

# COASTAL FORCES VETERANS' ASSOCIATION

## LONDON BRANCH

WINTER 2020



NEWSLETTER

### View from the Bridge



*ML 1301 in lively seas*

#### **Looking astern at 2019.**

Our Branch has enjoyed a very busy year, the highlight of which was the return to Normandy to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day. At home (i.e. on HMS *Belfast*) we enjoyed the film made by Tanja Kanceljak and her team from Croatian TV about coastal forces activities in the Adriatic. That meeting was attended by representatives from the Croatian Embassy.

Some of our members attended the Henley Traditional Boat Festival in July, following which we were invited on a cruise on the Thames courtesy of the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships.

Sadly we had to cancel our October meeting, but were able to turn out in force for Remembrance Day followed by a “run ashore” to the Anchor Tap

where landlady Julie Smith always makes us most welcome.

#### **Looking forward to 2020.**

2020 has two significant anniversaries – 80 years since Dunkirk and 75 years since the end of hostilities. We will keep you informed of any celebrations we hear of that would be of interest. We intend continuing to meet on HMS *Belfast* at least while veterans are capable of getting on board. We hope also to continue our associations with the Heritage Trust, the Traditional Boat Festival at Henley and the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships. Finally we intend keeping in touch with you all by means of this newsletter, which will be issued as soon as possible after the regular meetings.

## EDITORIAL

I hope you enjoy this first newsletter of the new year. I am pleased to be able to report on recent activities of London Branch.

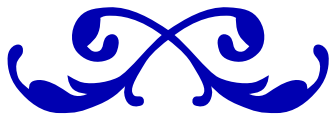
It is your newsletter and I welcome contributions. I have only a limited supply of photos which are limited to those boats and people with whom I have had direct contact. So if you have an interesting story to tell – please send it to me. I will publish

these in good faith as to their accuracy but we must accept that 90+ year old memories may have become blurred.

Lastly I am trying a new layout for this newsletter with the aim of making it is easier for those with impaired vision to read. Please let me know what you think.

### Branch Annual General Meeting 14<sup>th</sup> January

We met and agreed the Committee should continue unchanged. We then showed films of the Dunkirk Ship's Veterans Cruise, restoration work on HMS *Victory* and MASB 27. Minutes will be sent to members.



### Remembrance Day 2019

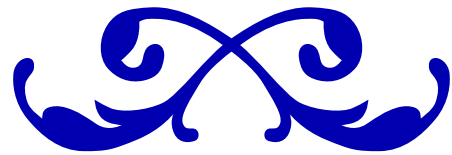
A group of over 20 including friends and families attended the service on HMS *Belfast*. The service was led by the Chaplain Rev David McLean RN, who spoke of his time as a Naval Chaplain in Afghanistan. The lesson was read by Rear Admiral Amjad Hussain CB, who has succeeded Admiral Lord West as the Naval Trustee of the Imperial War Museum. David Carter laid a wreath on behalf of the CFVA London Branch.



Afterwards we were treated to mulled wine and mince pies in the Ship's Company Dining Room, where we were very pleased to meet Sidney Downer who was the former CO of ML1410. (Seen here with Eddie Dibley and his daughter Wendy - background left)



We were delighted also to be joined by Richard and Sarah Smith from the Canadian High Commission (*see right*). Richard's father served with Coastal Forces as CO of MTB 266 and he has been trying to research his history. We then had a brisk walk to the Anchor Tap where Julie Smith had invited us all for lunch.



*George Phillips enjoyed a chat with Admiral Lord West (see left)*

## South London Branch.

I am sorry to report that our shipmates had their final meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> December. In the absence of Cyril Mabin and Grahame Berridge. George Chandler and June Baker led the proceedings. Trevor Robotham (CFHT) and David Carter (London Branch) were invited.

Trevor brought us up to date with progress on the Museum. We enjoyed a Christmas lunch kindly provided by the TS *Trafalgar* Sea Cadet Unit, who had played host to the Branch for many years. Sadly it means that London Branch is the only one still functioning.

I made it very clear that any South London members wishing to continue meeting would be most welcome to join London Branch on HMS *Belfast*.



