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NEWSLETTER



HMS Brave Borderer

In this edition of the Newsletter we have, once again, tried to focus on some of the dynamic individuals who successfully moulded Coastal Forces into the highly successful arm of the Service that it became. Also, in our Lives in Brief, we make a small tribute to our more recently departed Coastal Forces veterans. Sadly, on this occasion, one of our tributes is extended to The Rt. Hon. Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, who did so much to ensure that our Trust flourished and achieved success. We have limited our main articles to two as both these are a little lengthier than normal. A collection of reflections about time spent in the Gay Class boats gives an insight into operations in that era and this is accompanied by edited extracts from the fascinating account of David James, a Coastal Forces officer captured, interned as prisoner of War and then escaped back to England. Our Boats Roundup has a slightly extended article on Harbour Defence Motor Launch (HDML 1387) whose busy annual programme of wide spread visits does so much to project the name and image of Coastal Forces. Supporters may wish to be aware that this is my last Newsletter as Editor and Commander Rupert Head, also a Trustee, will now assume the post, producing Newsletter 24 in May 2019. I can only give a very sincere thanks to all those who have supported me as Editor and wish your new Editor good fortune.

Captain Trevor Robotham Royal Navy – Editor

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CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

It is with great sadness that I must begin by paying tribute to Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, the founding Chairman of the Trust and later our President, who passed away in June. I would like us all to recognise and applaud his immense contribution to the CFHT. He brought the Trust to its current well-founded status and was instrumental in developing its long-standing aims that are now being achieved.

Our Lives in Brief article has an extended narrative of Lord Strathcona's time in Coastal Forces and of his impressive life and political career, during which he could always be found standing-up for maritime matters. All involved in our Trust, past and present, owe him tremendous thanks and we will always be in his debt.

Turning to current activity, progress on our Exhibition project continues at a good pace although I recognise it is difficult for our supporters to appreciate how close we are to achieving our goal until physical work commences. This should start before the end of this year. Meanwhile, a busy CFHT team have been working with the National Museum of the Royal Navy and the Exhibition designers to complete the essential groundwork necessary to make this venture a success.

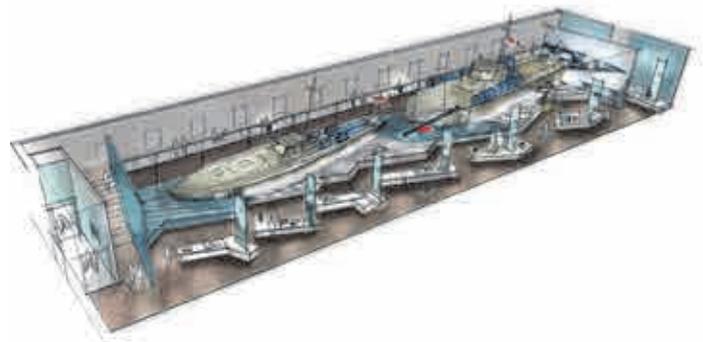
However, I must warn all our supporters that our financial status for the Project is fragile. We are restoring an old building and it is not surprising that new, sometimes costly issues emerge. Furthermore, modern exhibition design has to meet the latest requirements to provide access for all, including the disabled, which imposes further financially challenging demands. Our Trustees are doing all they can to recruit fresh financial supporters and, in this respect, we held a major presentation at Trinity House in London in early September. Nevertheless, I would also ask for your continued generosity to help us to successfully reach what will be the climax of many years work.

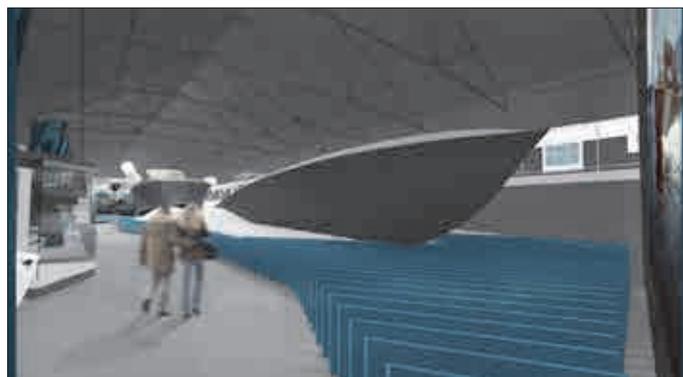
Finally, I am confident that you will find this Newsletter as interesting and informative as all those you have read in the past. Editing and producing the Newsletter is a labour of love and I would like to pay tribute one last time to its outgoing editor, Captain Trevor Robotham. Trevor has done a brilliant job for us all and I thank him on behalf of all readers. Equally I wish Commander Rupert Head every success as he takes on the role.

Vice Admiral Sir Paul Haddacks KCB
– Chairman of Trustees

THE EXHIBITION PROJECT

The planning and design aspects of the Exhibition Project continue to progress well although this stage of the work follows a well defined process of achieving approvals, a rather slow business. With respect to the restoration of the Exhibition building at the Priddy's Hard former Armament Depot, this needs the appointment of a number of specialist posts and this process is well on track under the management of The Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust, one of the partners in this project. CFHT have provided funding to advance the Exhibition building design work and to ensure that this aspect of the site development can get underway quickly, once all advance planning has been completed. It is currently planned for restoration work to commence on the Exhibition building by the end of the year. Design work on the actual Exhibition is particularly well advanced and will probably need to be paused at some stage in order that the Exhibition and building work aspects can be aligned. Work on the restoration of our two display boats, *CMB 331* and *MTB 71*, is just commencing although it is becoming clear that this aspect of the Project is underfunded. The Trust has therefore commenced a fund-raising drive to put this aspect on a sound basis. This small report is accompanied by a few pictures of the anticipated Exhibition, produced by Studio MB, the appointed Exhibition designer.





