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NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 24, MAY 2019



Artist's impression of CMB 4 attack on the Soviet Cruiser Oleg – 17 June 1919.

I feel both fortunate and daunted as I pen my first words as your new Editor; fortunate to take on a very successful and well proven periodical and daunted in that I have a high bar to get over if I am to do as well as my predecessor, Trevor Robotham. Trevor has been the backbone of the Trust for many years. He was Trust Director, then a Trustee (and Acting Chairman for a while) and, over the last 6 or so years, Editor. His knowledge of Coast Forces, the history, boats, operations and, most important, the people is encyclopaedic and unique. I know the Chairman will want to add his own words but, from my perspective, Trevor has done a marvellous job – in short, a hard act to follow. I will do my best but, of course, welcome all feedback, suggestions, ideas and, indeed articles and stories, from you, the readership. Our aim, quite simply, is to keep the memories alive and to do this we need contributions.

You will find in this newsletter a heartfelt tribute to Peter Cunningham

who has sadly died. He was a wonderful Trust supporter and organiser. He masterminded many events and did so with great courtesy, consideration and attention to detail. He worked extremely hard, often behind the scenes, for the Trust and will be greatly missed.

Turning to this newsletter, I include an article about operations off the Arakan Coast of Burma. This was a most successful but now largely forgotten chapter of Coastal Forces history. There is a short article to record the very significant contribution by the Royal Canadian Navy and as the start of a plan to cover the weapons of Coastal Forces, there is a short articles on the Holman Projector, a pretty extraordinary and singularly unsuccessful weapon of war.

The painting here marks 2019 as the centenary of the remarkable attack on the Bolshevik Fleet at Kronstadt, the first of its kind, by Lieutenant

Augustus Agar VC and there is an article in this newsletter covering the most exciting project to faithfully rebuild his boat, CMB 4.

Read on and enjoy

Commander Rupert Head,
Royal Navy – Editor



CMB 4 at Duxford.

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NEWSLETTER 23 CORRECTIONS

With apologies, we must correct the following errors in Newsletter 23: Page 6, A FIRST COMMAND, The GAY Class was designed by John Revens, RCNC in the Directorate of the Naval Construction (not by Vospers). This class replaced the 73-foot Vosper 1944 Class (not the Fairmile "D's" in the 2nd FPB Flotilla/Squadron), reference in the second paragraph on this page to the "squadron" seems 3 years premature (the "Gays" did not complete until 1953) and the photograph caption for GAY ARCHER should have read 1953, not 1951. Finally, on page 7 the four boats escorting HMY (not HMS) BRITANNIA were GAY BOMBARDIER, GAY CHARIOTIER, GAY CHARGER and GAY FENCER. With apologies and thanks to one very knowledgeable reader.

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

This Newsletter is the first coming to you under the editorship of Commander Rupert Head; I know that he would welcome feedback from those who would like to make contributions to future issues.

It is, once again with sadness, that I must begin by paying tribute to the very recent passing of one of our prominent World War II Coastal Forces veterans, Robin Coventry and, with extreme sadness, Peter Cunningham an absolute stalwart of the Trust. Robin continued to be a great supporter of the Trust, attending Remembrance weekends until in his early '90s. Peter will be remembered by many for his role as co-ordinator of the Coastal Forces Remembrance Service, at the Hornet Services Sailing Centre, a role which he executed to perfection. A tribute to Peter is included in this Newsletter.

Turning to current activities, progress on our museum project continues to be positive, although the anticipated work commencement at the end of last year or in the early part of this year has not been achieved. The factors affecting the delay are detailed in the project report but, in short, this is due to unforeseen environmental issues. It is hoped work will commence in late Spring. A positive effect from this delay in

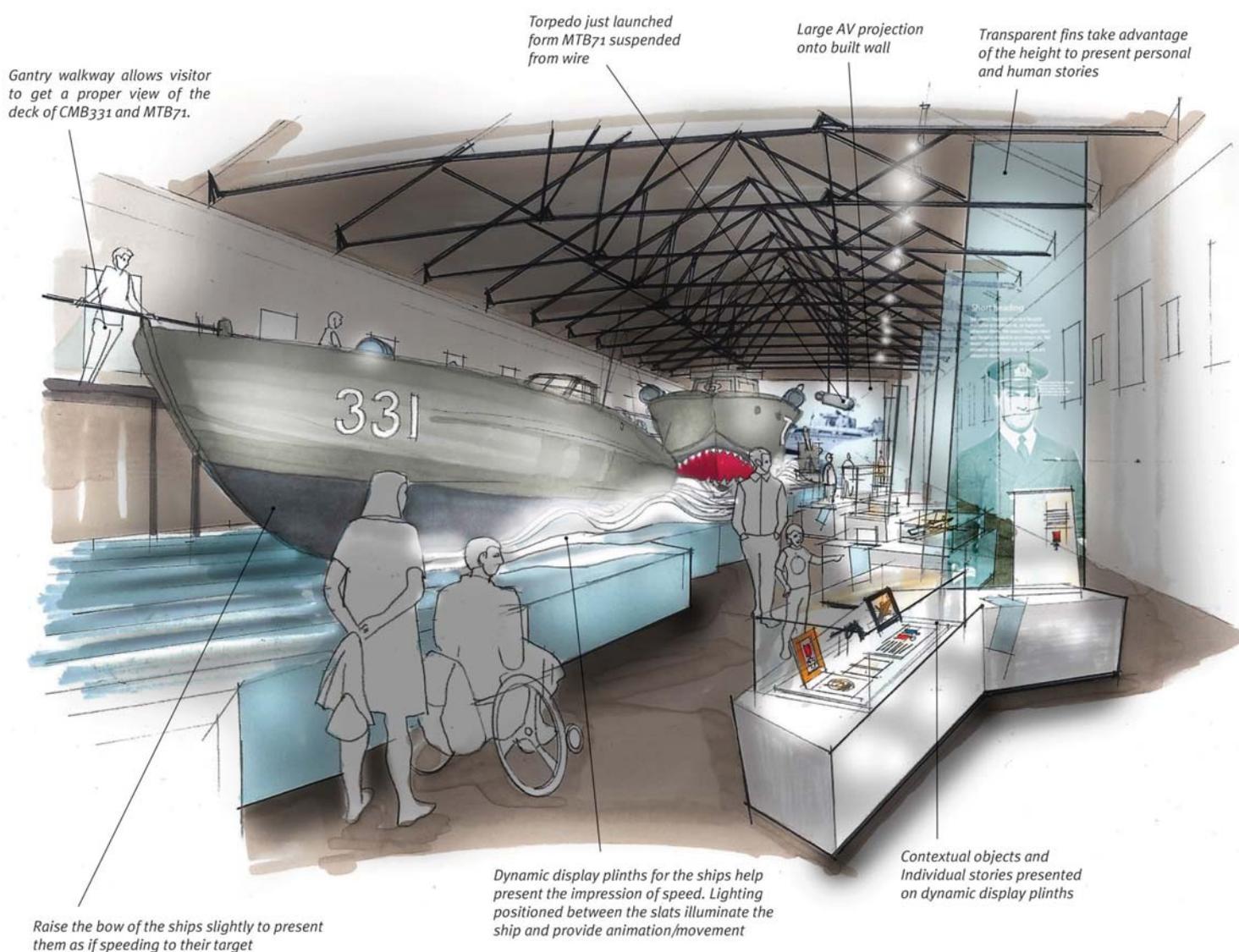
activity has been the need to examine and tighten the Project programme such that the same completion and opening date for the Museum can be achieved in 2020. I am pleased to say that all other aspects of the Museum development, and there are many, are continuing at a good pace. As previously stated, our financial status for the Project remains fragile as new issues of expenditure emerge. I would wish all readers to be aware of a major event to be held by the Trust on 19 June this year. The Coastal Forces Memorial at the Hornet Sailing Centre, Gosport, the previous Coastal Forces Base HMS Hornet, is being rededicated with a Service on 19 June. The Trust has been working closely with the staff of the Sailing Centre to refurbish the Memorial and ensure that it remains structurally sound for the future. Details of our intentions for this event are contained in the Newsletter and information can be obtained from our Director, contact details on page 16. Finally, I hope that you will continue to find this Newsletter interesting and informative and please feel able to contribute, through the Editor.

