

“Medusa”

Christmas Newsletter 2017

The last newsletter ended with Medusa taking part in an exercise with the First Patrol Boat Squadron. The year has gone on to be our busiest and most successful yet, but I start this newsletter on the sad note that we lost two of our crew members this year.

Richard Garland joined us some four years ago but very soon after was diagnosed with cancer. He thought he had beaten it and even bought his own boat “Freedom”. Sadly, it was not to be and he passed away in April this year. His family donated his boat to Medusa to be sold for funds and we propose to put the money towards building a replica dinghy.

In July, we were shocked and saddened by the sudden death of Brian Holmes, our cox’n for the last 30 years and ship’s historian. Brian had remained single, with Mavis, his elder sister, as his only relative. Medusa and crew were very much his family and we duly scattered his ashes in the Solent with a bugler playing the last post. Brian’s legacy is the amazing research he did into Coastal Forces vessels.



*Brian and Alan on
Medusa*

Returning to our busy year, we joined in the Haslar Festival at our home berth and, apart from many visitors, made contact with Hampshire Marine Police on their vessel Commander and were asked if we would take part in some firearms team training later in the year.

After a brief visit to Hythe to support an event there, we crossed the Channel to Cherbourg and then on to Grandcamp Maisy. This is a tiny port at the Western end of Omaha beach approached by over a mile of shallows that dry at low tide and a very tight entrance.



The approach channel at low water



The Mayor of Grandcamp Maisy and civic guests on board

We were made very welcome with a civic reception on board and so many visitors wishing to see us that the jetty submerged. Saturday 3 June was their commemoration day and the French really entered into it; virtually everyone in the village was dressed in American uniform. We were told there would be an historic vehicles parade and asked if we would like to ride with it. To our surprise the parade was a convoy of some 80 vehicles including five Sherman tanks. We were spread around various vehicles and set off for Isigny some 15 miles away. At every village, crowds were cheering and waving; after feeling a bit self-conscious at first, we soon all joined in. At Isigny, after a few drinks, we had dinner with our French hosts. Just as the evening was going a bit flat, Chris Harman noticed a flip chart and pens and promptly started a game of hangman. We were delivered back to Medusa in a WW2 ambulance!



The convoy passing through a village en-route for Isigny



Part of the convoy of some 80 military vehicles

As always seems to happen around D day, the weather took a turn for the worse, so we headed back to Cherbourg and weathered a gale there before heading back to the UK with a fairly big swell off the port quarter. On our way back, we called in to Yarmouth and to Cowes.

Last year I reported that we had been inspected by the RN for Medusa to be used for Combined Cadet Force training. Medusa passed with flying colours and, as a result, we have done sea days for Charterhouse school and Gordon's school. The days both went well with the CCF cadets fascinated by Medusa and her story as well as gaining experience operating her. These days will feature more in our calendar in future and are great for youth engagement as well as the finances.

On July 22 we had our summer BBQ on Mary Mouse for crew, family and friends. To complement this we did harbour trips on Medusa for family members; these were a great success. The following day we went over to the pontoon alongside HMS Warrior to be open to the public in time with the launch of the Dunkirk film. The following week we took Medusa across to Gunwharf and, as a crew, went to see the film. We were, of course, looking out for Medusa and spotted her in several scenes but, principally, taking the two stars from the hospital ship out to the destroyer. We all remember how challenging it was to get alongside the destroyer at sea so it was pleasing that this bit made it into the film. The film is now out on DVD and Medusa appears in the extra bits on the DVD.

The following day we went to Whale Island for a visit from the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Philip Jones. The visit was a great success and it transpired that the Admiral was very interested in the history of D Day, particularly Omaha. The weather was not kind with wind of F7 plus, holding us onto the jetty and rain squalls. I spent the visit wondering how on earth we were going to get off the berth as there was a vessel tight behind us and a nasty piece of projecting steelwork limiting how far we could swing the bow in. In the end, there was no choice but to go for it and we manoeuvred away under the critical gaze of the First Sea Lord....no pressure!. Mercifully all went well.

The First Sea Lord asked if we would escort the new aircraft carrier in to Portsmouth but it was not to be. She came in ahead of the scheduled date to take advantage of some calm weather and there were no escorts apart from the MOD Police. We, however, had a ringside seat from our berth at Haslar and the sight of her entering harbour made the very early start worthwhile.