*South London Branch members and families.*





Christmas Dinner with the Sea Cadets of TS *Trafalgar*

## News of preserved boats and those under restoration.

### *ML 1301 – HMS Meda*

This boat is being prepared as an onshore exhibit in “*Mechanisch Erfgoed Centrum*” – an industrial Museum in Holland. The work entails



*An impression of the supports in place*

making a set of iron supports to hold the boat level and stabilized – the condition of its timbers is such that it would collapse without them. Other supports are under the engines to take their weight and the keel.

The boat has suffered while in storage and parts of the deck are rotten, particularly around the hatches which has resulted in water ingress below. *Medusa* donated a spare hatch from when it was rebuilt and this is being used as a model for new ones.



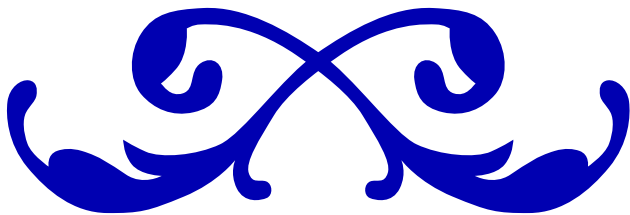
*Supports under the engine room*

## ML 1387 – HMS Medusa

Medusa has had a busy year starting with its annual lift-out and repaint followed by *Squadex* – the exercise with the 1<sup>st</sup> Patrol Boat Squadron. The main activity of the year was the Anniversary of D-Day, when the boat was first on show in Portsmouth followed by a voyage to Normandy for the celebrations there.

*Medusa on its mooring in Haslar Marina, Gosport next to the lightship “Mary Mouse” now a very good gastro-pub.*

Much work has been done by the volunteer crew to keep the boat looking smart. This included fitting a new dinghy, Kent Clearview Screens and modifying the 1960s Decca Navigator to work on GPS signals. The programme for 2020 so far includes a lift out and training in April; a voyage to both the Channel Islands and Normandy in May.



## Thanks for the Memories

We continue Sir Derrick Holden-Brown's account of his time in the Mediterranean.

### THE AEGEAN

“... Four boats of the 19<sup>th</sup> MGB flotilla were sent to Alexandria in October, 1943, thence across to Turkey and the Dodecanese Islands. The situation in the Aegean was difficult and in no way to be compared with the Dalmatian Islands

Greece and Crete were heavily garrisoned by the enemy. They had strong naval forces in those waters, and it is difficult to see what a small force of Dog-Boats plus some Short-Boats and MLs could really achieve.

In the end, they assisted in the evacuation of British troops from Kastellorizo to Alexandria, at the end of November 1943.



Two Dog-Boats went back to the Turkish coast where a Greek destroyer had beached herself near Calino after striking a mine and losing her bows. The two Dogs helped to shore-up bulkheads and prepare for a voyage at very low speed, then to escort her



of over 300 miles, which seemed unending but which finished in Alexandria to great rejoicing.

After fearsome enemy losses in Crete, the Aegean and Yugoslavia, it seems that our naval and military Commanders decided that operations in Italy and Krk, at the top end of the Islands, would eventually force the enemy to evacuate that area for fear of being isolated, and that is what happened.

### MINES.

Back now to the Adriatic. By October, 1944, the enemy had been pushed Northwards into the Gulf of Venice and Arsa. Unfortunately for us, they took with them all their mine-laying equipment and they seemed to have an unlimited supply of contact mines. On 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1944, MGB 663 was destroyed by a mine about 4 miles east of Venice.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 1945, MTB 655 struck a mine off the Istrian Peninsula, broke in two and burst into flames as her 100-octane petrol came to the surface.

The very next day, MTB 705 was sunk by a mine west of Zara.

### VICTORY AT TAGLIAMENTO.

On a brighter note, the War really was coming to an end. On 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1945, 7 E-Boats appeared off Ancona, the leader flying a white flag. They had many troops on board who they wished to offer as Prisoners of War, rather than leave them for the Partisans who would have been merciless. The E-Boats wanted to return for more troops but were not allowed to leave Ancona. Meanwhile, Tim Bligh had gone Northwards with 3 Dog-Boats to Tagliamento, a tiny little port at the very tip of the Adriatic. There they found a large number of enemy ships, including 20 F-Lighters and many small craft, apparently making their way from Trieste to Ancona. Yet there was a lot of confusion, and even at that moment there was the possibility that

On 10<sup>th</sup> April, MTB 710 was sunk north of Zara with 17 of her crew missing. Finally, on 17<sup>th</sup> April, 1945, MTB 697. was destroyed by a mine.