Vice Admiral Sir Paul Haddacks KCB
– Chairman of Trustees

EXHIBITION PROJECT UPDATE

We confidently report that we continue to move forward, working closely with our two major partners, the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust and the National Museum of the Royal Navy. As reported previously the new exhibition will be established in the old mine store at Priddys Hard and alongside the Explosion Museum (A good arrangement; both attractions will benefit from the sharing of infrastructure, services support and hopefully more visitors) The planning of the exhibition is well advanced – as shown in the computer-generated impression – and will centre around two historic boats, MTBs 71 and 331, both of which will be faithfully restored to their wartime appearances. The Property Trust has undertaken

the responsibility for the building itself (and is moving forward with an impressive plan to develop the whole area), but any plans to convert an old, disused and in this case listed building face unforeseen complications. Bats have been discovered and, being protected species, special arrangements will need to be put in place to safeguard them. This involves special surveys, possibly new bat habitats and an inevitable delay. But the message is that the aiming point is to have the building ready for setting up the exhibition early 2020 and an opening in May/June. This is ambitious but there is a good momentum; we will, of course, continued to keep our supporters well briefed.

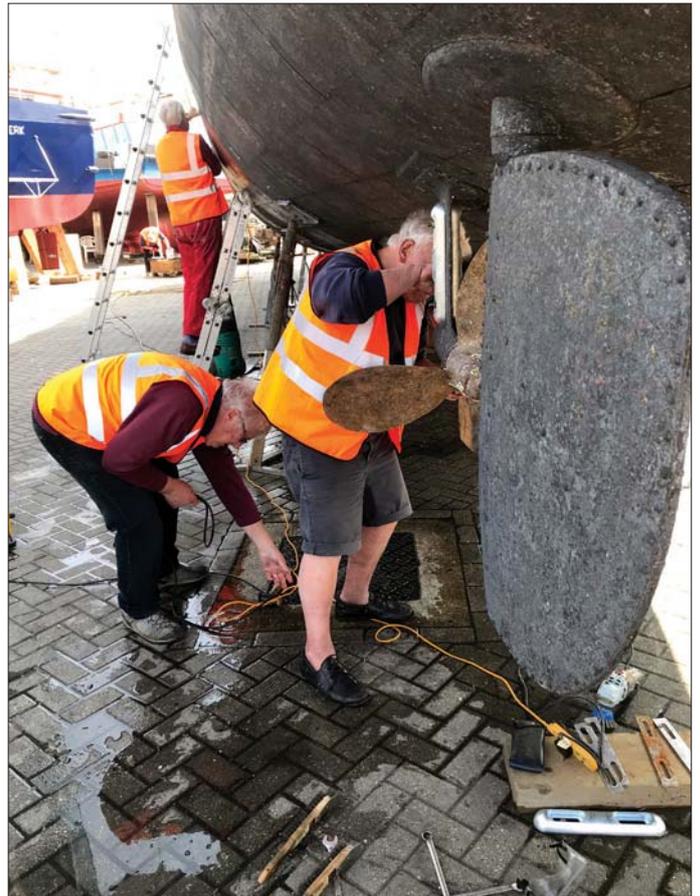


A computer-generated artist's impression of the exhibition.

BOATS ROUND-UP AND NEWS IN BRIEF

MEDUSA

Our operational year started early this year with an appointment to escort our big sister, Fairmile RML497, out of Southampton on her way to Hartlepool. On 30 March, we made passage to Saxon Wharf for our annual lift out. This happened on the following day; we had access to the vessel from 1200. By 1700 the propellers and shafts had been cleaned, new anodes fitted and antifoul applied. By the end of the next day the hull had been painted, draft marks picked out and we were ready to launch. This year was our five year major survey and the surveyor went through 24 pages of checks without finding a single fault. This reflects huge credit on the team that tirelessly look after Medusa. We made passage back on the Thursday, had our AGM on the Saturday and our first operational day the following Monday with a trip to Cowes. This has set the scene for a busy year which will include a SQUADDEX (Squadron Exercise) with the P2000 vessels of RN First Patrol Boat Squadron – a three week deployment to France and the Channel Islands over the D-Day period (particularly poignant and important visits as 2019 is, of course, 75 years since D-Day), two visits to Bucklers Hard plus sea days for a diverse selection of visitors, including Sea Cadets, CCF cadets and the prize winner of our auction for Children in Need. Its going to be a busy year.





RML 497 arriving at Hartlepool.

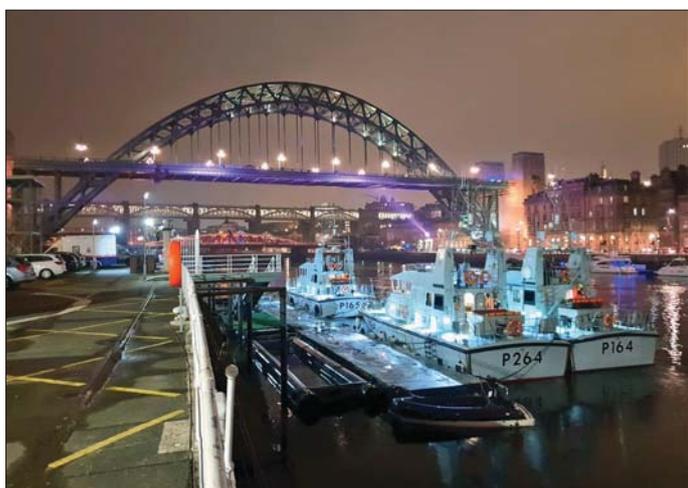
RML 497

In December 2015, the Rescue Motor Launch 497, a 120 foot Fairmile 'B' Class, was purchased from a West Country ferry operator by the National Museum of the Royal Navy. She has recently been moved to Hartlepool by road (no mean feat, as shown in this photograph) in anticipation of a conservation programme to get her ready for permanent display at the Royal Navy Museum at Hartlepool. There is a rumour that she is to be cut in half, bow to stern down the centre line, to give visitors a unique opportunity to see a World War Two motor launch in its entirety, inside and out!

