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NEWSLETTER



Heritage Boats leave Portsmouth Harbour



This Newsletter focuses to a great extent on 2016 being the Centenary of Coastal Forces with the introduction of Coastal Motor Boats into the Royal Navy in 1916. We have an article about the fledgling Coastal Motor Boats, their operations in the Baltic and the great difficulties they experienced in those early years. To complement this history we also report on the Centenary celebrations held by the Trust in the Heritage Dockyard at Portsmouth in late August. This gave the public the opportunity through extensive media coverage to see the splendid heritage boats so lovingly restored and maintained. This is reflected in the Newsletter with a collage of pictures. Following on from previous articles about individual Allied Navies we are now pleased to include an article on La Marine Nationale 1939-1945 and the very significant contribution to Coastal Forces operations made by the French Navy. Also we have slightly longer “Lives in Brief” articles than we usually include. This is to give greater emphasis to particular individuals who made a significant contribution to Coastal Forces in World War II or who achieved prominence in their post-war lives. This is justified by the recent deaths of three of our prominent veterans, Guy Hamilton DSC, Terry Robinson DSC and John Rafferty, whose personal account of his involvement in Operation Chariot, the raid on St Nazaire, is riveting. To complement these accounts we have an article on the life of Sir Peter Scott who, in addition to his unique service in the Steam Gunboat Flotilla, achieved prominence in many areas of both his pre- and post-war life. Feedback from recipients of the Newsletter and personal contributions are always welcome.

Captain Trevor Robotham Royal Navy – Editor

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CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

In my introductory letter last May, I wrote of the need to get the Coastal Forces Exhibition project to the top of the National Museum of the Royal Navy "to do" list as soon as possible. When saying that, I recognised that we are competing with a number of other high priority projects, not least the 2016 Centenary of the Battle of Jutland. To ensure that this pivotal event is properly commemorated, the NMRN has undertaken a magnificent restoration of HMS *Caroline* which is moored in Belfast and is the last surviving ship of the battle. The NMRN has also put together a wonderful display in the Historic Dockyard, Portsmouth, dedicated to the Battle of Jutland. Do visit these attractions if you get the chance.

Unsurprisingly, doing justice to the Battle of Jutland, continuing the ongoing refit of HMS *Victory* and other current commitments has meant that the NMRN has not found the financial headroom this year to move forward on the Coastal Forces Exhibition. Consequently the Trust has decided to make its own bid for a Libor Fund Grant for sufficient funds to get the project underway. We submitted the bid to the Treasury at the end of August and will know the outcome when the Chancellor presents his Autumn Statement. Fingers are firmly crossed. If successful, we will work closely with the

NMRN and the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust to get started on the initial phases of the Exhibition project at Priddy's Hard, with MTB 71 as the principal exhibit, as soon as possible. Needless to say, even if we receive a grant, our requirement to raise funds for the project will continue!

This summer we have commemorated the centenary of the delivery to the Royal Navy of the first Coastal Motor Boats. Our sail past of historic craft and the successful reception in Boathouse 4 has been reported elsewhere in this newsletter but I want to record my own appreciation for the fantastic support we received from so many quarters. I was particularly delighted that amongst our many guests were veterans both from World War 2 and the post war period, a Government Minister, a local member of Parliament and a former First Sea Lord. It is good to know that Coastal Forces and its history continue to engage the interest of so many people.

Finally, renewed thanks to the readership of our newsletter for your continued support. I, and the Trustees, are most grateful to you all.

Vice Admiral Sir Paul Haddacks KCB
Chairman of Trustees

BOATS ROUNDUP

MTB 102

Once again MTB 102 has had a busy year. She was slipped in February for her annual maintenance, pressure wash and particularly to repair two hull planks that had sprung. Back in the water in May looking splendid, she joined the other Association of Dunkirk Little Ships (ADLS) vessels for their gathering at Ramsgate over Spring Bank Holiday. MTB 102 then spent considerable time filming off the beaches of Dunkirk during June for a film planned to be released next year. As MTB 102 was entered in the Queens 90th Birthday Parade on the Thames, she took a day off from filming in Dunkirk and nipped across the North Sea to join the parade. Once completed, she continued straight down the Thames and was back in Dunkirk on the Sunday ready for more stardom.

Regrettably, MTB 102 was not able to join the Coastal Forces Centenary celebrations at Portsmouth in August. Adverse weather conditions before and after the event made the passage from Lowestoft to Portsmouth untenable for the old boat. Nevertheless, we were delighted that her skipper Richard Basey was able to join Medusa to lend welcome support to the occasion.



MTB 102 at Dusk

HDML 1387 (HMS MEDUSA)

Medusa has had a typically busy year. HRH Prince Michael of Kent joined the boat in early July for passage to the Isle of Wight for the Round the Island Race. Prince Michael is now becoming a frequent and very welcome visitor. Other activities through the year include filming off the beaches of Dunkirk with MTB 102, a splendid "crew weekend" at Bucklers Hard and, of course, involvement in the Coastal Forces Centenary Event.

