

MEDUSA
HDML 1387



Medusa Newsletter

Christmas 2018

Our busy schedule has continued right up to Christmas this year, but I am going to start this newsletter talking about people rather than Medusa.

The first piece of news is to report the passing away of Doug Withey on 10 November. Doug joined Medusa when she was commissioned at the end of 1943 and spent the war with her. His recollections provided a valuable first-hand account of what she did in WW2 and brought to life the slim and formal official records. Doug was last on Medusa at Portsmouth for the D Day 70th event in 2014 when he met HRH The Princess Royal and then took the helm to take Medusa out of the harbour.



Doug on Medusa in 2014 with his daughter and granddaughter, talking to HRH The Princess Royal.

On a much happier note, Brian (Sam) Small, who has been a volunteer on Medusa for 33 years was nominated for and won the National Historic Ships Marsh Award for volunteer of the year. The citation for the award reads...

“Brian spent his working life in the Royal Navy dockyard in Portsmouth as a boilermaker and is also trained in modelmaking, technical drawing and signwriting. He has always had an interest in naval history and heritage and was part of the dockyard Historical Society and was involved in rescuing a great deal of heritage that would otherwise have been scrapped – including HMS Gannet which is now fully restored at Chatham Historic Dockyard.

“Brian has been a volunteer on [HMS Medusa](#), the ship used as navigational leader for Omaha beach on 6th June 1944, for 32 years, making him the ship’s longest serving volunteer. He has done a great deal of detailed work on board the ship, most notably four replica Vickers guns which were such a

good likeness that the police requested a de-commissioning certificate for them! He does all the detailed paintwork on board the ship and, despite suffering from seasickness, has been out to sea on almost every journey.

“Alongside his technical expertise, Brian is a true gentleman, good humoured and brilliant with visitors to the ship, entertaining them with a fund of stories about the vessel. He coordinated the maintenance work of volunteers and is as integral a part of the Medusa crew family as the ship is a part of his life.”



Sam Small with Brian Marsh at Trinity House

The award was presented at a ceremony at Trinity House in London.

The last newsletter took us up to the August break when we all grab a little holiday. Mine was partly on my boat but mostly taking the RN training boat Black Swan to Dartmouth and back; a real busman's holiday.

In the spring we did some filming for Channel 4 and this was screened as “Dunkirk, the forgotten Heroes” and covers the 51st Highland division. The programme is still available on the All4 catch up service and is worth watching apart from the great shots of Medusa.

In early September we took part in the Heritage Open Days programme and took two groups around Medusa for each of the four days. It great to give local people the chance to look round and have time to spend with them. On the plus side we generally get a new volunteer out of it too.

On the 24th September, we took a group from the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights to Cowes and back. The write up of the day that appeared in the Shipwrights' Newsletter is reproduced below.

“Fearful of enemy submarines encroaching into our harbours the British Admiralty commissioned the building, mostly by yacht builders, of nearly 500 of these vessels, armed with depth charges and Oerlikon 20mm guns. Medusa is the only working example left anywhere. The design speed was only 12 knots but she has a remarkably short turning circle (inside that of a submerged submarine) and high stability due to a rounded bilge mid-ship section and, in anything other than a head-sea, she has a tendency to roll like a pig in a mud bath. On a trip across the channel to celebrate the D-Day

Landings she was apparently rolling fifty degrees each side - not good if you had brekky at a greasy spoon cafe before you set off!

The submarine threat did not really emerge and the launches found themselves being used for various different purposes. Medusa was launched in late 1943 and in June 1944 acted as Navigation Leader to guide American troops through the minefields to Omaha Beach, remaining under enemy fire for 30 hours. In May 1945 she took the surrender of German forces at the Dutch coastal port of IJmuiden. After the war she became part of the Naval Hydrography fleet.

Seven of us arrived at the Haslar Marine (Gosport) on a glorious sunny day to be greeted by her Captain, Liveryman Alan Watson, and his crew of ageing likely lads. After coffee and doughnuts on the bridge we set sail out past Fort Blockhouse into the Solent and, accompanied by the reassuring measured thumping of her original Gardener diesels, off across to Cowes. We berthed in front of the Royal London Yacht Club which generously flung its doors open specifically for the admirable purpose of supplying us with a splendid lunch.

On the way back to Gosport we played 'man overboard' games to demonstrate her manoeuvrability - Court Assistant Paul Butterworth was the expert on the helm!

Medusa does about 50 days out per year, including education and training for youngsters. The volunteer crew is a very likeable and hugely experienced group of guys, many of them ex-Merchant Navy. The engineer and I had served on sister ships in Union Castle line. They were all having fun and were slightly reminiscent of 'last of the summer wine'.

