

COASTAL FORCES
VETERANS'
ASSOCIATION
LONDON BRANCH

January 2018 Newsletter



View from the Bridge



Our Branch has endured quite a busy year.

First, and sadly, our attrition rate has increased this past year. We have lost three members, two of whom were veterans. The most recent that we have heard of since our last Report are Bill McAngus, Stanley Campion and Alfred Solomon.

" We Will Remember Them"

Other regrettable news is that our Branch Committee suffered a 50%

loss when our two computer technicians, Kevin Costello and Ted Else retired from duty, but remain as loyal members.

We are pleased to report that Roy Shepherd and Natalie Boatfield have been recruited since our last Report and, belatedly, we now have a padre, the Rev. Grahame Berridge shared with our South London Branch shipmates. I am happy to say that both Branches are drawing closer together as our memberships shrink. We are now pleased that veteran Vera Mitchell has been enrolled as our Social Secretary.

Perhaps the highlight of our year was the Duke of Edinburgh's personal invitation to a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. At least a dozen members (including escorts) took advantage of this event. We received yet another fillip to our prestige when Peter Bickmore received his second BEM, this time for his work in organising the annual memory trips to Tito's island of Vis, our base during Adriatic operations.

Bearing in mind that most of us are nonagenarians, our activity list is remarkable: Branch Representatives attended the Thames Traditional Boat Festival, following which we were invited to the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships, Remembrance Day events at HMS Hornet, HMS Belfast and City Hall, also the

Armed Forces Day Ceremony at the City Hall, the latter at the personal invitation of the London Mayor Sadiq Khan.

Returning to base, our AGM was held on 14th January. The Minutes refer to new Government Regulations which affect us. Secretary David is sending you some forms for you to complete and return.

May I repeat my request:- please complete and return them promptly.

Finally we were pleased and honoured that our friend of London Branch, Captain Trevor Robotham RN accepted our invitation to visit our Branch to tell us about the new Coastal Forces Museum – see the report in the minutes. This made a fitting end to a busy year.

Ken Gadsdon.

Editorial

Welcome to 2018 and I hope you enjoy this first newsletter of the new year. I am pleased to be able to report on recent activities of both London and South London Branches, and better still keep you aware of outings and events planned for 2018.

I look forward to having feedback from you, especially memories and photographs – to be provided by yourselves; letters to the editor and so on. It is your newsletter and by contributing, we can keep in touch with one another.

You may be aware that there is a Data Protection Act, which provides for the security of information held about you. I share this information with the two other Committee members - Vera Mitchell as membership secretary, and Ken Gadsdon as Chairman. I have also started keeping a list of next of kin, so as to know who to contact either in emergency or if we have not heard from you for a while. I would like to share your addresses (but not next of kin) with other Branch members, so that you can keep in touch directly with one another. Is this acceptable to you? Please let me know if you do not want your addresses shared outside of the Committee. For those who were unable to attend the AGM, I enclose a form for you to fill and return to me, not forgetting your subscription!

Branch Annual General Meeting 14th January

Our meetings will continue to be on HMS Belfast, but we will be using the wardroom, which should be easier to access. The dates will be: 14th January (which will be the AGM), 15th April, 8th July and 14th October.

Peter Bickmore has been asked by the Croatian Broadcasting Organisation to arrange interviews with men who were involved in the Adriatic Campaign, particularly based in Vis. The Imperial War



Museum, who operate HMS Belfast is kindly allowing the interviews to take place on Belfast at the next meeting 15th April.

Captain Trevor Robotham gave a very interesting presentation about the CF Museum under construction (see below). He explained the many tortuous obstacles the Heritage Trust (CFHT) has had to negotiate to get this far. They are now thinking about how best to display the exhibits.



It was confirmed that when the Branch eventually decommissions, the assets will be transferred to CFHT.