RIGHT *HRH Prince Michael of Kent visits Medusa*

BELOW LEFT *Medusa on at Bucklers Hard*

BELOW RIGHT *Medusa on a day out with HMS Blazer*



THE ROYAL NAVY'S COASTAL MOTOR BOATS (CMBs), 1916-2016

A BRILLIANT CHAPTER IN OUR NAVY'S HISTORY

Shortly after the start of the First World War, a group of young officers based in Harwich had put forward their ideas to introduce a new concept; the Coastal Motor Boat (CMB). This was a small fast attack craft carrying a torpedo whose essence was speed and shallow draft. The very extensive use of mines made it extremely difficult for submarines and boats of greater draft to approach enemy naval bases or mount offensive operations close inshore. The young officers, Lieutenants Hampden, Bremner and Anson, also considered such craft as ideal for delivering the then new Whitehead torpedo. In 1915, the Admiralty drew up a Staff Requirement and after successful trials, the 40ft hydroplane hull designed by Sir John Thornycroft was chosen. In August 1916, exactly 100 years ago, six 40ft Coastal Motor Boats were delivered to the Royal Navy – the first C.M.B flotilla.

These fast motor boats with their revolutionary single step hull were capable of a speed of 35 knots and with a crew



40 foot Coastal Motor Boat on trial at full power.



CMBs showing stern torpedoes.



Coastal Motor Boats in the Baltic in October 1919 in cold weather.

of just three, their speed and shallow draft enabled them to penetrate and attack heavy ships in a defended anchorage. Each could carry either an 18 inch torpedo, or two mines, or depth charges. The torpedo was fired out of the stern and the boat then had to turn sharply out the way. This was considered safe as long as the boat was travelling at the same speed as the torpedo!

Having established its sea-keeping qualities, the 40ft skimmer hull was extended to 55ft which, in addition to two officers, carried two motor mechanics and a wireless operator. Then came the 70ft boats which were able to carry heavier payloads. Together these Coastal Motor Boats formed the Royal Navy's first offensive arm of small fast attack craft, which

in due course came to be called "Coastal Forces". A base was set up at Osea Island on the river Blackwater in Essex and in the Fleet they were known as "The Suicide Club"! Other bases were quickly established at Harwich, Sheerness and Dover.

Their initial uses in The First World War involved anti-submarine operations and offensive operations against German Patrol Boats off Dunkirk, Zeebrugge and Ostend, often operating in heavily mined waters. The first notable CMB action was in 1917 when, off Dunkirk, a group of 40ft CMBs under the command of Lieutenant W. Beckett RN in CMB 4 sank a German destroyer and seriously damaged another. Beckett was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. CMBs were deployed also for other types of mission such as minelaying and anti-submarine work. At the Zeebrugge Raid in April 1918 a group of 40ft CMBs laid smoke screens to cover the cruiser *Vindictive* and blockships while they entered the heavily defended harbour.

After the armistice in 1918, Britain was dragged into an "Undeclared War" against Bolshevik Russia. It was in the ensuing Baltic Campaign that CMBs assumed the role they were designed for – not only in clandestine operations, secretly landing agents, but in carrying out attacks against the Bolshevik Fleet which other craft stood little chance of approaching. This resulted in two unique major attacks and many other naval successes.

In April 1919 the 40ft CMBs Nos 4 and 7, under the command of Lieutenant Augustus Agar RN operating in the Baltic, were loaned to the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). They were deployed in ferrying their agents in and

out of Petrograd, passing through the defensive forts and skimming over the Bolshevik laid minefields. In June that year, Agar in CMB 4 penetrated a screen of 4 destroyers to torpedo and, despite intense enemy fire, sink the Bolshevik heavy cruiser *OLEG* off Kronstadt. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his action and two of his crew were awarded gallantry medals.

As a direct result of the *OLEG* success, Admiral Sir Walter Cowan, commander of the Navy's Baltic Force, subsequently decided to mount a CMB attack against the Bolshevik Fleet inside the Kronstadt naval fortress itself. His force of light cruisers and destroyers had already been outgunned by the Bolshevik battleships and he had lost a cruiser and two destroyers to mines and submarines.



The Bolshevik cruiser OLEG

A hastily assembled flotilla of eight 55ft CMBs was towed from Osea Island to the Baltic. On 18th August 1919, in coordination with the newly formed Royal Air Force, they attacked the Russian Fleet inside Kronstadt Harbour, in an action which became known as “The Kronstadt Raid”. Two battleships and a submarine depot ship were sunk or disabled, harbour facilities damaged and a destroyer sunk later by mines laid by CMB 7 for the loss of three CMBs sunk and two damaged. Commander Frank Dobson, RN and Lieutenant Gordon Steele RN were awarded VCs, with many other decorations to the Commanding Officers and crews. The Russian Baltic Fleet never put to sea again for the remainder of the campaign.

After the Kronstadt Raid, Admiral Sir Charles Madden the C-in-C of the Grand Fleet wrote, *“This successful enterprise will rank among the most daring and skillfully executed of Naval Operations of this War. On no other occasions during hostilities has so small a force inflicted so much damage on the enemy.”*

However, by 1922 the CMB flotillas had been disbanded. Over 100 boats overall, both 40, 55 and some 70ft, were built during the CMBs lifetime, but the Admiralty cuts of the 1920s signalled their demise. Between the wars CMBs were overtaken and replaced by a new generation of Motor Torpedo and Gun Boats, with just a few 70ft CMBs remaining afloat, mainly in a coastal anti-submarine role. It took another World War, twenty years later, to see Coastal Forces resurrected to

become a huge, expanded arm of naval service.