RML 497 was laid down in 1941, commissioned in July 1942, initially based at Portland and later in the Orkney Islands. She was given an additional deckhouse abaft the funnel to provide basic medical facilities and to repatriate casualties and aircrew who had ditched in the Channel.

OPERATIONAL OUTSTATIONS OF THE FIRST PATROL BOAT SQUADRON

When people think of the Royal Navy they often think of the three main Naval bases of Portsmouth, Devonport and Faslane. Whilst these are indeed the home of the vast majority of the Fleet, scattered around the country the White Ensign flies



HMS EXPLORER, EXAMPLE and ARCHER alongside at Newcastle.

from the stern of many more vessels. These are the vessels of the First Patrol Boat Squadron's Outstations which are based across the UK in Edinburgh, Newcastle, Hull, Ipswich, Liverpool and Cardiff. They provide a Naval presence in waters which larger RN Ships are not able to venture and in ports of strategic importance away from the south coast.

Whilst being based in an outstation has the advantage of being away from the prying eyes of passing Flag Officers the boats are never out of the public view. Their small draughts mean that they are often berthed in city centre locations and constantly attract the attention of curious passers-by, so the highest standards must always be maintained. Being based in the heart of our cities means that the P2000s can maintain key links with regions which otherwise might forget the important work the RN does for the nation. The outstation boats operate closely with regional police forces, HM Coastguard and RNLI, contributing a highly capable defence asset to live operations and training exercises. As ever, the vessels' affiliation with University Royal Naval Units remains a key part of their role and being based across the UK allows students from all parts of the country to experience the work of the RN and develop skills such as leadership and teamwork which they can take forward into their future careers.

The outstation boats often work independently visiting the smaller ports and harbours of their regions but also regularly meet up to conduct their own exercises and training. This was the case late last year when HM Ships EXPLORER, EXAMPLE and ARCHER rendezvoused in Newcastle for their annual Squadron continuation training, a two day intensive package of navigation, seamanship and engineering training and assessments. The package ensures that the Ships are up to the required standard to deploy on operations and tests the Ships' Companies reactions to incidents such as a fire or flood, or to navigation in unfamiliar waters with restricted visibility. Lieutenant Hotchiss writes. "Having only been in command of HMS EXPLORER for two days this was certainly what I would call being thrown in at the deep end but I am pleased to report all three Ships passed with flying colours."

The year ahead will see all vessels of the First Patrol Boat Squadron being busier than ever, contributing to Fleet maritime security and taking part in NATO operations in the Baltic Sea. Additionally, all the ships, up to the required standard of readiness, will sail for their Easter deployments taking them to hard-to-reach waters across the UK, Republic of Ireland and mainland Europe, further spreading the reassuring presence of the White Ensign in uncertain times.

With thanks to Lieutenant Jon Hotchiss, Commanding Officer, HMS EXPLORER

GAY ARCHER

Paul Childs reports that GAY ARCHER is getting an extensive make over – deck repairs, cleaning and painting the engine room, a new engine hatch, electrical rewiring, reposition of fuel



One of GAY ARCHER's new engines.

tanks and temporary removal of guns for overhaul. However, the major task now is to fit the new engines. These should give her an impressive top speed of 30 knots and if all goes to plan, GAY ARCHER will be back fully operational in time to take part in the Bristol Harbour Festival later in the year.

As ever, this is an expensive business. There is a wonderfully dedicated team of volunteers who freely give of their time and expertise but, even with a generous sponsor who has helped with the purchase of the new engines, Paul still needs to raise a further £5,000. If you can help in any way, by big or small donations, please get in touch with the Trust office and we will gladly pass on your details to Paul.

MTB 102

Readers will be familiar with historic MTB 102 and her many poignant contributions to commemorations to mark World War Two major naval events. She will not go to Normandy this year but on 3 June 2019 she will transit the same waters as she did exactly 75 years earlier in 1944 when she embarked Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower to review the huge invasion fleet immediately prior to the Normandy landings; never had such a small warship ever carried two more important historic war time leaders. After D-Day 102 was deployed to West Country to work up Task Force 135 for the Liberation of the Channel Islands. It seems that there was not much 102 didn't do.

COASTAL FORCES ANNUAL DINNER AT HORNET

For many years the Annual Dinner has been held at the Hornet Sailing Centre on the eve of Remembrance Sunday. The aim of this annual event has always been to bring together the Coastal Forces veterans and, of course, keep memories alive. Sadly but inevitably the number of veterans has declined over the years and, after careful thought, the Trustees have agreed to discontinue the event. But the dinner has had a track record of most enjoyable and memorable reunions and it certainly achieved its prime aim.



This photograph shows an immaculate MTB 102 at the end of her winter refit under cover.

PROJECT CMB 4

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SEAGOING REPLICA OF THIS HISTORIC, 100 YEAR OLD COASTAL MOTOR BOAT

If you happen to be reading this article on 17 June 2019, you might like to know that it is one hundred years ago, to the day, that Lieutenant Augustus Agar, with his crew of one other junior officer and one senior rate, took his 40 foot coastal motor boat, CMB 4, into the heart of the Bolshevik Baltic Fleet anchored off Kronstadt in the Baltic and carried out an extraordinarily audacious, daring and successful attack. He launched his single torpedo at the cruiser *Oleg*, sank her and managed to escape under a hail of fire. Agar was awarded the Victoria Cross and his crew also received gallantry awards.

This David and Goliath story made many senior naval officers, planners and leaders in many countries sit up and take notice; it was the first time the full potential of these small, fast torpedo-armed craft had been so dramatically demonstrated. The Agar story has been told in detail in a previous newsletter (Number 8, May 2011) and, although the story loses none of its impact in the re-telling, this article is about an exciting, imaginative and challenging project to build a seagoing, faithful replica of the boat itself. The CMB 4 replica is now being built by the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust in Boathouse 4 in the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. But, first some background to the early coastal motor boats.

CMB 4 survived the 1919 Baltic Campaign and, in fact, survives to this day. She was saved for posterity, restored at the International Boat Building Training Centre at Lowestoft and is currently on display at the Imperial War Museum at Duxford.

The 40 foot CMBs were designed and first built in 1916 for the Admiralty by Thornycroft at their Hampton-on-Thames boatyard at Platt's Eyot. They were a radical design with a cigar shaped hull which was fitted with a single-step hydroplane on the underside of the hull. This enabled the boat to skim on the plane over the water at speeds unmatched by vessels with conventional hulls. The CMBs had to be of an extremely light construction but robust enough to carry a V/12 250 horse-power aircraft engine, adapted for maritime use, weighing almost a ton (but without reversing gear in order to save weight), together with a three-quarter ton torpedo and enough fuel, 100 gallons of high octane petrol, for a range of about 160 miles. The staff requirement also specified a boat which could be carried on the davits of a cruiser or battleship and which in relatively calm waters (up to sea state 4) could reach speeds of over 30 knots.