At the time, with the War nearly over, people wondered why the boats were continually exposed to such obvious dangers, but I think the answer is that the War was *not* over and all possible efforts had to be sustained up to the last moment. It was all very tragic.



some of the enemy vessels were unwilling to surrender and might open fire.

Bligh sent to Ancona for more Dog-Boats and when these arrived there was some sort of order, though some vessels chose to scuttle themselves. It took 25 hours of negotiation, but then 8 Dog-Boats set off for Ancona, escorting and even towing an armada of small ships with 500 troops on board.

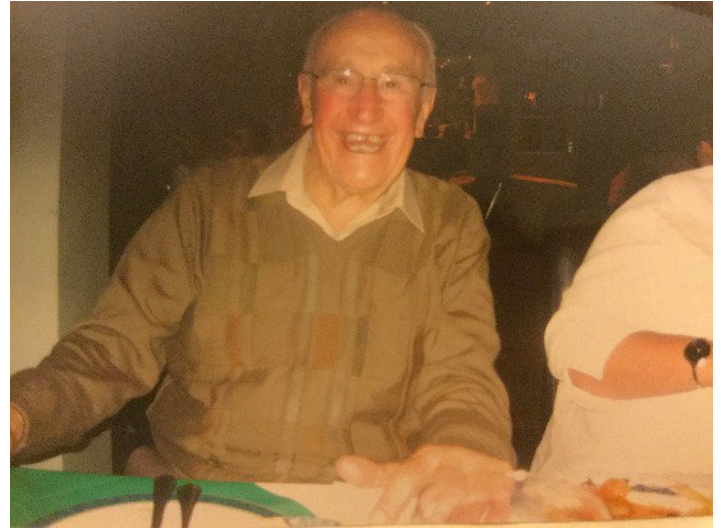
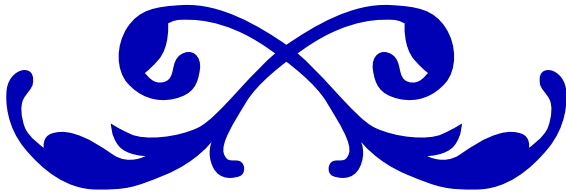
Thus ended hostilities on 4<sup>th</sup> May, 1945. Four days later, on Tuesday, May 8<sup>th</sup> 1945 (VE Day). At 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Prime Minister Winston Churchill officially announced the end of the War with Germany: **Victory in Europe...**"

This concludes this series of memoirs. My thanks to Heather Holden-Brown for letting us use Sir Derrick's papers.



## Obituary

We are sorry to learn of the death of Frank West on Christmas Day. Frank was an early member of the Association – CFVA no. 891. He served on MTB 479. Our condolences go to his daughter Sue and family.



**NEXT MEETING on HMS *Belfast* will be Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020\***  
(To be confirmed)

## LATE NEWS.

### Images or news arriving after close of Newsletter construction:

“Some of the veterans who visited Normandy in 2019 were pleased to receive letters from children at a College in Cabourg. They will be visiting England at Easter and we are trying to arrange to meet them on HMS *Belfast*”



*A picture from Sunday 12th January Meeting – 3 wise .....?*

## Obituary

We are saddened to report the death of Hector Sheppard-Capurro on 15<sup>th</sup> January following a short stay in Hospital. Hector served in the army in WW2 as an anti-aircraft gunner and dispatch rider in the Gibraltar Defence Regiment. After the war he established Sheppard's Marina in Gibraltar and was instrumental in preserving several former coastal forces boats including ML 1301 and MASB 32.

He took an interest in the London Branch and his generous donation kept it afloat at a difficult time.

His other great interest was in classic cars, he had a collection of Rolls Royce's, Bentleys, Rovers and an Austin 12 which like him was built in 1924. We have sent our condolences to the family.



*Hector on ML 1301 with David & Mary Carter, on left is MASB 32, on right is an Air-Sea Rescue Launch. (Photo: Gibraltar Chronical)* *Hector in his 1932 Rolls Royce with “Sandy” who adopted him.*