!!!STOP PRESS!!!

The Memorial Service for Sir Edward du Cann was held at St Margaret's, Westminster on Tuesday 13 November. The Memorial Service for The Rt. Hon. Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal will be held on 28 November, by invitation only.

BOATS ROUNDUP

MA/SB 27



MA/SB 27 – a challenge ahead.

Another World War II Coastal Forces boat is being saved and restored with *MASB 27* having been purchased in April 2016 by an organisation called 'D-Day Revisited'. It was then moved by road to its current location at Hawarden Airfield, just outside Chester. After months of research, their 'spare-time' restoration project began in November 2016. The boat is little more than a hull, full of debris, with several internal bulkheads and a small area of original decking. The restoration to complete wartime seaworthy condition is scheduled to take 2 years, aiming for practical completion by the end of 2018. Lifting into the water is planned for early 2019. Subject to satisfactory commissioning and sea trials, the first mission will be to attend the 75th Anniversary of D-Day in June 2019.

For 'D-Day Revisited', the historical significance of *MA/SB 27* is its part in the Normandy Landings of 6 June 1944. On the early morning of D-Day, research indicates that *MASB 27* was part of the Coastal Forces flotilla engaged in support of the US 1st Division in its assault on Omaha Beach. After the beachhead

was secured and troops could move inland, *MA/SB 27* remained in that area using its ASDIC to direct construction of 'Mulberry A' which was the artificial harbour established off Omaha. After its war service, like most timber gunboats, *MA/SB 27* was sold off to become a houseboat. All armaments and engines were removed. At 75 years old, the good news is that the boat has a sound hull. Originally built in double diagonal Honduras mahogany, the structure has survived remarkably well. We welcome the saving of another Coastal Forces craft and we will follow the progress of *MASB 27* with interest.

HDML1387 "MEDUSA"

This year has been a very busy one for *Medusa* and her maintenance is a bit like the Forth Bridge, once they have reached one end, it's time to start at the other. To keep her looking tip top and with everything working, she needs constant effort and a debt is owed to some very dedicated crew members. The following series of pictures depict some of the years activity.



Many hands at work.



ABOVE LEFT 1960 MkIV Decca which now indicates our position, not done that since 1994 thanks to Mark, Luke and Tom. Outfit QM, one of only 20 prototype Decca units deployed on D Day, this is number 19.

ABOVE RIGHT Cheltenham Combined Cadet Forces.

RIGHT Maybe the first deck landing on Medusa.

Over the winter, in conjunction with Portsmouth University, three final year Masters of Engineering students built a box that takes in GPS positions and drives the boat's 60 year old Decca Navigator. It's quite something to see the Decca dials moving again and the boat's position can be plotted from them on Decca charts. It is hoped to run further projects of this nature to make some more operational use of the boat's World War II equipment.

Word is getting around about *Medusa* and the demand from Combined Cadet Force Sections for a day out on the boat is growing. This year they have done a day for Cheltenham College and another for Gordon's School with a second for Cheltenham in the autumn. Cheltenham College came in February; amazingly the weather was kind with a mild calm day, a few days later it snowed. The picture shown is by courtesy of Cheltenham College; photography is not permitted when cadets are onboard, as part of the very strict safeguarding rules for young people are followed.

In April the boat did a day's filming at sea for "Dunkirk, the forgotten heroes" which was about the 51st Highland Division who were left behind on the French beaches. The film crew had to stream a drone, from which the filming was being done, and which was difficult to could keep up in the strong wind. The film crew were very relieved when it was safely back on board. The programme was shown on 15th July on Channel 4 and featured a lot of *Medusa*.

The *Medusa* Trust is regularly contacted by families of veterans wishing to visit the boat and such a visit was recently from KT Lwin from Myanmar. Now 92, he served with the Burma RNVR on the Arakan front in the 59th ML Flotilla on



HDMLs and Fairmile B's. After the war ended he took command of HDML 1456 which had been gifted to Burma.

It is always a joy for the *Medusa* team to meet people who have a connection with HDMLs and hear their story.

Each year *Medusa* spends about two weeks in France and for the last two years this has been to attend for the D day commemorations. This year they went via Dartmouth and Alderney before going to Grandcamp Maisy, adjacent to Omaha beach.

Their first port of call was Bucklers Hard where they were open to visitors. In the evening a reception was held on board, hosted by Mary Montagu, with guests including the historian, Dan Snow. Our next stop was Weymouth with an evening with Mike and Pam Boyce, skipper of *Medusa* from 1968 to 2013. As we rounded Portland Bill the next morning, we spotted them both there to wave us off.

On leaving Dartmouth, she sailed to Cherbourg, via Alderney, escorted briefly by a pod of Dolphins.

The boat hosted many visitors and held a reception for the local mayor and dignitaries. It was great to meet up with the friends we had made the previous year and several of the crew were able to go on the military vehicle parade. The French celebrate the occasion as their liberation and really enter into the spirit, with most dressed in period costume or uniform.



ABOVE *KT Lwin,*
Commanding Officer
of HDML 1456.

RIGHT *Crew at Britannia*
Royal Navy College Dartmouth.

BELOW RIGHT *A very*
welcome welcome.



The visit was slightly curtailed due to approaching bad weather and the boat made a lumpy return home.

Next year will be the 75th anniversary of D Day and the Medusa Trust are planning to be part of the commemoration in France. Ashes scattering is a regular feature of Medusa's programme and several had taken place over the year. Sadly, and memorably, one was for *Medusa's* Coxswain of 30 years, Brian Holmes. These are always solemn occasions and its difficult not to be moved as the Skipper, Alan Watson, reads the service with the ensign at half- mast and the church pennant hoisted.