The CMB's main armament was, of course, the torpedo. Trials to mount the torpedo facing forward resulted in stability problems with the hull assuming a bow down attitude. Furthermore attempts to forcibly eject an 18 inch torpedo over the bows with the aid of a ram were, not surprisingly, unsuccessful. An alternative



A 40 Foot CMB in the Caspian Sea, 1919.



Profile of a 40 Foot CMB.

arrangement was devised whereby the torpedo, facing forward, would be housed on rails in a trough extending aft from the cockpit to beyond the stern.

To carry out a torpedo attack, the CMB was pointed at speed directly towards the target, and when as close as possible a gas cartridge would be fired forcing the ram and thus torpedo backwards. The torpedo's motor would be fired up, when a trip wire was pulled, on hitting the water stern first. The torpedo would quickly reverse direction of travel and hopefully head forwards toward the target. At the same time, the CMB had to, of course, apply a hard-over helm to avoid the oncoming torpedo. This attack manoeuvre required great skill, verve and a fair degree of luck to succeed. To ensure the torpedo would hit, Agar would have had to have got very close to his target. He managed this, at night, travelling a speed, in amongst the enemy fleet and amidst the confusion of battle.

CMB4 REPLICA PROJECT

The current construction of the CMB 4 replica is being built by volunteers and students at the International Boatbuilding Training College, Portsmouth. The college is owned by the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust, who have undertaken this exciting project with Government Libor funding under the direction of its Boats Committee, Chairman Rear-Admiral



The replica CMB 4 under construction in Boathouse 4.

Neil Rankin and Chief Executive Peter Goodship. It is a major challenge of boat building skills to recreate this fully sea-going replica, the like of which has not been seen since the First World War. The construction team under Diggory Rose, project manager, and Bob Forsyth, lead shipwright, must loft, plank and complete the boat from start to finish. The build has more in keeping with aircraft construction than traditional boat-building.

This is all a very skilful business replicating boat building of 100 years ago; the only concession of modernity will be use of modern glues which will enhance the strength of the boat and give her a longer life. It is planned to engine and complete the boat, looking exactly as the original in 1919. The replica CMB 4 will join the Historic Memorial Fleet and will be available as a seagoing display for the hundreds of thousands of visitors who come to Portsmouth. In fact, any visitors to the Historic Naval Base can visit (without charge) Boathouse 4 and get a superb view looking down from the galleries onto the boat being constructed on the ground floor.

Rodney Agar, nephew of Augustus Agar VC and one of our Trustees, said when the project really got under way last year:

“This is quite marvellous news that the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust has been awarded the funding to build a working, sea-going Replica of a Royal Naval 40ft Coastal Motor Boat with its revolutionary Thornycroft hull design from 100 years ago. Not only will this require great boatbuilding skills, but this project will preserve the history of these epic craft for future generations and demonstrate also the ability, resource and seamanship required by the officers and men who operated these small craft – the forerunners of the Royal Navy’s Coastal Forces.”

Editor’s Note As a direct result of its success, the Augustus Agar attack in June 1919 was followed by a further, larger attack by eight 55ft CMBs in August of that year against the Russian Bolshevik Fleet in the fortress of Kronstadt. This action ‘The Kronstadt Raid’ is less well known but it was even more successful in terms of the destruction of two battleships, a submarine depot ship and harbour installations. Two more Victoria Crosses were awarded. This is another extraordinary story and will feature in a future newsletter.

THE ARAKAN CAMPAIGN

A RUTHLESS, BUT FORGOTTEN WAR, IN THE JUNGLES AND SWAMPS OF BURMA’S WEST COAST

Coastal Forces operations in Home Waters and the Mediterranean have been extensively related in previous newsletters, but the Arakan Campaign has been largely forgotten. In terms of boats and personnel this Far East campaign can not compare with the six years of Coastal Forces war in European and Mediterranean waters. But from 1943 to 1945 the small numbers of motor launches (Fairmile B’s and the Harbour Defence Motor Launches), manned up with an interesting mix of RN, South African, Indian and Burmese RNVR personnel, achieved considerable successes in the Far East Theatre of war. They operated in a hostile, difficult environment against a very determined enemy.

To set the scene, Arakan is the coastal region in lower south west Burma. It borders the Bay of Bengal and stretches from Cox’s Bazar and the Naaf River in the north down to Gwa in the south.

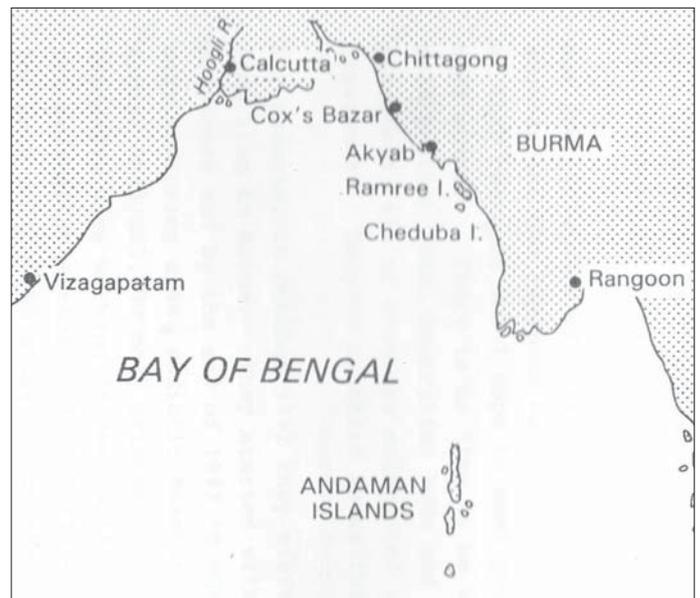
Following the Japanese invasion and occupation of Burma, and the full scale retreat of Allied forces, together with many civilians and refugees, into northern India, the Japanese halted their advances in May 1942 at the Chindwin River. This was as a result of the monsoon rains as much as anything (The Arakan coast receives 200 inches of rain in a year). But the Japanese still maintained a formidable army of 10 to 12 large divisions in the country, around 100,000 troops, and built up strong defensive positions, particularly along the northern borders with India and on the Arakan coast. They established total

control of almost the entire eastern coastline of the Indian Ocean, from Java, Sumatra, Malaya and up to Burma, and furthermore established air superiority over much of South East Asia.

The Japanese easily rebuffed the initial tentative Allied advances overland and from seaward in September 1942. Coastal Forces units were too few and relatively untrained to make any significant contribution. At this stage there were only some 5 motor launches and a motley collection of small landing craft in theatre. In August 1943 Mountbatten was appointed Supreme Allied Commander but all his efforts to build up assets, including Coastal Forces, took second place to the overarching Allied priority which was, of course, to mount D-Day. Nevertheless motor launches, manned by British, Indian, Burmese and South African crews, were gradually built up as more boats arrived after long, hazardous passages from UK waters or from the South African and Indian boat yards which constructed Fairmile B's from kits sent out from UK. The motor launches acquired new tactics and skills to operate up the myriad of rivers with jungle encroaching on all sides, with only basic charts and in thin skinned vessels full of high octane fuel and little intelligence of when and where they would meet the enemy. These forces continued to support the Allied Army, the British 6th Division and Indian 14th Division, which were mounting offensives into northern Burma. The aim was to push down into Arakan and, in particular, take Akyab Island which had all important port facilities and an airfield. The advances in 1944 eventually stalled when the Japanese counter attacked with great ferocity and the Allies retreated back to Cox's Bazaar in the north.

