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NEWSLETTER



65 years apart: HMS Hornet 1954 (left) with numerous Coastal Forces Motor Gun Boats in the background and today HSSC (right) re-dedicating the Coastal Forces Memorial with HMS Biter and HMS Trumpeter (not pictured) serving as Guard Ships.

Wikipedia says hornets have stings in their tails to defend themselves and to kill their prey. The article also says that their stings are more painful to humans than typical wasp stings and that, unlike honey bees, hornets can sting repeatedly. (I can vouchsafe all this having had a hornet inside my shirt whilst driving.) So what better name for the Royal Navy's most important coastal forces base, the *alma mater* of the motor torpedo boats. The picture of the hornet was used on all Coastal Forces badges and is at the top of this newsletter.

It was therefore entirely appropriate that the memorial to honour the Coastal Forces personnel, both recognising those who died and those who survived in the world wars, should be at HMS Hornet at Gosport. The memorial was unveiled in 1954 and, having been refurbished and repaired recently, has been re-dedicated 65 years on in June of this year. This re-dedication and the unveiling of the memorial plaque is reported fully, with photographs, in the central pages of this newsletter; the photographs above are of the 1954 ceremony when HMS Hornet was still in commission, and, as the Hornet Services Sailing Centre, the rededication ceremony in June 2019.

Thinking of anniversaries, the extraordinary, but now largely forgotten, attack by RN Coastal Forces on the Bolshevik major naval forces at Kronstadt in the Gulf of Finland took place a

hundred years ago and is reported in this newsletter. It is a cracking good story.

The Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust can boast substantial achievements in 2019, notably the arrival of CMB 4 at Boathouse 4 in Portsmouth Dockyard, the formation and “coming of age” of the Memorial Flotilla (which includes Coastal Forces boats) and the commissioning of the floating pontoons complex, adjacent to Boathouse 4, now the permanent home of the Memorial Flotilla. These achievements are covered in an article on pages 8 and 9.

The restoration of the Motor Anti-Submarine Boat (MASB) 27 and her return to the Normandy beaches this year are also covered, as is the story of one RNVR officer's harrowing experience of his time in command of a minesweeping motor launch (ML) when it was mined. Both the stories of the MASBs and MLs have had too little attention in the past and deserve more.

There is more here in this newsletter and regular readers will see that we have had to expand to 20 pages. I hope that there will something of interest for everyone. As I said in my first editorial, I welcome all feedback and any suggestions for future contents of newsletters. (My contact details are now included, together with Trust information, on the back page.)

Commander Rupert Head, Royal Navy – Editor

IN THIS ISSUE

| | | | |
|--|-------|--|-------|
| Chairman's Letter | 2 | The Kronstadt Attack – 17/18 August 1919 | 12-13 |
| The Exhibition Project Update | 3 | Lieutenant Commander Adrian Martin, MBE, RD, RNVR and ML 216 | 14-15 |
| Boats Roundup & News in Brief <i>Medusa</i> <i>Gay Archer</i> MTB 102 The First Patrol Boat Squadron – A Summer of Commemorations RML 526 – A Sad Ending Restored MASB 27 returns to Omaha beaches and Normandy CMB 4 comes to Portsmouth The Memorial Flotilla and the new pontoons | 3-9 | FLAG 4 | 16-17 |
| | | The 4.5-inch, 8 cwt, Mark I Gun | 17-18 |
| | | In Memoriam | 18 |
| | | Stop Press | 19 |
| The Re-Dedication of The Memorial to Coastal Forces | 10-11 | | |

NEWSLETTER 24 CORRECTIONS

With apologies, we must make a correction to Newsletter 24, Page 11, Royal Canadian Navy It has been pointed out by one of our most knowledgeable readers that the photograph of the MTB attributed to a Canadian manned boat is a Vosper 71ft boat and is MTB 34 of the 4th MTB Flotilla which operated out of Felixstowe, Dover and Blyth.

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

To quote Winston Churchill, "A nation that forgets its past has no future"; it is so important that we commemorate and remember the important contributions and successes of Coastal Forces during two world wars. We have had a number of very significant anniversaries during the last six months. 6 June 2019 was the 75th anniversary of D-Day. Three historic Coastal Forces craft, MEDUSA, MGB 81 and MASB 27 crossed the Channel and were the focal points for further commemorative events in France. D-Day 75 caught the public's imagination and showed that there is a thirst for history and a need to keep this alive. (An account of MASB 27's crossing comes later)

Later in the same month, on 19 June, our veterans, supporters, dignitaries and representatives from the RN attended the re-dedication of the Coastal Forces Memorial at the Hornet Services Sailing Club, formally HMS Hornet, the headquarters base of Coastal Forces (and the last to close in 1957) The memorial was first unveiled 65 years ago by Catherine Hichens, widow of Lieutenant Commander Robert Hichens, DSO*, DSC**, RNVR who had been killed in action in April 1943. Their granddaughter Tamsin unveiled the memorial on this poignant occasion. (Please read on for a fuller account and photographs which are in the centre pages)

2019 is the centenary year of the extraordinary Kronstadt raid when a small force of RN coastal motor boats successfully attacked major warships of the Bolshevik Fleet in the Gulf of Finland. Their disproportionate achievements have always deserved greater recognition. An account is included in this newsletter.

The men and women of the RN today, particularly those in the First Patrol Boat Squadron, the successors of Coastal Forces, have much history from which to inspire and engender pride in their branch of the Service. My fellow Trustees and I will continue to do all we can to help keep Coastal Forces memories and history alive. The new museum project is an important element of this core aim. Indeed, the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust is already doing much to contribute to the history and preservation of the small craft which made disproportionate contributions in two world wars. The inception of the Memorial Flotilla, which includes several Coastal Forces boats, is a very significant achievement. I am delighted that the flotilla now has its own berths on the new pontoons extending from the Boathouse 4 jetty.

Vice Admiral Sir Paul Haddacks, KCB – Chairman of Trustees

EXHIBITION PROJECT UPDATE

As previously reported, the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust is responsible for the Priddy's Hard development. This includes not just P Building but a considerable number of new houses, various on-site amenities, access roads etc. Inevitably, there have been planning issues (Gosport Borough Council came back with 90 or more imposed conditions). Having sorted out the bats (reported in the last N/L), Natural England has now directed that all water discharged into the harbour or to the sea has to be "nitrate neutral". There is a two month delay to the start date for building restoration work. We hope work will now start in November. In fact, the delay has been helpful in allowing more time for our other partner, the National Museum of the Royal Navy, to resolve certain issues associated with the Exhibition work. We still hope to be able to take possession of the building in March or April 2020 and realise our ambition to have a late summer opening. As



Model of MTB 71, one of the two historic craft which will be on display

previous reported, we have two historic boats to go into the exhibition. One is MTB 71. A model of her is shown above.