Edited from the Medusa Newsletter
contributed by Alan Watson.



"Squadex with the P2000 Squadron and HMS Medusa, 25 September – a splendid final 2018 sea evolution.

A FIRST COMMAND

GAY CLASS OPERATIONS

In the early 1950s the Vosper-designed Gay Class supplanted the ageing Dog Boats of the 2nd Fast Patrol Boat Squadron. This only happened because the first diesel-engined class were not ready due to delays on Britain's first high-speed marine diesel engine, the Napier Deltic.

Based at Hornet, the squadron spent most of their time on training exercises to ensure crews were well tuned for the variety of roles in which these boats could be employed. This included acting as a fully equipped gun boat, an equally well-armed torpedo boat, a mixture of the two carrying both torpedoes and guns, or in a mine-laying role. Appropriately, this was the time when Coastal Forces broke with the traditional description of MTB and MGB and became Fast Patrol Boats – FPB for short.

Live exercises included night or daytime gun and/or torpedo attacks on the Home Fleet as they came home to Portsmouth, helping to train other ships of the fleet based at the Portland training centre and assisting the Special Services squadron to hone their clandestine landing techniques. There was an annual 6-week NATO coastal forces exercise (Operation 'NO DAME' or 'BOLD DAME') held every Spring which involved a fortnight each off the East Coast and Danish and Norwegian waters, normally accompanied by a depot ship. Finally, a 10-day 'jolly' was allowed in the Summer, when senior officers were allowed to select a suitably well-endowed port visit! Choices varied amongst Ireland, the canals of

Holland, Scotland, North or West France and the Channel Islands. Routine self-maintenance, including time on the slip to check shafts and propellers, took up the majority of a boat's harbour time interspersed with the occasional "duty crash boat" day in case of local problems in the sea or air.

FIRST COMMAND

The following is an edited version of an article written by John Cadell, published in "Hold Fast the Heritage", the BRNC Dartmouth September 1943 Term's book. He commanded HMS *Gay Archer* in Coastal Forces based at Gosport in 1953 and was then Commanding Officer of the 2nd FPB Squadron at HMS Hornet. He, like several others, was to experience early command in their careers. After many commands and a long and successful career, he retired as Vice Admiral Sir John Cadell, KBE.

Impromptu Squadron Command

"Aspiration to command one's own ship is inculcated in all of us from our first days at Dartmouth. Normally this was seen as likely to come at the Lieutenant-Commander level, after years of dedication to duty and marked success in in the lower echelons. By expressing a desire to get into Fast Patrol Boats, one could accelerate this process and attain command as a young Lieutenant. Normally one did a year as a First Lieutenant and. Then a year in command. I joined *Gay Archer* as Josh Swinley's First Lieutenant and after 6 months he was selected to be a Flag Lieutenant and



HMS Gay Archer in 1951.

I was appointed to fill his command slot. After a further nine months I was luckier still to find myself in command of the whole short boat squadron as a result of too exuberant a guest night where we broke the Squadron Commander's neck. I hasten to add that it was nothing too serious and that after just over three months he was back in command. Fortuitous for my short squadron command, our sphere of operations involved no mid-winter patrolling of the North Sea or cold passages to the Hook of Holland, which was the norm, but instead a very gentlemanly procession up the Thames, escorting the President of Portugal on a state visit with a week alongside Westminster Pier to impress everyone we could by our smartness and the hitting power and versatility of our small weapon platforms. Remember that at that stage the short boats 75 foot long, could change their role from gun boat to torpedo boat or mine layer in under eight hours. This could also be achieved from a forward base if this had been prepositioned and we ran on AVGAS which could be produced by road tanker at any jetty in Western Europe at very short notice. A prolonged NATO exercise in the Baltic was the second part of my stewardship and this was professionally challenging as well as being great fun. As Indian summer turned to autumn winter punctured by storms, the lengthening nights gave scope for a variety of changing tactics. Working closely with our own long boats and with Danish and Norwegian forces, whose hulls were based on the e-boat, added further versatility to our tactics. War-time lessons were relearned and the fact that the British had still kept to two basic hull types where other nations had concentrated on only the long boat hull, gave us a fine weather advantage that was never challenged. After prolonging exercises as long as we decently could, getting home for Christmas became imperative. The snag was that after emerging from the western end of the Keil Canal, we were met by a series of extremely strong westerly gales to which the long-term weather forecast gave little hope of improvement. Temporary shelter in Wilhelmshaven gave time for the weather to moderate. We considered our options to be either waiting for the weather to moderate, set-out at high speed and tolerate the resulting damage or go through the Dutch canals and try and emerge at Zuider Zee. Although we knew the Dutch canal option was possible, there were no records of a motor torpedo boat having achieved this with no charts. We bought maps from a local garage and set-out on the journey. Of our three engines, only one was running, one was on stand-by and the third was being cleared of weeds. Twenty minutes was the longest time an engine would run without choking. So the passage was doubly interesting navigationally and a nightmare for the engineers. The passage went well and we were in Den Helder ready for a break in the weather in order to make a dash to Lowestoft. The break came and we made our dash with a very bumpy ride along the English south coast, reaching HMS *Hornet* on 22 December."



HMS Britannia escorted up the Thames by the Gay Class Squadron.