This year, 100 years after the first CMBs were delivered to the Royal Navy, there are just two original 40ft CMB hulls remaining - the iconic CMB4 preserved ashore at the Imperial War Museum, Duxford and CMB 9 which has been converted for private use, with just a small engine, based at Avonmouth. There is one remaining 55 ft CMB still preserved at the Chatham Historic Dockyard, CMB 331, but no 70ft hulls remain.

For CMBs, the operations in 1919 in the Baltic were the scene of their greatest success. They were fortunate, also, to have found in Cowan an Admiral who saw and was able to exploit immediately their offensive potential. Neil Pilford, historian at the Imperial War Museum wrote:

“The paralysis of the Russian Fleet after the attack on Kronstadt offered the Allies a remarkable strategic opportunity if they and the White Forces had been able to co-ordinate their efforts. Certainly the actions of the CMBs in the Baltic represent a startling example of flexibility and economy of means in the application of Military Power: they also embody those qualities of Resource and Personal Bravery, which, when men bring them to even the most contentious of their affairs, compel our admiration and respect”.

Edited from original text by Commander Rodney Agar,
Royal Navy

COASTAL FORCES – CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

On 25 August The Trust held a highly successful celebration of the Centenary of Coastal Forces, 1916-2016. The event included the gathering of heritage Coastal Forces boats in the Historic Dockyard at Portsmouth, supported by a small number of World War II and post-war Coastal Forces veterans. The activity throughout the day attracted considerable media attention resulting in very welcome publicity for Coastal Forces in general.

The historic craft that were able to contribute to the celebration were Motor Gunboat (MGB) 81, Harbour Defence Motor Launch (HDML) 1387 (*Medusa*), Harbour Service Launch (HSL) 102 and Seaplane Tender (ST) 1507. These boats were complemented by the presence of HMS *Smiter*, a P2000 Patrol Boat currently serving with the Royal Navy and attached to Oxford University Royal Naval Unit. The Trust continues to have a very close relationship with the P2000 Flotilla. It was with great regret that Motor Torpedo Boat (MTB) 102 was not able to join the event due to unfavourable weather conditions for its passage south to

Portsmouth. Similarly, engine problems prevented HMS *Gay Archer* joining the event and due to the length of passage to Portsmouth, CMB 9 was also unable to attend.

After a morning of intense media activity – radio, television and news interviews with the boats' crews and veterans – the boats gathered at 1230 for a sail past through Portsmouth Harbour out to Spithead and then returned to harbour. This had been well publicised and attracted great public attention. The celebration culminated in a Reception for 120 guests in the splendid newly renovated No 4 Boathouse, close to HMS *Warrior*. The boathouse restaurant was an excellent venue with views across the harbour and of the historic boats moored on the pontoons directly below the boathouse. A mixed gathering of representatives of organisations supporting the Trust and individual supporters enjoyed the occasion and a brief display by the Trafalgar Drummers. The Trust is grateful to the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust for the use of this superb venue.





*Vice Admiral Sir Paul Haddacks
with Alan Watson, Skipper of HMS Medusa*



Robin Coventry – World War II Coastal Forces veteran



Peter Bickmore BEM – Coastal Forces veteran and shown in war years



HMS Medusa crew with Richard Basey, Skipper of MTB 102 in rear



THE FREE FRENCH NAVY – *Navales Francaises Libres (FNFL)*

MARINE NATIONALE – 1939-1945



With the fall of France a surprising number of French seaman were to reach the shores of Britain and were to form the nucleus of the very successful Free French Navy, *Forces Navales Francaises Libres (FNFL)*, serving as one of the Allied Navies alongside the Royal Navy. However, this was not initially an easy situation for either the French or the British. Many of the French held a distrust for the Royal Navy, based on the sinking of the French fleet at Mers el Kebir, while the British showed little enthusiasm for co-operating with the newly arrived French forces. However, these initial suspicions were to be quickly dispersed and the Free French naval forces were to be most welcome guests in Britain and to play a vital role within the Allied Coastal Forces.

It was in July 1940 following the French - German armistice and the establishment of a Vichy Government, collaborating with the Germans, that concerns were raised about the French Fleet falling into the hands of the enemy. In addition to the French Fleet at Toulon a large contingent of the French Navy was at Mers el Kebir in French Algeria. Delicate negotiations took place between the French naval commander Admiral Darlan and the British Government to encourage the surrender of the French ships to the Allied Forces. The negotiations were unsuccessful and this very complex and immensely sad saga resulted in the fleet at Mers el Kebir being attacked by air and fired upon by a large squadron of British warships, under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir James Somerville. The French fleet was made ineffective with the great loss of over 1,300 lives, the sinking of a battleship and severely damaging five other capital ships. French ships at Toulon were scuttled thus denying these potentially valuable assets to the enemy.

In June 1940 three French torpedo boats arrived in Portsmouth. These were flimsy craft made of riveted plywood which also had unsupportable mechanical problems. It very quickly became apparent that they were of little use. However, the French also brought four of their heavily armed *Chasseur* torpedo boats originally designated “submarine chasers”, which proved to be immensely successful minor warships. These boats remained based at Portsmouth.