Medusa was built by R A Newman & Sons in Poole - which today is Sunseeker Yachts. Much of the teak used to restore her decks came from the old Kenya Castle and Windsor Castle passenger mail ships."

This fun event was followed on 26/27 September by more serious stuff in the form of Squadex 2018. Here Medusa has the enormous privilege of joining the First Patrol Boat Squadron of 14 P2000 vessels for manoeuvres. After a briefing we set off for a practice run on the 26th. We departed the harbour in two columns with Medusa at the rear of the starboard column. All was well until the first major turn to port off the forts. Our column sped up to make the turn, but, on completion of the turn seemed to be going faster than we could keep up. That was the purpose of the practice and all was sorted in the debrief that evening. On the 27th Medusa left harbour in advance of 1PBS and waited just beyond the forts. As the two columns swept by, Medusa tucked in on station at the rear of the starboard column. The first evolution was for the P2000s to form a chevron and Medusa to move up the centre. The next evolution was the tricky one. Medusa had to swap places with the vessel ahead of her while half the P2000s dropped back thus forming two chevrons with Medusa in the middle. This worked perfectly and it's a relief to see in the picture below that we are spot on station. The final manoeuvre for us was to turn to starboard to exit the formation and take station with HMS Blazer with the Second Sea Lord on board to return to harbour. The remaining P2000s then continued manoeuvres at speeds that we could not match.



The twin chevron formation, Medusa right in the middle.



Aerial shot of Medusa during the event.

To have this continuing link with the Royal navy is fantastic and to be treated as “one of their own” for a couple of days a year is a huge privilege. It was great to see Medusa’s crest alongside those of the squadron at their offices in the base. We have been invited to the next one next April.





HMS Blazer with Second Sea Lord on board in company with Medusa

October 13, we had our Trafalgar Night dinner aboard the lightship adjacent to Medusa. This coincides with the anniversary of Medusa's launch (20 October) and so we were able to wish her a happy birthday.

Our year still going strong, we took a group of cadets from Cheltenham CCF for a sea day. We are doing more of these each year and they are proving to be very popular.

The following weekend we went to Bucklers Hard where we are always made very welcome. The weather was kind for late October and we were able to have a birthday celebration out on deck. Mary Montagu joined us and cut the birthday cake.



The Hon Mary Montagu cutting the birthday cake.

Nov 11 saw Medusa over at HMS Hornet for the remembrance service. This year was very well attended, and the rain held off though it was cold. The number of veterans has dwindled but it's interesting to see how many of the next generations still wish to come.

Medusa gained a namesake this year. Starlings are a problem at the marina where we keep Medusa so a local falconer visits with his falcons to frighten them away. This year he had a new Lanner Falcon and a competition was held to name her; the winner "Medusa". Medusa the falcon is now a regular visitor on board and rather likes the 20mm gun barrel as a perch.



Medusa's namesake the Lanner Falcon Medusa.

In October, The Medusa Trust held a fundraising event on HQS Wellington in London. It was well attended and there was lively bidding for the auction lots which included a superb picture of Medusa painted by the famous artist Mandy Shepherd. We have 100 limited edition signed prints of the picture for sale. The evening was a great success and we now have funds to take us to Normandy next year.



Usually Remembrance ends our year but this year we had a day with Tom Cunliffe filming one of his excellent video blogs. This went live last night and by this morning had 500 views. We were hoping to go to sea with him but the weather was awful so the bits in the blog showing us at sea are old footage....the lack of the after gun is a clue!

The link is <https://youtu.be/gsoSu5esexs>

Not quite done yet, we had a day at sea with a Dutch TV company who are making a 6-part series on D Day which will feature Medusa. They were very interested in the Ijmuiden connection and were fascinated to see a copy of the surrender document for Holland dated 5 May 1945.

Next year is looking busy. I had booked to come out of the water 22 April but Squadex is 24/25 so will try and bring our lift out forward to the beginning of April. D Day 75 is going to be the big event in our year and will cover 31 May until 16 June. The plan is still shifting but is likely to be 1, 2 June at Portsmouth, 3 June lead vessel with veterans out of Portsmouth, 6 June at Pegasus bridge the head west taking in Grandcamp Maisy, Cherbourg, Channel islands, Dartmouth and home. The weather, of course, may have other ideas!

I am frequently asked about other HDMLs around the place. Worldwide there are 20 hulls left, diminishing by several each year. In the Spring newsletter I will do a roundup of what is left and where they are. Some are hardly recognisable as HDMLs.



Sarinda ML1392 at Heswall.

It really only remains to thank you all for your support, whether that be crewing, maintaining, fund raising or just reminding us that keeping Medusa at sea is important. Thank you all and best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Alan