BOATS ROUND-UP AND NEWS

MEDUSA

Medusa has had a busy season and we still have more trips to do before Remembrance in November after which we concentrate on maintenance until next March. Our season started on a high with participation in SQUADDEX 19 when we exercised with the First Patrol Boat Squadron. Day one was the practise day which included some new formations. Our favourite was a diamond formation with Medusa in the centre; for this we became guide vessel, hoisted our "G" flag and the other vessels formed up on us. The weather was quite lively and it was a challenge to maintain course. The second day was even livelier and the squadron returned to the Solent early as their embarked guests were suffering.

A first this year was a day at sea on Medusa which was auctioned by the BBC to support Children in Need; we made it a bit more special for the winner with a lunch at the Royal London in Cowes.

This year is the 75th anniversary of D-Day and Medusa played a full part in the commemorations. Early June we spent two days alongside in the historic dockyard and welcomed veterans on board and then escorted the vessel out taking them to France. Medusa crossed on the 4th June and attended an event at Ouistreham before moving to Pegasus bridge for the 6th. It was a busy time with 480 visitors to the ship in one day. On the 7 June we went along the coast past the Mulberry at Arromanches to a small fishing port, Grand Camp Maisy, to the west of Omaha beach. We had a welcome from the Mayor and local dignitaries and took part in the celebration of their



Alan Watson in deep conversation with a D-Day veteran

liberation on the 7 June. From Grand Camp Maisy we called at Cherbourg before going on to St Peter Port, again to a great welcome. We had a visit from the local Sea Cadets and took a group from the local Combined Cadet Force to Sark for the day. On the 15 June we made passage back across the Channel and, after an overnight in Yarmouth, arrived back at our home berth in Haslar. Virtually every passage had been rough but we managed to maintain our schedule and Medusa behaved faultlessly. Our season continued with a weekend visit to Bucklers Hard, sea days for CCF cadets and attendance at the rededication of the Hornet Coastal Forces Memorial.



Medusa alongside at Bucklers Hard

GAY ARCHER

As the team in Boathouse 4 in Portsmouth Dockyard will attest, historic boats, particularly if they go to sea, require constant attention, in-depth maintenance and careful nurturing. Gay Archer requires all this and more. Paul Childs has reported on her refit. This has included repairs to the decks, refurbishment

of the wheel house, manufacture of gearbox and engine mounts, new fuel systems and refurbishment of the 40-mm gun mount ... the list goes on, but at the end of the day, that day being in January 2020, Gay Archer, will look like the photograph below and ready to go back to sea..

MTB 102

MTB102 has had to say goodbye to John Ford. John is an engineer who cut his teeth on RAF air/sea rescue launches and who, for over 20 years, has given so much of his time and extensive experience to 102; a valuable member of the team, he will be much missed.

Wind and sea conditions have not been kind to MTB 102 this summer. The essential insurance cover which is needed for all her passages and participation in maritime events is limited to wind force 5

or less and six of the seven events planned between June to September had to be cancelled. The biggest disappointments was missing the D Day 75 commemorations and a visit to Brixham to mark MTB 102's crucial clandestine role in the liberation of the Channel Isles. But planning is going ahead for 2020, in particular Dunkirk 80 in late May. Watch this space.



Gay Archer – she will return to this pristine condition



MTB 102 alongside at Oulton Broad, Lowestoft

THE FIRST PATROL BOAT SQUADRON – A SUMMER OF COMMEMORATIONS

Six ships from the First Patrol Boat Squadron commemorated their forebears during a hot and blustery June in both national and local ceremonies. On 5 June, during the televised national D-Day 75 Commemorations, HMS Biter, Explorer, Puncher and Pursuer led MV Boudica, filled with veterans, in a sail past involving 16 warships from several allied nations, including Canada, the United States, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The National Commemorative Event, attend by HM The Queen, involved the escorting of the MV Boudica from Portsmouth Naval Base by four P2000s past a formation of eight inbound Warships just outside of Portsmouth Harbour. As the ships passed each other in the channel a ceremonial ‘Cheer Ship’ was carried out by each inbound RN vessel as a salute to the Veterans. The evening was made ever more memorable as a Spitfire flew between the ship’s columns at gunwale height, dipping wings in recognition at each passing of the MV Boudica. The Sail Past proceeded to Nab Tower where MV Boudica left the Naval Escorts and continued her passage to France for the D-Day Beaches.

After the D-Day 75 Commemorations, HMS Biter and Trumpeter remained on the UK South Coast carrying out navigational training for University Royal Naval Cadets. On



Lt David Vail (Left), CO HMS Trumpeter and Lt Matt Smith (Right), CO HMS Biter pictured with Bob Hichens, son of Lt Cdr Hichens DSO, DSC** RNVR.*

17 June both ships attended the Coastal Forces Rededication Service at the Hornet Services Sailing Centre. HMS Trumpeter and Biter provided the guard with respective University Royal Naval Units (URNUs) Midshipmen and a fitting backdrop to the ceremony by placing themselves in (very tight!) berths behind the memorial. (For a full record and photographs of this important event, see centre pages.) After the Ceremony, HMS Trumpeter departed to the sound of the Three Cheers from the audience after a particularly difficult unberthing, whilst HMS Biter remained open to visitors for tours.

RML 526 – A SAD ENDING

Readers may recall a previous newsletter report that work was underway to restore the Rescue Motor Launch (RML) 526 at Hythe. We have heard that the vessel has, sadly, sunk alongside the jetty and that any hopes of restoration have now gone. In fact, a survey revealed that the hull is irreparably damaged.

Some three months ago the Harbour Master, on behalf of the Environment Agency, served notice that unless the owners take action to remove the vessel it would be subject to legal distraint, removed and destroyed. The owners have not, it seems, taken any action and so the vessel may have already gone.

