



Medusa Trust Newsletter, January 2015

This newsletter is to tell you how HMS Medusa met the objectives to remain seaworthy and accessible to the public in 2014. You are receiving it because you have kindly supported us. We do not want to bombard you with unwanted e mails so if you don't want to receive further newsletters, please do let us know. Similarly we take data security seriously and your e mail address is not visible to any other recipients nor will it be passed to any third party.

Medusa is owned by The Medusa Trust, a registered charity set up solely to own and operate her. There are presently three trustees, Lord Strathalmond, Commodore Laurie Hopkins, RN and Alan Watson who is also her Captain. The Trustees are supported by a dedicated team of volunteers who form the crew, do the maintenance and act as tour guides. In addition the Trust maintains, publishes, and constantly updates the historical archives for all the 486 Harbour Defence Motor Launches which were built between 1940 and 1945 (www.hmsmedusa.org.uk)

Medusa's operational year starts with her lift-out wash and paint at Saxon Wharf at Southampton. The yard is responsible for the lifting and pressure wash but the volunteers do all the rest of the work. This year we replaced a propeller. While we were out of the water we had a visit from a surveyor to check the underwater condition. This was the last step in achieving our Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) certification to carry passengers commercially. No concessions are given for Medusa being a historic vessel, so, although hard to achieve without interfering with the historical integrity, she now meets all applicable safety regulations and can carry up to 15 persons (including crew) up to 20 miles offshore. This is an important step for our financial sustainability as well as setting a benchmark to which the vessel will be maintained.



Medusa at Saxon Wharf

Medusa does not receive any regular grant and so we fund-raise each year to support the maintenance and operation of the ship. Last year, 2014, was projected to be an expensive one with the work to bring her up to MCA standard and a considerable number of sea miles and diesel consumption to get to France and back. Major funding falls to the trustees who this year ran a fundraising event on HQS Wellington in London. This was very successful and together with other donations fully funded the year's activity. Of course 2015 is another year!

2014 was the 70th anniversary of D Day and considering Medusa's pivotal role as a navigational leader for Omaha Beach, it was appropriate that she should take a prominent part in the commemoration. Running up to D Day Medusa provided an escort out of Portsmouth for the ferries carrying the veterans to the commemoration. On the 2nd June we hosted on board some 100 veterans, some of whom had come from the US for the first time since WW2. It was humbling to hear their stories, sometimes spoken for the first time. Fortunately over the last months we had been shadowed by a journalist from British Forces Broadcasting resulting in two one hour programmes covering Medusa's story that were broadcast on 6 June and went on to win an award.

On the 5th June, we were honoured by a visit by HRH the Princess Royal and Admiral Tim Laurence and were joined by past crew of Medusa including Doug Withey who was on Medusa and manned a Vickers gun at D Day as well as Admiral Roger Morris, her last RN captain from 1965.



HRH the Princess Royal, Adm Tim Laurence and the Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire meet the crew

On the morning of the 6th, we went to Southampton for the rededication of a D Day memorial plaque at Ocean Village before heading across the Channel to France.



The Mayor of Southampton, veterans and VIPs on board.

The weather was unkind initially with high wind and intense thunderstorms and not dissimilar to the original D Day. At the other end though the weather cleared up and we passed up the canal from Ouistreham in sunshine. Passing under Pegasus Bridge was memorable with cheering crowds and a piper. Alongside at Caen, we were very popular with the French and were pleased we had a French speaking advance party to meet us and help with tours of the ship– we estimate we showed over a thousand people over her. To mark the occasion, the Mayor of Caen presented Medusa with a specially cast bronze medallion.



Medallion presented to medusa by the mayor of Caen. The reverse reads "70th anniversary of D day, we shall remember them"

Three days passed rapidly and we were off again, heading back down the canal in convoy with other historic craft, two RN patrol vessels, HMS Ranger and HMS Express and an RN Minesweeper, HMS Ledbury.



Medusa in convoy with MGB81, HSL102, MTB102, HMS Ranger and HMS Express.

At Ouistreham, we turned and headed West and, as the weather was calm, were able to enter the Mulberry harbour at Arromanches, the first time Medusa had been there since 1944.



Medusa inside the mulberry harbour at Arromanches

We then did a slow run along Omaha beach before entering the tiny fishing port of Port en Bessin immediately to the East of Omaha. Our arrival caused quite a stir but we were made very welcome.

None of us will forget the lone veteran on the end of the jetty who stood to attention and saluted us as we left.



Alongside at Port en Bessin, a tight fit.

From there we went to Cherbourg, before heading back across the Channel in perfect weather. We navigated Medusa back to the exact spot she had sat on the night of 5/6 June 1944, marking the entrance to the swept channel for Omaha beach and held a short service before putting a red rose for each crew member on the water.



Paying our respects on the spot Medusa occupied on 5/6 June 1944.

We were only back in Portsmouth for a few days before we were off again to Lymington for their D Day commemoration. While there we hosted a very successful wardroom party for local dignitaries as well as a reception for the Mayor and veterans following the dedication of a plaque in the town.

Early August saw us off to Poole. We had been there the previous September to celebrate Medusa's 70th birthday at the place where she was launched and now returned to be honoured with formal affiliation with Poole. The ceremony was held at the Mayor's parlour and The Mayor, Councillor Peter Adams presented the ship with the certificate of affiliation. An unexpected twist to this was the Mayor swapping his Poole tie for a Medusa one, hence the skipper improperly dressed!



The Mayor of Poole presenting the affiliation certificate to Alan Watson

Back in Portsmouth in September we welcomed the public to the ship for the Heritage Open days which are a national event where the public are encouraged to visit heritage locations, many not normally accessible.

We took advantage of the good weather in October to visit Cowes twice, the first as part of a crew training weekend and the second to fill up the fuel tanks before the winter. Medusa holds 1500 gallons (6800 litres) so the fuel barge operator is always pleased to see us. Continuous crew training is necessary because everything is manual and basic. This means we need a minimum of 6 crew to operate her and teamwork is essential. This only comes with practice and we like to swap roles around to make us as flexible as possible.

Our final formal engagement for the year was our annual Remembrance Day visit at HMS Hornet, the home of Coastal Forces. We take Medusa across to Hornet and position her as backdrop to the Cenotaph there. She is much appreciated and visited by veterans and their families as well as the families of the NATO representatives.

In addition among the year's more major engagements there were single days out to take out veterans' families and bid farewell to some with scattering of ashes.

The year has been a busy but very successful one for Medusa and her profile continues to grow. 2015 is beginning to look quite busy too, starting with the annual lift out for maintenance in April through attending Dartmouth Regatta in August and attending Remembrance in November. Bookings for day events from acting as a venue for management training, scattering of ashes and working with the Sea Cadets are coming in, and the diary is filling up.

When we made our initial application to the Lottery for the funding of Medusa's restoration we said that "for Medusa to exist was simply not enough, she had to have a purpose to be sustainable". We hope you agree that Medusa did much more than "simply exist" in 2014.

On behalf of the trustees, volunteers and the ship herself, thank you for your support in 2014 and we hope you will continue to support us in keeping this amazing little vessel where she belongs.... at sea.

