



Medusa Newsletter, Summer 2024.

I had planned to get this newsletter written and circulated in April/May but held off until the D-Day 80 plans were firmed up. This took longer than expected and needed a lot of input from us (see story below) and then the whole thing was suddenly upon us, so this will be a report of the event rather than the plan for the event.

Commodore Laurie Hopkins LVO.

First though, some sad news. While we were away in France for D Day 80, I was notified of the death on 7th June of Commodore Laurie Hopkins LVO. Laurie became involved with Medusa in early 2004 when his company supported our fundraising to put together matching funding for a Heritage Lottery Fund bid to refit Medusa to keep her seaworthy. We asked HLF for £1m and had to match fund that by 10%. Laurie became a firm supporter of Medusa and became a trustee in 2013. He was a very active trustee, organising fundraising as well as being our one-man FOST (Flag Officer Sea Training) helping to establish and raise our operating standards. When I took over as skipper in 2013, I had some big boots to fill after my predecessor's (Mike Boyce) 45 years in the role. Laurie's advice was invaluable. Laurie was also a regular participant in the boys' week on Trinity Star, known as Last of the Summer Wine (Maritime Section) when we had great fun, good food and the occasional glass of something. I, for one, will miss him.



Commodore Laurie Hopkins LVO, 1947-2024

Coastal Forces Squadron Dinner.

Now an annual event, the RN Coastal Forces Squadron dinner was held at Priddy's Hard with the pre-dinner drinks in the Coastal Forces museum and the dinner in the Grand Magazine. Medusa is an honorary member of the Squadron, and I was again privileged to represent her at the dinner.



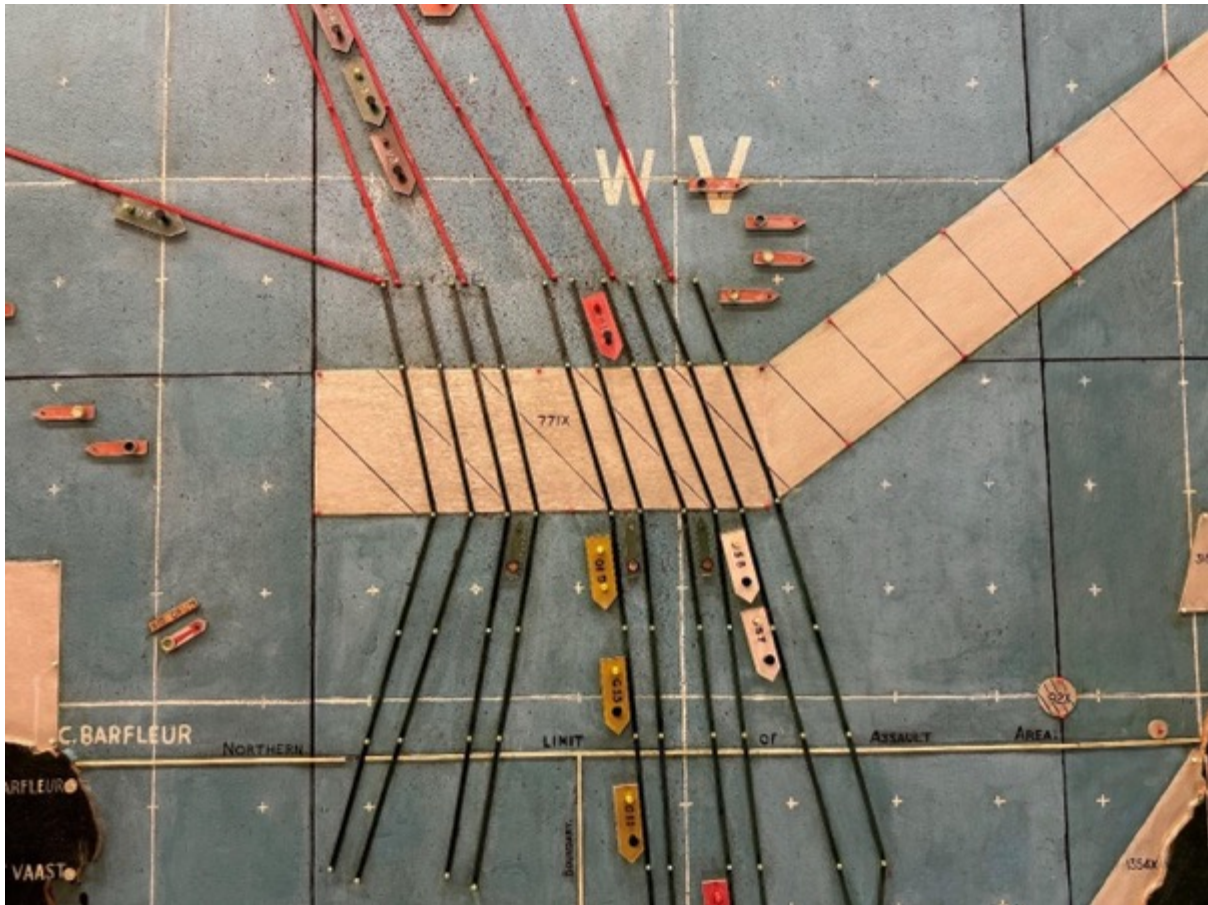
Commanding Officers past and present of Coastal Forces .

