



NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 6, MAY 2010



MTB 1939 White 72ft

It is good to be able to report growing support for this newsletter and to record the thanks of the Trustees for your donations. Please keep them coming! As a matter of interest, supporters may wish to know that, in addition to a healthy distribution within the UK, copies of this Newsletter are also read by supporters in Australia, Bermuda, Canada, Croatia, France, Hong Kong, Holland, Norway, South Africa, Spain and the USA.

The section entitled SUPPORTERS' CORNER has been enlarged to include FEEDBACK. So it will now report some interesting re-actions and messages sent in as a result of previous articles. There have been some queries as to the year given for the Class Identification pictures featured on the front page in each Issue. In fact, the date shown is the year in which that class was *ordered* by the Admiralty, so of course that will usually be earlier than the time when the boats first appeared at sea.



MTB 1938 Vosper 70ft



MTB 1938 Thornycroft 72ft



MTB 1939 Vosper 71ft (17ft beam)

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CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

This Newsletter gives me the opportunity to thank our Coastal Forces veterans who continue to give their unstinted support to all our activities and in doing so bring our various events alive. I should also like to thank the trustees of the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust, all of whom work hard in many different ways. We depend completely upon this support. You will see several reports on the various activities and achievements in this Newsletter. However,

I must reassure you that we continue to give considerable attention to our principle objective, that of finding a permanent home and exhibition site. Several opportunities have presented themselves to the Trust over the years, and although each has always been considered carefully, our focus currently remains on the Royal Naval Museum, to which we feel we can contribute so much. I hope that you enjoy this Newsletter.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Since the last Newsletter our commemorative events at *Hornet*, and at Newhaven have taken place and I would like to thank all those who supported these occasions. We have two further commemorative events planned for Dover and Falmouth and you will find information about these in this Newsletter. It is also heartening to see the continuing strong support for the Remembrance Service at *Hornet*. This is your event and it is your presence, with family and friends, which allows this very special occasion to prosper.

In the last Newsletter I said a little about the initiative which was underway for Portsmouth Historic Dockyard to acquire the fully restored MGB 81. The negotiations were sensitive at

the time but have since reached a successful conclusion. MGB 81 is now available for display to the public at Portsmouth (along with HSL 102), and we have a more detailed report about this in the Newsletter. In addition, HDML 1387 (*Medusa*), well known to many of you, has completed her long restoration and will soon be available again to the public, looking absolutely splendid. Lastly, readers will be pleased to hear that the Coastal Forces DVD Documentary is finally coming to a conclusion and should be available by the middle of the year. In conclusion I would like to thank you all for the support that you give me throughout the year.

PLAQUE PROGRAMME



Sir Derrick unveils Hornet Plaque

GOSPORT

A plaque commemorating Coastal Forces at HMS *Hornet*, during World War II and up to the decommissioning in 1957, was unveiled by our Chairman, Sir Derrick Holden-Brown, immediately following the Remembrance Service on 8th November. The plaque was placed on the nearest building adjacent to the Coastal Forces Memorial and a short service of commemoration was led by The Reverend Sam Williams, who had also conducted the Remembrance Service. The events were supported by a large gathering of veterans and their families, and also benefitted from the presence of officers from the Allied and Commonwealth Navies and a contingent from HMS *Sultan*. Many commented on how impressed they were with this occasion and how pleased they were to be involved. Sir Derrick spoke of the importance of HMS *Hornet* as a principal Coastal Forces base and the fact that it was the last of the World War II bases to be decommissioned. The weather was extremely kind, as it has been for all of these commemorative events.



Hornet plaque

NEWHAVEN

The unveiling of the plaque commemorating HMS *Aggressive* at Newhaven took place on Saturday 28th November with strong support. Due to the difficulties of gaining public access to the original site of *Aggressive*, now occupied by the commercial docks, the plaque was placed at an excellent location, high in Newhaven Fort, overlooking the original site of the naval base. The unveiling was conducted by Rear Admiral Michael Stacey CB, a post war Coastal Forces veteran and he gave a splendid address. In addition to many veterans and their families the event was attended by Councillor Clara Butler, the Mayor of Newhaven, who welcomed all those attending, and The Rt. Hon. The Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, President of the Trust, who also spoke. The Reverend



*Capt Robotham Lord Strathcona Admiral Stacey Rev Berridge
Newhaven Mayor*

FUTURE EVENTS

Dover – Planned for Saturday 10 July commencing at 1100, the plaque will be placed on the Lord Warden House (Southern House), which was formally the Lord Warden Hotel used as the Coastal Forces (HMS *Wasp*) accommodation centre during the war. This is located in Lord Warden Square, CT17 9EQ, close to the Dover Harbour Board entrance to the Cruise Terminal. It is hoped that Admiral Lord Boyce will unveil the plaque and give the Address.