Sovereign's Escort to HM Yacht Britannia 1954

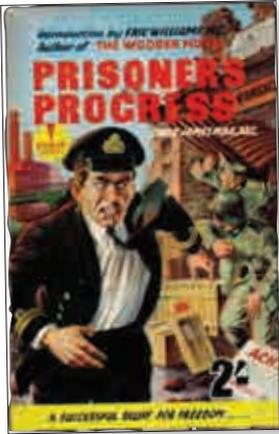
by Murray Johnstone

"Upstream of Tower Bridge and abreast of the Royal Yacht Britannia, lay four Gay Class FPBs, including *Gay Archer*, awaiting the disembarkation of the Queen after her Coronation tour of the Commonwealth in the early summer of 1954. For the final mile of the tour she was to proceed up-river to Westminster Pier in the Royal Barge, escorted by her waterborne household cavalry, the Second Fast Patrol Boat Squadron. Buildings within sight of the river were bedecked with flags and loyal greetings and both banks were thick with cheering people. The wharf side cranes were manned and dipped in a giant salute as she passed in Britannia. The Sovereign had returned to the Realm. After the Queen and the royal party disembarked the royal Yacht into the Royal Barge, the Squadron formed up with, HM Ships *Gay Bombardier* (SO), *Gay Charioteer* ahead of the barge, *Gay Charger* and *Gay Archer* bringing up the rear. We cruised at about 8 knots with each pair of boats 50 foot apart, closing to 15 foot apart as we approached a bridge. When practicing this manoeuvre a few days before the event, we had lost the top few sections of our whip aerials on the underside of the lower bridges. Time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted. Escort work completed, the Second FPB Squadron proceeded up-stream to Albert Jetty, Chelsea. What better watering place could there be for ships of the Second Fast Patrol Boat Squadron.

The above abridged articles are attributed to their Term Book, "Hold Fast the Heritage", written and edited, by Rodney Agar and Murray Johnstone.

Note: *The ex - HMS Gay Archer has been privately restored as a running, seaworthy vessel by Paul Childs and his family of 'Military Boats'. She can be visited at Watchet Harbour, Somerset and is maintained by voluntary finance, so donations would be most welcome.*

“PRISONERS PROGRESS” – THE STORY OF A COASTAL FORCES OFFICERS JOURNEY



In Newsletter 17 we told the story of the sinking of *MTB 79* in an action with the enemy with her Commanding Officer, Lieutenant David James being taken prisoner. This article continues that story by describing his journey as a Prisoner of war and his remarkable escapes.

The action during which David James was taken prisoner took place on the night of 27/28 February 1943 off the Dutch Coast. A large mixed unit of MGBs, MTBs and

MLs were deployed, with the MGBs and MTBs protecting the MLs minelaying operations, while also seeking an enemy force which may have been in the area. Lieutenant-Commander Robert Hichens was in *MGB 77* and his good friend David James in command of *MGB 79*. As the minelaying operations came to an end an enemy convoy was detected and the MTBs and MGBs became engaged in a complex and fierce action, described in detail Newsletter 17. *MGB 79* was hit several times by enemy gunfire and her petrol tanks exploded. With her engines out of action and the boat heavily ablaze David James ordered tracer to be fired into the air as the recognised distress signal and, with little expectation of being rescued, he had no option but to get his crew to abandon the boat. His distress tracer fire was seen and recognised by Robert Hichens who approached and began taking crew onboard but his position was unsustainable, being illuminated by the ring of light from the burning of *MGB 79*. Robert Hichens managed to rescue six of the stricken crew before the damage to his own boat and the vulnerability of his own position forced him to withdraw. David James, left afloat in the sea, was then to begin his own remarkable journey.

Treading water he narrowly missed being chopped-up by the propellers of a final rescue attempt before the British force departed and, five minutes later, a German trawler approached. Taken onboard with other members of his crew and deposited in the boiler-room to warm-up and dry out, he then realised that his temple and hand were both filled with shell fragments. The captured crew were well treated and were taken to Rotterdam. From there the crew were taken by train to Utrecht and the first thoughts of escape came to David James but his guard was much too vigilant. Poking his head out of a compartment window to seek his opportunities, David James was faced with the head of his guard watching him from an adjacent door window, with a smile and brandishing his revolver. He and his crew were moved on to Osnabruck and

then Wilhelmshaven to face persistent interrogation for twelve days. He was then taken by train to Bremen and then on what he describes as an absurd little train to Tarmstedt, close to MALAG O, the camp to which they were going. The operations of the little schuttle train created great amusement amongst the group of prisoners of war. The train was ridiculously understaffed. Having fussed into the park bahnof where they were to be collected the guard got out to collect tickets while the driver unhooked the engine and took it round to the other end of the train. He then came back and clipped the tickets of the new passengers which had since been sold to them by the guard. He spent the journey to Tarmstedt seeking opportunities to escape but he failed to take stock of his surroundings, a failure that was to cost him dear some nine months later. On arrival at Tarmstedt the prisoners were met by an elderly German naval officer called Schoof, on a bicycle. He asked in excellent English whether all the prisoners were able to walk the next two miles and, learning that one man had an injured leg, he offered him the bicycle.

Life in the camp was highly tolerable with endless hobbies and activities with which to engage and pass the time. One hobby which was prominent in the mind of David James was that of escaping and he became preoccupied with the best way this should be tackled. The camp was situated in flat, sandy country surrounded by two barbed wire fences about ten feet high, six feet apart, with concertina wire between them. At each corner was a watch tower fitted with searchlights and guns. A formidable typical prisoner of war camp. Additionally, the Germans had taken effective precautions to detect any tunnelling by fitting microphones at thirty yard intervals to detect digging. They had whitewashed the earth under the barrack hut floors to detect any dispersal of soil. Add to this the fact that the area surrounding the camp was highly militarised. Previous escapes from the camp, including that of Lieutenant Micky Wynn DSC,



British Powerboat MGBs underway.