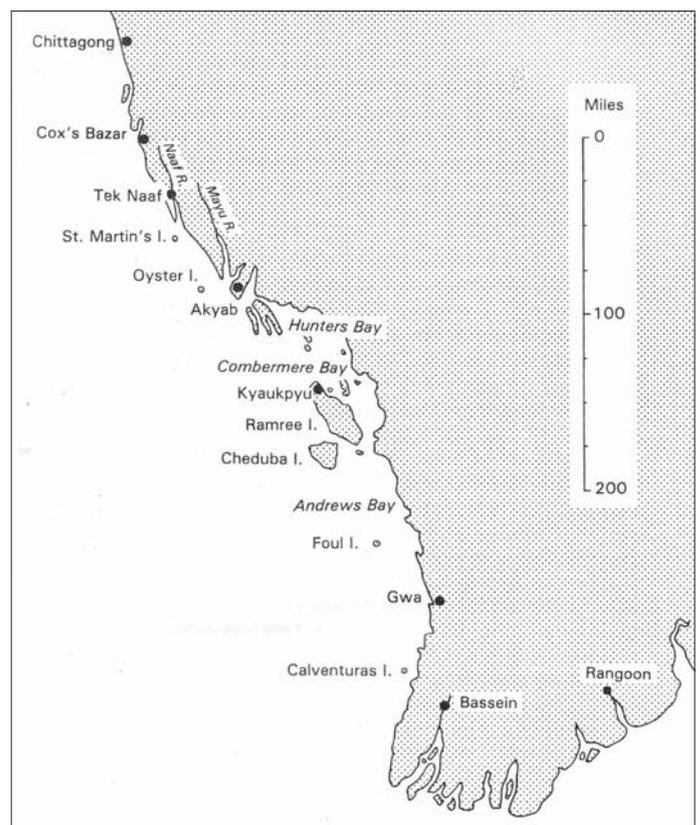
However, war in the Pacific was slowly and inevitably turning. The Japanese occupying forces in Burma required a massive logistic supply chain. The demand for arms, ammunition, fuel and food strained the capacity of the Bangkok-Rangoon railway to its limits. The Japanese had established impressive road systems in Burma, but even these were inadequate, particularly during the monsoon season. Every use, therefore, had to be made of sea routes, but since the USA had entered the war 750 Japanese cargo ships had been sunk. By 1944 the Japanese had fallen back on commandeering ferry boats, coasters, junks and sampans. These motley armadas crept down the China coasts and through the Malacca Straits towards Burma. USN and RN submarines and carrier based bombers picked them off as they came south. In addition, from Ceylon and India Allied long range aircraft - Sunderlands, Catalinas and Liberators - ceaselessly patrolled the Bay of Bengal and far southward, while fighters scoured the coasts and creeks. At the end of 1944 the significant Japanese occupation forces in Burma were being withdrawn but they were far from defeated; the Japanese Army never saw surrender as an option and they were still a very potent and dangerous fighting force.

It was against this background and the overarching strategic objective of liberating Burma, that Coastal Forces of motor launches and harbour defence motor launches were gradually built up, assembled in various bases naval bases in Ceylon and

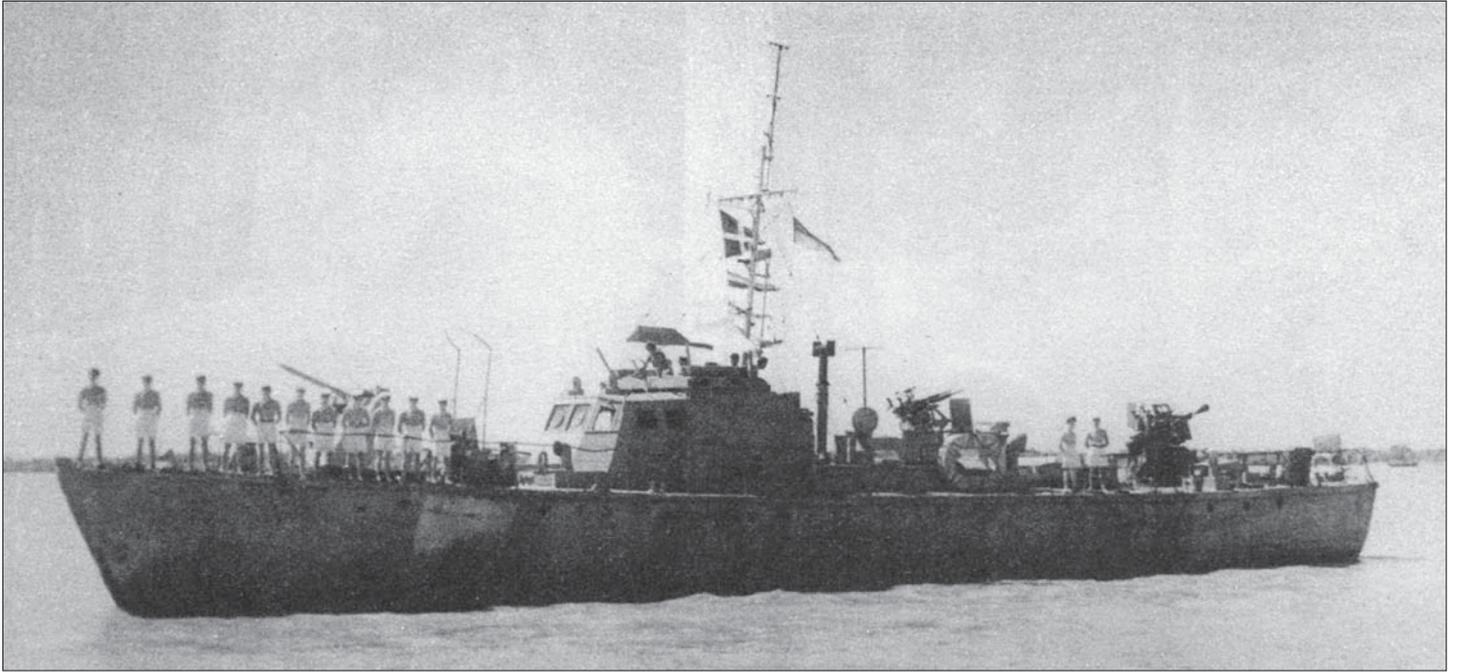


ABOVE Bay of Bengal area of operations.

BELOW The Arakan Coast.