Falmouth – Planning is underway for a commemorative event at Falmouth (HMS *Forte IV*), for Saturday 19 June at 1100, in Events Square, which is adjacent to the Maritime Museum. *This date is still subject to confirmation.*

Please advise the Director (07740 243963) if you intend to come to either event.



Standards at Newhaven

Grahame Berridge officiated and Lieutenant Charlie Nunn guided the formalities of the event, as he has done on many other occasions. We were extremely pleased to have strong support from the British Legion and Royal Naval Association Standard Bearers. However, the event was made particularly special by the involvement of Royal Marine Cadet Heidi Watkins, the Royal British Legion official Trumpeter, who made a splendid contribution to this service.

PHOTOS COURTESY SUSSEX EXPRESS

SUPPORTERS' CORNER & FEEDBACK



A converted WWI ML

WORLD WAR ONE ML

In Issue 4 (July 2009) the series of Class Identification pictures began. The very first one featured an early ML. Don Barltrop has written to say that his father bought one of these boats in 1919/20 and fitted her out as a houseboat. Berthed at Walton-on-the-Naze, the family used her "for many happy holidays" right up until 1972. What a compliment to the builders, The Electric Launch Company of the USA!

BRACKLESHAM BAY REUNION

In the July 2009 issue of the newsletter I reported on the successful May Reunion at Bracklesham Bay and said it would be our final reunion because the camp could only do it for a minimum number of attendees. But I am now pleased to say that once again the Southern Branch *will* be hosting one again this year.

George Chandler and I have had a meeting at the camp and we have arranged to share the reunion with the HMS *Newfoundland* Association, who are in the same situation as us regarding numbers. The dates are FRIDAY 28th MAY to MONDAY 31st MAY 2010.

Southdowns will be sending booking forms to all members who attended last year, but if you do not receive one please contact me on **01243 585716** and I will send you one direct. I do hope that many of you will be able to make it because this may well *have* to be the last one.

With regards to all.

Reg Ellis (*Southern Branch Secretary*)

"SPUD" LYLE

After his son (Andrew) asked in the last newsletter for any old shipmates who had served with his father to contact him, he has reported the response:

Thank you so much, it has borne fruit and given me a tremendous insight into the lives of those who served in coastal forces, both at sea and ashore...! No less than 8 people

have been in touch, all in their 80s or 90s and their memories have been most heart-warming. My father, who was older than most of his fellow COs, apparently; "enjoyed a drink" (to say the least), was "aggressive at sea", "not one to miss an opportunity for a party", "didn't suffer fools gladly", "was a wonderful man". Clearly he was well and kindly remembered, and it has been a great revelation to me to be exposed to the infectious enthusiasm of those concerned with MTB 611 and the 51st Flotilla. I have also been introduced to several books in which my father features. In particular may I thank Leading Stoker Stan Minnette, whom I have visited twice in Looe, and hope to see again shortly. He is 86, and served in 611.

NORMAN HINE DSM

At the end of the article about Lt Cdr Mike Marshall in Issue 5 (November 2009) there was a reference to two survivors from MTB 2002. Here, largely in his own words, is an account of the incredible experience of one of them, the late Able Seaman Norman Hine DSM, who had served in this boat during her previous clandestine trips to the French coast.



AB Norman Hine DSM

"On 12 May 1945 (7 days after war's end) we sailed for Sweden with merchant seamen passengers destined for British ships which had been interned in Sweden. At 0145 the next morning we struck a floating mine and the boat flew to bits. I found myself in the water and as I could not swim I struggled to a piece of the stern still afloat. Tommy Sheehan and a stoker called Bristow were there but Tommy pushed us off as the stern was sinking. Eventually I got to a float net where the others were. I always used to wear a one-piece sailing suit filled with kapok and that is what kept me afloat and saved my life. Thirty men had disappeared and we found some human remains but no survivors. It was soon daylight and in the net we found some ring-pull cans of water. It wasn't nice so we only took a few sips. The day was sunny but the water freezing and Bristow took to sipping sea water until he went berserk. We couldn't decide what to do but next day we found he had died so we let him float away. We drifted all day, saw some of our planes we thought were looking for us but eventually they went away. That night it got rough and the water was washed away and I slipped into unconsciousness. But I awoke and couldn't make out where I was. It was a small cabin where I could feel the gentle roll of the sea, so I knew it wasn't the next world. A lady came and said they had rescued us. She was the captain's wife of