Southwick House Map Room.

For a while I had been promising to arrange a visit to the D Day map room at Southwick House. It's still an active military site so it takes a bit of arranging but it was finally in place for 3rd April. A group of us were able to get a close look at the map and some other interesting exhibits.



Medusa team at Southwick Map Room



Close up of Medusa's position on 5th June (4th pin in from the left on the edge of the minefield)

D Day 80 Planning.

This year is the 80th anniversary of D-Day so our plan was always to go back to France to be there on the 6th June. The first hurdle was raising the funds to do this and the second was that no major problems would come to light when we lifted out (as they did last year when we had to cancel our trip to Guernsey due to a failing shaft bearing).

This year we lifted out at Victoria Quay which is very close to where we usually berth. The lift went to plan and nothing to concern us emerged. The day after we arrived, there was a very high tide and the whole yard flooded, Medusa was nearly afloat again. Medusa has a certificate from the MCA enabling commercial work (coded to Cat 3) which requires annual survey. This year was the five yearly out-of-the-water survey and is pretty thorough. Two surveyors clambered all over her for a day as well as going through all our paperwork. End result; nothing at all wrong. It was a great result and a compliment to the team that maintains Medusa to such a high standard.

Over the last year we have been building a relationship with HMS SULTAN and HMS COLLINGWOOD with regular visits to Medusa. A team of 10 from Collingwood helped us with painting and general maintenance which gave us a fast turnaround. We lifted midday of the 8th April and were back in the water on the 12th.



Medusa team with help from COLLINGWOOD busy with the lift out.

The next hurdle was fundraising. This kicked off with an article in the Daily Mail; the headline read “Medusa won’t be going to France due to the cost of fuel” which shocked us a bit as we fully intended to go! The article brought in some funds as well as the usual crop of comment ranging from why “they” were not funding it to some fairly offensive remarks about rubber dinghies in the channel. It was a good start but nowhere near enough. At this point Shan Merritt offered to help; Shan is the daughter of Dennis Merritt who was captain of ML1392 (now Sarinda) in WWII and had the same role as Medusa but at Gold beach. Shan’s tireless efforts raised the funds we needed and a bit more.

While at the National Arboretum, I spotted there is a Survey Ships Association and had a look at their website. Medusa did not get a mention, so I contacted them, the end result was a visit from them and a cheque for £500. We also received cheques from two Royal Navy Associations.

ML1392 is in the care of Simon and Gemma Robins who have brought her back from certain scrapping two years ago. Their story is on You Tube under “Ship happens”. Gemma stayed on Medusa for a weekend in the spring and did one of her weekly videos contrasting the original condition of Medusa with the modified one of Sarinda. She ended with an appeal for funds for us which brought in donations from Canada, the US, Australia, as well as the UK. It certainly showed the positive side of social media.

Gemma has also just published the diary of one of Sarinda’s crew, Frank Capstick, which gives a bit more insight into Medusa's wartime operations. It’s a great read.