The initial success and the enthusiasm of the French crews convinced the Admiralty that support of the French would be beneficial to the war effort. The Admiralty therefore provided the French with four new Fairmile B class MLs which were to operate initially from Portland providing escorts and defensive patrols. They operated within the 20th ML Flotilla which provided boats for Operation Chariot, the raid on St Nazaire in May 1942. Operation Chariot resulted in a great loss of British boats and the flotilla was reformed later in 1942 with the addition of a further four MLs and with all French crews throughout the flotilla. Later in 1942 the MLs were exchanged for eight new Vosper MTBs, all to be French manned, except for RN Telegraphists, and to form the 23rd MTB Flotilla. The French had really arrived!

The all French 23rd Flotilla arrived at Kingswear on the River Dart, which was to be their operating base throughout the remainder of the war. Their depot ship at Dartmouth was the *Belfort*, originally a French sloop. Their operating area was to be the Brittany coastline and the Channel Islands. The French settled into their new surroundings and into their new role with considerable enthusiasm and their crews became a much loved addition by local residents. Many of the seamen were billeted with local families. Their first Senior Officer,

based in the Royal Dart Hotel, the Coastal Forces base *HMS Cicala*, was Capitaine de Corvette Meurville. In very short time two of the French boats made a major success with the sinking of a 2,000 ton merchant ship, despite considerable oppositions from armed escorts. The sinking of a 3,000 ton merchant ship followed. In all the 23rd Flotilla carried out over 450 patrols and sank five German ships totalling over 7,000 tons. Their British decorations included one DSO, five DSCs, two DSMs and six Mention in Despatches. However, it was a uniquely French decoration that was bestowed on individual boats, the *Ordre de l'Armée*. These were bestowed and presented to individual boats by General de



The French Chasseur (submarine chaser) Torpedo Boat.

137 Ton, length 43.4 M (141 feet), Beam 5.24M (17 feet), steel construction and steam driven.

Gaulle who must surely have had a personal interest as his son Philippe was second in command of one of the boats.

However, the French MTBs at Kingswear were not the only French Coastal Forces. The French-built chasseurs, previously mentioned, remained based at Portsmouth. These mostly steel built 130 ton boats were heavily armed, formidable warships. They saw action from their early arrival in Portsmouth, with the evacuation of Dunkirk. In 1941 the flotilla moved from Portsmouth to Cowes, Isle of Wight, after the French Admiral Muselier had lobbied the Admiralty to provide a dedicated base for the French gunboats. They occupied Marvin's Yard on the Medina River using the French sloop *Le Diligente* as their base. Once again, they were warmly welcomed by the local residents and the French entered into local life whole heartedly. Nevertheless, they were busy and their operations (operations) included convoy escorts, raids on the French coast and, eventually, vital roles in the Normandy landings on Omaha and Juno beaches.

They suffered their losses. Air raids on Marvin's Yard killed several French seamen and *Chasseur 8* was sunk with the loss of the entire crew, except for the RN liaison officer. Their boat had been spotted and bombed by an enemy aircraft while on escort duties from the Isle of Wight. *Chasseur 5* ran into difficulties off St. Albans Head while escorting a French submarine and sank. The *Chasseurs* had a particular problem of stability. Their high Bridges and high mounted armament made them difficult to handle in high seas. In the case of



General De Gaulle addresses French French naval forces early in the war

Chasseur 5 only five members of the crew escaped her upturned hull when she capsized.

The involvement in the Normandy landings was undoubtedly a very emotional and long awaited experience for the French crews of the *Chasseurs*. Only two boats were involved in the invasion on 6 June but others were involved in the follow-up forces 24 hours later.

The significance of French naval forces fighting alongside their Coastal Forces shipmates and their fearless contribution to the defeat of the enemy cannot be overestimated.

PROMINENT VETERANS

SIR PETER SCOTT, CH, CBE, DSC*, FSC, FRS, FZS

Coastal Forces, through both world wars and the post war period, produced many individuals who went on to achieve fame or high office in their lifetime. One such veteran was Peter Scott, ornithologist, conservationist, artist and broadcaster, who had the distinction of having already established a very recognisable presence before joining the RNVR in 1940. The only child of the Antarctic explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott Royal Navy, his godfather was J M Barrie, the creator of 'Peter Pan'. He read Natural Sciences at Cambridge and he had strong artistic talent, having his first London Exhibition in 1933. Before the start of the war he had represented Great Britain at dingy sailing in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, winning a Bronze Medal.

In the fashion which is typical of his whole life, Peter Scott managed to cram an awful lot into his naval career from late 1939 when he joined as an RNVR (Supplementary List) Sub Lieutenant, till the summer of 1945, when he left, having achieved the rank of Lieutenant-Commander, to fight in the



Peter Scott

post-war General Election. By which time he was an MBE, had been awarded two DSCs and two Mentions in Despatches. It was Peter Scott who gave a very moving radio broadcast eulogy following the death of his friend Robert Hitchens DSO*, DSC** in April 1943. The following appreciation of Peter Scott was written by his wartime colleague and very close friend Commander Christopher Dreyer, DSO, DSC, Royal Navy.