a Norwegian coaster. We were landed at Kristiansand and they hid us in the basement of a hospital as there were still Germans around. They surrounded us with light bulbs and over two weeks thawed us out. Then the SAS came and sent messages home and gave us cigarettes and other comforts. We were both black from the waist down and the doctor said we were bound to lose our toes. In fact Tom suffered from gangrene and we were eventually flown home where we finished up in Derbyshire Royal Infirmary, and Tom lost his feet and my stumps were trimmed. I was moved around various hospitals but managed to get married to my childhood sweetheart Cynthia. Later I was awarded the DSM for my services; for gallantry, skill, and undaunted devotion to duty, shown in many hazardous operations.”

CHARLES DENNIS SCUTT

Prompted by the article about the final Veterans Visit to Vis in NL 4 (July 2009), he wrote to us:

Now living in Australia, Charles Scutt, who was Cox'n of MTB 243 running out of Komiza in 1943, recalls an unusual incident when on a long night operation, probably to deliver spies or saboteurs to a point among the islands. “When nearing our destination our engines broke down so we concealed ourselves between a sunken schooner and the jetty whilst the mechanic effected repairs. Our security was shaken by local inhabitants warning us of the imminent approach of a liner whose selected course was through the narrow channel between us and the land the other side. This now towering vessel appeared, completely white with large Red Cross symbols

predominantly displayed; one could almost touch it as it slid past. With our limited armament and concern for violation of International Law, we had to let it pass unhindered. But rumour from the locals had it that, in fact, the ship was being used as a troop carrier”.

PETER DeLOOS

Following the article on page 10 in Issue 4 (July 2009) Brian Pink wrote:

Peter DeLoos is in the top rank (far right) of your photo. I had the great pleasure of interviewing him some time ago. He was serving in the RNN cruiser Tromp in 1940, the ship chosen to evacuate the Dutch princesses to Canada. At 40 he was the oldest on board and they called him grandpa! Just after his return his country was invaded and he escaped in a small boat to Great Yarmouth, where he and his comrades were promptly arrested for wearing uniforms with “Krieg Marine” on their cap tallies! He then served in MGB 46 operating out of Fowey, Dover and Ramsgate with the 3rd Flotilla. He won a DSM for his distinguished service in bringing the boat safely home after she was extensively damaged in an action on 14/15 June 1942. Enemy shells hit the engine room, killing the ‘Chief’, rupturing fuel tanks and badly damaging all three engines. Peter got one working and nursed it all the way back home in spite of the engine room being full of fumes and awash with fuel. He had to be put on a milk diet for days to aid his recovery.



Peter DeLoos

BOATS ROUNDUP

MGB 81

Our last Newsletter reported that negotiations for the purchase of MGB 81 were progressing well but were still at a sensitive stage. We can now report that the purchase has been completed with funding principally from the National Heritage Memorial Fund but with a substantial contribution from our Trust. The boat is now owned by the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust and it is currently on display at Gunwharf Quays, Portsmouth. It will remain afloat and will appear at maritime events where appropriate. The boat does not currently have all its upper-deck fittings and weapons, so action is in hand to rectify this situation. Replicas of the principle weapons are being produced by MOD apprentices at QinetiQ, Boscombe Down. The Coastal Forces Heritage Trust supported the activity leading up to the purchase and the Trust is assisting in its management and the fitting-out of the weapons.



MTB 81 arrives at Portsmouth



Ready on the slip



She's afloat

HDML 1387 (*Medusa*)

This Harbour Defence Motor Launch, known as HMS *Medusa* in her post-war service, was re-launched on 1st March at Hythe where she had undertaken her refit. The funding for this extensive restoration came from a grant of over £950,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, plus additional matching funding raised by the team who submitted the lottery bid and who then managed the work. This was led by Alan Watson, a previous CFHT Trustee, and ably supported by Mike Boyce, the long standing previous owner of *Medusa*. Considerable input was provided by the strong band of supporters in the Medusa Trust. Only a small degree of additional fitting-out is still required and after that this historic World War II Coastal Forces craft should be operational around the South Coast this summer.

MTB 102

The boat will have her usual busy year, most ably led by Richard Basey, who has now been appointed Vice Commodore of the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships (ADLS). It is in this capacity that MTB 102 will lead the ADLS fast Flotilla across the Channel for the 70th Anniversary of the Dunkirk evacuation, from 27 to 31 May. MTB 102 will be on the Thames in September for a Dunkirk veterans' cruise (*details available from Richard on 01603 782068*). The MTB 102 Trust is now also successfully running Newsoms Boatyard on Oulton Broad.