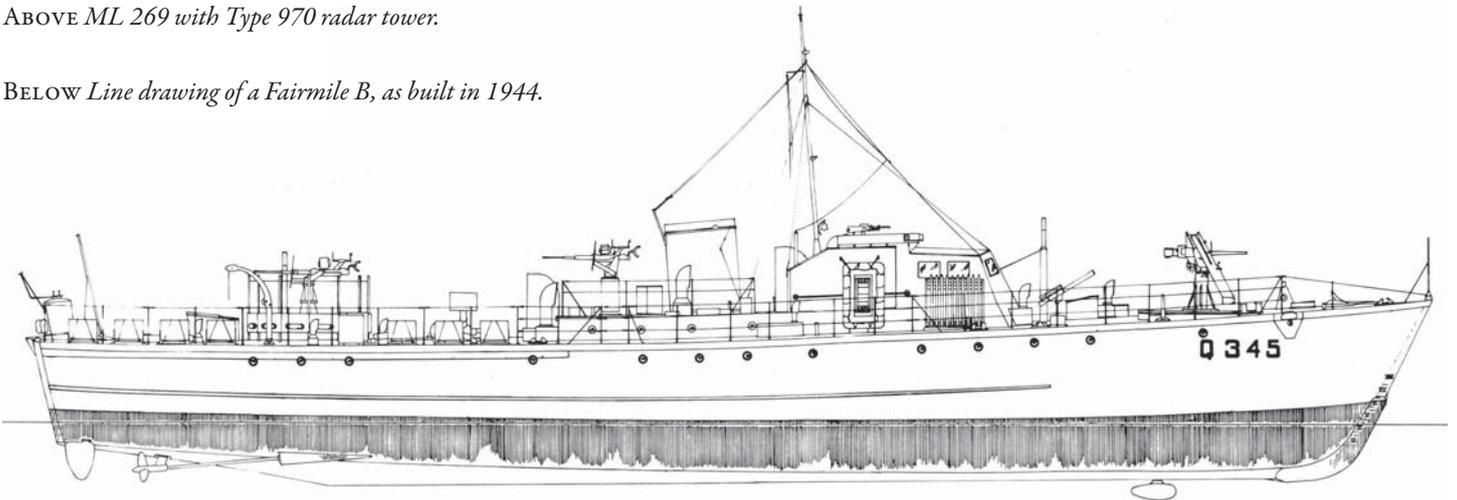


India, trained intensively, deployed eastwards and commenced operations along the Arakan coast. Fairmile B motor launches were tough, robust and generally well armed boats. They mounted a 3-pound gun forward, a single Oerlikon midships, a 40-mm Bofors and 3-inch trench mortar aft and twin Brens on the bridge. The boats could spend up to 25 nights in a month on operations, normally holed up and camouflaged in creeks in the daytime and weighing anchor after sunset to edge up the tidal rivers (known as *chaungs*) through the mangrove swamps, in almost total silence,



ABOVE ML 269 with Type 970 radar tower.

BELOW Line drawing of a Fairmile B, as built in 1944.



all orders given in a whisper. Coastal Forces were deployed on a wide range of covert missions including getting specialised commando units and intelligence officers ashore to reconnoitre possible assault targets and acquire vital intelligence. The boats would land Burmese resistance fighters with weapons and stores. Specialist demolition teams would also be landed to blow up installations and obstacles. The Japanese left behind mines (in the water and on land) and all manner of unpleasant booby traps. Close liaison was built up with the Burmese villagers who had no love for the Japanese. (The Burmese armed themselves with long sharpened spears and vicious double edged knives; it was said that Japanese could expect no mercy)

British and Indian forces, working closely with the local Burmese resistance, were determined to block off Japanese retreat and finally defeat this very tough and determined enemy along the jungle shoreline and inland and cut off the vital north south coast road. Typical of



The Burma Star.

the operations in 1945 were a series of night ambushes between 14 and 18 May when two groups of MLs, 8 boats altogether from the 13th and 14th Flotillas, destroyed 8 Japanese vessels carrying troops, ammunition, stores and fuel down the Bawle River. The Japanese vessels were ambushed and engaged in withering fire from ranges between 50 and 100 yards. Most caught fire and were deliberately grounded although the Japanese tried several times to ram the MLs. Japanese forces might have been retreating but they fought with almost suicidal bravery. The SO of the first ML group said in his report:

“The courage or blind animal-like tenacity with which the enemy pressed on into the heavy and concentrated fire of our ships, even after his vessels had burst into flames, was a most sickening experience. In one case, one of the enemy returned to his beached bess and, surrounded by flames, attempted to get his forward gun into action”

ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY

The Royal Canadian Navy made a vital contribution to Coastal Forces in the Second World War. RCN officers and ratings, mainly reservists, came across from Canada at the beginning of the war and became totally integrated into the Royal Navy. (They were joined by naval volunteers from various European countries, mainly those which had been invaded and occupied, and, of course, by Australians, New Zealanders and South Africans). The Canadians did not get their own flotilla until early 1944. One of the first Canadian arrivals was Tony Law who gained a wealth of Coastal Forces experience early on, including commanding MTB 48 during the abortive efforts to intercept the German capital ships, Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and Prinz Eugen in the "Channel Dash". It was little surprise that he was appointed to command the first wholly Canadian MTB Flotilla, the 29th, in March 1944. The flotilla was based at Dover, consisted of 8 new 71' 6" British Power Boats and was to become a highly effective and successful fighting unit. A second flotilla, the 65th, was formed under the command of Lieutenant J.R.H. Kirkpatrick with 10 'D' Class Fairmiles (Dog Boats). The morale of the 29th was slightly dented when the Admiralty decided that the torpedo tubes should be removed and replaced with 48 depth-charges. This was in response to reports of a new type of German submarine which was thought to represent a real threat to the D-Day landings. Pride and enthusiasm were restored when this intelligence was proved wrong and the tubes were re-fitted.

The 29th became the first combined MTB/MGB unit and fought a number of highly successful engagements. An action off the Dutch coast in May 1944 prepared the Canadian boats for their involvement in D-Day. They left Ramsgate on 28 May for Portsmouth, to assume their designated role of protecting the eastern flank. On their first night they had a furious battle against 6 enemy R-boats; 4 Canadian boats were damaged and had to return to Portsmouth.



A Canadian MTB of the 29th Flotilla.

Nevertheless, the remainder, under Lieutenant-Commander Tony Law, stayed on station and completed their task, whilst under constant attack. Even after the Normandy landings, the war at sea continued with intensity. On 8 and 9 July the 29th Flotilla was again in a major action with up to 10 R-boats and, although successful, all the Canadian boats had now been badly damaged and a third of the flotilla had become casualties. The flotilla sailed for Ostend on 15 January 1945 and Law returned to England while his boat was repaired. There he was to receive the devastating news that the 29th Flotilla had been involved in the greatest single disaster in the history of Coastal Forces. The explosion and subsequent major fire in Ostend harbour had destroyed 5 Canadian MTBs along with 7 British boats, with heavy casualties. The magnificent 29th Flotilla had almost been wiped out and 26 Canadian personnel who had fought gallantly through the war were killed.