Obituary

Telegraphist Alfred Solomon, CFVA number 2684

It is with great sadness that we report that Alfred Solomon “crossed the bar” on 6th November 2017. Alf was a Telegraphist serving on MGB’s 330, 644 & 612 and was drafted to replace the usual Telegraphist for one day, fatefully being on board MTB 622 on her final mission when she was sunk in March 1943. Alf spent the remainder of the war as a POW. In civilian life, he was a talented professional musician. His funeral was at Croydon Crematorium on Monday 20th November.

William (Bill) McAngus, CFVA number 159

It is with deep sadness that we learned of the death of Bill McAngus who died age 90 on 22nd October 2017 after a long stay in hospital. Bill was one of the pioneers of London Branch and our pathway in the 1980s for our Branch meetings at Tenter House, Moorgate, with grateful thanks to British Telecom.

Bill cheated his entry into the Royal Navy by denying his age, and served on MTB 479, 785 and MTB 690, together with shipmate Jim Barnes who joins with me in this tribute to Bill. Bill was one of those London cabbies within the Square Mile who tells of the story when he picked up his Commanding Officer of MTB 690 and together with Jim Barnes had a bit of a reunion.

To Bill’s Wife Pat we send our deepest sympathy.

L/Sea Stanley Campion MID

We are very sad to report belatedly that Stanley Campion MID crossed the bar on 29 May 2017. Our thoughts go out to his family and friends at this very sad time.

Stanley served on board MTBs 408, 658, 662. He later served on Control Target Boat CRT41 and as Coxwain on Torpedo Recovery Boat TRB1.

His award of MID in the London Gazette 21st August 1945 reads:
'Able Seaman Stanley CAMPION Service No: P/JX 654587 MGB 662 Mention in Despatches For gallantry, skill and determination whilst serving in Light Coastal Forces in daring and successful attacks on enemy armed shipping in the Adriatic during the months of March and April, 1945.'

RIP Stanley

'Lest we forget'

Remembrance Day 2017

A group of us attended the service at City Hall organised by the Mayor of London on 10th November. This was a multi-faith service attended by both military and civic leaders from Greater London. The service was led by the Very Rev'd Andrew Nunn, the Dean of Southwark (C of E) and the sermon by the Most Rev'd Peter Smith, the Archbishop of Southwark (RC).

On Remembrance Day itself, we had a group of over 20 including friends and families attending the service in HMS Belfast. We were delighted that

Bernie, Tex, Andrew and Natalie at City Hall



George Phillips with daughter Dawn and family



reconciliation. I am glad therefore that the London Branches have been instrumental in contacting our former opposite numbers in the Kriegsmarine.

George Phillips and his family made the journey to London to join us. Afterwards Julie Smith from the Anchor Tap, (Bernie Coot's local) invited us all for lunch.

The theme of both the sermons at these events, was of the need for

Wreath layers Bernie Coot and Lt Cdr (SCC) Mark Macey



Peter Bickmore and family attended the service at HMS Hornet, where wreathes were

Bernie and Julie Smith in Anchor Tap



laid, including one for Reg Ellis from his colleagues who served in Vis.

Other events

South London Branch held a very enjoyable Christmas Lunch on 16th December, to which we were invited. We were well looked after by the Cadets and parents of TS Trafalgar.



South London Branch were represented at the London Boat Show by Terry Palmer's launch "Pandora" which was much admired.

News of various preserved boats and those under restoration



HRNZN Kuparu - before



HRNZN Kuparu - after

Some of you know of my interest in HDMLs. Many survived the war and found other uses, some even legal! There are a number being restored at present, the people concerned are in touch via e-mail

and share information and advice, relying very much on the work done on Medusa and the lessons learned. Here are two vessels in New Zealand

Kuparu restored and afloat – well done Scott!



HRNZN Paiea



ML 1301 is now in a museum in Dronten, Holland and open to the public as a static exhibit. She now has her own website, see <https://mecmuseum.nl/hdml-1301>. It is in both Dutch and English.