NOTICE BOARD

CFOA DINNER

As is the normal practice, this will take place at Hornet on the Saturday evening 13 November 2010, the day before Remembrance Sunday. Anyone wishing to attend, and who has not already been contacted by John Deeker, please contact him on **01747 863372** or at **john@painsfireworks.co.uk**

CFOA TIE

There have been a number of enquiries concerning the flags on the tie which can now be worn by all supporters of the CFHT. Just to set the record straight, the flag on the left (white flag with blue centre) was Flag Victor, which was the collective callsign for MTBs. The one on the right was Flag Sugar (green and white diagonal stripes), the collective callsign for MGBs. These signals were discontinued in 1948, when the new RN Signal Books were introduced and the Navy followed the American practice of using the flags from the International Code.



QUICK QUIZ

The year 2010 is an appropriate one in which to feature this photograph, and of course it is very unusual to see HM Ships under way at sea with the Union Jack flying. Does anyone know what the occasion was, when this shot was taken?



MAKING HISTORY

THE BALL BEARING RUN

In the early days of WW2 it became apparent that vitally important aircraft and vehicle manufacture would be severely curtailed without the availability of certain stainless steel products, including ball bearings, rollers and finely-machined tubes. Enemy bombing and poor pre-war planning meant that the cupboard was almost bare in Britain and the only supply source remaining was in Sweden, one of the few places in the world where these specialist products were available. As a neutral country, Sweden was happy to trade, equally, with anyone who would pay and could collect. Germany, as keen for these products as she was to deny them to Britain, was not only Sweden's neighbour but also the enemy of Britain. So she had two reasons for making the British trade wither and die. What's more, having occupied both Norway and Denmark, she had the means of making the Skagerrak impassable and trading by air uncomfortable.

Enter one George Binney. A previous organizer of University expeditions to the Arctic, former employee of the Hudson's Bay Company now with United Steel, and a man of outstanding experience of Scandinavian trading conditions. With support from the highest levels, and posted to the legation in Stockholm, Binney successfully master-minded (and personally led) Operation Rubble, the breakout of five interned Norwegian merchant vessels loaded with no less than 25,000 tons of vital steel supplies, in January 1941. They had beaten the minefields, the German Navy and air attacks. There was a knighthood for Binney, but subsequent breakouts in 1942 did not meet with such success, although the demand for these supplies were just as great at this stage of the war, if not greater.

And so the scene was set for a new plan to be developed. Left over from the previous efforts there were two ships marooned in Sweden fully loaded with the much needed goods, and so Sir George suggested the idea of using suitably converted MGBs to bring this precious cargo home. They would be faster and more difficult to intercept, and hence safer, than merchant ships. They could also carry many times the cargo still being brought home by air. The Admiralty provided five Camper & Nicholsons 117ft MGBs, which were converted by changing the crew and officers' accommodation into a forward and after hold, and building a lightweight deckhouse and bridge upon the upper deck. These boats were powered by three diesel engines (less vulnerable than petrol) and could cruise at over 20 knots after conversion, with a cargo capacity of around 40 tons each. Three boats were completed in this layout by C&N and the others converted by Amos and Smith, at Hull. For armament they carried twin Oerlikons, fore and aft, twin Vickers .303in machine guns on either side of the bridge, and a quadruple Vickers abaft the bridge. It was felt the best chance of success lay in using the Red



ABOVE *Sir George Binney*



LEFT *Ball Bearing Run*

Ensign with Merchant Navy crews, which also had the benefit of being less embarrassing to Sweden if things went awry.

The natural source for recruiting suitable crews lay with the Ellerman's Shipping Company. Their Wilson Line was based at Hull, and thus familiar with North Sea conditions. Volunteers were called for, involving "a service entailing special risks". 70% of those selected were from Hull, many not more than twenty years old, and picked for their adaptability as much as for their professional skill. Conditions in the deckhouse would be exceptionally cramped (36ft by 15ft for 18-20 men) and better suited to young, fit men. In charge were first mates holding a master's ticket and the various specialists of engineers, wireless operators etc had to be very carefully chosen. Each boat carried a 'Chief Officer' who was in fact an SOE approved liaison officer whose experience could, and in the event did, help to mould each crew into an efficient team for such a special enterprise.