However the achievements of the Canadian 29th and 65th Flotillas do not tell the whole story of the Canadians contribution. Many of those early Canadian reservists served with distinction throughout the war. Tommy Ladner was one of the early joiners served in MGB 75 under the Senior Officer Robert Hichens; he was Mentioned in Despatches twice. He was later to command a Fairmile D, MGB 663, in the Adriatic, he was awarded a further two M-in-D's and the DSC. Serving alongside him were two other Canadians who also achieved distinction. Duggie Maitland, a charismatic leader, commanded MGB 657 and was awarded two DSC's for numerous actions, and Cornelius (Corny) Burke of MGB 658 was also to be awarded two DSC's. He went on to get third DSC for the bombardment of Lossin Island. These three officers, Maitland, Ladner and Burke, were in a class of their own. But it is also worth recording that 80 Fairmile B boats were built in Canada and manned by Canadians. They operated off the east and west Coasts of Canada, and made up a total of 15 flotillas.

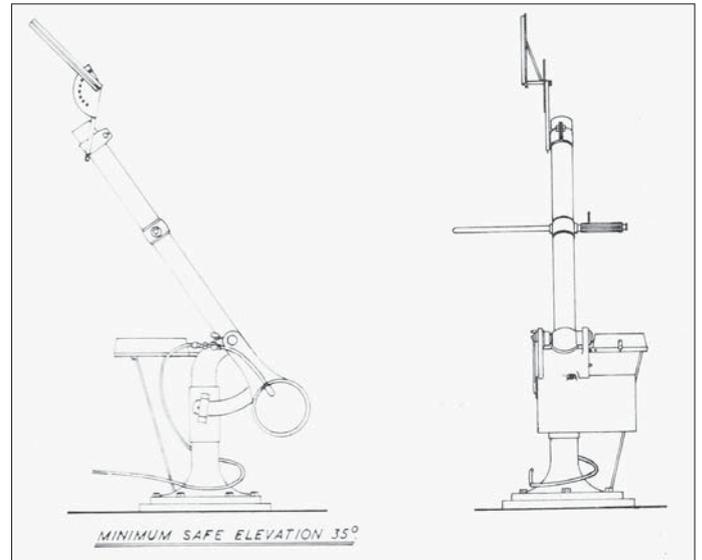


Three decorated Canadians.

COASTAL FORCES WEAPONS – THE HOLMAN PROJECTOR



A Wren demonstrating the Holman Projector.



Drawing of a Holman Projector.

The Holman Projector was devised and manufactured as a cheap, simple, mass-produced weapon. It was designed to propel a 16 lb Mills bomb on a 3-second fuse into the path of a low-flying aircraft. However, as an effective anti-aircraft weapon of war, it was widely considered to be a disaster and never really earned any respect or affection within Coastal Forces. It was produced by Holmans, a machine tool manufacturer based in Cornwall, in large numbers for the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy. A total of 4,500 were manufactured during the war. It was easy to operate and maintain but required skill and considerable luck to point it in the right direction and at the correct elevation and fire it at the exact critical moment.

A number of models were produced but all worked on the principle of a pneumatic mortar, using compressed air, high pressure steam or explosive propellant to send the projectile 600-650 feet into the air. The weapon was aimed by eye and with very basic sighting; angle of fire and elevation were little more than “guesstimates”. The barrel could be trained left and right and the elevation adjusted up to 85 degrees. The Mills bombs were supplied in open ended tins. After 100 foot the tin fell away and a spring lever operated activating a spring plunger which in turn activated the explosive three seconds later. The theory was that an air burst in front of an attacking bomber would deter the aircrew sufficiently to prevent them from lining up for a bombing run and pressing home an attack.

There is little historic record that the weapon ever achieved its aim (There are, however, reliable accounts of the Holman projectors being brought into actions from Coastal Forces vessels at German bombers over Yarmouth; the Mills bombs only succeeded in bringing down the Norfolk Electricity Grid cables which crossed the River Yare thus cutting off power to



ABOVE Model of a Holman Projector.



RIGHT A Holman HE round.

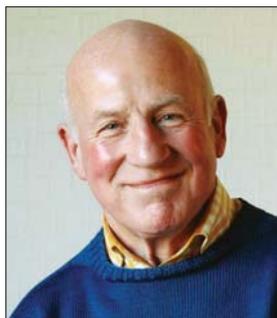
the town). Later in the war the projector was adapted to fire grapnels on the end of ropes and used by the Royal Marine Commandoes to carry out assaults up cliff faces. A flare and parachute projectile was designed for the Holman for illumination during night actions and there are records of some successful usage in the Mediterranean.

To be fair, the Holman Projector was never going to be more than a stop-gap, basic, defence weapon, primarily for British merchant ships. Whilst it was widely fitted to Fairmile A's, some Fairmile B's, early Fairmile D's, British Power Boat MGB's and some steam gunboats, it did, on a few occasions, provide a morale-boosting weapon and offered an opportunity for hard pressed crews under air attack to “hit back”. It was also used very effectively hurl potatoes and rotten vegetables during lighter moments of inter-flotilla rivalry.

PETER CUNNINGHAM – A TRIBUTE

It is with great sadness that we have to report that Peter Cunningham, who played such an important role in the CFHT team for 10 years, died on 20 December 2019. Peter enjoyed a full and varied naval career. His midshipman time was spent in HMS Victorious in the Far East and then in a minesweeper operating from Kuching in Malaysia. A number of sea appointments followed including serving as the Gunnery Officer in HMS Salisbury, his favourite sea appointment, and as First Lieutenant of HMS Undaunted. Later he served in the first commission of HMS Invincible. He also enjoyed a teaching role at the Royal Navy's leadership school, HMS Royal Arthur, and managed to squeeze in a French interpreter course, with time in Paris. After retirement from the Service, he gained a retired officer appointment on the staff of the Second Sea Lord, with special responsibility for the naval sections of the combined cadet units in 128 schools across the country. He enjoyed working with high calibre young men and women, sailing, climbing, diving and organising expeditions to as far afield as Iceland, Western Canada, Norway, France and Spain, in addition to many ceremonial events:

Peter was a man of great integrity, charm, kindness and skill in dealing with people. He had time for anyone and after finally leaving the Navy he joined the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust. Over the next decade he acted as the Trust's Project Co-ordinator, lending his unique skills to organising the memorial, ceremonial and fund-raising events, all accomplished with hard-work, professionalism and great attention to detail. He will be long



remembered for masterminding the Remembrance services at the Coastal Forces Memorial, at the Hornet Services Sailing Centre. Peter will also be remembered for his Christian commitment as a Baptist and his love of Rugby (He was "capped" to play for the Royal Navy. He also qualified as a Rugby referee and with his an impressive reputation for his fairness and knowledge of the sport, he continued to referee into his early 70's.

Peter's commitment as a Christian permeated every activity of his life. A strong member of the Baptist Church and he was an Oblate of Alton Abbey, in Hampshire, a role which he took very seriously. His caring nature for others was based on deep Christian faith and commitment. He always saw the good in others, constantly praising the achievements of his friends, while never highlighting his own personal achievements. Towards the end of his illness, as late as November, he was still organising the Trust's annual dinner at Hornet and the Remembrance Service. It is testament to his dedication, that even when in the terminal stages of illness he continued to welcome arrivals at both events with warmth and kindness but with never a mention of his own situation.

It has been said that, "*some people drift through life almost unnoticed while others leave a footprint wherever they tread*". Peter left many, many deep footprints.