Medway Queen

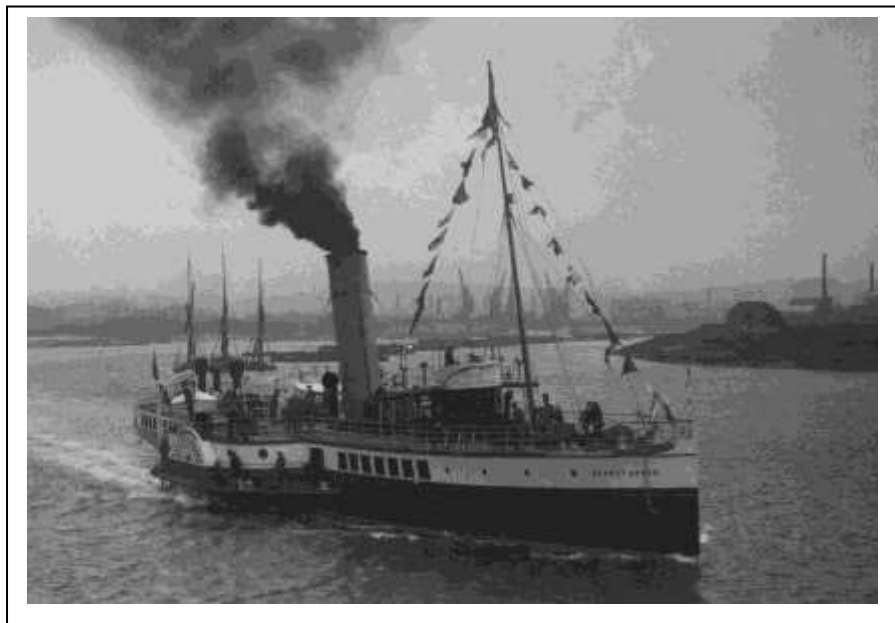
This is another ship undergoing restoration, although not a coastal forces ship, this paddle steamer worked alongside CF during the evacuation of Dunkirk, and throughout the War as an auxiliary minesweeper. One of our members, John Kempton is Chairman of the Medway Queen Preservation Society which is restoring the ship. He has arranged for a series of articles about the ship, which I hope will be of interest.

Medway Queen – An historical outline by Richard Halton

PS. Medway Queen started life as an excursion steamer. She was launched on 23rd April 1924 and entered service with an inaugural voyage on Friday 18th July from Strood and Chatham to Southend and then on to Herne Bay. Captain T. J. Aldis was in command for the first two seasons and was succeeded by Captain Bob Hayman for the 1926 season and until the outbreak of war. Special excursions were undertaken including the 1937 Spithead Naval Review. In 1938 Medway Queen was converted to oil-firing which meant that during Dynamo she could refuel more quickly than her coal fired sisters.

After assisting with the children's evacuation in 1939, Medway Queen was converted for minesweeping and fitted with a 12pdr gun forward and machine guns on the paddle boxes. The aft saloon was cut down; providing more deck space for the minesweeping gear. Windows and peacetime fittings were removed and the bridge strengthened. HMS Medway Queen was commissioned in November 1939 and went to Harwich. She later joined the 10th minesweeping flotilla in Dover. Lieutenant A.T. Cook RNR took command in the spring of 1940. His First Lieutenant was Sub-Lieutenant John Graves who retained an association with the ship throughout the war and afterwards. The navigating officer was Lieutenant Jolly RNVR and the junior officer was Lieutenant Keilly RNR

The order for Operation Dynamo was issued on Sunday 26th May although some troops had already been evacuated. On Medway Queen's first trip everything was chaotic; the ships anchored offshore and used their boats to collect men from the beaches - a slow process. Once on



board the soldiers were given food and "Navy Cocoa". As Dynamo proceeded Medway Queen settled into a routine; each night was filled with the noise and danger of battle and the following day was spent clearing up and replenishing. Besides the danger it was physically exhausting; but Medway Queen and her crew made seven trips! The French rear guard was picked up on the night of 3rd June. While loading, a ship astern of Medway Queen was hit and driven into the paddle box causing damage. The ship served as a minesweeper for the remainder of the war – a story in itself – moving to a training establishment in Edinburgh in 1944.