Steam Gunboat (SGB) 309 later named HMS Grey Goose in which Peter Scott served as Senior Officer of the SGB Flotilla

By Christopher Dreyer

“Peter came to us in Coastal Forces in the summer of 1942. He had been hoping to get command of a destroyer, but the Admiralty first gave him something smaller - a new Steam Gun Boat, SGB No 9 which later on, when the class got names, was called Grey Goose, and at 150 ft was much bigger than the rest of our MGBs and MLs, which together made Coastal Forces.

Peter had Grey Goose for some eighteen months and for about a year he was Senior Officer of the SGB Flotilla, mainly operating from Newhaven (where my MTB flotilla was also operating for the early part of 1943). After taking part in the Dieppe raid in August 1942, Peter and the SGBs had a number of gallant battles in the Channel in the spring and summer of 1943. In March 1944 he joined me on the staff of Captain Coastal Forces (Channel) to prepare and operate all the Coastal Force Craft in the Channel during Operation Neptune, the naval portion of Operation Overlord, the invasion of France.

On our small Coastal Forces Staff, attached to C-in-C, Portsmouth, Peter became a roving controller, spending some

time in the assault area in France, and later on with the Americans in Cherbourg, operating their PT boats against the Channel Islands.

He was an invaluable staff officer, because the combination of his wide knowledge of Coastal Forces operations, his good brain and tactical sense, together with his considerable reputation, made him an excellent envoy and representative.

One of Peter’s most noticeable characteristics as a sailor was his formidable determination that he must be the best at whatever he took on. When he got command it had to be the best boat ever, when he was given a flotilla it had to be the best of the lot. I always imagined that the determination sprang from an inborn need to keep up his father’s immense reputation, since he had been brought up with the background of that great sailor and explorer’s heroic journeys and death.

At the same time, in parallel with his firm ambition to succeed, he was undeniably and daringly rather scruffy - his uniform, tended to be pretty shapeless and he wore a grey cardigan underneath, which showed, and there was frequently some paint here and there, on him or his clothes.

In some respects the fact that when he joined the Royal Navy he was already a household name as a painter, author, naturalist broadcaster and Olympic dinghy sailor, was a disadvantage to him, in that his superiors were liable to expect him to be a cocky young so-and-so and his equals were liable to be jealous. However, one soon learned that, although he neither concealed nor paraded his determination and ambition as a dedicated sailor, he was a kindly and amusing messmate and companion, a most excellent shipmate in any situation and a very good friend.

He was not a member of The Coastal Forces Veterans Association, because he really could not afford the time and he was incapable of doing anything half heartedly! Nevertheless he was proud of his time in Coastal Forces and was always a valuable advocate for the service.”

THE 30th MTB FLOTILLA – Operations in 1944

The following is a graphic personal account by Lieutenant Paul Watkins RNVR who served with Peter Scott. He describes what Peter Scott referred to as some of the most intense operations for the boats, and fiercest fighting for the crews, that Coastal Forces in the Channel had ever had:-

“It was late in the hot August of 1944 when the 30th MTB Flotilla was based in the prefabricated harbour at Arramanche, with the whole crew living on board. We slipped at 1900 and headed towards the radar-directing frigate with MTB 471, CO Peter Standley, leading followed by me in MTB 476 and the Australian Bob Lang as tail-end Charlie in MTB 477. Briefed in

the frigate, our task was to get onto the enemy convoy route just south of Cap d’Antifer, in spite of the high accuracy of the shoreside guns which we hoped to evade by stealth. However, even with silencers engaged, when we were about 4 miles off the coast we saw the familiar triple flash from the cliffs, followed by the crump of the guns and next the whistle of shells as they fell to seaward. The MTBs zig-zagged but the guns were getting our range and, just as Peter (Standley) had called a conference to decide where to go next, a shell burst right between Peter and the bow. Much to our amazement, we found our for’ward gunners alive and little damage to the boats. Shells are never quite as close as they seem.

So we kept moving in order to get closer inshore where the heavy guns could not reach us. Next came a radar plot from the frigate directing us to intercept a northbound patrol even further inshore. As we closed I had the usual weak feeling around the stomach, soon to be replaced by the thrill of excitement as we lifted the throttles and streaked into what we expected to be a gun attack, the enemy R-boats not rating a torpedo. As their first starshell burst overhead, I shall never forget the sight as the three boats leapt through the waves, throwing up great sheets of spray, dazzlingly white under the now ominous bright sky, but unhappily giving the enemy a perfect target: a stream of menacing tracer, starting horribly slowly at first, then on you and past you in a flash. As we opened up with our 6-pounders and Oerlikons the enemy made smoke and turned away. Our damage was negligible, so Peter decided to go around their smoke for another run, only to be met by more starshell and fierce 20 and 40mm fire at a range of about 300 yards. Adjusting speed from stopped to flat out to confuse the enemy, he then decided to engage them from inshore. But now rising seas and intermittent starshell made station-keeping a nightmare.

Now we entered the really bloody part of the battle. The enemy had turned out to be a much larger force than we had expected and his shooting was streaming in at about knee height. I could see bursts all over 471, it seemed incredible anyone was still alive on her upper deck but her guns were still firing. Our 6-pounder gunner was doing magnificent work with repeated hits as my mouth and nostrils began to fill with acrid cordite smoke and my ears numbed by the deafening noise. Yet one felt a strange elation such as I have never experienced before or since - I felt like singing and shouting. My big fear was that 471 would get stopped and we would have to rescue her crew under that murderous fire but luckily she kept on going as we ourselves now came in for a hammering. Two shells hit our 6-pounder, wounding the gunner, others burst in the engine room, a fire started in the W/T office, the wheelhouse was riddled and the Oerliken crew lay dead or wounded by their shattered gun. 477 had also been badly hit so we turned ahead of the enemy line to dis-engage.

