

MTB102 NEWSLETTER – AUTUMN 2009

RAMSGATE

Immediately after the West India Dock trip we provisioned MTB102 again for a trip to Ramsgate in support of the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust. A memorial plaque was to be unveiled at the Sailors Church in memory of the Coastal Forces who fought from Ramsgate and those that didn't make it back.

Early on the 29th May we slipped from the yard and took the 0700 bridge lift at Lowestoft. We had a fairly good uneventful trip south and by 1330 102 was alongside the East Breakwater in Ramsgate Harbour. Later that afternoon we moved 102 into the inner harbour and alongside the wall by the Sailors Church.

The service was held on the Saturday at 1230 in the presence of Admiral the Lord Boyce GCB, the Mayor of Ramsgate, Vice Admiral J H S McAnally CB LVO, Rear Admiral Sir Donald Gosling KCVO, RNR, Sir Derrick Holden-Brown and Wing Commander M Watson. There was an excellent turn out of Coastal Forces Veterans and Cadets and a moving ceremony. MTB102 sat in glorious sunshine alongside the harbour wall in the port she used during her time operating in the Dover Straights.

After the service the Veterans marched to the Royal Temple Yacht Club for a reception. We had to leave the reception early to move 102 back into the outer harbour before the lock gate closed. Two of the Veterans visited 102 with a film crew to talk of their times aboard vessels similar to 102 for a DVD being made about Coastal Forces.

Dinner ashore that evening was very pleasant and Sunday morning conditions looked good so we sailed from Ramsgate just before 0900. Another uneventful trip saw us safely back in Lowestoft for a bridge lift at 1620 and by 1635 102 was back on her home berth at Newsoms Yard.

MONARCH

Frank Hutchinson, the owner of Dunkirk Little Ship Monarch, was sailing Monarch from the Thames to his boatyard at Kegworth, Derbyshire when he was forced by bad weather and sea conditions to shelter at Lowestoft. As there looked to be no immediate let up in the weather Frank asked us to look after Monarch while he made other arrangements to get home. This we were quite happy to do and found Monarch a berth in our marina. As Frank is now getting on in years and with the prospect of much to do to his boat and a realisation that we all reach a point when rocking and rolling on the open sea in a small boat ceases to be a pleasure, along with his wife June, decide to donate Monarch to the MTB102 Trust for safe keeping in the future. We hope to slip Monarch soon and carry out the repairs needed to keep her sea worthy. Frank and June have joined the Friends so that they can keep up to date with our progress with their boat.

MORE DLS

With Monarch safely in our marina we had a request for a mooring for the summer from Alan and Ann Jackson of Riis 1. They arrived in the rain in late June but enjoyed a very pleasant stay in Lowestoft and locked through onto the Broads to sample the delights to be had there.

ARMED FORCES DAY

As there was to be an Armed Forces Day celebration in Lowestoft close to the Heritage Quay we got in touch with the organisers and offered to put 102 on show on

the Heritage Quay. This caused a lot of interest within the organisation so much so that 102 featured on the advertising posters displayed around the town. Also, the day after, we were due to take out a party from the Broadland Boat Owners Club so we made a weekend of it.

102 slipped from her home berth on the Friday evening, took the 2100 bridge lift and went alongside Excelsior berthed on the Heritage Quay. Saturday morning Excelsior sailed so we moved over to let her out and then had the pontoon to ourselves for the rest of the weekend. Armed Forces Day was very relaxed for us which made a change as we had a few interested visitors to see us.

On Sunday morning we took our boat club visitors to Caister and back. It was a great day to be at sea and was enjoyed by all. Back through the bridge and home for tea.

TRANSPORT TRUST

Twice we had to cancel a visit by members of the Transport Trust, once because of the hole in the bow and once because of bad weather. The third time was very lucky indeed.