By way of postscript, this 112ft long RML was built in 1942 at the Solent Shipyard on the River Hamble to a then revolutionary

Fairmile design incorporating the use of plywood in the frames of the ship's hull. RML's were used during the Second World War on convoy protection duties and for recovering downed aircrew in the seas around Britain. RML 526 was later used as a target towing vessel for gunnery practice. Decommissioned in 1946, 526 served in successive conversions as an ambulance launch, a smugglers vessel, a private yacht and as a ferry operating between Brixham and Torquay.

RESTORED MASB 27 RETURNS TO OMAHA BEACHES AND NORMANDY

Perhaps the least known class of World War Two Coastal Forces craft was the Motor Anti-Submarine Boat, known as the MASB. These boats, 63 feet in length and displacing 16 tons, were designed pre-war and built by the British Power Boat Company led by the legendary Hubert Scott-Payne. Initially, their prime purpose was to provide protection for harbours, estuaries and inshore waters against anticipated U-Boat incursions, but this threat never really materialised (apart from Scapa Flow, of course!) However, MASBs were versatile, tough and useful little boats and they undertook a wide range of duties, including clandestine operations along Northern France and air sea rescues. They were built with double diagonal planking of Honduras Mahogany, had a crew



RML 526 with her aft compartments flooded



The immaculate foredeck shows the high standard of restoration and boat-building skills.

two officers (usually RNVR) and eight ratings and, in addition to depth charges (if in the anti-submarine role), were only lightly armed with close range, defensive weapons.

MASB 27 is the last of her kind, certainly the last seagoing MASB. Additionally, she is historically important because, as well as her clandestine operations between Cornwall and Normandy, she took part in D-Day and supported the US 1st Division in the Omaha Beach landings. Shortly after the landings, she used her ASDIC to assist in the positioning of the essential Mulberry Harbour caissons. After the war, like many of her kind, she became a houseboat and over the next 55 years had a number of different owners.

Over the last three years MASB 27 has been re-built and restored, to the highest standards, at Hawarden Airfield near Chester to her war time condition. The project has been driven by the inspiration and dedication of John Phipps MBE. His charity, D-Day Revisited, was formed with the aim of enabling the veterans to get to Normandy for the commemorations, over the last ten years and, in particular, for the 75th commemorations in June this year. It was a tight and inflexible deadline to get MASB 27 ready in time to cross the Channel in June.

Immediately after her arrival at the Boathouse 4 Jetty at Portsmouth, MASB 27 joined the Flotilla of Historic Boats, the Memorial Flotilla. John Phipps takes up the story...

“The following morning, the flotilla set out into the Solent and settled on station to join the Brittany Ferry with around 100 D-Day veterans on board. As the ferry passed the Naval Base, four P2000 patrol boats edged out to lead the way, with HMS Medusa, MGB 81, HSL 102 and MASB 27 falling in immediately astern, followed by a collection of a dozen Dunkirk ‘Little Ships’. The RN frigate HMS St Albans took station astern and completed the formation as the entire flotilla slowly made its way past the Spinnaker Tower.

The steam past was impressive and attracted great interest both from large crowds ashore and from spectators afloat. Once

out of the Solent, we took station on MGB 81 and HSL 102. Having set course for Ouistreham, we increased speed to 26 knots. The sea was pretty choppy for the first 20 miles, with 102 occasionally going out of sight in heavy spray.

Conditions improved on nearing the French coast, and, in fact, became flat calm by the time we were into the lee of the Cherbourg peninsula. For the last 10 miles it seemed we were sliding over a sheet of glass.... perfect conditions. 102 had a couple of brief problems with one engine, but this caused marginal delay as she slowed occasionally to clear the fault. Otherwise, the 3 old ladies looked like sprightly and very business-like gunboats – powering across the sea in exact repeat of the historic invasions force 75 years ago.

Our view was mainly of 81 at perfect angle, doing an untroubled 30 knots as we approached the Ouistreham Channel. Once into the harbour, we idled engines to await opening of the lock gate into the Orne Canal. It was at this point that, naturally, the kettle was switched on. With most electrics in use, the main fuse blew and we lost everything, including transmission control. So, a troubling few minutes as we quickly took a line from 102 to keep us from drifting. There was calm management of both boats as our engineers quickly focused attention on finding a fix. Port authority representatives dealt smoothly with entry procedures and our electrics were soon back on line.



MASB 27 is piped into Portsmouth



MGB 81 with MASB 27 astern

In line astern, the 3 boats idled up the Orne to Pegasus Bridge. Still light, it was a quiet and quite idyllic scene as the three gunboats headed for berth alongside the bridge. Once there, we had to ask a couple of pipers to take a rest as we couldn't hear mooring instructions with that racket going on!

So – we got there. Not only under her own power for the first time since 1945, but MASB 27 had crossed to Normandy for the first time since the D-Day assault on Omaha Beach. She stormed across at speed, all under the White Ensign again – back on duty.”

CMB 4 COMES TO PORTSMOUTH

An article in the last newsletter was dedicated to the impressive project to build in Boathouse 4 in Portsmouth Dockyard an authentic replica of Lieutenant Augustus Agar's boat, CMB 4. The build has been progressing well. Long lost traditional boat building and shipwright skills have been brought back to life with the construction of this exact replica of the original boat which, until three months ago, resided in the Imperial War Museum at Duxford in Cambridgeshire. This expansive museum is a largely aviation museum and is, of course, some distance from the sea and the navy. However, CMB 4's place in both Coastal Forces and Royal Navy history is unquestionable. It was this frail, wooden craft which, 100 years ago, was taken into the heart of the Bolshevik naval anchorage and which, under command of the audacious and daring Augustus Agar, penetrated the minefields and a screen of four destroyers to get close enough to fire, hit and subsequently sink the heavy Russian Bolshevik cruiser Oleg. This extraordinary David and Goliath story was the first time the Royal Navy demonstrated to the navy as a whole and to navies and governments around the world the potential of small, fast craft armed with a torpedo and with the benefit of surprise and courage, can achieve.

Augustus Agar himself was awarded the Victoria Cross and his crew of two gallantry medals but the boat itself has been out of reach of the naval museums ... until now.



CMB4 arrives in the Historic Dockyard



CMB 4 – as she is today in Boathouse 4

CMB 4 has been loaned to the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust by the Imperial War Museum. It is now on display in Boathouse 4 in the dockyard alongside the construction of the replica boat – a fascinating exhibition. This vessel is unique and, as far as Coastal Forces goes, is the “jewel in the crown” of Coastal Forces history. It has been a great achievement by the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust to get the Imperial War Museum to agree to the loan of CMB 4. The boat is now mounted inside Boathouse 4, level with the mezzanine floor. Very appropriately and directly below, CMB 4 the full sea-going replica is being constructed. The latter is still upside down but virtually all the ribs are now in place and planking up is expected to start shortly. Although display boards to tell the CMB 4 story are not yet in place, it is worth a visit – and, unlike other visitor attractions, Boathouse 4 is free entry.