As we drew clear the starshell now showed us clearly that our enemy was much stronger than we had thought, revealing two R-boats and two flak trawlers only 200 yards away to starboard. The snag was we had to go even closer to get clear, reduced now to almost sitting targets. Our Oerliken had of course stopped firing by now, with the wounded loader blocking the ammunition hatch, but my starboard Vickers gun hit the second R-boat heavily. The trawler's fire though was deadly - my mast was severed, aials shot away and, worst of all, my illuminating rockets stowed above the petrol tanks were set off and burnt brilliantly, shooting out of their racks in all directions in a terrifying manner. Close astern of 471 as we turned away there was a heavy explosion on her stern and a

huge cloud of smoke. I turned to port to avoid what I expected to be the wreckage and lost her in the smoke. Some frantic and rather strange R/T talk assured me she was making way to the westward with 477 still in company, so I re-joined them to find that the explosion had been her smoke apparatus blown up by a shell.

The sea was now quite rough with a Force 5 wind and my boat and 477 had holes near the waterline and could only make 8 knots. It took what felt like hours to reach a destroyer (*Seymour*) and so disembark our casualties who needed urgent attention. As we lurched and jarred alongside her steel hull the lights showed what a mess the boat was in with riddled superstructure and the foam from a fire extinguisher mixed with blood flowing from the gun platform. Getting the wounded across was no easy task but both crews were marvellous and my badly hurt Oerliken loader, was the most cheerful of the lot. AB Randles, a 39-year-old widower with two young daughters, was the only member of the crew to be killed, curled up around the base of his gun. Staff on the *Seymour* suggested I buried him at sea on the way home. Trying to remain civil to explain the difficulties of this as we were sinking fast, I managed to persuade him to do it for us. As we lay off waiting for the others I drank a glass of water which tasted so foul I asked my 1st Lt to try it: it was the thick layer of cordite in my mouth that had made it taste so bad.

Finally at about 0330 we set course for Arromanches about 30 miles away, with all three boats taking on serious quantities of water, and with speed down to only 7 knots and not helped by a following sea. We had to jettison many deck fittings and our torpedoes but still the water level kept rising in the forward messdeck, where luckily the forward bulkhead held. But after about an hour we had to summon a C-class MGB to tow 476. We carried on with horrendous steering problems as the whole foc's'le became awash until, at last at around 0700, we successfully negotiated the tricky entrance to the harbour with only some 18 inches of freeboard left, instead of the normal 7ft. Securing alongside a friendly Dog-Boat, the CO invited us all down to his wardroom where, cigarettes and whisky to hand, we were at last able to relax in the warmth of their hospitality and talk, talk, talk through the night's events.

The Base engineers said that we had been hit by 18 explosive cannon-shells and countless machine gun bullets. 471 was in a worse state owing to their smoke apparatus blowing up and completely clearing all the gear from her stern. With MTB 477 also in a bad way we were a pretty battered unit. Cheering news came next day though, when we heard from HQ that we had put a trawler out of action and probably sunk one of the R-boats. And the Admiral signalled "*Much regret casualties sustained in your most gallant and successful action.*"

With thanks to Lt Paul Watkins RNVR

LIVES IN BRIEF

FRANK ASPINWALL

Frank Aspinwall who died in 2015 served in MTB 666 as a leading Stoker when she was lost during an action off Imjuiden on 4/5 July 1944. MTBs including 666 had engaged a heavily protected convoy heading towards the invasion fleet area, when 666 was struck in the Engine Room by shellfire from a shore battery, putting the boat out of action and causing a number of casualties. The boat had to be abandoned with many lives lost. The surviving crew, including Aspinwall, took to the water, where they had to survive for several hours before being picked up by enemy ships. A partially submerged 666 was brought into Imjuiden between two German flak trawlers, and patched up sufficient to allow inspection of the vessel by German naval experts. While this was underway the boat spontaneously exploded inside the E-boat pens in which it was housed, killing many German personnel onboard her at the time. Frank Aspinwall served the remainder of the war as a POW.

JOHN RAFFERTY



John Rafferty

John Rafferty was a Petty Officer Motor Mechanic (POMM) who served in ML 177 during Operation Chariot, the raid on the great Normandie dock at St Nazaire. ML 177 was a Fairmile B, commanded by Sub-Lieutenant Mark Rodier RNVR, which carried torpedoes and was to be a vital escort for *HMS Campbelltown* to its final journey into the estuary at St Nazaire. POMM John Rafferty was on the base engineering staff at Weymouth before being drafted to his role as

‘roving engineering staff’ for the operation flotilla, along with his engineer officer Sub Lieutenant Toy. John’s very good friend in Weymouth, CPO Sam Wallace expressed concerns that the operation was too dangerous and he tried to persuade John that he should remain in the base at Weymouth. Although John had the authority to nominate someone else in his place he rejected this opportunity. ML 177 carried a Commando contingent which made the number of men onboard three times the boats normal complement.