And special it certainly was. Alerted by the previous breakout, the Germans would be on the lookout for any subsequent effort to get more of these precious goods to Britain. The boats would be running the gauntlet of the standing Skagerrak patrols outside Swedish waters, there were



Unloading at Lysekil

radar stations on both sides of the gap, there were extensive minefields, the enemy had command of the air for most of the 500 miles involved, and they had Fleet destroyers based both in Denmark and Norway. On arrival in Sweden the converted MGBs would be under the constant eye of enemy agents and diplomats who would report their every move. And with relatively frail craft heavily loaded on the home run, in winter, in the North Sea, there were bound to be major mechanical problems to be overcome, sometimes in horrendous conditions. And finally there were large fishing fleets on both sides to be circumvented. Perhaps their only advantages were their speed, their shallow draught and the fact that the Swedes, at this stage of the war, could be expected to lean more towards the Allies than the Axis. When weather and operational conditions allowed they could also expect friendly air cover to escort them home from the middle of the North Sea.

The plan was for the boats to be at the Skagerrack as darkness fell, so that they would reach neutral Swedish waters after a night run, berth at Lysekil as a normal merchant ship would, load their precious cargo, and then pick their return sailing times according to the desired weather conditions and to ensure a night-time return through the danger area. Clearly these conditions were only available during the longer winter nights and depended heavily upon the right weather conditions, especially with poor visibility. After an intensive training period which included a round Britain voyage via the Caledonian Canal and some very harsh weather, the coasters, now named *Hopewell*, *Nonsuch*, *Gay Viking*, *Gay Corsair* and *Master Standfast*, were ready to open the operation by autumn 1943. Binney (granted the rank of Commander RNVR to protect him in the event of capture) was appointed Commodore, a small HQ was set up in Hull, and naval jurisdiction was exercised by CinC Nore, with a link to Naval Intelligence. Code named Operation Bridford, the objective set by the Ministry of Supply was to bring home 400 tons of the specified goods.

On 26 October the flotilla, with Binney in *Nonsuch*, sailed for its first voyage. But within 24 hours they decided to abort after the flotilla had been reduced to only two boats, due to engine problems in the others, and they had already been discovered and attacked from the air. In the lead, Binney felt the risks emanating from their speed reduction did not justify trying to get only two boats through from an original group of five. So he turned for home. What he could not know was that the first boat to have problems, *Gay Viking*, had lost contact with the others early on, but considered it her duty to continue. She made it to Sweden, received a tremendous welcome from the local populace at Lysekil, loaded her cargo successfully, and was safely back in Hull on the morning of 31 October.

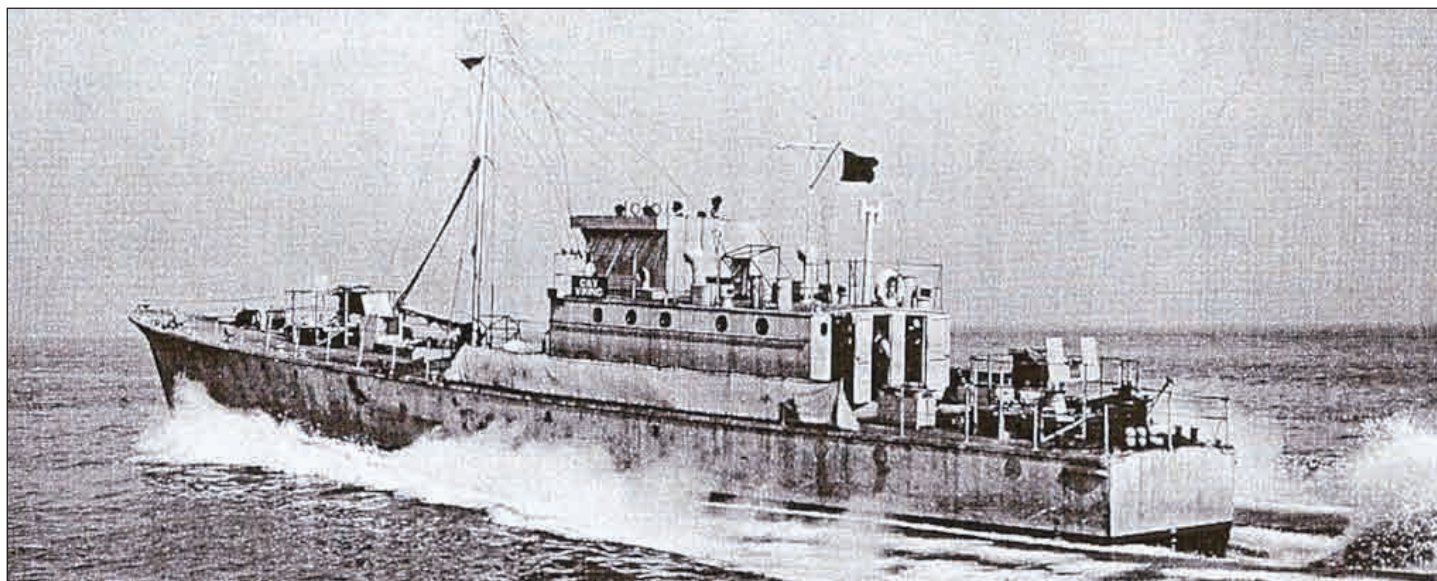
With weather conditions ideal, Binney sailed that same evening with the three serviceable boats left available. But again engine trouble reduced the sortie to two, *Hopewell* and *Master Standfast*, and again luck ran against them. When through the Skagerrack and approaching the Swedish coast they had to stop to establish their exact position and in doing so they got separated. *Master Standfast* was sighted by the enemy, challenged and fired upon by a patrol vessel. Caught like a rat in a trap and having sustained several casualties, she was boarded, the crew became prisoners of war and the boat was towed into Frederikshavn. Sadly, the Master died later of his wounds. Meanwhile *Hopewell* had continued her voyage and arrived safely in Sweden. After a long wait for the weather, and an aborted attempt in mid-November, she eventually reached home on 1 December, having endured very rough conditions, two engine breakdowns, and with only 120 gallons of fuel remaining.