Augustus Agar (in CMB7 as CMB4 had been damaged) went on to take part in a larger and equally successful attack on the Bolshevik Fleet a couple of months later. There is an account later in this newsletter marking the 100 year anniversary of this major Coastal Forces action.

THE MEMORIAL FLOTILLA AND THE NEW PONTOONS

The Memorial Flotilla brings together an important collection of small craft which have played a vital part in the conflicts of the 20th century, particularly in the two world wars.

The collection has been built up over the last fifteen years or so. Many of the vessels had been discarded and were in decay. They have been brought to Portsmouth and restored with traditional boatbuilding by skilled artisans and volunteers to their original conditions. The collection includes



Motor Gunboat 81 which had a full history of action in World War II, HDML 1387, HMS Medusa and, as already been covered above, MASB 27. Medusa, MGB 81 and MASB 27 took part in D-Day commemorations in June this year and re-enacted the historic Channel crossing.

While based in the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, the aim of the Property Trust is operate the craft in different parts of the country. As Peter Goodship, the CE of the Trust, has said, "...creation of this operational fleet commemorating the roles these pioneering craft played in both world wars will provide a fitting tribute to the veterans who crewed them and a reminder to all of the heroism these crews displayed in the defence of our nation." The addition of the replica CMB 4 will be an important addition to the flotilla. The project has been funded by the Chancellor of the Exchequer using LIBOR funding.

It is important, clearly, that the flotilla has permanent berths. Piles have been sunk into the harbour seabed between HMS Warrior and South Railway Jetty and a complex of floating pontoons positioned between the piles. The Memorial Flotilla boats are now berthed on the pontoons. This has been a very successful project and provides exactly the right home for the boats where they can be appreciated by the public visiting the dockyard and, in particular, by the visitors to the Boathouse 4 restaurant looking down on the pontoons. This has been made possible following a successful application for a major LIBOR grant.

ABOVE Three of the Memorial Flotilla form up to re-enact the D-Day Channel crossing

BELOW The Memorial Flotilla berthed alongside the new pontoons





ABOVE *Re-Dedication with 1PBS P2000's behind*



LEFT *Vice Admiral Sir Paul Haddacks, KBE, Chairman of Trustees*

BELOW *Tamsin Clive, Granddaughter of Lt Cdr Hichens, delivers her address*



THE RE-DEDICATION OF THE MEMORIAL TO COASTAL FORCES

As the Chairman of Trustees has already presaged in his letter, these two centre pages are given over to provide a record of an important event in the Trust's history, the re-dedication of the Coastal Forces Memorial at the Hornet Services Sailing Club (HMS Hornet) by the Chaplain of the Fleet on 19 June 2019.

During the Second World War the Coastal Forces operated small fast boats that were mostly tasked with protecting the shipping around the UK coast and conducting clandestine operations against the enemy. The work was fraught with danger; operating in small wooden craft, heavily loaded with ammunition and high-octane fuel, brave young men went out night after night to conduct operations against the enemy.

George Chandler, a long-time supporter and Coastal Forces veteran, speaking about the memorial said: "It means respect for those that died. I lost nineteen good shipmates during the war so when I come here I see them all, and it can be very emotional let me assure you, you know when you've lived and fought with people, you never forget them."

It was during Coastal Forces operations in WWII that the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve's most highly decorated officer, Lieutenant Commander Robert Hichens was killed in action in April 1943. Robert Hichens widow, Catherine unveiled the memorial to honour her husband and all the men of Coastal Forces in September 1954. Now in 2019, days after the D-Day 75 Commemorations it was re-dedicated by Robert and Catherine Hichens' granddaughter, Tamsin Clive.

Speaking at the re-dedication Tamsin said: "It really is a great honour to be standing here 65 years after my grandmother Catherine, widow of Robert Hichens, unveiled this Coastal Forces memorial here at HMS Hornet in September 1954 – this ceremony of re-dedication is a moment when we can all once more honour both those who died and those who survived."

The ceremony held at the Coastal Forces Memorial at HMS Hornet was carried out by Martyn Gough QHC, Chaplain of the Fleet, with music being provided by a brass quintet from the Band of HM Royal Marines Collingwood.

"This is a chance to remember that Coastal Forces were a vital part of British defence, especially along the south coast and up the Eastern Seaboard. People who were often volunteers gave an awful lot to try and keep us safe. The chance to come back and reflect after 75 years on the service they gave in wartime and afterwards is still important."

The Coastal Forces were disbanded 1957 with the closure of HMS Hornet but the use of fast small boats lives on in the Royal Navy's P2000 Archer Patrol Vessels. HMS Biter and HMS Trumpeter were present on the day along with a naval party of newly qualified University Royal Naval Unit (URNU) Midshipmen to provide a fitting backdrop for the ceremony. Also, in attendance was the WWII fast patrol boat Medusa, an original Coastal Forces vessel which supported the landings at Omaha Beach on D-Day.



ABOVE *Lusty singing*



RIGHT *The Chaplain of The Fleet*

BELOW *The Unveiling by Tamsin Clive, Granddaughter of Lt Cdr Hichens, DSO*, DSC**, RNVR*



THE KRONSTADT ATTACK – 17/18 AUGUST 1919

On the night of the 17/18 August 1919 Lieutenant Augustus Agar VC guided a small flotilla of 55 foot Coastal Motor Boats (CMBs) into the Bolshevik naval base of Kronstadt to carry out one of the most audacious and successful torpedo attacks in history. A few months earlier, Agar had shown, in the most dramatic way possible, that a small, fast craft, could, under cover of darkness, get through the heavy shore defences and headily gunned guard-ships, to launch a torpedo attack and to sink a major warship. This attack has been related in detail, many times, not least in this newsletter. However, the CMB flotilla attack which followed in August has had much less attention. This is surprising, particularly as it resulted in significantly more enemy losses and two more Victoria Crosses, and a wealth of other gallantry awards. In the centenary year of this important and successful RN Coastal Forces engagement, it seems appropriate to tell the story here.

