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The Secret War from the River Dart

by

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**DARTMOUTH
HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP**

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**THE SECRET WAR FROM THE
RIVER DART**

The Story of the Royal Navy's 15th Motor Gunboat
Flotilla

1942-1945

by

**LLOYD BOTT CBE DSC, Lieutenant RANVR.
First Lieutenant MGB502.**

The Dartmouth History Research Group

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Preface

This is the story of secret missions from Dartmouth and Falmouth to Brittany in 1942-1944, of passengers carried to and from France and of the French Resistance and Escape Networks. It also covers the later operations from Scotland to Norway, 1944-5, and the tragic loss of MGB502 off Norway in May 1945, just after the end of the war in Europe. It is an abridged version of the book "The Royal Navy's 15th Motor Gunboat Flotilla", lodged with the Australian War Museum, Canberra, and the Imperial War Museum in London.

Acknowledgements

I should like to draw the attention of readers to "Secret Flotillas, Clandestine Sea Lines to France and French North Africa 1940-1944," by Sir Brooks Richards KCMG DSC, published by HMSO. I believe it is as near a history as we could possibly get and contains a wealth of information. Its author was an officer with the SOE's Naval Section at Helford and in the Mediterranean. It is an outstanding contribution and I find it to be an invaluable reference. I have also used the manuscript by David Birkin, DSC Légion d'Honneur, called "The Saga of L'Aber Wrac'h." In addition, Michel Guillou, a Breton historian, has allowed me to use his account of the activities of Operation ALIBI, the French Resistance network.

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FOREWORD

In the troubled state of France after the German invasion in 1940, when De Gaulle was urging patriotic French people to join his resistance to the Germans rather than support the collaborating Vichy government, both the British and French Secret Services tried to set up networks of agents who could provide reliable information about what was going on in France. These agents ran the risk of being reported to the Germans and being arrested, tortured, deported or shot. They needed to have the highest courage and dedication.

Despite many difficulties, networks were set up in France which were in touch by wireless with the British Secret Intelligence Services (S.I.S.), Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.) and the French Deuxième Bureau. Agents, mail and supplies were transported across the Channel by sea and by secret flights by Lysander and Hudson aircraft of the Royal Air Force which parachuted them into France or landed in remote fields.

In the West country, many fishing vessel missions sailed from the Helford River and from the Scilly Isles to Brittany and the west coast of France. During 1942 the 15th Motor Gunboat flotilla of the Royal Navy was established based in the River Dart. It was to play a vital part in the operations leading to the D-Day landings of June 1944 in Normandy.

In January 1945 the Director of Naval Intelligence reported that "*These officers and men were outstanding representatives of an Irregular Naval Flotilla which had performed hazardous duties for all services since the fall of France.*" Colonel Maurice Buckmaster, head of S.O.E. French Division wrote that they were "*A series of operations which were of enormous value towards the liberation of France.*"

The enemy must have known from the start that operations of this nature would be attempted and very soon found out from captured agents that cross-channel traffic was being carried out. The element of surprise, then, lay not in the method used but in the pinpoints and detailed arrangements for these operations.

The men and women of French Resistance and the Escape Networks of Europe were our necessary, vitally important, brave and wonderful comrades in the great events which I shall try to recall. Our lives were in their hands and their lives in ours. The reliance and trust which were born in the war years have developed into the life-long bonds which exist between us today, and deserves to be remembered by the children of today.

Lloyd Bott,
Melbourne, Australia. May 1997.

**WE REMEMBER THE
15TH MOTOR GUNBOAT FLOTILLA
OF THE ROYAL NAVY
KINGSWEAR 1942-1944**

**THIS FLOTILLA CARRIED OUT
CLANDESTINE OPERATIONS FROM THE
DART TO NORTHERN BRITTANY FROM
1942 TO 1944. WORKING CLOSELY
WITH THE FRENCH RESISTANCE,
IT LANDED OR BROUGHT BACK TO
ENGLAND MANY BRAVE BRITISH AND
ALLIED AGENTS AND ALSO BROUGHT
BACK MANY ALLIED AIRMEN SHOT
DOWN OVER EUROPE.**

**MGB 502 WAS SUNK OFF NORWAY
ON 12 MAY 1945. THERE WERE
ONLY TWO SURVIVORS.**

This Remembrance plaque, located on the quay side, at Kingswear was unveiled on 29th April, 1995, by Contre Admiral de Kercauson, French Defence Attaché in London, in the presence of Captain Moore RN, Commanding Officer of HMS Britannia, local civic dignitaries, Sir Brooks Richards, members of the 15th Flotilla and the French Resistance networks, their families and friends.