July 2nd we took 102 back down the harbour to the Heritage Quay and picked up our guests. The day was fine and sunny and the sea conditions perfect so that we were able to demonstrate 102 to her best advantage and the members of the Transport Trust left very impressed by our boat. The Transport Trust gave the MTB102 Trust a restoration award two years ago and wished to see the vessel first hand. They were not disappointed.

HUMBER

An Army fast launch has been resident at Marchwood in the care of the British Military Powerboat Trust for several years and when the collection at Marchwood was broken up George Black, a farmer at Ringland in Mid Norfolk, gave Humber a home in a barn on his farm. Now that George has become involved with the MTB102 Trust he has handed Humber over to the Trust and in mid July we moved her from Ringland to our yard at Oulton Broad. It was a complicated move and involved two of Wave Trades cranes and Kingsley Farringtons specialist truck and boat trailer. The move took all day but by 1700 Humber was safely in the boat shed where she will be made water tight and ready for launching. So now we have the Navy, Army, RAF and Dunkirk Little Ships represented in the Trust fleet.

ANOTHER POSTPONEMENT

A week later we were to take out a party from the North Norfolk Classic Vehicle Club but the sea intervened again, conditions being too rough for 102 so we entertained them at the yard. With a tour of 102 and a look at the boats in the shed they had a good day out. The Sun was shining despite the wind.

The next day we loaded 1500 ltrs of diesel to top up 102 for a top secret mission on behalf of the Royal Navy.

SECRET MISSION

For a while we had correspondence from Whitehall regarding a mission that had to be kept secret at all costs and latterly had included information and instructions from a Rear Admiral. On the evening of the 18th July 102 slipped from her home berth and through the bridge at 1900. We moored on the holding pontoon to wait for the tide and at 0410 we slipped and headed south. By 1100 we were in the lower reaches of the Thames after a lumpy trip down the North Sea and at 1515 102 was secure alongside HMS President, the Royal Navy Reserve shore base, in the shadow of Tower Bridge.

Monday was spent alongside with final briefings and visits from various naval personnel including Commodore Ewen Macdonald, the NRO. Early Tuesday morning we slipped quietly from HMS President and proceeded upriver to Westminster Pier where a berth had been reserved for us by TFL (Traffic for London). Right on time a party of officers from the Admiralty arrived on the pier and formed up to say goodbye to the retiring First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Jonathon Band, our Patron. Admiral Band had no idea that 102 was on the Thames to take him out of the Navy in style after forty years service.

The secrecy of the mission was complete and we were thanked by the Assistant to the First Sea Lord, Captain Steve Murdoch. With the Admiral was Lady Sarah Band, Rear Admiral Sir Donald Gosling RNR and his companion, Flag Lt. Olly Hucker and Charles Du Cane.

With everyone safely on board we slipped from the pier and commenced to turn and head upstream. The Embankment by Westminster Pier was by now lined with more gold braid than we had ever seen in one place and the assembled staff from the First Sea Lords Office gave Admiral Band three cheers the Navy way, then we were under Westminster Bridge and away from the Navy.

As it was just after low water we were able to negotiate all the bridges without lowering the mast which was a huge bonus with guests on board and I had the privilege of having a Rear Admiral beside me just to call the depths on the depth sounder. We made it to Richmond Lock without running aground, just! From Richmond it was straight forward to Teddington Lock where we did have to lower the mast for the foot bridge and then on to Sir Donalds' house for lunch.

RETURN TRIP

After lunch Admiral Band and his party left by road and we prepared to return to HMS President. Sir Donald asked if we would take him and his staff to Teddington Lock on the return trip which we did and stopped alongside at the lock to disembark our guests. As it was now high water on the river we lowered the mast and left it down all the way back to President where we arrived at 1845.

SUPPER

The crew of 102 had just had an amazing day doing things we never thought would happen to us and our old boat and the day was not yet over. At HMS President it was their training night and a Lt. Cdr. was sent with an invitation for us to join the officers in the Wardroom for a glass or two and supper. This finished off a wonderful day in a very pleasant manner.