But first, one cannot help but wonder what the Royal Navy was doing waging naval conflict in the Gulf of Finland in 1919. This was, of course, after the World War One Armistice and it would be fair to say that Britain and the Royal Navy was war weary. But the huge expanse of Russia was in a state of turmoil and civil war. This was two years after the 1917 Revolution but opposing forces still struggled for supremacy. The situation around Petrograd (now St Petersburg) was engulfed in a particularly ruthless war as the pro-monarchist White Russian Northwest Army under General Nikolai Yudenich launched a major offensive against the occupying Bolshevik forces in an attempt to take control of this hugely important city. Kronstadt was a vital part of jigsaw as it was the only port to give access to the Gulf of Finland, the Baltic

and trade (outside the winter months when the port was frozen up). Kronstadt was heavily defended with a chain of forts and an extensive minefield. In 1919 it was the strategic base for the revolutionary Bolshevik navy (Two years earlier Russian sailors had mutinied and raised the Red Flag in the cruiser Aurora alongside in Petrograd and shot all the officers; in Soviet history this was a defining moment and is remembered as the start of the armed revolution which led eventually to the collapse of the Imperial Russian Empire)

So why was the RN deployed and in some strength to this theatre which was, to say the least, confused and dangerous? It seems that there was little political debate or interest in the UK as a whole. The whole operation was shrouded in secrecy. The main reason was that the British had treaty obligations to support the neutrality and independence for the Baltic States against a latent German attack, and also the provisional Russian Government had appealed for help against the Revolution. The Bolshevik Baltic Fleet was a key naval force in keeping Petrograd, the second largest city in the country, in Bolshevik hands. The RN force was fairly significant and included a big-gun monitor for shore bombardment (HMS Erubus), a seaplane carrier (HMS Vindictive), several modern "C" Class light cruisers, some "V" Class destroyers, two sloops, at least one submarine and, of course, a flotilla of CMB's. Up until the RN withdrawal in December 1919, British losses included the Cruiser HMS Cassandra, two destroyers and both the sloops, all from mines. An RN submarine was sunk by an enemy destroyer and a total of 4 CMBs were lost (3 on 17/18 August, one stranded later). A total of 112 British service personnel lost their lives in this forgotten conflict.



A WWI CMB with roundall on foredeck for recognition from the air

RN forces were for the second half of the deployment under the command Rear Admiral Walter Cowan, an aggressive officer who believed in taking the war to the enemy. After Agar had shown what could be achieved, Cowan, with Admiralty approval in London, directed the multi-CMB attack with a flotilla of 7 CMBs. These CMBs had been towed 1,700 miles through the North Sea and Baltic (one had foundered!). The attack was led by 34-year old Commander Claude Dobson, DSO in CMB 31. The CMBs were 55 footers, a step up from Agar's boat. There were two variants, the "A" type which carried one 18-inch torpedo and the "BD" type which had two torpedoes. Both could do 35 knots and carried a crew of four or five. The torpedoes were forcibly ejected over the stern, the torpedo, hopefully, pointing at the target, and continuing forward at speed in the same direction, whilst the CMB executed a sharp turn away to get out of the way of its own torpedo. It was a hit and miss business. The CMB had to get very close to the target to achieve best results; 200-300 yards was ideal, but the torpedoes themselves were erratic and often went off course.

Late on 17 August, Agar, in the 40-foot CMB 7, led the attacking CMBs past the coastal defences and the destroyer guardship, through a very narrow gap in the breakwater and into the harbour itself. It seems that the element of surprise was not achieved. All the CMBs came under heavy and light gunfire and machine gun fire from the Russian warships and from the guns ashore in the forts. It is worth emphasizing that the CMBs were lightly constructed, frail wooden craft, with fuel tanks of high octane petrol fuel. They relied on speed, manoeuvrability and guile but, inevitably, a number were destroyed during the attack. Three boats, CMB's 79, 24 and 62, were lost, survivors being taken prisoner but later released. Four officers and four ratings were missing and presumed killed. Nothing is recorded about Russian casualties and, indeed, it seems impossible to get the Russian side of the story. (Apparently, the Russians chose not to accept that that Agar had earlier sunk their heavy cruiser, the Oleg; it was reported as a submarine attack) But Russian casualties from both attacks must have been heavy as many of the crews would have found themselves in very cold water and drowned.

Dobson in CMB 31 went in first and fired two torpedoes at the 17,400 ton battleship Andrei Pervozvanny. Both torpedoes hit and sank her. Lieutenant Archibald Dayrell-Reed, captain of CMB 88, was killed during his attack and the boat went out of control. Second in command 26-year old Lieutenant Gordon Steele moved the body of his CO out of the way and got the boat back under control. He successfully lined up an attack on the 23,360 ton battleship Petropavlovsk. It is believed he managed to get at least one torpedo hit which disabled her. Other boats attacked the elderly Russian cruiser Pamiat Azova, which was then being used as a torpedo boat depot ship, and she was also sunk. CMB 72 attacked a Russian destroyer, but the torpedo missed. CMB 7 fired a torpedo and hit a vessel alongside in the Military Harbour. After this attack the Bolshevik Fleet never put to sea again during the campaign.



A model of a First World War CMB

Interestingly, British aircraft also played an important part in the attack (seaplanes from HMS Vindictive and others from a hastily carved out runway ashore at Biorko in Finland). A most notable feature of this Kronstadt Raid is that this was the first ever planned joint attack with the RN and the newly formed RAF which had combined from the former Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service. There were reports of aircraft attacking the searchlights and acting in a diversionary role. This must have involved skilful and daring flying and good night navigation. There is no mention of any aircraft losses in the records, or, indeed, of any gallantry awards for any aircrew – this is surprising.

