

MEDUSA  
HDML 1387



## Winter 2015 Newsletter.

Somehow it's come round to Christmas again; I'm really not sure how as the year has flashed by. It's time for me to write to you all and thank you for your continued support of Medusa and wish you and your families a peaceful Christmas and a Happy New Year. It's also an opportunity to summarise what has been going on this year and look forward to the next.

### **2015 operations.**

After the excitement of the D day event of 2014, it looked like 2015 might be a bit mundane but it has been notable for smaller but no less significant events. In April we went to Saxon Wharf for our annual lift out and painting. At the same time we have our annual survey to check the vessel is sound and that all our equipment is up to scratch and properly certificated. It will come as a surprise to many that the ships horn has to have a certificate to show that it makes a suitable volume of noise for the size of vessel. To meet the specification we have installed a compressed air horn complete with compressor and air receiver. It is certainly loud and its now necessary to warn people on the foredeck before sounding it! The two short blasts as we enter Portsmouth harbour to indicate we are turning to Port into Haslar creek has a remarkable effect on other vessels and echoes off the harbour buildings for some time.

### **The last (but perhaps not) patrol.**

It was a great pleasure to welcome three gentlemen, ex Hong Kong Flotilla on board and go to sea. The Hong Kong Flotilla operated HDMLs post war including some of the Australian version of the HDML which was some 6 foot longer and had accommodation for two stewards in the tiller flat. The day was at their request and was billed as their "Last Patrol".

Peter Yeates disappeared for a while to check his bunk (port side, aft, upper) and attend to his cleaning station as he had all those years back (it was the wardroom and forward heads which were sparkling after his attention).

The three enjoyed the day so much that there is to be a "last last patrol" in 2016.



*Don Rowland, John Metherell and Peter Yeates on the not the last patrol.*

### **D Day 2015 and the Royal Yacht Squadron**

One of the items in our charity fund raising event of 2014 on HQS Wellington was a day out on Medusa for six people. This was duly won by Lloyd Dorfman and we were determined to make a memorable day of it. We went over to Gunwharf to pick our party up and were berthed ahead of Donald Gosling's fine vessel Leander. As it happened it was the day of the Royal Yacht Squadron anniversary and sailpast and several members of the royal family accompanied by the First Sea Lord walked past Medusa to join Leander. We followed her out of harbour and headed across to Cowes where two lines of large vessels including those of the King of Sweden and Denmark was anchored ready for the review. As it was a couple of hours to go we decided to give them some practice and steamed down between the lines of vessels and received many hearty waves and a few salutes (some of the overseas vessels were not quite sure what we were and took no chances). Fortunately we had Commodore Jeremy Rigby, the Naval Base Commander, aboard so they were properly returned. Back in Portsmouth our guests were entertained to lunch and then in the afternoon visited HMS Diamond.



*Commodore Jeremy Rigby, Commodore Laurie Hopkins with the Squadron astern*

## **Admiral Burrard Neale commemoration**

Admiral Burrard Neale is perhaps the most famous person to come from Lymington but few had ever heard of him. As 2015 was the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth there was a concerted effort to raise his profile and restore a memorial to him.

Medusa and HMS Smiter were invited to participate and were made very welcome by both the Lymington Town and Royal Lymington yacht Clubs. Medusa hosted an evening reception on board for the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights, the organisers of the event and officers from the yacht clubs. Although a brisk and chilly wind was blowing, it was a successful event and Lymington is likely to be an annual visit.



*Flying the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights flag in Lymington*

## **Commander H Golding Commemoration.**

In the Spring, Jill Goulding, the granddaughter of Commander Goulding contacted us. She told us of how she had found a case of her grandfather's papers covering his time in the Royal Navy, particularly at HMS Northney and his involvement in various wartime organisations that became the SBS. It was an amazing story and largely unknown. Jill has set out to remedy this and had arranged for a Blue Plaque to be established outside Northney Marina and another on his former home on Hayling Island. She had arranged for some of the very few remaining Cockleshell Heroes canoes to come up from Hayling Island Sailing Club (former training base) to Northney bearing the plaque with an overflight of a Spitfire and a Dakota. She wanted Medusa to act as escort and berth in Northney for part of the commemoration. Once we found that she was entirely funding the event herself we waived any thought of charging and joined in.

The weather forecast for the day was not good, but for once was wrong, and it was a beautiful day. We arrived off Haling Island Sailing Club on time and met up with Laurie Hopkins in his fine vessel Brinton and slowly made our way up harbour stopping frequently

for the canoes to catch up. Brinton did a fine job as a sort of maritime sheep dog, gathering up the flock and keeping them going the right way.