ABOVE *Communal activity in Milag O*

LEFT *Group photograph – Milag O*

RNVR, of St Nazaire distinction, had ended in capture and imprisonment in Colditz Castle.

Before too long he was invited to join another officer in devising their personal escape plan, which then had to be approved by the camp Escape Committee. Much effort was put into their plans which varied between cutting through the fence wire at a vulnerable point leading into the German guard compound which then presented several exits to the outside, tightening of security resulted in this plan never being possible, involvement in two tunnels, named Lucy and Mabel, both discovered and a “clever plan” to get himself transferred out of his existing camp to another, with escape in mind while on the way. It was known that there was a standard form used by the German High Command for the transfer of prisoners between camps. With the help of the camp paymaster Lt Cdr John Linton an original transfer form was to be obtained from the corruptible German office team but a change of staff foiled this plan. His idea for what was to be his successful escape came during a routine visit to the Bath-House, which was outside the main perimeter fence. While these visits by groups of prisoners was conducted under heavy guard and high security, David noted that the guards all stayed in the bath-house giving the prisoners close attention during their showering and it was only on opening a steamed-up window that David noted that no guards remained outside. A plan was therefore formed for his escape in December 1943 but the obstacle was coving-up for a missing man. The counting of the bath party was stringent and took place several times during each Bath-House visit. It was decided to rely on creating confusion on the numbers at each count and the fact that a missing prisoner would result in 30 days imprisonment if caught while the guards got six weeks imprisonment for allowing the escape to happen. It was therefore decided to rely on either the absence not being detected or the guards being reluctant to report it and depending on the discovery being made at some other time and particularly by other guards. The escape through the bathroom window was therefore executed and David, wishing to get well clear of the area, walked two

miles and successfully caught a local shopping commuter train from Tarmstedt into Bremen. His carefully devised plan was to make for the Baltic ports in an attempt to blend-in as a Bulgarian naval officer. Firstly, he was to travel as a Danish electrician until he was clear of the area then as a Bulgarian naval officer. Bulgaria was a monarchy and the Royal crown on his uniform buttons was thought to be similar to those of the Bulgarian Navy. Supporting paperwork had been produced identifying him as Lieutenant Ivan Bagerov (pronounce it as you wish) and whose reproduced Bulgarian naval identity could be confusing to any German authority who stopped him to check. Replica German Identity Papers or those of a French worker would be familiar to German officials and therefore less easy to fool. The only alteration made to his uniform was the addition of a five-letter flash of gold on blue on his left shoulder signifying the Royal Bulgarian Navy. Once outside the camp he experienced several hair-raising close encounters, each of which had the potential to end in capture. However, capture was evaded and he reached Bremen by train and then, miraculously onto Hamburg, Lubeck and finally the port of Stettin on the Baltic. He flashed his forged papers in Bulgarian to increasingly confused officials along the way and, despite many curious looks at his “converted” RNVR uniform, he was not challenged. It was then fourteen hours since he escaped from the camp. Then his problems really commenced with difficulties finding the docks and then a suitable ship bound for Sweden as all he found were German. He decided that he must return to Lubeck which he did and which proved to offer several better opportunities, with a number of Swedish ships in harbour. Here disaster struck and attempts to get onboard an appropriate ship resulted in arrest by alert dockyard police and on to a cell in Lubeck prior to return to his camp. Over the next few months a slackening of German enthusiasm for their role saw a number of escapes, mainly through cutting the boundary fence wire. Escapees included Geoffrey Place, VC., of midget submarine fame; Frank Carr DSC., of Coastal Forces and Bill Tilie, taken at St Nazaire. Escape plans became the main occupation of the prisoners and this led to David James

second and final escape attempt. He was going to repeat his method of being a seaman but in this second attempt, in late 1944, he was to be a Swedish merchant seaman, heavily bandaged due to burns and under the name of Christof Lindholm being repatriated. His escape, once again from the Bathhouse was put into action on a snowy day in February, when the German guards came into the bathhouse to evade the weather, rather than patrolling outside. His first escape had in effect been a practice for this second journey on which he was able to exercise all his local knowledge. Nevertheless, the journey was fraught with dangerous encounters and eventually took him to Danzig. Wandering in the dock areas in total exhaustion and in constant dangers from police checks he was unable to find a Swedish ship so, in desperation, chose a Danish ship for his escape. Hiding under coal in its bunker and suffering a nervous return of the ship to Lubeck, a seaman who had provided him with food gave him the bad news that the ship had changed plans and was not leaving German waters and was therefore no further use to him. Getting himself ashore once again in Lubeck his luck changed dramatically when he found a Finish ship and got himself onboard. Hidden by sympathetic crew, he hid in the Boiler Room area for the two day passage to Stockholm and to safety. Like all escapees David James was to say that the greatest factor



in their treacherous journeys was “luck” and all felt the sense of a greater body watching over them. What of the loss of his presence in the Malag. A Warrant Officer James, who was similar to David in appearance, succeeded in passing the Germans twice in the counting of prisoners, thus giving a credible time lead for his mistake. The day after his arrival in Stockholm his father, Sir Archibald James, as Permanent Private Secretary (PPS) to the President of the Board of Trade, R. A. Butler, was sitting in the House of Commons, behind his Minister, when handed a note reading, “Your son has succeeded in escaping from Germany and is now in Stockholm”.

After the war David James became prominent in both politics and public life.

He became the Member of Parliament for Brighton Kempton and subsequently for North Dorset. As an author, he wrote about his interest in the Antarctic and he was an adviser on the production of the film “Scott of the Antarctic” and in 1962 he featured as Eamund Andrews guest in the “This is your Life programme”. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions in *MGB 79* in February 1943 and the MBE for his escape across Germany.