Dobson and Steele were awarded the VC. Dobson went on to reach Flag Rank, retiring in 1940. Steele became a Captain and for many years commanded the training ship HMS Worcester, finally retiring in 1957. Two other officers were awarded the Distinguished Service Order. One of these was Augustus Agar, he already had a VC, a VC and DSO within a couple months is impressive, and may be unique. Six officers were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and a number of petty officers and ratings were awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

As was said in the opening of this article, the momentous events of 18/19 August 1919 have been largely forgotten. To mark the 100 year anniversary, the Daily Telegraph re-printed an article dated 20 August 1919. This article reported the Kronstadt attack. The losses of the Russian battleships were reported (together with the loss of a destroyer and a cruiser damaged). At the time the Admiralty said nothing about how the ships had been sunk, but with no capital ships in the area, it was rightly concluded that torpedoes had been used and that CMBs were involved. It is interesting to note that as 1919 drew to a close, war-wary RN personnel in this theatre became progressively more disenchanted. The Great War was over, little leave could be taken, they were a long way from home and it seems Cowan himself did little to endear himself to his men. In fact, there are reports of minor mutinies. Estonian independence was recognised but the White Army failed to capture Petrograd and the Bolsheviks gradually gained widespread dominance. The Royal Navy was withdrawn, to the relief of many – politicians and servicemen. Sadly, the Kronstadt stories and, in particular, the extraordinary successes of the CMBs were filed away and largely forgotten. It would not be until the mid-1930s that that Coastal Forces would, phoenix-like, re-awake and come to play vital roles in the 1939-45 war at sea.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ADRIAN MARTIN, MBE, RD, RNVR AND ML 216

Perhaps not surprisingly, these newsletters have tended towards the wartime actions and successes of the motor torpedo boats and the motor gunboats. The skill, dash and bravery of the young commanding officers and their crews as they sought out, ambushed and engaged the enemy, usually at speed, often at night and sometimes at very close quarters, came to capture the imagination and admiration of both the general public and the wider Royal Navy.

But, of course, the range and variety of Coastal Forces wartime operations extended across very many important and equally dangerous roles. For example, many motor launches were deployed into minefields to create essential safe routes for convoys, bigger warships and merchant shipping. Over six hundred 112-foot long Fairmile B MLs were built in boatyards around UK and abroad. A number of these tough, versatile craft were specifically fitted for minesweeping, initially to sweep acoustic and magnetic mines; others were fitted with the Oropesa sweeps to counter the moored contact mines. (Many MLs were fitted out as minelayers too.)

The Trust is fortunate to have an excellent wartime account by an RNVR officer who spent the majority of his service in command of a ML on minesweeping operations, the late Lieutenant Commander Adrian Martin. He wrote his account principally as a record for his family and the family has kindly agreed to allow the Trust to draw upon this.

Adrian Martin was born in 1922 at Appledore in Devon into a family with a seafaring tradition going back to the 17th century. In 1941 he was called up and after very short and basic training he joined a motor launch as an ordinary seaman. Clearly his officer potential was quickly recognised; he became a CW (commission warrant) candidate and was sent to HMS King Alfred for officer training. He passed out well and was allowed to choose his preference for type of service. He elected Coastal Forces and had hoped for an MTB but he found himself as First Lieutenant of a Fairmile B motor launch, ML 216, which was being converted for minesweeping.

Adrian Martin was thrown into command shortly before his twenty-first birthday when his Canadian commanding officer was able to catch a plane to Canada for overdue leave. Martin continued to take ML 216 to sea to meet operational requirements and his appointment in command was confirmed. The ML continued sweeping the East Coast convoy routes, a largely routine but still dangerous business, and often in unpleasant conditions. The boat was equipped with a large, heavy bucket



Adrian Martin

shaped apparatus with a hammer inside which was intended to set off the acoustic mines and two cables which would be towed astern, with a high voltage current from a generator onboard emitting a charge between the cables to deal with the magnetic mines. Deploying this gear from a wet, rolling deck called for seamanship and good teamwork.

In September 1944 ML 216 was ordered to the approaches of Ostend (which was in German hands) to sweep the approach channel. Martin raised the possibility of contact mines with his superiors but was informed that the intelligence staffs had discounted this.

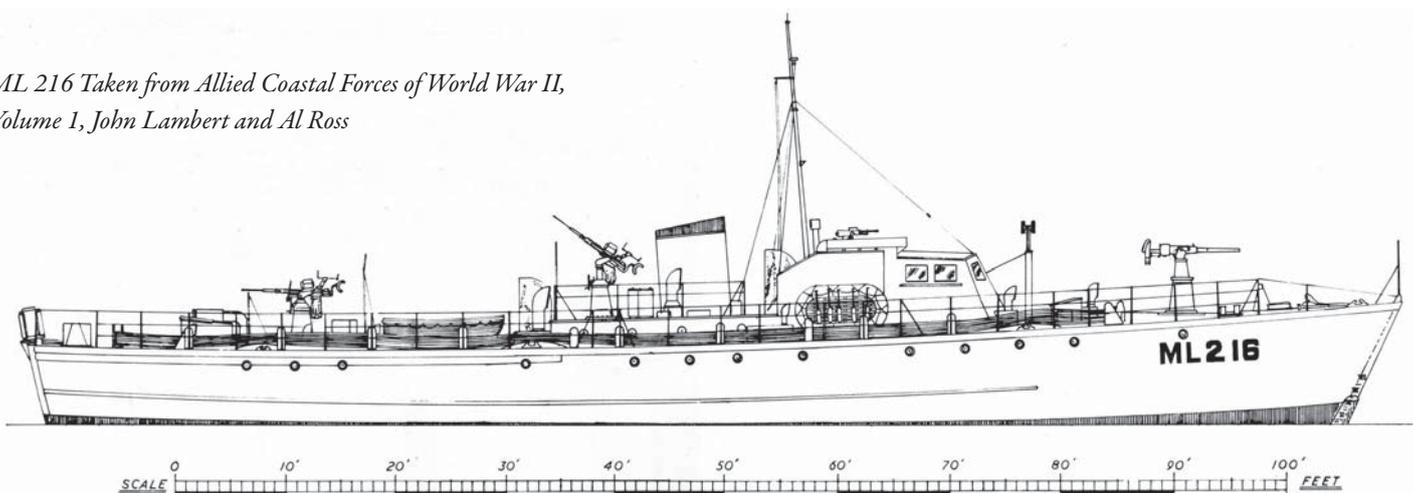
Turning now to the powerful yet unemotional account written by Martin himself:

“...early on the morning of September 19th my ship hit a contact mine. We lost all the forecastle, part of the bridge and a lot of the hull under the bridge. The engine room was almost intact but the forward bulkhead was leaking. By a stroke of luck, I found a horn of the mine on the after Oerlikon gun platform which I put in my pocket (See note below). Of the seven water-tight compartments in the ship, there were only three left which were watertight. Most of the crew left the ship in a lifeboat and I understood that they reached the shore of Belgium – there was no one killed but some of the crew were injured, I remained onboard with four volunteers.