Chapter 1

THE 15TH FLOTILLA OPERATIONS

The 15th Motor Gunboat flotilla was established in 1942 to undertake special operations carrying across the Channel, to and from France, agents, mail and supplies for the purpose of providing reliable intelligence, supporting Intelligence and Escape Networks and for supporting the Special Operations Executive (SOE) whose function it was to encourage and support Underground Resistance in Europe and ultimately to prepare the Resistance forces for the battle of liberation.

The flotilla operated from Dartmouth under the direction of Captain Frank Slocum CMG RN who was Deputy Director Operations Division [Irregular] (DDOD[I]) at the Admiralty. He was an extraordinary and caring man. Our Commander at Dartmouth was Commander E.A.G. (Ted) Davis DSO and bar, RNR. He did a large number of missions to France. He was a perfectionist of great drive and ability and a pleasing personality. He was held in the highest esteem by all those working in the operations. He became a very close friend.

At the outset the flotilla consisted of MGB318 and MASB36 augmented from time to time by gunboats from other flotillas. MGBs 502 and 503 joined the flotilla in the latter part of 1943. MGB718 joined in March 1944.

The flotilla used to lie midstream in the River Dart, alongside "Westward-Ho", an old paddle steamer which moored there. It served as our base and had accommodation for visitors.

Our passengers were briefed in London and driven down to stay with a conducting officer in one of several hotels in Torquay. When DDOD[I] and the Naval Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, agreed that the operation could proceed, the agents embarked on Westward-Ho and went to a cabin to rest and wait.

Five minutes before sailing time, the agents and their waterproofed luggage were transferred unobtrusively to the motor gunboat which was to carry them to France. Everyone had been checked to make sure that he (or she) neither rattled nor shone.

The last thing we received before sailing was the German naval recognition signals. We often wondered how this information was obtained but have since

learned that it resulted from one of the great scientific achievements of the war - the unravelling of 'ENIGMA', the top-secret German coding machine. Our scientists were thus able to intercept and decode all the secret codes and information passed by the German High Command to fleets and units all over Europe. This was of such importance that the knowledge the Allies so obtained, was to be used on special occasions only so the Germans would not realise we had broken into 'Enigma'. (We did not have the recognition signals for the period after midnight because they were not transmitted through Enigma until after we had sailed),

Moon less nights were always chosen, and sailings so timed that the craft would not be within 30 miles of any enemy-held coast until two hours after sunset. Getting closer to the shore speed was always cut to reduce the sound and the wash and the phosphorescence. Close inshore S-phone contact was usually made; failing that, the beach party would flash an agreed Morse letter from a hand-torch. The MGB anchored offshore to a grass rope - a rating standing by with a hatchet to cut it in an emergency. (Of course, it was also much quieter than an anchor chain), The landing party was rowed in with muffled oars in a surf boat which had been newly designed for the purpose.

The normal task confronting the officer in charge of a convoy of boats or a single craft was a journey of anything from a half-a-mile to two miles between the mother ship and the shore in complete darkness and invariably athwart strong tidal streams for which the Brittany coast is notorious, and more often than not on a lee shore and a coast strewn with a maze of rocks. Perhaps I might add a further hazard which I experienced myself. On a still, quiet night we could disturb hundreds of screeching birds as we rowed close to the shore.

When a gunboat went on a mission we always had a specialist navigator - David Birkin DSC, 'Tich' Salmond DSC or Brian Fraser. Navigation was a vital task and we were very well served.