[The 1944 Diaries - Frank Capstick Diary, WW2 History and The Ship Happens Story: Amazon.co.uk: Capstick, Frank "Curly", Robins, Gemma, Humphris, Chris: Books](#)

With funding in place and Medusa in great shape, the next thing was working up a programme. A whole heap of paperwork and regulations had come into force since we last crossed the channel and it was by no means straightforward. We were invited to an event at Caen on 2nd June but this conflicted with events on the 4th June this side of the channel so we declined. There was initially a lot of focus on this side for shoreside events but nothing much on seaward, but it slowly came together.

An early call to Brittany Ferries gave us in the information that the French were sending the Freedom Flame over as a token of thanks. The Freedom Flame has been burning since 1923 at the tomb of the unknown soldier under the Arc de Triomphe in Paris and this is the first time in 101 years that it has moved from there. From Portsmouth it would go round D-Day related sites in the UK as well as Arlington National Cemetery in the US before returning to France with the veterans on 4th June. I suggested to Brittany Ferries that we could escort them out as we had done for the 75th and over the next days things started to drop into place. After some 'phoning around to gather support, Cdr Glenn Higson the XO of the Naval base contacted me and offered to take the lead on organising the events. He wanted one change from the 75th plan which was this time for Medusa to lead the event.



The Freedom Flame.

Things were gathering pace. Next, we were contacted by Nathalie Varniere from the London Coastal Forces Veterans branch to help arrange a visit by a veteran, George Chandler, who served on MGB710 (Fairmile D) in the Adriatic in WW2. This we did and he visited Night Hunters then Medusa where he enjoyed his tot. French TV were in attendance so Medusa appeared on French national TV as well as Meridian in the UK.

TV3 link

https://youtu.be/YTuuj_zrIFA?si=wEZdMhuywoJHmQ1M

Meridian link.

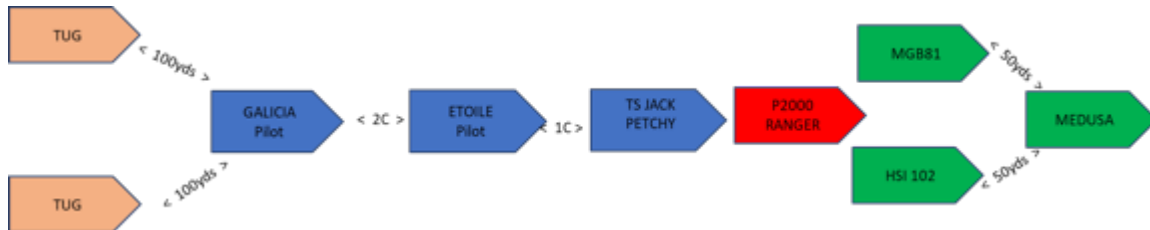
<https://www.itv.com/news/meridian/2024-05-29/d-day-80-the-last-veterans-george-chandler>



George Chandler.

Freedom Flame arrives.

On the 14th May, Medusa led a flotilla into Portsmouth with the French ferry, Galicia, carrying the flame. The weather wasn't very kind, and it was a challenge getting everyone formed up, but we did it. The flotilla consisted of Medusa, HSL102, MGB81, HMS Ranger, TS Jack Petchy, Sail Training vessel Etoile, MV Galicia and two tugs.



The flotilla entering harbour



Hornet SSC 60th.

The next thing in our now very busy year was to move to Hornet for the celebration of their 60th anniversary. As usual it was a challenge getting into a tight berth, but we made it with our new paintwork intact. On the morning of the 23rd May we were visited by HRH The Princess Royal who commented on how fabulous Medusa looked. The crew were smartly turned out too!