The next day was spent relaxing and preparing 102 for the return trip and the following morning we left President at 0430 and headed downstream. Just for a change we had a following wind and sea which made for a very comfortable trip for us and 102. By 1500 102 was back on her home berth at the Yard.

ASHES

We did have a trip arranged late in August for a Coastal Forces Veteran, Harry Ley, to have a last trip on a torpedo boat. Unfortunately Harry didn't quite make it and died in July so his family arranged for us to take them out and scatter his ashes in the North Sea where he had fought as a young man. These occasions are both sad and happy at the same time. Sad for the fact the man has gone. Happy for the fact he was a survivor and lived a full life and could be put in the sea of his own choice.

MARITIME FESTIVAL

First weekend in September and it's that time again. This year was the 10th Anniversary of the Gt. Yarmouth Maritime Festival and we had been booked for it since the last one. The day before the wind was very strong and caused some problems for the organisers and also caused us to delay sailing until very early on the Saturday morning. 102 was alongside by 0800 so no problems there. The weather was reasonable and we had very many visitors to see 102 including some from her distant past. Everyone agreed that she looks better now than she has for many years.

Late Sunday afternoon we sailed and had 102 back home by 1830.

ADLS

The Association of Dunkirk Little Ships had asked, during the summer, if we would take 102 to Kingston on Thames in September to take part in the Annual Veterans Cruise. This cruise has been for Dunkirk Veterans but as they get fewer in number it is being opened to WW2 Veterans in general. We agreed to do this if it could be arranged for 102 to have free passage on the non tidal Thames. This was arranged with the Environment Agency so plans were made to attend.

With clearance to use HMS President again the logistics became easier and so suitably provisioned and fuelled 102 sailed from the yard early on the 11th September and by 1700 we were alongside HMS President again. A good nights sleep and an easy morning on the Saturday and at 1400 we slipped and headed up stream. All went well and at Chelsea Bridge we waited alongside a vessel brought into the country from a Swiss lake, by a German with whom we enjoyed a tot of Pussers Rum. He realised then why his side didn't win. At 1730 we slipped again and headed upstream to get through Richmond Half Tide lock and were soon at Teddington. Through the lock and by 1900 102 was alongside at Kingston in the company of the Yarmouth Belle, a trip boat that plied her trade at Gt. Yarmouth for many years.

VETERANS

Sunday morning there was much activity on the quay side as various groups of veterans arrived, including a bus load from the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. The local sea cadet group was very busy and at 1000 Prince Michael of Kent, the Honorary Admiral of the ADLS, arrived to inspect the parade. After the inspection the Veterans were allocated to individual ships and the cruise got under way. We had four Navy veterans on board and a film crew from BBC preparing a documentary to be shown next year.

The cruise upriver was through two locks and at the first one, Molesey, we said goodbye to the BBC and hello to Kevan Jones MP, the Minister for Veterans. We managed to splice the mainbrace which pleased the veterans greatly and at Sunbury lock we collected Prince Michael and Sir David Davies so we spliced the mainbrace again which pleased the Veterans even more. We arrived at Weybridge Mariners Club and said goodbye to our guests. By the time all the Little Ships arrived, the waters around Shepperton Lock were getting crowded and berths were at a premium so we hung on to a private mooring which surprised the locals but they were quite happy for us to stay for a while. At 1430 we said our goodbyes and set sail back down the river.

ANOTHER FILM CONTRACT

After we had committed 102 to take part in the Veterans Cruise we were approached by a film company, Studio Lambert, to take part in a programme being made for ITV. This involved being at Brighton Marina by 1200 on the 14th September. Normally this

would not be a problem but as we were at Weybridge until 1430 on the 13th September it meant a long overnight sea passage. Fortunately we were able to pick up an old friend, Ed Hadnett, and two junior officers from the RNR, at Richmond Lock. This eased the strain on a long trip, especially as Ed is now a PLA Thames pilot, so for the first leg of the trip we were able to leave the navigation to him while we got on with other essentials, like Sunday dinner and large amounts of tea and coffee.