Meanwhile, under the command of Binney's number two Brian Reynolds, the other three boats had sailed on 26 November but were forced to turn back by exceptionally poor weather causing excessive rolling. This could not only result in multiple injuries on board, but would also make aerial attack impossible to counter. Worse, a further attempt in fog resulted in two groundings which caused more delays. But *Gay Corsair* got away for a solo trip and successfully reached Lysekil before the weather closed in again. In the event she eventually got home on Christmas Day, and so another 40 tons were chalked up. As she arrived, Binney was sailing again with *Hopewell* and *Gay Viking* and after a voyage plagued once more with mechanical defects,

they reached Lysekil on 28 December. He returned with *Gay Viking* on 18 January after an extremely lucky break had kept them clear of a German destroyer force based at Kristiansand.



Brian Reynolds



Gay Viking on trials

And so the blockade-busting runs continued, with every chance being taken when conditions were right, and with every operational boat available at that time; sometimes three, often two, but frequently only one. Experience gained by now meant the Masters were getting better at keeping clear of suspicious echoes on the radar, they could gauge more closely their speeds in order to time their run across the danger areas, and their improving relationships with Swedish pilots and port authorities were proving of benefit within those 'neutral' waters. The final run that winter in March 1944 was successfully completed by *Gay Corsair* and *Gay Viking*, in spite of yet more problems with gear boxes and crankshafts leading to dangerous reductions in their cruising speed.

Nevertheless, by the end of that 'season' Operation Bridford had shifted a total of 347 tons as against the air bridge sum of 88 tons. In the words of the then Minister of Supply; "This operation gives us a substantial part of the equipment for a new ball-bearing factory and should enable us to maintain our own supply of ball-bearings. There is no need for me to exaggerate the importance of this." Binney was awarded the DSO, the Masters well deserved OBEs and the (so-called) Chief Officers MBEs.

There was however to be a sequel to Bridford. A new operation (Moonshine) was set up to deliver arms and munitions for the resistance in Denmark, which was to use the collection of more steel items from Sweden as a cover for sending the MGBs across. Although involved in the planning, Binney had suffered a heart attack, so the Commodore's role went to Brian Reynolds. *Hopewell*, *Nonsuch* and *Gay Viking* were allocated, and most of the original officers and crews recalled. But the weather denied any opportunity to sail until late in January 1945.

The outward voyage went without a hitch and their clandestine cargo was discharged at Lysekil. However, although

enemy activity was by now vastly reduced, they still had the extreme cold and weather with which to contend, plus of course the many floating mines and fishing vessels to avoid. After routine maintenance and loading for the return run, they set off in company on 5 February. *Nonsuch* soon became separated as the group altered course to elude some fishermen. As soon as she realized she was on her own, and in accordance with her orders, she carried on alone to reach Hull next morning.

