

MTB102 Newsletter JULY 2014.

After the winter maintenance MTB102 was looking very smart for the coming Summer and in anticipation of a very long trip in May and June an extra 700ltrs fuel capacity was added and in mid May she took on 2500ltrs diesel.

For a while we had been in discussion with John Phipps of the Liverpool branch of the RBL regarding the Millin Pipes and we were requested to carry the pipes on their last leg from Weymouth to Portsmouth Harbour. We had originally decided to attend Ostend at Anchor but couldn't miss this event especially as the RBL agreed to pay our fuel costs to get to Portsmouth. Fortunately this worked in well with our other plans.

On the 23rd May MTB102 sailed from Lowestoft bound for Chatham where she took part in the ADLS Commemorative Cruise on the Dunkirk Anniversary. As is our habit, we took the tide down the East Coast and arrived at Chatham, in the dark, after high water and managed the lock without touching the sides of the lock gate. Even surprised me!

Two days were spent in the old RN Dockyard that is now Chatham Marina with the boat open to the public when possible. There were about twenty Little Ships present which made quite a show when dressed overall. Most of Chatham turned out to see us and kept us very busy with very many visitors on board.

That was stage one of our trip.

Bank Holiday Monday MTB102 sailed from Chatham and into a very brisk North Easterly in the Thames Estuary. Not very pleasant to say the least but we coped. As we approached the anchorage at North Foreland we had a call from the RAF ASR Helio asking to put their winchman on board. This we agreed to but when asked to alter course into the wind and sea we declined the request. This gave the Helio pilot the chance to test his skills as he had to fly sideways at about ten knots to stay in position. Very interesting and he was obviously a skilled guy at the controls.

The winchman duly arrived, was given a present of the MTB102 book and departed on his bit of string again. What some people will do for a living. We did get a call from the Helio Captain thanking us. "It had been very good training" he said. The rest of the day round to Dover was relatively uneventful.

Tuesday 27th was the long slog from Dover to Portsmouth where we arrived early evening and berthed at Haslar Marina. Just before midday the next day we took the tide to Weymouth. This took us further west than 102 had been since 1975.

Once alongside we were greeted by our Piper, Karl Wainright (a good Scottish name) with the Millin Pipes and Sean Pullen, his minder. Karl made himself comfortable in the fo'c'sul and had a practise with his pipes. Despite my feelings about bag pipes he is very good and I was impressed. I nearly like bag pipes now.

The next port of call should have been Poole but the arrangements fell through and so we took advantage of Weymouth's hospitality and stayed an extra day. We had a lot of interest shown from the good people of Weymouth with quite a few visitors.

Saturday 31st May we made the trip from Weymouth to Southampton and Ocean Marina where the Pipes and MTB102 were greeted by the Mayor and Mayoress of Southampton and the Commodore of the Royal Southampton Yacht Club.

On Sunday we sailed for Portsmouth on the last leg of the Millin Pipes journey. On arrival we hid 102 behind the Mary Mouse lightship and Monday morning slipped out to officially arrive at Flagship Pontoon, Portsmouth, with the pipes being played on the fore deck by our piper. As we moored alongside Flagship Pontoon we were greeted by a great number of D. Day Veterans and various dignitaries from the Portsmouth area. We also had good news coverage on ITV.

That concluded stage two of our voyage.

Tuesday 3rd June 2014, exactly 70 years since MTB102 took P.M. Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower around the assembled D Day fleet, MTB102 slipped from Haslar Marina with Medusa, MGB81, HSL102 and headed out of Portsmouth bound for Ouistreham and Caen. Medusa left us shortly after leaving Portsmouth and the MGB and HSL decided to increase speed to cross the Channel. As we were on an economy run we carried on at our 13kts and arrived at Ouistreham 15 minutes before the lock time for the canal. Bad planning on my part as I wanted to arrive as the lock opened. All three boats then transited the lock and proceeded to Caen.

The trip up the canal was uneventful but fascinating especially around the Pegasus Bridge area. Arriving at Caen Harbour, MGB81 and HSL102 were able to proceed to the head of the dock and turn to go alongside. Unfortunately MTB102 did not have enough room to do that so we turned in the middle of the dock and proceeded astern, past the MGB and HSL to slot into our berth almost against the end wall of the dock. This became the norm for us in Caen and considering there were only three of us on board compared to the full house on the other two boats, we were very pleased with ourselves and our boat.

Wednesday 4th June we had a very slow trip back down the Canal to Pegasus Bridge following a large gaggle of kayaks with local school children paddling for all they were worth. Once through the Bridge we moored just downstream for the next two days. This solved the catering as the sausage and chips at the Trois Planers café were very tempting.

Around this area security was very tight with Gendames every where. We even had a visit from an explosives sniffer dog. When we lifted our vent box top for the dog to check he jumped in and started to make himself at home until pulled out very roughly by his handler.

Thursday 5th June all three boats were tidied up ready for the public and we had a visit from The Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall with many D Day Veterans present on the quay side. The Prince of Wales always takes an interest in things nautical and this visit was no exception.

6th June nothing moved with a total security clamp down. Just across the canal from us was a chateau being used by the various Heads of State in town for the Commemorations. We had lots of visitors of all nationalities on board MTB102 and reduced the shop stock quite well.

7th and 8th June we were back in Caen for the reception at the Normandy Building on the quayside where each boat attending was presented with a medallion from Caen. More visitors and more shop sales. By now there was quite a fleet in Caen Dock as Medusa had arrived and we had two Royal Navy P2000s and a Danish Navy boat with us. Also just outside the dock on the canal was HMS Ledbury. Monday 9th June was departure day for all of us so we had quite a convoy sailing down the canal to lock out. We had eight university students from the P2000s with us on the trip to the lock. MTB102 was first to leave the lock and so as we left the buoyed channel we headed North East to Dover. On this leg of the journey we had just about every weather condition except wind. There was thunder, lightning, torrential rain and even hail at times but the sea was flat and we arrived at Dover late in the evening.

Away early next day it was a misty passage along the Kent coast and across the Thames Estuary but we made good time and did the last five miles at full throttle which felt good after preserving fuel for so long. We caught the 1600 bridge lift at Lowestoft and by 1625 MTB102 was home with 300ltrs of that precious diesel left.

All in all this was a very good trip. 730 miles in 19 days without refuelling and we have to say this was with a boat that has not had vast amounts of money thrown at it, is probably 75% original and we believe is the only surviving warship that was involved with Dunkirk and D Day. Minimum crew, minimum fuss and maximum reliability. We love her to bits and take great delight in showing her to the public where ever we go.

The crew involved at various times on this trip were Debbie King, Mike Hill, Gary Hill, David Ross and my self.

Richard Basey,
Skipper MTB102.