There was exceptional difficulty in the early life of the flotilla due partly to the unreliable and unsuitable type of coastal force craft available, the frequency of mechanical breakdown and the lack of navigational equipment.

The physical characteristics of the enemy-occupied coast where we had to operate were very difficult - the rock and shoal-infested waters of the North Brittany coast, the strong and variable tidal streams and currents. Yet accurate landfalls were

made and embarkation spots were reached by pure skill, unaided by modern navigational aids other than breakers marking danger. The work was continuous through winter, not infrequently in snow storms, poor visibility or rapidly deteriorating violent weather conditions.

It was in this period, 1942 through to October 1943, that a large number of operations were undertaken by MGB318 and boats loaned from other flotillas with, however, limited success. Time after time they encountered most difficult weather conditions making it impossible for the objectives to be achieved. They were character-building operations. Very few agents were landed, some stores were landed, sonar buoys for navigational aids were laid. Without doubt the trials they had to bear were appalling.

One officer, Lieut. Black RANVR, was captured early in 1942, when his boat capsized on landing in heavy surf. He became a prisoner-of-war. This accident led to an investigation into the question of surf-boats to be carried in the MGBs. After much research and experiment, standard 14-foot boats were produced and used with great success in the later operations.

Eventually, the improvement in the ships placed at DDOD[I]'s disposal, coupled with the introduction of QH gear (which enabled us to home on RAF beacons) and other aids to navigation and detection of enemy forces, permitted faster and more effective passages to be made. Resistance groups on the Continent became more secure.

These advantages were to a degree offset by increasing enemy vigilance both onshore and at sea along the convoy routes and coastal waters. Further, a number of the limited pinpoints available were compromised by disaster overtaking the intelligence and other organisations served by the flotilla, whilst others had been rendered useless by beach mining and enemy defences in the immediate vicinity, leaving only those localities most difficult of access.

Particularly, as the launching of the Allied invasion of Europe drew nearer, the enemy convoys were more strongly escorted and coastal controls strengthened, with the result that ships of the flotilla sailing singly and unsupported invariably had to run the gauntlet of numerous enemy forces at sea.

Perhaps we might, briefly, recall the general position of the war in 1943. In the Pacific, following our sea victory at Midway (June 1942) and on land at New

Guinea and Guadalcanal (Dec. 1942 - Jan. 1943), the Japanese had lost the initiative.

At El Alamein in October/November 1942, the German Army was forced back across Africa, thence on through Sicily and Italy. Winston Churchill later said:

"Up to Alamein we survived - after Alamein we conquered."

On the Russian Front the Russians repelled the German armies at Stalingrad in January 1943 after a five months battle. There, too, the German Armies were retreating.

At the same time, the superiority of our Air Forces became evident. I recall well, whilst I was on the North Sea in the summer of 1943, the extraordinary experience of witnessing the forming-up overhead of a 1000-bomber raid on Germany. Allied air power continued to grow enormously in strength and effectiveness with improvement in electronic aids and new aircraft.

The Battle of the Atlantic had by May 1943 been won, thanks to improvements in Radar. Admiral Doenitz, Commander in Chief of the German Navy wrote later:

"Radar, and particularly radar location by aircraft had, to all practical purposes, robbed the U-boats of the power to fight on the surface. Wolf pack operations against convoys in the North Atlantic were no longer possible."

In May 1943 41 U-boats were destroyed. Their withdrawal meant that the vital lifeline across the Atlantic essential to maintaining Great Britain as the forward base for Allied operations against Germany, was now secured.

In Europe preparations for the invasion, the giant step across the Channel, went ahead. However with a strong and determined enemy it would take two years and tremendous battles before victory was won.

More personnel had to be put into France to mobilise and prepare the local population for the part they had to play. As part of the overall programme the 15th MGB flotilla was updated to provide the necessary communication links across the English Channel. It was indeed fortunate for me that I should be invited to join the 15th MGB flotilla in January 1944 when it had been reorganised and the groups in France were also operating effectively.