Meanwhile, in the leading *Hopewell* they had been having problems with their gyro compass, log and echo sounder. With the magnetic compass unreliable due to her cargo, she called *Gay Viking* through by lamp to take over the lead. In close formation on a dark moonless night with a following sea causing both boats to yaw wildly, this was bound to be a tricky manoeuvre, and their luck ran out. In the resulting collision *Gay Viking* was severely damaged and in danger of sinking within minutes. The Master ordered his crew into the rubber dinghies, set the scuttling charges, and was very lucky to get away from his ship. Amazingly, all were rescued by the *Hopewell* who, despite her extra load and a stove in bow, managed to return safely to Sweden and, in due course, to Hull with a full load of steel.

And so ended the extraordinary chapter of running the blockade by these little ships of coastal forces, manned by their Merchant Navy crews. Bearing in mind the colossal odds against them, these men in their small, vulnerable craft had shown a quite exceptional level of resolution, skill, stamina and personal courage. That their efforts resulted in such success with so few casualties must be one of the wonders of coastal forces history, and a unique compliment to those who designed and built the vessels involved.

(The full story is told in Ralph Barker's 'The Blockade Busters'.)

SPECIAL FEATURES

FORCE NAVALES FRANCAISES LIBRES

Flowing perhaps mostly from the sad occasion when the Mediterranean Fleet 'took out' the French Fleet in North Africa in 1940, there was not much enthusiasm shown by either side when the Royal Navy heard that de Gaulle had called upon all free Frenchmen to take up arms against Germany. Nevertheless, a number of French vessels had got away from France, amongst them a flotilla of old but heavily armed VTBs. Clearly, they could not operate for long without the availability of spares, but their performance sufficiently impressed the RN that the Admiralty agreed to replace them with British built MLs. This flotilla was to form the 2nd division of the 20th ML Flotilla based at Portland, providing escorts, defensive patrols and air/sea rescue.

Subsequent to the loss of all the British boats in this flotilla at St Nazaire, the 20th was reformed with all-French crews. By August 1942 it was working so well that the MLs were returned to the RN in exchange for a flotilla of Vosper MTBs, which became the 23rd MTB Flotilla. After trials and work-up they arrived at Kingswear in February 1943, with an operating area stretching from Brest to Cherbourg, including the Channel Islands. The first SO was Capitaine de Corvette Meurville. He had three French-speaking RNVR liaison officers, plus RN telegraphists for the boats, and a healthy rapport grew up between them and their RN colleagues. Based alongside an old French sloop and living ashore either in their HQ building or in billets, they settled well in the River Dart. In operations they soon recorded a first success when sinking a 2000-ton merchantman, and later on in 1944 four boats off

Jersey achieved a further success resulting in special awards of the Ordre de l'Armée. These, a uniquely French decoration bestowed on the boat, were presented by de Gaulle himself, whose son Philippe was First Lt of one of them. During the invasion this flotilla guarded the western flank and later on were the first craft to enter Brest. In all operations they completed 451 patrols and earned one DSO, five DSCs and six DSMs.



de Gaulle in MTB 94

Meanwhile, several other groups of *chasseurs* which had arrived early in the war had assisted in the evacuation from Dunkirk, and then were initially based in Portsmouth, later moving to Cowes. Each was allocated a British liaison officer and telegraphist. Generally steel-hulled with a crew of 38, these 130 ton diesel boats carried five guns of up to 75mm calibre, plus depth charges and, latterly, RN-fitted Asdics. In the Solent, they not only earned the gratitude of the people of Cowes with their anti-aircraft prowess, but also provided the permanent seaborne defence patrol off St Helen's Fort as back-up to the boom defences and to deter possible midget submarine attacks. They also took part in the raids on Bruneval and Dieppe. Otherwise their duties involved general



Free French Chasseur

escort work in the Channel guarding convoys and occasionally escorting French submarines coming off patrol. Several boats were lost, one by having a bomb dropped by a lone aircraft right down her funnel. Two were off the beaches on D Day and *Chasseur 41* became the first French Navy ship to enter Cherbourg. The crews were so popular in Cowes that several crewmen married local girls, and two couples are believed to be still living there today.

RIGHT *MTB 94*



LIVES IN BRIEF

JOHN ARKELL DSC SUB LT RNVR

John joined the RNVR and after initial service was commissioned and undertook training at HMS *King Alfred* and then *St Christopher* for service in Coastal Forces. He served in MGB 607 as the Navigating Officer and was involved in activity in the Channel and North Sea seeking-out enemy convoys and engaging the enemy in several actions. MGB 607 with the 17th MGB Flotilla, was engaged in a fierce action off Smith's Knoll in the North Sea on the night of 24 October 1943. As a result of his involvement in this action John was awarded the DSC but he was severely injured, losing an eye and sustaining damage to his face. He became a patient of Professor Sir Archibald Macindoe, the famous plastic surgeon who developed new techniques from which many badly injured servicemen benefitted.