WEATHER

The weather decided not to play fair so along the North Kent Coast it was unpleasant with a good force five from the North East. Around 0300 on the Monday morning we rounded North Foreland and with the wind behind us conditions became easier. By 0600 we had crossed Dover approaches with things going well. We arrived at Brighton at 1145 so the first part of the contract was honoured. At Brighton Ed and his junior officers departed and Mike Hill arrived by train to strengthen our numbers.

FILMING

Our film crew and celebrities arrived mid afternoon and after a safety and familiarisation briefing we sailed. I had visions of the lumpy conditions we came in on four hours earlier causing problems but as we turned the corner onto the sea it was flat calm so we were able to complete the days activities with no problems. As well as the film crew on board we were filmed from a helicopter and a fast boat alongside us. At dusk we rounded Beachy Head and found our way into Eastbourne Marina in the dark. Here the TV crew left us and the following morning we sailed for Dover on our own.

WEATHER – AGAIN

Wednesday morning the TV crew joined us again but by now the weather conditions had deteriorated and so we had to cancel the sea trip. We sat in Dover Marina all day hoping for better conditions on the Thursday. Better they were but only marginally so we sailed on our own again to Chatham Marina. Arriving there early afternoon we found the staff to be very helpful and a Friend of MTB102, John Kempton, who works at the marina, was on hand to guide us and refuel 102.

THAMES AGAIN

Friday morning our TV friends arrived early and we slipped from the marina and headed back down the Medway, turned left at Sheerness and headed back up the Thames. The TV crew were busy filming all the time and when we got to the Barrier there was another helicopter with a camera. Timing was becoming critical as we had to be at St Katharines Dock by 1415 so that we could lock 102 in at slack high water. We approached London Bridge at 1400 and so after turning and preparing 102 for the lock we approached the entrance dead on time. 102 created quite a stir in the lock as we think she is the first torpedo boat to enter the dock. We were given a prime mooring in front of the Dickens Inn and were able to unwind completely for the first time for a week. The TV people threw a party and so we helped them get through several bottles of champagne. The programme will be called “Britain From the Sea” and should be screened in the Spring on ITV.

HOME

As it is only possible to enter and leave St Katharines Dock at high water and the lock does not work at night we had to wait until Saturday lunch time to get out. This we did with another good audience and Mike left us to return home by train. We then

had the best trip of the whole week. The sun was out, the sea was flat and the only problem we had was a mist coming down as the sun set but with our radar this was a minor problem. The mist had lifted by Southwold and we arrived back at Lowestoft at 2335. By Sunday morning 102 was shut down on her home berth. She had performed perfectly all week.

RELIABLE

Through the Summer 102 had sailed about 1500 miles and we only had to change both fuel filters once. This in itself shows how clean the fuel system is as our Cummins engines circulate a huge quantity of fuel per hour which all goes through the filters. In the rough conditions we have experienced this year any sediments in the tanks will have been well stirred up. Now she is ready for her winter refit and preparation for Dunkirk 2010.

TRUSTEES

With the expansion of the MTB102 Trust and our commercial venture with Newsons Boatyard we have increased our Trustees to six. We now have three of our original group, Andrew Hawker having resigned to concentrate on his work with the Norfolk Scout Association, and have added Keith Wood of Newsons, George Black of Humber and Philip Norton, a solicitor specialising in charity law. This gives us a well balanced group and bodes well for the future.

FRIENDS

The membership of the Friends of MTB102 continues to grow slowly and is vital to our organisation. Along with our sponsors it would be very difficult to keep this very important piece of British Naval history performing as it does without you. Thank you very much from the MTB102 Trust.

SPONSORS

As ever the Trust is deeply indebted to all of our sponsors. They are a very important part of our operation. Without them I don't think we would be where we are now. Many thanks to you all.

EVENTS 2010

27-31 May ADLS Return to Dunkirk for the 70th Anniversary.

4-5 September Gt. Yarmouth Maritime Festival.