The details of the story of the landing of ML 177’s Commandoes and the escorting of *HMS Campbelltown*, under intense fire is long and bloody. A glimpse of this is best given by John’s personal account of the intensity of the action, as follows.

“Down in the engine room I could hear the gunfire fading and I thought we were getting away with it. The next I knew I was lying on the engine-room deck almost submerged in water and in

complete darkness. Struggling to the engine-room ladder I hoisted myself up, only to find that the hatch to the upper deck would not open. After a lot of banging and pushing it was eventually opened by a survivor who had been sitting on it. The scene I came upon was unbelievable, the deck was overflowing with dead and dying, and hardly anyone unscathed. We were still under merciless attack from several shore batteries, but amidst all this carnage, one of the crew was still at his post returning fire.

Realising that there was little I could do on deck, I decided to return to the engine room. I climbed down the steel ladder not knowing what to expect, but hoping that I could re-start the engines. The area was now bathed in blinding light from a searchlight streaming through a huge hole in the ship’s side. As I contemplated the scene I heard calls for help from a Commando who came half-swimming, half-drifting through the hole. He was severely wounded and had lost an eye. With some difficulty I managed to push him up the ladder onto the deck. Returning down, I saw that the starboard engine was completely smashed, having taken a direct hit from probably a 75mm. The port engine was relatively unscathed, but all the electrics had gone and so had the hydraulics for the steering.”

ML 177 accompanied *HMS Campbelltown* on her port quarter up to her breaching the Normandie Dock and then took onboard some of the survivors from the ship, including the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Commander Sam Beattie RN. Of the force of 15 MLs, only ML 177 managed to reach the gates at the old entrance to the basin. Under intense fire for the rest of that night and severely damaged, ML 177 was abandoned at 0500 and Rafferty along with Sam Beattie and two others clung to a carly float until being rescued by a German trawler and then being taken into custody as prisoners for the remainder of the war.

MIG (GUY) HAMILTON DSC

Joining the Royal Navy in 1940 Guy Hamilton served as a Hostilities Only rating in *HMS Eskimo* on Russian Convoys and for a period in the Mediterranean. He was commissioned in the RNVR and joined Coastal Forces, initially serving as Navigating Officer of MTB 673 undertaking operations in the Western Approaches. His boat was in a collision and Hamilton move to MGB 718 where he was to serve as First Lieutenant and, of particular relevance, as the Boats Officer. MGB 718, under the command of Lt. Ronnie Seddon, was in the 15th MGB Flotilla under the Flotilla command of Lt. Cdr. Peter Williams RNVR. The flotilla was



Guy Hamilton



*Lt. Guy Hamilton with ABs
Rockwood and Dellow –
hiding in a French field June
1944 and on reunion 1991.*

dedicated to clandestine operations from Dartmouth, Aberdeen and Lerwick. Hamilton undertook numerous clandestine operations to enemy occupied coasts encountering endless dangers and contributing greatly to the war effort.

Hamilton's unique adventure occurred during one such operation. The purpose of Operation Reflection over the night of 15/16 June 1944 was to land three agents on Bonaparte Beach in the Baie de St Briec, to the north of Plouha, in Brittany. The beach had been used successfully on several previous occasions. Weather conditions were fair and good progress was made to the French coast. In accordance with normal practice MGB 718 anchored three-quarters of a mile from the coast in order to minimise the noise from the engines and anchor operations reaching the enemy. A surf boat was lowered over the side and the three agents, their luggage, Guy Hamilton as Boats Officer and with two ratings, Able Seamen Rockwood and Dellow, headed for Bonaparte Beach. The landing was successful and the surf-boat made its way back to the anticipated meeting point with the MGB. Meanwhile the MGB had experienced anchor problems and had started engines to maintain her position. Hamilton's "walkie-talkie" was defective although he could then hear engine sounds in-shore. This was MGB 718 searching for the surf-boat and her crew. This was unsuccessful and, with dawn imminent, MGB 718 reluctantly sailed for England.

Hamilton and his crew of two struggled back to the shore and spent the night hiding in a field, which turned out to be a minefield. They then had several tense days and nights endeavouring to make contact with the French Resistance by making cautious approaches to local farmers. Contact was eventually made and they were lodged with a friendly family.

Hamilton had excellent French and he accompanied his hosts to the boules alleys of the Cafe' Le Meur, which was also frequented by the Germans. It was not until the night of 12/13 July that Hamilton and his two ratings could be rescued, being picked-up with twelve other Evaders by MGB 503 in another clandestine Operation named *Crozier*. Hamilton was awarded a DSC in December 1945.

Post war, he resumed his career as a Film Director, achieving great success. He was Assistant to the Director John Houston on *The African Queen* and his first major directing success was *The Colditz Story* (1954) He directed the Bond films, *Goldfinger* (1964), *Diamonds are Forever* (1971), *Live and Let Die* (1973) and *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), all of which films he uniquely modelled. Later in his career he collaborated with Lord Brabourne on a number of very successful Agatha Christie films. Guy Hamilton retired to his villa in Mallorca.