*Medusa escorting the cockles*

Mercifully there was little wind as getting into Northney in a small vessel has its challenges, in Medusa it was not easy especially as we had to go right to the innermost part of the marina and then turn in a very tight space to get alongside. We made it but I wondered how on earth we would get back out again. Our luck was in the following day and we departed without mishap.



*Memorial plaque to Commander Goulding at Northney*

## **A valiant attempt to get to Dartmouth**

Sometimes the odds are against you, and so it was with our trip to Dartmouth. We had arranged to attend the Royal Regatta and a superb berth had been allocated to us as part of a very warm welcome the harbour master, the organising committee and Britannia Naval College.

After the Hayling Island event we passed through Gosport to do a crew swap and headed for Portland in poor weather with worse forecast; Gale force 8 imminent was not good news. To add to our woes the port engine oil pressure was lower than we were happy with and so we did part of the passage on one engine. At Portland the weather closed in and stayed that way for days. After several days it started to moderate but still not enough to go further West, so, with more gales forecast, we headed homeward. The high point coming back was an escort of dolphins off Anvil Point.

## **The London trip that did not quite happen.**

Everyone has heard of the Lord Mayor's pageant through the City of London but less known is that it starts by water from Pimlico and goes down to Tower Bridge where the incoming Lord Mayor is given a tot of rum at HMS President and then goes off to his coach. We were asked early on if we would be part of the escort down the Thames and this seemed a great thing to do. Try as we might though, we could not find any willing sponsors for the £5K it would cost us in fuel to round to the Thames and back. The clincher was our concern about the port engine and it seemed unwise to do a 500 mile trip until we had done some remedial work on it. We therefore withdrew from the event in good time so that another vessel could fill our spot.

As it happened the weather over the period we would have been making passage was terrible so its most likely we would not have made it there let alone back.

## **Remembrance, London Sea cadets and a few other trips.**

There were other trips in the year including a very successful day out for the London Sea Cadets, another for the Morgan Owners Club and a slightly more sombre one to scatter the ashes of Mr Peter Knight of Esher. Our season ended with Remembrance Day at HMS Hornet.

## **Artefacts**

Increasingly Medusa is looking like a warship and we have made further steps to enhance the appearance this year. The major project was to refit the after gun which, in turn, meant putting back some of the deck strengthening that had been removed decades ago. This made a big improvement to the appearance of the ship but there have also been many small improvements internally.



*A very sad looking 20mm mounting*



*Refurbished with its Oerlikon fitted*

We have acquired a set of steel helmets complete with liners and a set of antflash gear to go with them. These are very popular with young visitors.



*Sam modelling a new helmet.....anyone remember “wot no”?*

Other acquisitions include a stone rum flagon complete with its basketwork, unfortunately it was empty but you cannot win them all!

This spring we put some radio gear back into the wireless office. This included the Marconi TW12 receiver, a Gee set, the receiver and display of the 291 radar and the IFF set. The plan has always been to gradually get this gear working and this has taken a leap forward this year.

One puzzle was that we knew the standard fit for HDMLs was the Marconi TW12 receiver and transmitter and we were lucky to get hold of a very rare receiver. The puzzle was that the dimensions did not match Medusa’s original drawing and this was finally solved by a veteran telling us that, apart from early HDMLs, the US TCS equipment was fitted. A quick check revealed the dimensions matched so the search was on for TCS. Annoyingly I had seen a complete system in working order on EBay only a few months back but had not followed it up as I did not then know it would be of use to us. A few months later EBay produced a receiver and a transmitter has just appeared from a private sale. The winter job is to build the power supply and get it all working. The component parts for the wire antenna have ben sourced and the deck insulator and cabling has been fitted, so, hopefully, we shall have a working system for next year. Morse should again be heard in the W/T office!



*TCS receiver*



*And the matching transmitter*

For D day Medusa was fitted with one of only 25 prototype Decca Navigator units (the Navy called them QM). We have a photo which shows the unit fitted to ML1383, the other HDML at Omaha. Decca worked by receiving low frequency radio signals from three shore stations and comparing their phase. The result was shown on two dials and the reading from these plotted on a special chart. Unlike later models, the prototype had its dials on a separate panel and in true British fashion the prototype dials were made from the innards of gas meters. This equipment was taken off Medusa at the end of WW2 but later in her life she was fitted with a MkIV set.

Early this year Ebay yielded a brand new MkIV which has been fitted in the chart room.



*Brand new MkIV Decca*

Occasionally I checked EBay for Decca bits and was amazed one night to see one of the prototype dials for sale. I know of only two others so we had to have it. Incredibly no one else bid so it was ours for 99p. I sent a note to the seller commiserating that he did not get more for it and explaining where it was going. The reply explained that the seller was expecting a lot more but was happy knowing it had gone to its proper home, and then

offered the other dial plus the backing plate as a gift! We now have the dials from Unit 19 from the original batch. Subsequently EBay has yielded the metal case for the electronics and it will be possible to mock up a front panel to give something very close to the original.