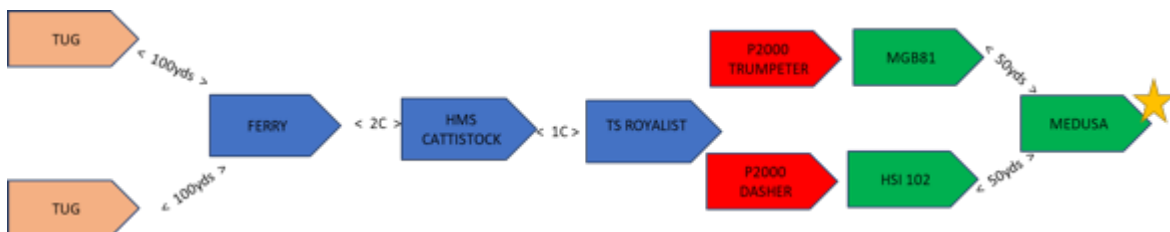


HRH the Princess Royal admiring a smart ship and crew.

D Day 80th.

We slipped our moorings at 0715 on the 4th June and headed up the harbour. It was much on our minds that 80 years previously Medusa had just received the recall signal that D-Day was delayed by 24 hours and had turned back towards Weymouth bay to take shelter before setting off again 24 hours later. Our task this time was to form up a flotilla and be underway down the harbour so that the ferry Mont St Michel would drop into place astern of us and we would go out of harbour in formation. It all went to plan. There was considerable press coverage though some mistook us for an operation RN vessel.

The flotilla consisted of Medusa (the star below denotes guide vessel that the others form up on), HSL102, MGB81, HMS Trumpeter, HMS Dasher, TS Royalist, HMS Cattistock, MV Mont St Michel and two tugs.



We received this back from Cdr Glenn Higson the XO of the base . “On behalf of the Naval Base, may I extend our thanks for your participation in all of the events in Portsmouth...from the arrival of the Freedom Flame, to the escorting of our vets to Normandy. The presence of the historic vessels were mentioned to me several times by many organisations, who were impressed with all they witnessed. So thank you again and I think we can safely say that you acquitted yourselves impeccably and displayed the very best of British.”

And from Chris Jones, the Communications Manager for Brittany Ferries “A massive thank you to you and all the crew of Medusa for everything you did both for the arrival of the French Freedom Flame on 14th May, and for the departure of the D-Day veterans on 4th June. Medusa's presence was much appreciated by the young people accompanying the French Freedom Flame arriving, and by the Normandy veterans departing. Both events became much bigger than I had anticipated, and you were the first to get in touch! I am really pleased that everything went for Medusa and at BF we really appreciated her presence. On our side we were so happy with how everything went on both occasions. Both days will stay with me. I hope we will be able to work with you again on similar occasions in the future.”



The flotilla proceeding down harbour



Medusa bridge team concentrating

We continued across the Channel keeping Royalist in sight astern of us. The weather was bright and sunny but more wind than we would have liked, and we have three hours of fairly lumpy weather mid channel. After a 90 mile passage we arrived at Ouistreham and waited for the lock. Royalist came in astern of us and we headed up the canal in company. She berthed first and we went alongside. HMS DASHER and HMS TRUMPETER had overtaken us mid channel and were already there, as were the two Sea Cadet vessels John Jerwood and Jack Petchy. We did not have any formal commitments, so our crew had a chance to visit the museum and see the sights; last time we were there we had so many visitors that we hardly went ashore. We were hugely impressed by the cadets, keen, polite and superbly turned out with an amazing standard of drill.



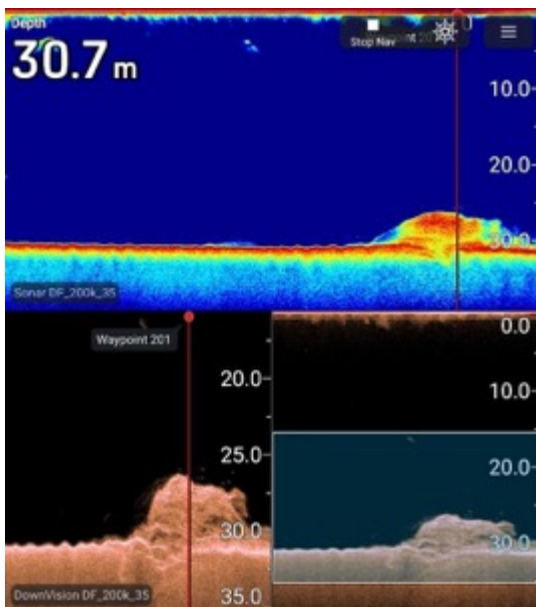
Pegasus bridge.