For further information see "HM MTB 718 – Something Special" written by Philip Milner and Rodney Seddon, published by Milner - Seddon in 2014. ISBN 978-0-9931445-0-9

TERRENCE L ROBINSON DSC

Terry Robinson, who has died aged 98, distinguished himself in Coastal Forces in the Mediterranean during the Second World War, and post war was to become "Mr Coca-Cola" in his home land of Northern Ireland. In 1938, to gain experience as a waiter, he moved to the Hotel Splendide, Lugano's most fashionable hotel, and then the Hotel du Chateau d'Ouchy, Lausanne. He was inclined to wear a kilt which he wore in the traditional fashion until at a cocktail party he was instructed by the manager's wife to remove her dog from the room and he paraded the length of the room with the dog and the front of his kilt caught up in his arms. A extrovert character, he played rugby for Saracens' first XV. Volunteering for the Royal Navy, as an Ordinary Seaman his first ship was the Tribal-class destroyer *Cossack* under her famous fighting captain, (later Admiral of the Fleet) Sir Philip Vian. Robinson was a look-out on the bridge when *Cossack* attacked the battleship *Bismarck*, and recalled Vian charging his much larger German enemy at high speed at night until he turned sharply at close range to deliver a salvo of torpedoes. Next day *Bismarck* was brought to bay by the Home Fleet.



Terry Robinson

After completing officer training, in August 1942 Robinson was appointed first lieutenant of ML 147, based in Lowestoft. There, in rough weather, he jumped into the icy North Sea to rescue a man overboard and was awarded a Royal Humane

Society's Testimonial on Vellum. In 1943 he was appointed First Lieutenant of MGB 641, based in North Africa. Working in close harmony with American PT Boats he was involved in torpedo and gun attacks on enemy shore installations, on submarines and surface vessels and in landing agents. In August 1943 he took command of MGB 660 at Bastia, in the 57th MTB Flotilla commanded by the fearless Lt. Cdr. Tim Bligh. (Post war Tim was to become Sir Timothy Bligh, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan.)

MGB 660 was detached for special operations with the Long Range Desert Group on the coast of Albania and later to the Aegean, where Robinson was involved in continuous operations against enemy transport lighters, schooners and E-boats and in supporting Tito's partisans. Robinson established a fearsome reputation in clandestine operations with the Raiding Support

Regiment, regarded as the most aggressive of all the troops conducting clandestine war in the Aegean.

Robinson ferried the King of the Hellenes and his staff from the cruiser *Ajax* into the port of Piraeus soon after Athens was liberated, and in mid-December 1944 he also landed Harold Macmillan, then the British Minister Resident in the Mediterranean. On the night of February 13/14 1945, the 57th MTB Flotilla off the coast of eastern Istria, northern Croatia, attacked and sank three large German F-lighters (heavily armed barges), and Robinson was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his marked courage, skill and resource. Postwar, Robinson returned to his home in Northern Ireland, where his father had bought the Coca-Cola franchise. His brother, Denis, had been killed at Caen serving with the Seaforth Highlanders and it fell to him to help his father develop the business which he did with immense success.

STOP PRESS

WHO DUNN'IT AT DARTMOUTH?

Spotted recently, attached to the Trust's Memorial plaque on the Kingswear side of Dartmouth harbour is the following intriguing notice, dated 11 November 2015 :-

'In respectful and admiring memory of all those agents landed in the Baltic States by Coastal Forces between 1949 and 1955. Most were betrayed (by Blake) and most were shot or disappeared. Carried out under the name of Operation Jungle and the so-called British Baltic Fisheries Protection Service.'

The notice was placed by a former Sub Lt RNVR, who was involved. It would be nice to know who he is. Can anyone help?

BOAT HIRE

Readers may wish to be aware that the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust (PNBPT) in the Historic Dockyard at Portsmouth have craft available for hire for special occasions at sea in the Solent. Regrettably this does not include trips at sea on MGB 81, owned by the Trust, due to safety considerations for those onboard. The following craft are available and have proved popular for those wishing to celebrate a special occasion. Contact for hire and details of cost should be made through boats@pnbpt.co.uk.

For further details see www.pnbpropertytrust.org.

ST 1502

A World W II Seaplane Tender.

HSL102

A World War II Harbour Service Launch beautifully restored.



ST 1502



HSL 102

ADDITIONALLY

HDML 1387 (HMS *Medusa*) which is regularly reported on in this Newsletter and MTB 102 are available for hire subject to their individual programmes. Please contact by their individual web sites "<http://www.hmsmedusa.org.uk>" www.hmsmedusa.org.uk & "<http://www.102.com>"

IN MEMORIAM

WE SAY FAREWELL TO:

Frank Aspinall	CFVA 2078	Tom Huberston	
Frank Aspinwall	CFVA 2078	C B Mitchell	
Roy Avis	CFVA 1019	John Macaroon	
Hubert C H Du BOULAY DSC		Blake Parker	
Thomas Dunn	CFVA 2109	John Rafferty	
George Dymott		Bill Read DSM	CFVA 379
Roy Ellis	CFVA 3030	T L (Terry) Robinson OBE, DSC	CFVA 3255
Eric M England		Charles Smorthit	CFVA 1437
Thomas Charles Gordon		John Daniel Spink	CFVA 2743
M I G (Guy) Hamilton DSC	CFVA 590	Mr Wapling	
Tony Hart DSC			

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
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.



or if you wish to make a single payment, please complete the box(es) below:

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