One ship which was taking part in the operation came to take us in tow but got the tow rope round one of its propellers and had to retreat to UK at slow speed. Eventually a Fleet Sweeper (HMS Postillion) was sent to find us but by then we had drifted into a British-laid minefield. The fleet sweeper captain didn't want to risk his ship and crew by going into a minefield to tow us out so he stayed outside this minefield. There was still a risk from German aircraft and E-Boats at this stage. However, after 9 days we eventually drifted out of the minefield and were taken in tow. Unfortunately, the fleet sweeper captain was trying to tow us too fast and the wardroom flooded. We had to be towed stern first because we had no bow. The ship eventually rolled over and sank not far from Margate. We managed to get onto the fleet sweeper and were taken to Harwich.”

With about one third of the ship destroyed it does seem extraordinary that no one was killed outright but the reason is probably that the ship was sweeping at the time and most of the crew were down aft. This account also says much for the design and quality of the boat-building (216 was built by Lady Bee Ltd at Shoreham). It is remarkable she stayed afloat for as long as she did. The tension and strain during the 9 days after

*ML 216 Taken from Allied Coastal Forces of World War II,
Volume 1, John Lambert and Al Ross*



mining drifting and helpless in minefields with the added possibility of attack from air or sea can only be imagined.

(Note: In his interview later with Captain Minesweeping Martin was able to produce the horn as irrefutable evidence of contact mines in the channel)

Adrian Martin was appointed to command another ML, ML 493, for operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. He was initially

based in Ancona on the north east coast of Italy. From here he conducted many important minesweeping deployments, as far north as Venice and along the coasts of Yugoslavia (The Germans had left plenty of mines behind them as they retreated). Space precludes recounting his further wartime experiences but Adrian Martin ended his account on a wry note of humour, "I never kept a personal record of how many mines I disposed of in three and a half years.....However, I do know my ship disposed of one mine off Ostend in a very dramatic manner!"



ML216 – Painting by Commander Eric Tuffnell, RN

FLAG 4



MTB 315, an ELCO Boat, transferred under lend lease at Casteloriso. COURTESY: Minor War Vessels in Focus by Lt Cdr Ben Warlow, RN

Flag 4 was the executive single flag hoist for “Attack with Torpedoes”. It was also the title of Dudley Pope’s book which vividly recounts the Coastal Forces war in the Mediterranean and which has provided many of the details for this short article. Tacticians, historians and veterans will never agree which was the “perfect” torpedo attack. In the 5 years of war across the Mediterranean theatre, there were many from which to chose. Interestingly, a comparison of the totals of torpedoes fired by Coastal Forces against the Submarine Service shows 27% hits for the former, against 22% for the latter.

I choose a particular engagement of Cape Zebib on the night of 31 March/1 April 1943, not only because it was, by any measure, very successful but also because the lead-up was clearly most unsuccessful – only half of the original force of 4 MTBs took part and the conditions at the time were appalling for MTB operations. In early 1943, MTBs of the 10th Flotilla, under the command of Lieutenant Denis Jermain, were based at the port of Bone (now known as Annaba), on the north eastern corner of Algeria. From the end of 1942 Allied forces were being supported with essential supplies coming into Bone. The port was crucial in the invasion of Tunisia and the eventual defeat of the Axis forces in Africa. An enemy convoy was reported off Cape Zebib, the headland at the northernmost point of Tunisia, bound for Bizerta. Four MTBs, 316 (with

Jermain as Senior Officer), 265, 266 and 315 were sent to intercept. (All were lend-lease 70-foot or 77-foot ELCO torpedo boats which had been shipped across from America via the Cape of Good Hope and Suez.)

The weather was extremely unpleasant, a 20-plus knot wind, heavy swell and much haze. One of the MTBs, 265, reported a man overboard, was detached to carry out a search and told not to attempt to re-join. An hour later Jermain’s boat, 316, developed engine problems and could not go on. There was too much sea running for Jermain to attempt a transfer. MTB 266, with Lieutenant Richard Smith RNVR as SO, and MTB 315 (Lieutenant Leonard Newall, RNZNVR) were ordered to continue.

At 2310 the two boats arrived north of Cape Zebid and cut engines to wait and listen. Forty unpleasant minutes of severe rolling in the swell followed before the convoy, consisting of three merchant ships, two destroyers and several E-Boats was spotted. The MTBs were not seen until the torpedo attack. It was the perfect ambush. 266 got in close and fired both torpedoes at the second merchant ship. Both hit and the ship sank very rapidly. 315 got in very close also to the next ship and fired both her torpedoes and these too hit. Smith in 266 spotted a destroyer on the starboard quarter of the convoy and, having no torpedoes left, decided to attempt a depth-charge attack. However, the MTB was severely outgunned and had

to withdraw. Newall in 315 also came under sustained fire. Both MTBs had to make a run for it. Two merchant ships carrying vital supplies and munitions for the Africa Corps had been sunk. However, the winds increased to full gale and both MTBs had a long battle to get back. In fact, 315 had broken its back and was taking in water. They could make no more than 8 knots. Eventually they reached the port of Tabarka, 80 miles east of Bone.

This action demonstrated the advantages foul weather and the effectiveness of a good ambush, letting the advance escorts pass and then getting in very close to the main targets. The two commanding officers, Richard Smith and Leonard Newall, were awarded Distinguished Service Crosses and there was a total of four Distinguished Service Medals and several Mention-in-Despatches.

THE 4.5-INCH, 8 CWT, MARK I GUN

During the latter years of the Second World War it was decided that a heavier shell was needed to deal more effectively with German E-Boats, R-Boats and armed trawlers and, indeed, sampans and junks in the Far East. It was decided that the Fairmile Ds, the 'Dog Boats', and those Fairmile Bs earmarked to deploy to the Far East, needed a significantly heavier punch than the standard 6-pounder gun. After a series of live fire trials to compare the 4.5-inch gun with a 95mm tank howitzer variant, the former was chosen.