We sailed with the three SCC vessels on the 7th and exchanged courtesies before separating off Ouistreham.



Medusa off Sword beach (courtesy Royalist).

Our next task was to locate the wreck of HMS Magic, 9.5 miles North of Ouistreham. She was hit by a German one-man torpedo (called a Neger) on 6 July 1944 with considerable loss of life. The father of one of Medusa's crew, Richard Hobbs, was on board at the time. Once we had located the wreck on our sonar, Richard conducted a short service and put flowers and a cross into the water in memory of those who did not come back.



HMS Magic seen on Medusa's sonar. Top image is low resolution, lower right is high and lower left expanded high resolution.



Richard Hobbs conducting a service for the crew of MAGIC.

From there we made our way to the Mulberry at Arromanches. The weather was calm, so we were able to enter the harbour and planned to sit there for a while. It wasn't long before a French police boat turned up and sent us on our way; there was a VIP event at the memorial ashore and an unexpected warship caused consternation.



Inside the Phoenix caissons that formed the outer breakwater.

From there we went out to sea and retraced the passage that the father of another of Medusa's crew, Mark Fowler, took on D Day. He was in the Fairmile B, ML304, that led the Rangers to Point Du Hoc. Mark still has his father's chart with the course line on it and we planned to follow this. Again, the French had other ideas and a French warship told us that there was a VIP event at Point du Hoc and a four-mile exclusion zone in force. We headed West and had a look at Utah beach before coming back to Point Du Hoc after the restriction lifted. We had time to spare as we were waiting for the rising tide to get across a one mile long drying area to get into Grandcamp Maisy. We finally got alongside at 2130 after a very long day.



Sunset in Grandcamp Maisy.

Grandcamp Maisy is a tiny fishing port just west of Omaha beach. We have been there before and always made very welcome. This time was no exception. On the 8th (Saturday) there was the annual military vehicle parade. This time there were around 300 WW2 vehicles, mainly US, led by five Sherman tanks. Mid afternoon they started up and moved off. It was a tremendous sight, and the convoy took over an hour to pass by us.

Monday morning, we headed North for Cherbourg. Again, sunny weather but a strong wind which gave us a rough passage especially around the North East corner of the Cherbourg peninsula which Tom Cunliffe in the Shell Pilot describes as “a preview of Armageddon”. Cherbourg would not reserve us a berth but gave us some options as we arrived. We headed for pontoon K close to the facilities and use of our air horn dissuaded a sailing boat which had just darted in front of us from nicking the berth we were heading for. Later that afternoon several boats from the RNVR club came in and we met up with folk we knew. We had a meal ashore that night in a Tapas bar and were made welcome by the owner who turned out to be ex French Navy.



Medusa alongside in Cherbourg



Relaxing evening in a Tapas bar.

We departed Cherbourg early on the 11th. The weather was still windy, and it was lumpy for the first 40 miles of the passage. We were pleased to arrive mid-afternoon. Mike and Pam Boyce entertained us for dinner at a local pub that evening.

The next morning, we had a visit from the Mayor of Portland and then sailed for Haslar. Finally the weather did what we wanted, light wind and clear sky so dry decks the whole passage. We arrived back without incident and very few defects to remedy,

D Day 1944.

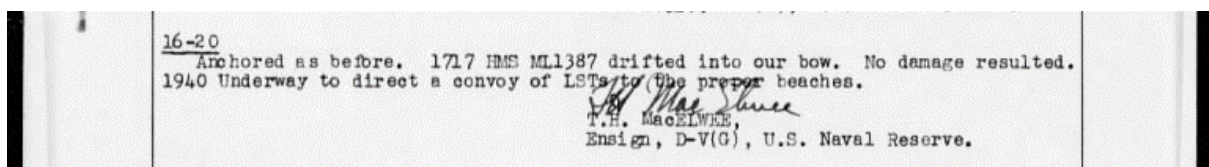
After WW2 most Coastal forces logbooks were destroyed by the admiralty. One or two were "liberated" by commanding officers and a few personal diaries exist but other than formal "reports of proceedings" little detail exists. Medusa is no exception. We have her orders which are specific for D day but not after, spoken record from her CO Maurice Liddiard, spoken records from Doug Withey and Harry Andrews plus the weekly record of where she was in the "Red books".