This summary of David James escape is taking from the far more detailed fascinating account given in his book, “A Prisoner’s Progress” and can be obtained from the Director CFHT on request.

PROMINENT VETERANS

CAPTAIN PETER GERALD CHARLES DICKENS, DSO, MBE, DSC, ROYAL NAVY

In World War II Peter Dickens was a brilliant and daring leader in command of MTBs and, post war, he was to become the first President of the Coastal Forces Veterans Association. Peter Dickens was the son of Admiral Sir Gerald Dickens and the great-grandson of our famous novelist Charles Dickens. In the early years of the war, as a Sub-Lieutenant, he was First Lieutenant of a Hunt class destroyer, *HMS Cotswold*, countering mine-laying E boats and he had to be rescued when the destroyer itself was mined. Among the officers to receive the casualties was Robert Hichens.



This was the first meeting between the two who were to subsequently work together extensively at *HMS Beehive*, Felixstowe and who were to become great leaders within Coastal Forces.

From the moment he joined Coastal Forces in 1942, Peter Dickens achieved one success after another. He at the fore in six successful engagements in his first year including the sinking of several German armed trawlers and an heroic action in taking the crew off a damaged British MGB

The Senior Officer MGBs Lt. Cdr. R. P. Hichens RNVR and Senior Officer MTBs Lieutenant P. G. C. Dickens RN at HMS Beehive in early 1943 – shortly before Robert Hichens was killed.

near Terschelling and setting fire to the vessel while under constant heavy enemy fire. Peter Dickens was the master of the deliberate, unhurried approach. He believed that an unobserved attack should always be the prime method and he prided himself on being able to fire torpedoes at the enemy before they knew that MTBs were in the vicinity. Peter Scott, a great friend, wrote that Dickens was the greatest MTB exponent of his time. After the war Peter Dickens commanded the destroyer HMS *Daring* and Chatham Dockyard before retiring from the service in 1964, when he became an honorary ADC to the Queen. In retirement he was the author of several books including a very realistic and thoughtful account of his experiences leading the 21st Motor Torpedo Flotilla in "Night Action – MTB Flotilla at War" (1975 and recently republished). In the book he is modest about his achievements in Coastal Forces but the fighting quality of a courageous man, not afraid to admit his fears and failings, comes triumphantly across. He was the seventh member of his family to become president of the worldwide Dickens Fellowship. He died 25 May 1987.

COMMANDER CHRISTOPHER WILLIAM STUART DREYER, DSO, DSC, ROYAL NAVY

Christopher Dreyer was a highly respected naval officer who distinguished himself in Coastal Forces and who was to become the second President of the Coastal Forces Veterans Association. Christopher Dreyer came from a family of prominent naval officers and he joined the Royal Navy in the pre-war 1930s. After promotion to Lieutenant in 1939, he joined Coastal Forces at HMS *Vernon* in January 1940. At that time the 1st MTB Flotilla of 60 foot British Power Boats was based at Felixstowe, some having just returned from Malta through the French canals, as described in our earlier article. In March he was given command of *MTB 102*, the 68 foot Vosper prototype and became Senior Officer of the 3rd MTB Flotilla, consisting of just MTBs *102* and *100*. Their role at that time was the training of other officers for the rapidly expanding Coastal Forces. Very soon after this, the Germans invaded Norway and then Holland and Belgium and war activities became intense. As also described in our previous article on *MTB 102*, in May 1940 the boat was to make seven voyages to the beaches of Dunkirk under Christopher's command, for which he was awarded the DSC. In July he was given command of *MTB 30* a new Vosper design MTB built by Camper & Nicholsons. Operating from Felixstowe in the 4th MTB Flotilla, he was heavily involved in anti-invasion patrols and offensive operations off the Dutch coast. Regrettably, illness struck and Christopher left MTBs for the job of First Lieutenant of the ex- American destroyer, HMS *Ludlow*, training the army in the use of Landing Craft off the Scottish coast. Returning to MTBs in July 1942 he was Senior Officer of a series of Flotillas, the 5th, then 6th MTB Flotillas at Dover and subsequently the 24th MTB Flotilla at Newhaven.



The officers of the 24th MTB Flotilla with their Senior Officer Lieutenant Christopher Dreyer DSC RN, centre.

Much of this period involved intense operations and he was awarded his second DSC in 1942 for an attack on an enemy convoy in the Dover straits, while serving in *MTB 44*. In May 1943 he moved his 24th MTB Flotilla of Vosper 71 foot boats to the Mediterranean operating in Bone and then Malta, in readiness for Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily.

Coastal Forces was to make a major contribution to the success of the invasion, operating patrols through the narrow Messina Straits where the larger warships were unable to operate and severely restricting enemy activity. Christopher was awarded the DSO for his role in the Sicilian operations but regrettably he was once again invalided home with sickness. After recovery he was sent to the Admiralty to write the definitive directives (CB) on Coastal Forces warfare and then was appointed Staff Officer to Captain Coastal Forces (Channel) in advance of the preparations for the Normandy invasion. After the invasion his Coastal Forces involvement continued with two years at HMS *Hornet* as Senior Officer MTBs and then, in 1950, to Admiralty Bath where he was able to apply his knowledge in co-ordinating the technical departments in the design and maintenance of Coastal Forces craft. There followed a period with the Royal Swedish Navy as advisor to their developing Coastal Forces, from which he was awarded the Order of the Sword of Sweden. In 1953, as Executive Commander of the then new HMS *Ark Royal*, for her first commission, illness struck again for which he now had to leave the service, cutting short what promised to be a continuing brilliant career. He then worked for Vospers in a senior position for 22 years selling their Fast Training Boats (FTBs), other patrol boats and warships to many navies of the world, until the company was nationalized in 1977 and became part of British Shipbuilders. Most particularly Christopher became the second President of the Coastal Forces Veterans Association and a founding Trustee of our Coastal Forces Heritage Trust, founded in 1994.