*Display from QM set No19, used at D Day. Now back with Medusa.*

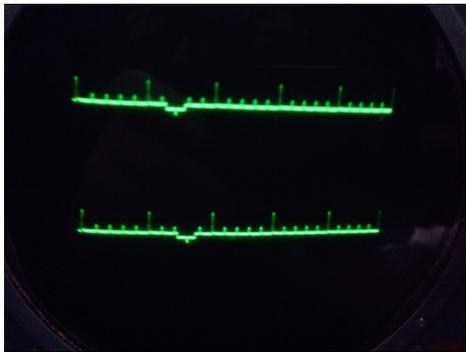


*Picture of QM set with dials in the foreground. This set is from ML1383, the other vessel at Omaha so the one to the left is most likely that from Medusa.*

A separate acquisition this year is a complete and working Gee navigation system complete with a simulator to inject signals into the receiver. Gee was an RAF system for precision bombing and worked by measuring time differences between a master and two slave transmitters located in the UK from which it was possible to fix a position on a gridded chart. Some 800 sets were used at D Day but with the expectation that it would be jammed as the Germans were aware of the system. Decca on the other hand was completely new and was only used for the first time on D Day so escaped notice and jamming.



*Gee system consisting of receiver unit, display unit and a home made power supply underneath.*



*Display showing calibrated pips from which time delay is measured in "Gee units"*

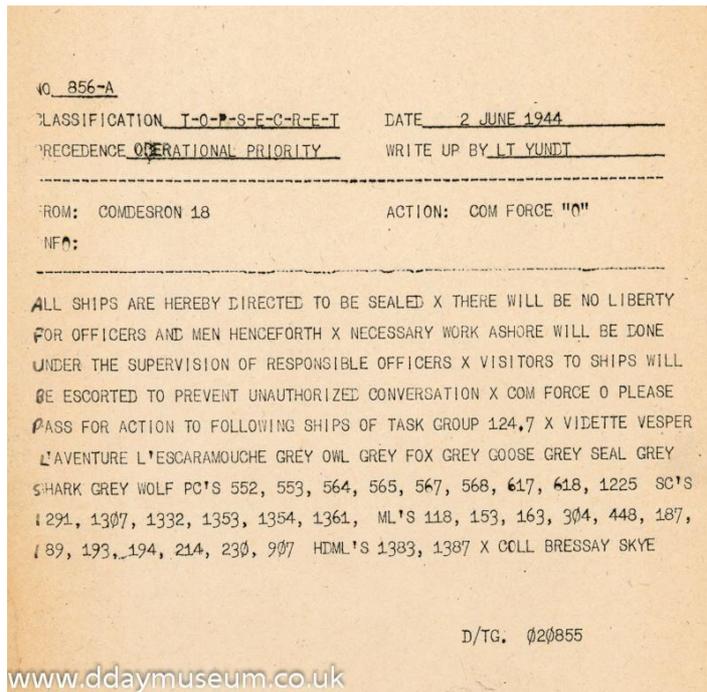
The latest acquisition is a rather nice RN Pyrene brass fire extinguisher; these were very effective on fires but lethal to the crew.

There is a lot to be done over the winter but, by next Spring, Medusas electronics fit will have taken a leap forwards.

### **Behind the scenes, website and admin.**

Our focus naturally is on Medusa but the website plays an important role in giving people across the world access to information. The website now has video on it including some rare film of Medusa while still in Naval service. The major part of the website, however, is the archive section with the history of each of the 480 HDMLs. Hardly a week goes by without more information appearing and this section, which is the result of many years work by Brian Holmes, has had a major update this year.

It never fails to surprise that information about Medusa still surfaces. The National Archive at Kew has yielded documents relating to her wartime activity. One is the "Red Book" which was published weekly and gives the location of minor war vessels; this has enabled Medusas war diary and the many stories we have of her to be given some date structure. Another interesting document is an "after the battle" appraisal of how Decca and Gee worked including the transcript of the interview with Medusas skipper. Between Kew and HMS Collingwood we have copies of most of the equipment handbooks including the FH830 ultrasonic beacons that were used to mark the entry points to the minefield. Courtesy EBay the safe in the wardroom again contains a selection of original confidential books.



*Copy of signal to Medusa just prior to D day (courtesy D Day museum)*

Much admin work goes on behind the scenes each year; documents have to be filed with the Charity Commission, Companies House and Medusas MCA certification has to be renewed each year which involves making sure that all the inspections are done and certificated up to date.