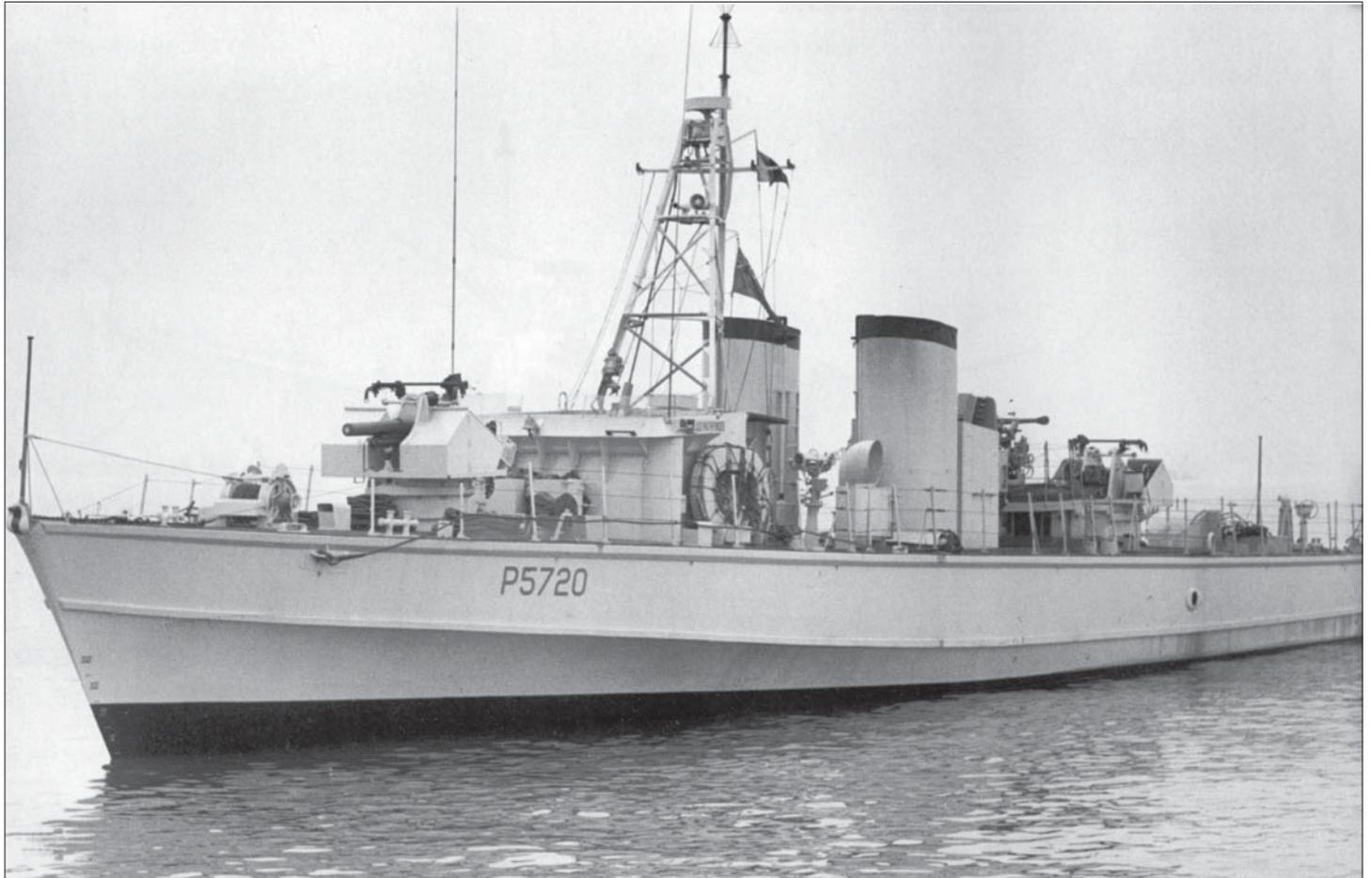
This gun had an interesting, if largely uneventful history, and was, by a considerable margin, the largest calibre weapon to be fitted to any Coastal Forces vessels. Of course, destroyers, frigates and, indeed, aircraft carriers all carried various variants

of the 4.5-inch gun – admittedly guns with longer barrels, greater ranges and much more sophisticated fire control. But the Coastal Forces short barrel, 8 CWT weapon was very different.

The light 4.5-inch, low velocity, semi-automatic gun had a relatively short range of 3000 yards (about half the range the Navy wanted) and a simple aiming sight; it was not an accurate weapon but could deliver a 15 lb shell (two and half times more explosive than the 6 pounder). The gun incorporated a power-operated mounting and the rate of fire could reach 15 rounds a minute. Vibration was an inherent problem; after a few rounds there was risk of serious collateral damage, including cracks in hull structure. It seems that most of the boats fitted with this gun could carry only some 10-12 rounds.



Fairmile "D" P5035 (ex-MTB 793) fitted out as a gunboat, with 4.5-inch guns fore and aft and no torpedo tubes fitted, c.1949



HMS Bold Pathfinder was fitted with 4.5-inch guns fore and aft; one wonders how much ammunition could be stored and where and how the officer-of-the-watch could see directly ahead. COURTESY: Minor War Vessels in Focus by Lt Cdr Ben Warlow, RN

In the event, the 4.5-inch gun did not enter service until 1946, after the war. 98 guns were eventually delivered to the Navy, although not all were fitted. The first boats to have the gun were MTBs 509 and 528. After trials the gun was then progressively fitted into some of the 'Dog' Boats (in the gunboat

configuration) and three Camper and Nicholson 1943 Class boats. Later when MTBs and MGBs all became FPBs (Fast Patrol Boats), some Vosper 73 foot boats and later Gay and Dark Classes (in the gunboat role) were also fitted with the gun. HMS Bold Pathfinder had two.

IN MEMORIAM

WE SAY FAREWELL TO:

John (Jack) Bell
Walter Coals
William Handley
Cyril Mabin
Arthur K Pickford

CFVA 205
CFVA 1962
CFVA 2180
CFVA 2868
CFVA 2017

Alfred David Ripley
Albert Scott
John (Jack) Sowerby
John White MBE

CFVA 1803
CFVA 2549
CFVA 1261

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

!!!STOP PRESS!!!

The re-dedication of the Memorial to Coastal Forces underlined the long and deep relationship between Hornet and the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust. A number of trustees suggested that the Trust could appoint an Honorary Trustee from JSSC Hornet. The chairman put this to the Commodore of Hornet. He responded enthusiastically and put forward Chief Petty Officer Aurora Allen, who is the serving Royal Navy representative on the Hornet Committee.

Aurora is a very keen volunteer for this role. She has extensive experience of Committee and Trust work, has served at sea in a number of ships and in Afghanistan and is an active yachtswoman with a good understanding of small ships and their challenges. She is keen to be involved with us in such events as the Remembrance Sunday.

WE ARE DELIGHTED TO WELCOME HER TO THE TRUST



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