After the war she was refitted in Southampton and Medway Queen resumed her old route under Captain Leonard Horsham. The summer seasons followed a similar pattern to those before the war with excursions and charters mixed in. In 1953 she attended the Coronation Review at Spithead as part of the official line up and with a full complement of passengers brought down on a special train from London. Photographs from the early 1960s show the ship in the Pool of London where she sailed on a few occasions on charter. Medway Queen continued in service until the end of the 1963 season when she was withdrawn. Her "retirement job" from 1966 to 1974 was as a restaurant and night club on the Isle of Wight. There were many happy days on board, remembered by people in the areas where she operated and those who holidayed or visited there.

Editor – Thanks to John Kempton and Richard Halton for this article. For a social event, would members like a day trip to Gillingham to view the ship? We may be able to arrange transport with by courtesy of the Sea Cadets. Please let me know.

Thanks for the Memories

The contribution to our memory corner this edition comes from Ronald Harrison, who was a telegraphist on MTB 665. It is quite a long article, and regretfully I have had to condense it. Let me know if you would like a copy of the full original.

Ron was posted to CF in January 1943 and sent for 3 weeks training at HMS Attack, followed by 4 weeks on a HDML in Fort William, where they learned all the different aspects of a warship. Then to Hornet and on to join MTB 665 at Appledore under Lieut. P A R Thompson DSC RCNVR. During this time a Blenheim bomber crashed on the beach at Instow, and they had to collect the dead aircrew and take them to an ambulance. Disaster struck the boat at Pembroke Dock. During practice action stations a leading seaman inadvertently fired the twin Vickers while replacing the gun cover and killed the No.1.

From Pembroke they sailed to Gibraltar, the range extended by fitting extra fuel tanks. Shortage of fresh water meant we washed in seawater – but the special soap did not lather! From Gibraltar we went to Algiers, on the way were hit by a heavy wave which provided a firework display on hitting the radio. It never fully recovered.

Eventually we reached Malta, and operated along the coast of Sicily with the 33rd Flotilla. Ron was only on the bridge when leaving or entering harbour, most of the time spent below with his wheezy radio and listening to the sound effects of any action. When Port Augusta was taken, the boat operated from there anchoring in mid-harbour. Ron slept on deck, air raids permitting. Visits ashore were out of the question, the only time was when they were allowed to visit a room containing vats of wine where they were allowed to sample – just one mug! Nevertheless, Ron overslept as a result and woke up to find they were at sea on patrol.

On the night of 15th August 1943 they were proceeding through the Messina Straits when they were spotted. Several shells hit the boat near the bridge and petrol tanks; the engine room received a direct hit putting the engines and generator out of

action. They had to abandon ship, putting the code books in a weighted bag which they dumped and promptly followed as the boat was now on fire. Guided by the navigating officer, they swam away from the boat and held on to a carly float, two wound men sat on the float, the others hung on; two men were missing believed killed. They tried to steer the float towards the shore but the current was too strong. At daybreak they found themselves in the middle of the Strait, and were picked up by a German landing craft, a fully dressed German sailor jumped over the side to help them on board, and treated them to a bottle of schnapps.

They were landed near Reggio di Calabria, then taken to a camp near Naples. When the Allies landed, they were moved north by train. After Italy capitulated, the Germans moved further north to Austria. Ron was ill with dysentery and jaundice and put into hospital. When better he was moved to a forestry camp at Ossiach en See with 25 soldiers captured in Greece. Food was scarce and they resorted to stealing food from the cattle or even capturing the odd stray chicken. The winters were harsh and they slept on straw palliases to conserve energy. There are many tales of ingenuity and scheming one had to adopt to survive until they were released in May 1945.

Royal Naval Christian Fellowship – Ancient Mariners

One of my ex-RN friends put me in touch with this group, who organise meetings and social events for former Naval personnel. If you would like to know more about them, or receive their newsletter, please let me know.

NEXT MEETING on HMS Belfast will be Sunday 15th April 2018.

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