### **Working with the National Museum of the Royal Navy.**

Medusa is now recognised as an affiliate group to the National Museum of the Royal Navy. This, at present, has no formal obligation either way but we have already built a good working relationship and it feels like we are both respected and valued.

Just of late we have been helping the museum with the acquisition of Medusa's big sister, ML497, one of only three remaining Fairmile Bs in UK waters. Designed by the same person, there is a huge resemblance between the two vessels, albeit the Fairmile is 112 feet long to Medusa's 72.

Our involvement has been to badger the museum into buying her, assisting with the bid for funding, initial inspection of the vessel and then work on board to bring her back to life after a one year period laying idle in the River Dart. There is more work to be done after which we will help bring her back to Portsmouth where the shipwright team from Boatshed 4 are ready bring her back up to scratch.

We can look forward to operating with her in the future; it will be a fine sight to see both vessels heading out of harbour together.



*RML497, Medusa's big sister.*

### **Winter jobs on board.**

Though we are not out and about there is still plenty to do on board. Apart from odd repairs from the season there is much cleaning and painting to do as well as a major job in the engine room.

This year the port engine caused us some concern by falling oil pressure. Our engines are early 1940s and one of the slightly odd features is that the oil only gets cooled if the pressure is above a certain point; below this no cooling takes place which in turn thins the oil and drops the pressure more. Later versions of the engine had a second oil pump to maintain the cooling. Though ours has the fitting point for a second pump there is no keyway in the drive shaft so it's a major job. A slightly easier solution is to fit an auxiliary heat exchanger and this is the route we have followed. This is now virtually done and, over the winter, we will venture out and test it, perhaps topping up the fuel while the diesel prices are low.

## **Tales of Medusa's past.**

Over lunch earlier this year, Admiral Roger Morris, Medusa's last Naval Captain asked me if I had heard the story of how Medusa fell over one night. Roger told me about it and then kindly agreed to write it up. His account is below and goes to show what a charmed life Medusa has had. The official logbooks for the period are in the Archive at Kew, one day I will look and see what they say!

In the summer of 1964 we were working up the west coast of Wales, surveying Tremadoc Bay and also tasked with the resurveying of Barmouth Harbour. This is a broad expanse of drying banks at the mouth of the River Mawddach with a couple of trickles of water to carry the river to the open sea at all states of the tide.

We could only carry out sounding from half tide through high water to a couple of hours after full tide. After that we had to scuttle back to the pool of water off the harbour quay where we could just float at low water springs.

Since our work often involved running across drying banks we carried a couple of shores of 4 by 4 timber to prop the ship up if we were caught on a bank on a falling tide. Without using these she would fall over as the tide fell below the turn of the bilge, and might well fill rather than come upright as the tide rose.

We also occasionally dried out deliberately when alongside in a berth which dried out so that we could file down the nicks and bends in the propeller blades acquired from the same sandbanks and snags.

In Barmouth there was a quay which dried out. We berthed alongside regularly, as that was more convenient than mooring out in the stream and having to wade through shingle and mud to get ashore at low tide. On a falling tide we had to be very careful that the ship leant on the wall by weighting the inboard side with dan buoy sinkers and any other weights. The critical time was as the tide fell away from the bilge. If she was not leaning into the quay at the crucial moment she would flop away from the wall towards the slope down into the pool, and would probably fill as the tide returned.

On this particular night low tide was about six am. When the ebb tide dropped the keel onto the seabed at about four am *Medusa* seemed to be happily leaning against the wall. An hour later we were all woken as she gave a lurch away from the wall. Just why we never discovered, but it was immediately a case for "all hands to the shores". With a struggle we managed to get her propped with both of the 4 by 4s, but listing some 35° away from the wall.

We did not want people moving round on board, and risking the shores working out, so we decamped to the Barmouth Yacht Club, of which we had been appointed honorary members, a house fronting on the jetty with an upper room, where we could get ourselves dry (shoring her up was a wetting and dirtying business) and knock up some breakfast for ourselves. We could also keep a careful eye on the ship.

Happily the shores held, and as the tide rose the old girl came back upright, and we were able to rejoin her with no harm done. Fortunately, this was early enough that not many of the locals saw her in her lapsed state.

We never tried to berth alongside again except at or near high water, but laid ourselves head and stern moorings in the channel off the quay. For the rest of the survey we used these, and came and went using the dinghy. I for one slept much better at night!

I hope you will have found this an interesting read; the next edition will be Spring next year when our plans for the year have firmed up a bit. We have a few bookings already and are going to have another crack at Dartmouth, hopefully with a bit more success next time.

Thank you all again for you support and a Happy Christmas to all,

Alan Watson