The First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Philip Jones aboard Medusa with Barry Ford and Alan

HMS Queen Elizabeth from the bridge of Medusa.



The last weekend in August saw us making passage to Shoreham to host a reception for the World Ship Society. Although we were berthed in the commercial port, there were good facilities and most mornings involved a leisurely breakfast at a café on the seafront close by.



Forward mess on Medusa, Ed and Laurie listening to one of Sam's stories.

In early September, we did an ashes scattering; our second so far this year, followed by an exercise with the Hampshire Tactical Firearms Unit. The exercise scenario was that we had been taken over by armed boarders who had control of the vessel. We substituted "take us to Cuba" for "take us to Cowes" to stay within our fuel range. To our rescue came two RIBs full of armed policemen all dressed in black. They were pretty quick in sorting out who was who and isolating the "baddies". The exercise was repeated a couple of weeks later but this time the instructors, playing the "baddies", opened fire as the RIBs came in and received very enthusiastic automatic fire in response. There were quite a few other vessels around who were accidental spectators to the exchange of fire and the sight of the instructors playing dead on the deck. The whole operation was a success and will be repeated in 2018. We now have a rather splendid Tactical Firearms crest to add to those in the wardroom.

After a night in the Hamble, we spent a day at sea for crew training with everyone swapping roles and each crew member having a go at manoeuvring the vessel for "man overboard"; even the engineers had a go! From this, we went up the Beaulieu River to Bucklers Hard, where, as always, we were made very welcome. We hosted a drinks party that evening with Lord and Lady Montagu, The Hon Mary Montagu and guests. Because of press coverage before our visit, we were contacted by Mrs Ruth Lily who told us that her daughter was getting married during our visit and was having her reception at the Master Builder in Bucklers Hard. We arranged to pick up the bride and groom and take them to their reception. The arrangements were kept secret from bride and groom until the day before and they were amazed and delighted when they came aboard. On the day, the unsettled weather cleared and the whole event went off perfectly.



Medusa alongside at Bucklers Hard.



Jessica and Lt Andrew Ward on Medusa

Our final event for the year was Remembrance at Hornet. We were joined by Richard and Robin, both “wavy navy” Lieutenant Commanders and the veterans were delighted to see the now rare wavy strip again.

It has been a busy year. There were other trips and events such as the Gosport Heritage Open Days which we supported as usual but I have concentrated on the main ones. Aside from events on board Medusa there have been other exciting things going on. Arising from the open day, I was invited to visit Portsmouth University and was made very welcome. They have wonderful engineering facilities and, after a tour, we discussed how we might help each other. The end result is a project for three Masters of Engineering final year students. The project is for them to research and understand how the Decca Navigator system worked and then construct a simulator to make the set on board Medusa work again so that we can demonstrate it to visitors. This is in line with trying to get as much of the equipment on board to work. This is an exciting development and hopefully will lead to further projects in the future.

Continuing our initiative to work with CCF units, we have a booking for 2018 from Cheltenham and I was invited to visit Oundle, near Peterborough, to address their CCF RN section on Medusa and her history. It transpired that Oundle used to be affiliated with HMS Illustrious but, since her scrapping, have no affiliate vessel. They are now keen to make Medusa their affiliate vessel.

In 2013, we agreed an affiliation with the Museum of the Royal Navy. It was basically an agreement to assist each other where we could with no real obligation either way. The agreement is now being redrafted to make the benefits either way more tangible. We are among distinguished company, the other affiliates are Coastal Forces Heritage Trust, Unicorn, D Day Museum, Haslar Heritage Group, HMS Courageous and HQS Wellington. Nothing will change with regard to our independence and governance, but we will be doing more to support NMRN and they us. Of the affiliates, we are very close to the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust and have been assisting with the project to establish a Coastal Forces Museum at Priddy’s Hard, opening in 2019.

Financially, we end the year in good shape but our berthing bill will hit us soon, there is the lift out in the spring and we will have to buy some fuel before long. There is no let up to fundraising!

The length of this newsletter gives a clue to how busy we have been this year. To keep Medusa at sea and looking smart is down to very hard work from our dedicated group of volunteers and

support, both practical and financial, from a much wider group. Thank you to everyone who helps, no matter how