanding Officer in all his other boats. It was while serving in MGB 15, on patrol off Ymuiden on the Dutch Coast, in company with other MGBs under the overall command of the Canadian Lt. JD 'Doug' Maitland, that they encountered a German armed trawler, which they took by surprise and engaged. The trawler was sunk without returning fire and the

action was highly commended. Maurice Bowyer was awarded his Mention in Despatches for an action on 29 January 1944 in the Drevnik Channel while in command of MTB 97. An enemy tanker and schooner were sunk and the Italian crew of the schooner were captured.

ANTHONY DAVID (TONY) FLETCHER

Joined the Royal Navy in the early years of the war but it was not until completion of his Dartmouth training and his "Fleet Time" as a junior officer that he was to join Coastal Forces 31st MTB Flotilla in October 1944 at Lowestoft. By July 1945 he was First Lieutenant of MTB 381, when the flotilla was transferred the flotilla from Lowestoft to Portland and then MTB 381 in the 2nd MTB Flotilla. His first command was in MTB 527 still as a Sub-Lieutenant, which led to a second command in MTB 530 in the First MTB Flotilla then based at HMS Hornet. He left the Royal Navy in 1957 and pursued a career as a Hydrographic Surveyor. This work took him to the Middle East, Far East and Australia, in addition to home waters. In 1962 he was part of the Storm Warning Service at the Metrological Office at Bracknell followed by an appointment as a Senior Systems Engineer with EASAMS Ltd, naturally with maritime connections. Retiring as Manager of Maritime Projects in 1985 his maritime connections continued through consultancy work. Tony was a great supporter of our Trust.

STOP PRESS

DONATIONS TO THE TRUST

The Chairman and Trustees wish to thank the families of recently deceased Coastal Forces veterans **George Douglas Elliot** and **Leslie John Sprigg**, both of whom asked for donations in the memory of their loved one to be given to the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust. The Trustees are extremely grateful for this very welcome financial support. Additionally, a recent Legacy from the Estate of **Ronald Murray** has helped the Trust considerably. In this respect, details for contributions by Legacy can be found on the CFHT web site www.coastal-forces.org.uk.

VETERANS – APPEAL FOR WORLD WAR I MARITIME DESCENDANTS

As part of its World War I centenary project, *Britain's Surviving Vessels*, National Historic Ships UK (NHS UK) has launched its new Veterans Appeal. Their aim is to find descendants of those who lived, worked, served or owned a range of vessels during the First World War. Once descendants have been identified the intention is to bring them together with the vessels of their ancestors and their current owners. Martyn Highton, Director

of NHS UK, said: "People forget that the First World War was a war at sea in addition to one of horrific land campaigns. With this Project we are keen to highlight the role of smaller vessels and we hope that the Veteran's Appeal will encourage members of the public to get in touch and tell the forgotten stories of their ancestors, so that these can be linked to the surviving craft in which they served." The Project has been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and tells the forgotten stories of more than 60 vessels of varying sizes, including SS Nomadic, a passenger tender for the SS Titanic and pressed into service as a US troopship; HMS Caroline, the last surviving British warship that took part in the Battle of Jutland; the stout barge John Constable that was scuttled for fear that she would be used as a German troopship in the event of an invasion and the topsail schooner Result which was converted into a so-called Q Ship with concealed armament to lure U Boats into battle. The Project's web site is at <http://www.ww1britainssurvivingvessels.org.uk>. Further information can be obtained from: **Tom Williams, HLF Press Office** on 020 7591 6046 or **Hannah Cunliffe, National Historic Ships UK**, on 0208 312 8558: e-mail at Hannah.cunliffe@nationalhistoricships.org.uk

IN MEMORIAM

WE SAY FAREWELL TO:

Paul Aeron-Thomas	CFVA 733	Anthony (Tony) Fletcher	
Paul F Ashwell		William T S Hall BEM MID	CFVA 1698
W H Baltram	CFVA 1554	W M Harrison	CFVA 2928
Maurice Bowyer	CFVA 737	Antony Hart DSC	
James A Brier	CFVA 518	John Lambert	
Phyllis Brown	CFVA 992	John McCarron	
Robert George Eberuh		Colin Morris	CFVA 2641
George Edgley	CFVA 1864	John Robertson	CFVA 2618
George Douglas (Doug) Elliot	CFVA 2616	Leslie John P Sprigg MID	CFVA 911
Eric M England		Ernest Alexander Stear MBE	CFVA 2774
Gerald Fenner	CFVA 3087	Ronald Trim	CFVA 2972
David Fear	CFVA 3167	David Eames Wilson	CFVA 730

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM





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Objectives of the Trust: The object of the Coastal Forces
Heritage Trust is the advancement of the education of the
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permanent display, for public benefit, of Coastal Forces craft
together with relevant artefacts, records and memorabilia
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