LIVES IN BRIEF

ADMIRAL SIR JAMES EBERLE GCB



Admiral Sir James Eberle GCB.

Jim Eberle's first experience of the war at sea was his brief period as a young officer in Motor Torpedo Boats based at Newhaven in Sussex. From there he was engaged in escorting Allied convoys and countering the threat from German E-boats. Thereafter he was dispatched to the Far East to join the battlecruiser HMS *Renown* and later the cruiser HMS *Belfast*, which arrived in the Pacific just as the war against Japan was ended by the atom bomb. He specialised as a gunnery officer and he participated in bombarding of the shore installations Coast during the Korean war. He was then selected to be the trials officer for the navy's first anti-aircraft missile system, Seaslug. This made his name and led to an appointment on the staff at Dartmouth naval college, where he discovered an enthusiasm for beagling with the college pack. He became master and chairman for more than 50 years, and, on one occasion, brought his pack on to the deck of the amphibious warfare ship *Intrepid* for a "hunt breakfast". He was to be promoted Rear-Admiral three years earlier than convention allowed and he progressed to be Commander in Chief Fleet and Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command. As Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet his leadership style was lively; he was known with affection as "Ayatollah Eberle", exercising "management by bombshell". He was the Chairman of Chatham House until late 1990 and such was his reputation that he then continued to be employed on a variety of missions, including one to Beijing to lay the foundations for a closer relationship with the UK.

Admiral Sir James Eberle, GCB. 31 May 1927 - 17 May 2018

THE RT. HON. THE LORD STRATHCONA AND MOUNT ROYAL

The Rt. Hon. Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal served in Coastal Forces in World War II, as The Hon. Euan Howard. He served in a number of MTBs from Bases on the East Coast, eventually becoming 1st Lieutenant of *MTB 721* and then in command of *MTB 780*. One aspect of the war which distressed him was his presence at Slapton Sands in the aftermath of an attack by German E-boats on the flotilla of American PT boats who had been rehearsing for the Normandy landings. The enemy raid on the assembled PT boats left hundreds of US sailors dead, floating in the bay of Slapton Sands, off the Dorset coast.

He was to become the founding Chairman of the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust in 1994 and on relinquishing that role, in 2008, he became the Trust's President. He surrounded himself with a strong group of former World War II MTB and MGB commanding officers as Trustees and quickly established the Trust as a well recognised and respected authority. From



LEFT *Euan Strathcona*. ABOVE *Euan Strathcona at home on his Island of Colonsay*.

its early days he guided the Trust with extreme skill and through his many connections he enabled the Trust to raise to raise funding for the support of Coastal Forces heritage craft, whose sponsors were struggling to sustain their operations. Many various activities were undertaken during his leadership, seminars, strong representation at Navy Days and Festivals of the Sea, contribution to an endless number of publications and films, and the establishment of commemorative plaques at former Coastal Forces bases. Euan Howard succeeded his father in the Baronacy in 1959, the title had been created in 1900 for Donald Smith his great, great grandfather, a Scottish-born Canadian financier, philanthropist and politician who co-founded the Canadian Pacific Railway and was the principal shareholder of Hudson's Bay Company. His obituary in *The Times* described him as "a maker of modern Canada" and "one of the great outstanding figures of the Empire". A special remainder ensured that the title passed to the 1st Lord Strathcona's daughter, Margaret, who was married to Robert Howard, a surgeon. Their eldest son, the 3rd Baron Strathcona and Mount Royal, served as a Unionist MP in the 1920s and was under-secretary of state for war from 1934 to 1939.

After the war, Euan Howard undertook several successful business activities and, when he inherited the Baroncy on the death of his father, he took his seat in the House of Lords on the Conservative benches. He served as Lord in Waiting (government whip) under Edward Heath and after Margaret Thatcher took office in May 1979, he was appointed as a Defence Minister, firstly for Defence Procurement and then as the Minister for the Royal Air Force. He was appointed as the chairman of the Bath Festival followed by which he was the deputy chairman of the SS *Great Britain* Project from 1970 to 1973, to restore the ship. He was the president of the Steamboat Association of Great Britain and became involved in the successful project to reopen the Kennet & Avon canal. Ever mindful of his heritage, he marked the centenary of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1985 by re-enacting the photograph

featuring his forefather driving in the railway's last spike at Craigellachie in 1885. He shouldered lightly the burden of having an entire Canadian regiment bear his name and was often invited to formal events in Canada by the officers of Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians). He also enjoyed travelling beyond Canada. Europe was for skiing, but he ventured forth into the Anglosphere, visiting Africa, Australia and America. Along with his title, Euan Strathcona had inherited large estates in Scotland, including the Hebridean islands of Oronsay and Colonsay. In 1977 he put them on the market, but ended up keeping Colonsay, on which he undertook improvements to the gardens. He continued much of his public work, notably as the Prime Warden since 1965 of the Fishmongers' Company, one of the oldest of the City guilds. He was a friend of the Duke of Edinburgh, whose 90th birthday celebrations he attended in 2011. Indeed, these two elderly men would be highly competitive when together and at times would debate which of them would outlive the other.