After the war John worked as a Solicitor with his firm of Burrige, Kent and Arkell where he remained until retirement, serving for a period as President of the Dorset Law. He was an ardent supporter of his old school, Sherborne and was a prominent and extremely active member of his home town of Shaftesbury. He had a long association with the local Royal British Legion, acting as their Poppy Organiser from 1945 to 1981, and serving in the roles of Honorary Secretary, Chairman and then President, eventually receiving the Legion's highest national award. He was Chairman of the Cricket Club, Secretary of the Gardening Association, a Borstal Institute visitor, founder member and President of the Rotary Club, President of Probus, Chairman of Scouts and, in 1997, made a Freeman of Shaftesbury. John had a very strong faith and was closely involved with the Church throughout his life. He was Church Warden at St Rumbold's, Cann, for several years, then of Holy Trinity, followed by St Peter's for twenty four years, all in or near his home town. On retiring he was made Church Warden Emeritus and was Registrar to three successive archdeacons of Dorset, for a period spanning thirty three years. John made an invaluable contribution in all his activities.

THE REVEREND GORDON RONALD PATTERSON MBE

Although he did not serve in Coastal Forces, Ron was the longstanding Honorary Chaplain to the CFVA Southern Branch, officiating at many CFVA Annual Reunions and at our Remembrance Services at *Hornet*. He had had an active wartime and post-war naval career. Ron joined the Royal Navy as a Boy Second-Class in 1932 and after serving in *Hood* and *Neptune*, he was commissioned as a Sub-Lieutenant in 1937. After the outbreak of war, he served in the Far East and then escorting both Atlantic and Russian convoys, from which he was lucky to survive. He served in *Nelson* as a Lieutenant on escort duties to Murmansk and then took part in Operation Torch, the Allied Landings in North Africa. After first commanding Landing Craft 831, he went on to become Staff Officer to the Beach Master on Juno Beach for the Normandy Landings. Later in 1944 he was sent to serve in the Pacific with the American 7th Fleet. It was in this theatre that he came into contact with newly released prisoners of war and became aware of the appalling conditions under which they had suffered. He resolved to devote the remainder of his life to the cause of peace, justice and reconciliation. After the war he remained in the Royal Navy for a further 13 years, commanding an Algerine Class Minesweeper and being appointed MBE in 1955. On leaving the navy he trained for the Clergy at Oxford in 1958 and after several junior appointments was appointed Vicar of St Barnabas, Swanmore where he was to remain for 23 years until retirement in 1985. All who lived in the Swanmore parish over those years will remember Ron's tireless work on their behalf, in many fields, and his Christian work extended way beyond his own parish. He will be sadly missed by many.

IN MEMORIAM

WE SAY FAREWELL TO:

(CFVA No)	
R. Alderman (3122)	R. McPherson
R. Allen (3306)	S.C. Micklewright (2098)
J.E. Atkinson (1057)	Rev R. Patterson MBE
J.N. Arkell DSC (2154)	(Hon CFVA Padre)
A. Banger DSM (1747)	C.R. Perrin VRD (155)
B. Bazely	D. Robinson (2937)
Hon P.G.M. Best	C. Shakeshaft (1823)
J. Broad (2759)	F. Spittle (1417)
S. Dobson (127)	P.F. Stacey (1311)
H. Godwin	D. Stratton (3414)
E.S. Good	J. Thompson (2108)
F. Hiscock (2583)	L.W. Trimmer
C.E. Lawton	B. West (1746)
T. Lesisz (Polish Navy)	E.K. Whitworth (450)
W.L. Marsh (2227)	

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

THE COASTAL FORCES HERITAGE TRUST

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Hampshire PO1 3NH

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Fax: 023 9272 7575

!!! STOP PRESS !!!

Lt A.A. Podd RNVR

Sophie Podd, whose father commanded MTB 469 of the 4th Flotilla based at Lowestoft in 1944, would like to hear from anyone who served with him.

She can be contacted at: 2 Church Court, Church Lane, Lymington, Hants SO41 3RA or on **01590 676616** or email poddy1@btinternet.com

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Objective 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 restoration and permanent display, for the public benefit, of Coastal Forces craft together with relevant artefacts, records and memorabilia relating to such craft, and those who served therein.