D Day events are well documented. The Red Book tells us she left Plymouth 27 May for Portland. She is in Portland 2 June and is included in a signal sealing the ship so that nobody could board or leave. Her D Day orders say she had to be on station at the edge of the minefield evening of the 4th June so, working back, she would have left Portland around 0400 4 June. From the CO we know she received the signal postponing D Day while at sea and turned back, sheltering in Weymouth Bay before setting off around 0400 5th June.

Her orders require her to go to Portsmouth (Hornet) on completion of the D Day task. From Frank Capstick's diary we know that 1392 got into Hornet around 2200 on the 6th so must have left station on the minefield edge early afternoon. This would have been possible once the minefield channel had been buoyed. The ten HDMLs that were to mark the entrance carried a dan buoy to deploy. We know that Medusa deployed hers and it sank. We have spoken record that she remained on station for 430 hours (but cannot verify this) which would suggest she left station late on the 7th and got back to Hornet on the 8th.

There is nothing in the Red Book to help, the next note is that she was with Portsmouth command from the 18th (so released from US control).

We had stories of her being close to Omaha beach but were unable to verify this until the log book of a US subchaser SC1354 was located with an entry on 10 June saying she had been in collision with HMSML1387 with a position just off Omaha (49 25N 000 41W) Some fairly harrowing stories now drop into place.



A story that Medusa had to pick up a senior officer from the UK side from a port they had not been to before and take him to a major vessel on the French side still remains a mystery. If it was a new port then it must have been to the East of Portsmouth, maybe Newhaven.

Another story from Doug Withey that it has just recently been possible to verify was that they were running short of food on the French side and went alongside a big warship that his brother was serving on and scrounged fresh bread and food. He said the warship had been mined or torpedoed the night before and that the crew were laying out packets of cigarettes that had been rescued from a flood to dry. The ship in question is HMS FROBISHER that was torpedoed the night of 8 Aug off Juno beach. This confirms that Medusa was still shuttling back and forth to British beaches two months after D Day.

We still have to place the story about damage to the ASDIC dome but the spoken record mentions sheltering in the mulberry. This was almost certainly Mulberry B at Arromanches and the storm that destroyed Mulberry A was 19 June but this event is yet to be nailed down.

The next Red book entry puts her in Falmouth with 1383 on 2 July and then back in Portsmouth on the 9th July with the 149th flotilla. After that nothing until a note on 24th sept that the flotilla dispersed along the south coast for repairs and then on 1 October that she is at Granton (Edinburgh) as escort for a minesweeping flotilla.

While we were in France I was contacted by Julie Dixon who is the daughter of Harry Andrew who was one of Medusa's crew in WW2. She has a dated copy of the photo of Medusa entering Portsmouth Harbour mid July 1945; I had guessed early August.



Medusa entering Portsmouth Harbour July 45.

Julie has a big box of her father's letters home and is going to extract anything that will help our historical record. He says of D Day that they have been putting in a lot of sea time and that all shore leave has been cancelled. His first letter after D Day is dated 16 June. I was not sure which of the original crew was Harry and she has been able to clarify that so now another person in the crew photo positively identified.



Harry Andrew, one of the wartime crew.

It is amazing that after all this time there is still new information coming to light. I have always been reluctant to write up in detail Medusa's movements and story post D Day until I could verify the stories. I nearly have enough to give it a go!.

Moving on.

With D Day 80 behind us we still have a busy year ahead. Unfortunately, the Summer Barbeque at Hornet had to be cancelled due to low numbers, but over the next few weekends we have events for the RN Volunteer Cadet Corps with 8 young cadets spending the weekend on Medusa. In the Autumn we have port visits to Lymington and Bucklers Hard as well as Heritage open days, a scattering of ashes, Trafalgar Night and Remembrance. Medusa would not look so smart and none of these events would be possible without the brilliant team of volunteers who support Medusa. To you all, my thanks and the tanks of the trustees.

Alan