The 4th Baron Strathcona and Mount Royal – 26 November 1923 -16 June 2018

CAPTAIN JAMES (JAS) BRIGGS ROYAL NAVY

James Briggs, always known as Jas, entered the Royal Navy in 1946. He joined Coastal Forces as a Lieutenant at HMS *Hornet*, first cutting his teeth as a First Lieutenant and then in command of HMS *Gay Cavalier* a Fast Patrol and Torpedo Boat. At this time Coastal Forces was spending a fair amount of time in the Baltic operating with the Norwegian, Danish and German Coastal Forces. On one occasion Jas, in company with a Dark class boat, was sent off to carry out a night exercise. Towards the end of the night a promising looking target appeared on the radar and it was resolved to carry out a simulated torpedo attack. It was slightly foggy and dawn just breaking as the two boats formed up and made their attack. It was only when the



Captain Jas Briggs Royal Navy with Sir Bernard Miles on the Bridge of HMS Phoebe, explaining the art of navigation.

two boats broke out of the mist up close that it was realized that the 'target' was not a merchant ship but a giant Sverdlov Class Russian Cruiser. The two boats turned on their heels back into the mist expecting to be blown out of the water and made their way home to their mother ship. On arrival Jas and his compatriot expected all sorts of problems arising from what might be described as a hostile act or diplomatic incident. Happily no more was heard about it. This sort of activity was just what Jas had joined for. He drove his boat with panache, verve and skill, and he took this style with him in his many commands. Following this very happy time as a commanding officer of one of Her Majesty's Ships Jas went back to HMS *Dryad* at Southwick, the Navigation School to become a specialist navigator. He was top of his course.

As Navigating Officer of HMS *Phoebe* in December 1965 saw him back at sea taking part in the emotionally charged evacuation of Aden, a moment of history. This was followed by the start of a series of commands when he, as a Lieutenant-Commander, took command of HMS *Ulster* the navigational training ship. It was here that his wicked sense of humour began to show itself, for example inviting his Sub-Lieutenant to jump overboard in full uniform in order to provide a demonstration of the man overboard drill. On another occasion a former sailor in *Ulster* wrote: "Yes he was known as Basher Briggs. Once when off Sandown, Isle of Wight he stopped the ship ordered the seaboat away to get him a bucket of sand and an ice cream, all duly returned to ship. He then refused to pick up the seaboat crew and sailed off to Portsmouth leaving them to make our own way back".



*Captain James Briggs, Royal Navy.
2nd May 1932 to 14th May 2018*

On another occasion, when HMS *Ulster* on one foggy summer's day crept into a small tidal Cornish harbour and, with her bridge between the breakwaters and her bow among the fishing boats at the end of the harbour Captain Jas on loudhailer asked: "Good morning, can anyone tell us where we are?" Reply from small boy with bucket and spade: "Mevagissey". From *Ulster*, backing out into the fog: "Thank you. Don't forget to join the Royal Navy". Unfortunately this incident got into the *Western Daily News*, following which Jas was ordered by the Admiral at Plymouth to explain himself, in full uniform, in person, and with a written report in triplicate! Another former sailor wrote: "Yes 'Basher' Briggs was my first Captain on *Ulster*, mad as a hatter, used to stop the ship and fire with his shotgun at anything he saw floating on the ocean, he used to come to work each day, when in the Dockyard, on his beat up old LD Lambretta, wearing greatcoat and leather helmet, but, he never used a Pilot or Tug when coming into Portsmouth, always did it himself, very good when he was on the bridge." Whist in the dockyard with *Ulster* close to the cruiser HMS *Blake* in drydock Jas spotted a fire in the *Blake*. Together with a leading hand he went over to *Blake* and extinguished the fire. For this act, which probably saved a lot of lives and severe damage to the ship, he was awarded a Commander-in-Chief's commendation. In December 1972 he was sent back to sea again, as the Executive Officer and Second in Command of the aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal* and, following a MoD appointment, he commanded the Second Frigate Squadron first in HMS *Apollo* and then HMS *Diomedé*. He commanded no less than six ships at sea, through all ranks from Lieutenant to Captain, a rare achievement. His final appointment was as a Commodore and he retired from the Service in 1984, assuming the appointment of Admiralty Shipmaster driving newly built ships on their trials. Captain Jas was everything that an officer in the Royal Navy ought to be. He was

considered to be one of the best ship handlers of his day having a flair of being able to place his ship exactly where he wanted it. He was bright, clever, and efficient with a wicked sense of humour. He was a natural leader of men and this came through very clearly in the course of his career in the Royal Navy, which lasted for some thirty-eight and a half years.

With thanks to Michael Fulford-Dobson,
Captain Royal Navy.

IN MEMORIAM

WE SAY FAREWELL TO:

Bernie Coot	CFVA 807	Gerald Lee	CFVA 3
Graham Billington		Edwin George Lucas.	CFVA 2277
JWF (Jas) Briggs		Clive Mackintyre	
Sir James Eberle		Donald Henry Macdonald	CFVA 1531
Thomas Ernest Evans		Kenneth Penning.	CFVA 3160
Ken Forrester MID	CFVA 262	Ernest Phillips	CFVA 3163
M Francis		J Picton	
Leonard Jones.	CFVA 2241	Keneth Douglas Ross	CFVA 1782
Ray Hammond		Ronald H Spearpoint	CFVA 2882
Christopher John Handscombe		The Rt. Hon. Lord Strathcona	
K Harrison		and Mount Royal	CFVA 2261
B Hetherington		Percy Robert Tutt	CFVA 3282
Ioan Hughes	CFVA 2501		

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM



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Objectives of the Trust: The object of the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust is the advancement of the education of the public in the history of Coastal Forces by the restoration and permanent display, for public benefit, of Coastal Forces craft together with relevant artefacts, records and memorabilia relating to such craft, and those who served therein.



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