In the six months before D-Day, when the pre D-Day traffic was at its height, the flotilla had an extraordinary run of successful operations. This was doubly fortuitous as in this period it provided, except for the Mediterranean operations, the only means of communication with France as the RAF Lysander and Hudson secret landings which had been the main source of communication had, late in 1943, been forced to cease operations because of doubts about the security of the line in France. Brooks Richards reports in "Secret Flotillas" that Gilbert Déricourt, the air-landing operations officer for SOE, was in touch with Bomelberg of the ABWEHR in Paris.

The 15th MGB flotilla was responsible for supporting the field organisations providing the intelligence vital to Overlord (ie. The Normandy landings in June 1944). We brought home the intelligence enabling the German V1 and V2 rocket sites to be attacked. We kept open the lines of communication with the SOE underground movements in Europe. This involved putting in and bringing out agents and service personnel responsible for organising the Resistance forces and preparing them for their roles as D-Day approached, and we evacuated more than 150 Allied airmen shot down over Europe.

In this period the Commanding Officers were:

Lieut.-Commander Peter Williams DSC	MGB502	Senior Officer
Lieut. Michael Marshall DSC	MGB503	
Lieut. Jan McQuoid Mason DSC	MGB318	
Lieut. Ron Seddon DSC	MGB718	
Lieut. John Motherwell	MASB36	

We were all proud of the work done by the flotilla and the qualities of its personnel -the leadership, seamanship, navigational skills, initiative, physical endurance, cheerfulness, dedication, integrity, loyalty, skill and courage in operations. We possessed the qualities and were adequately trained to become what we were, a very efficient, professional organisation.

The various organisations for which we worked had their own several circuits or groups on the Continent and their own beaches on the North Brittany coast. All gunboats worked at some time or other for all agencies but MGB502 worked largely on SOE missions and MGB503 worked largely with MI9, responsible for escape routes.

I shall refer, firstly, to the role of MA/SB36. As early as November 1941, she landed an agent in Morlaix Bay and in December 1941 she undertook a sea reconnaissance around Ile-de-Batz to test defences and approaches. In my time MA/SB36 did not undertake any normal landing operations as she was considered unsuitable for that purpose. I have been informed by her Commanding Officer, Lieut. John Motherwell RCNVR that in 1943 she was used from the Scilly Isles to cover clandestine fishing vessel operations from Helford River to be available in quick time should they require assistance. Also, during the early months of 1944, she was engaged in secret trials at Helford relating to limpet mines, with special service organisations. Just before D-Day, John informed me, she transferred to Portsmouth and then to the Normandy beach head to land 1 jeep and 6 officers for reconnaissance.