T. Robotham

PROMINENT VETERANS

LIEUTENANT JOHN (POLLY) PERKINS, DSC*,RNVR

Lieutenant 'Polly' Perkins was a MTB commanding officer with a reputation for courage, coolness in action and marksmanship. He was an attractive, charismatic character. But to those senior to him he could appear irascible, even aggressive. However, he was always protective of, and loyal to, his staff

He joined the RNVR in 1939 and served in minelayers. He wanted to see action and volunteered for Coastal Forces. He initially served in motor launches and was appointed First Lieutenant first to ML212 and then to ML193. He expressed his irritation that as a 20-year-old volunteer he had to serve two years as a midshipman and sub-lieutenant, even though he had seen more action than older volunteers who were made lieutenants on joining up.

From July 1942 to June 1943 Perkins commanded MTB 230. Perkins's boat was based at Lowestoft and, because he drove



his men hard, was available for patrols more often than most of the other MTBs there. On one sortie, when his motor mechanic reported that the thrust block was red-hot, Perkins told him to keep it running by playing a hose on it. On one of his first patrols, in a faultlessly planned and aggressive operation off Texel off the Frisian islands, he crept inshore of a convoy while the RAF bombed the shipping and MGBs attacked from seaward. Perkins himself fired a torpedo which hit a German auxiliary patrol vessel. In another night action, on 1 September off Terschelling, his boat was one of only two MTBs not forced by engine trouble to return to harbour. In a confused battle, Perkins came under heavy attack from escorts guarding a convoy; but he penetrated the screen and fired torpedoes at two targets. The first hit the Swedish iron-ore carrier *Thule* and the second an armed trawler; both ships sank.

Perkins's personal view was that serving in MTBs was not all that hazardous: the Germans usually fired too high, which meant that they did not inflict serious damage, and there was little close fighting because the MTBs would approach their prey unseen, fire their torpedoes at close range and then quit the scene of action at high speed. For his actions between 10 September 1942 and 19 March 1943, when he was serving in the Nore area of the southern North Sea, Perkins was awarded the DSC for his gallantry. He was also mentioned in dispatches.

For 16 months from June 1943 Perkins served as captain of MTB 683. He was awarded a Bar to his DSC for his outstanding skill and determination in engagements off the Dutch coast on 9 June 1944.

On 18/19 December 1944, by which time he had been promoted to command the long-range MTB Fairmile "D" Class 766, Perkins was hiding in the Norwegian fjords during an operation to land and recover agents. On one occasion he sent a rating ashore to obtain some Christmas trees for the forthcoming festivities. Three small saplings were brought on board but when the boat returned to Lerwick for a debrief on

how the operation had gone, Perkins was persuaded to give up two of the trees to the senior Norwegian naval liaison officer. One subsequently found its way to King Haakon VII and the other to the Norwegian prime minister, both of whom were in exile in London. Perkins dined out on his claim that this was the origin of the Norwegian custom of sending a Christmas tree to Trafalgar Square every year since 1947.

Perkins's MTB 766 was spared when a fire and explosion destroyed 12 boats and killed 63 men from coastal forces in Ostend harbour on 14 February 1945, but during the incident he was blown into the water and narrowly escaped being sucked into burning petrol on the surface of the sea.

Perkins had strong views about many things: Lieutenant Peter Dickens, his flotilla leader and a career naval officer, was too strait-laced and had much to learn about the relaxed ways of the RNVR; Peter Scott's steam-driven gunboats were vulnerable and "full of pipes", and their reputation rested on Scott's propaganda. Meanwhile Perkins continued to fire his torpedoes in single shots long after it had become official tactics to "rather make sure of one, than miss with two".

After the war Perkins trained as a barrister and was called to the Bar. He soon realised, however, that he would not make his fortune there. Instead he became assistant company secretary at Rolls-Royce, before moving to the Manchester dye firm Clayton Aniline as its company secretary – he was later appointed joint managing director. By 1967 he had moved to CIBA laboratories at Horsham and in 1971 became managing director of CIBA-Geigy.

Perkins always enjoyed motor yachts, justifying ownership of a series of powerful craft by saying that he wanted to be "sure of being back in the office on Monday morning". After leaving the world of business he opted for a quieter life as harbourmaster of Brighton marina, although in 1979 he was asked to join the board and soon became its managing director; he organised the opening of the marina by *The Queen* in the same year.

IN MEMORIAM

WE SAY FAREWELL TO:

John Hawkins
R K Forrester
Harry Moran
John White
Frank Brown
Robert Starkey

CFVA 262
CFVA 3111
CFVA 3131
CFVA 2683
CFVA 2288

Albert Scott
Ernest Baker
Reginald Webb
Oswald Wright
Robin (Puffin) Coventry

CFVA 3257
CFVA 2512
CFVA 1514
CFVA 1404

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

!!!STOP PRESS!!!

INVITATION TO THE RE-DEDICATION OF THE COASTAL FORCES MEMORIAL AT HORNET AND LUNCH AFTER

The Memorial to those of Coastal Forces who gave their lives for their country, is, as many of you will know, on the waterfront at the Hornet Sailing Centre (formerly HMS HORNET – of course, the *almer mater* of Coastal Forces) The memorial stone and inscriptions have, inevitably, been deteriorating over many years but specialist restoration work has now been successfully completed. The Memorial will be re-dedicated on Wednesday 19 June, commencing at 1130. It is hoped that the service will be conducted by the Chaplain of the Fleet and that a band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines will be supporting too.

All supporters of the Trust and the recipients of this newsletter are warmly invited. There will be a reception afterwards and a light buffet lunch. If you would like to

come, please let Arty Shaw (Club Secretary Joint Services Sailing Centre) know by email: hornetsailing@btconnect.com or phone 023 9258 0403 and also let him know if you would like to stay for the lunch. The address if you want to write is JSSC, Haslar Road, Gosport PO12 2AQ. We need to know who is coming for security reasons and the numbers for lunch for catering planning.

This is an important event and will also mark 25 years since the foundation of the Trust and it will be 100 years, almost to the day, since Lieutenant Augustus Agar VC carried out his extraordinarily daring torpedo attack on the Bolshevik cruiser *Oleg* off Kronstadt in the Baltic on 17 June 1919.

We very much would hope that many of our supporters will be able to make it.



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Patron: Admiral Sir Mark Stanhope GCB, OBE, ADC, DL

Chairman: Vice Admiral Sir Paul Haddacks KCB

Director: Captain Simon Haill, RN

Trustees: Commander 1st Patrol Boat Squadron, Cdr. Rodney Agar RN, John Ascoli, Commander R. Bosshardt Royal Navy, William Dreyer, Commander Andrew Gordon-Lennox RN, Vice Admiral Sir Paul Haddacks KCB, Cdr Rupert Head RN, Antony Hichens, Captain Christopher Morrison RN, Rear Admiral James Morse CB, Captain Trevor Robotham RN, Alan Watson

Administrator: Jonathan Kemp

Objectives of the Trust: The object of the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust is the advancement of the education of the public in the history of Coastal Forces by the restoration and permanent display, for public benefit, of Coastal Forces craft together with relevant artefacts, records and memorabilia relating to such craft, and those who served therein.



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