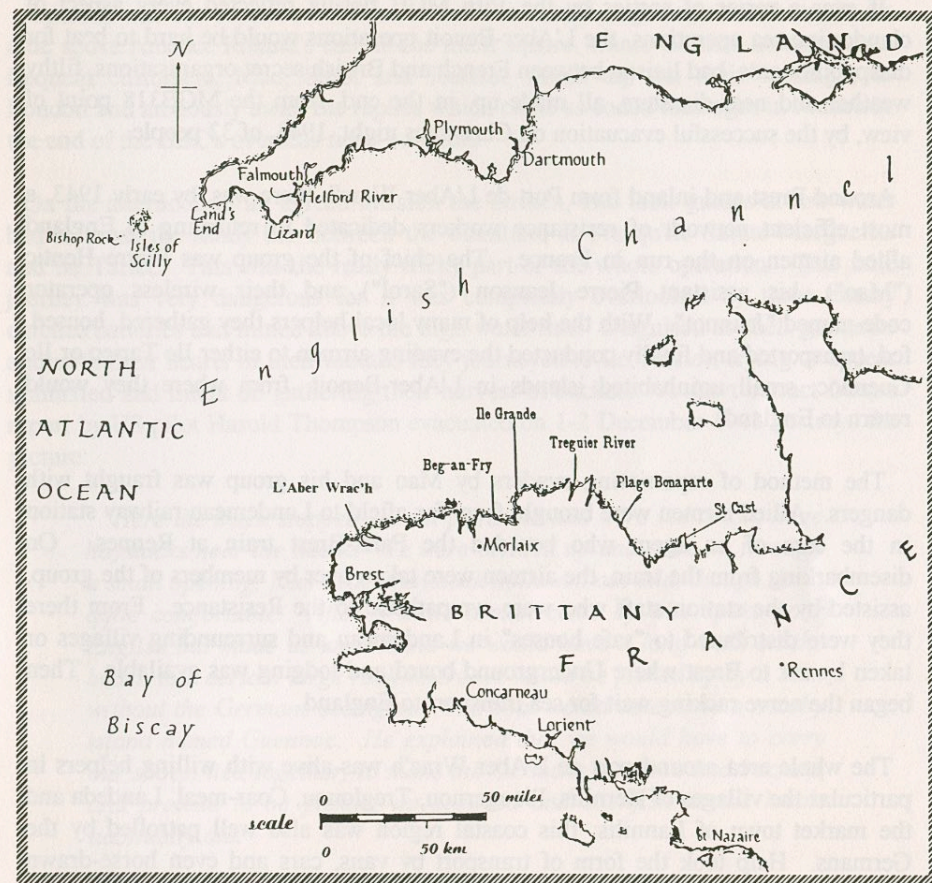
Chapter 2

OPERATIONS TO L'ABER-BENOIT FROM FALMOUTH

This next section is devoted to the series of five missions undertaken by MGB318 in November-December 1943. MGB318 undertook many other operations to other locations but this will be the series for which she will be longest remembered.

Despite all the difficulties in the early years, MGB318 carried on with great tenacity and courage and set a standard of which we were all very proud. Commander Davis DSO travelled with MGB318 on many of her operations; Lieutenant Jan McQuoid-Mason DSC was her Commanding Officer from 1943; Lieutenant David Birkin DSC was the navigator on all of the missions described. He was a first class navigator and a very close friend. His success was all the more remarkable as his general health was only fair and he was very prone to seasickness. The source of my information primarily is David's manuscript "The Saga of L'Aber Wrac'h". Brooks Richards' "Secret Flotillas" also has excellent revealing information. Sir Brooks has convinced me that Ile Rosservor, Ile Guennoc and Ile Tariec are all in the area known as the L'Aber-Benoit Estuary.

The L'Aber-Benoit Estuary is a treacherous area of water completely unprotected from the winds blowing in from the Atlantic, often reaching gale force in alarmingly short time.



This map shows the main area of operations of the 15th MGB Flotilla, which entailed cross Channel traffic between the West Country and the coastline of Brittany. Towards the latter stages of the war in Europe (1944 - 1945) the Flotilla was assigned to operations across the North Sea, between Scotland and Norway.

If ever a series of sorties by the 15th MGB flotilla reflected every aspect of clandestine sea operations, the L'Aber-Benoit operations would be hard to beat for disappointments, bad liaison between French and British secret organisations, filthy weather and near-disasters, all made up, in the end, from the MGB318 point of view, by the successful evacuation on Christmas night, 1943, of 32 people.

Around Brest and inland from Port de L'Aber Wrac'h there was, by early 1943, a most efficient network of resistance workers dedicated to returning to England allied airmen on the run in France. The chief of the group was Pierre Hentic ("Mao"), his assistant Pierre Jeanson ("Sarol") and their wireless operator code-named "Jeannot". With the help of many local helpers they gathered, housed, fed, transported and finally conducted the evading airmen to either Ile Tariec or Ile Guennoc, small uninhabited islands in L'Aber-Benoit, from where they would return to England.

The method of repatriating evaders by Mao and his group was fraught with dangers. Allied airmen were brought from far afield to Landemeau railway station in the care of an agent who boarded the Paris-Brest train at Rennes. On disembarking from the train, the airmen were taken over by members of the group, assisted by the station staff who were sympathetic to the Resistance. From there they were distributed to "safe houses" in Landemeau and surrounding villages or taken by car to Brest where Underground board and lodging was available. Then began the nerve racking wait for sea transport to England.

The whole area around port de L'Aber Wrac'h was alive with willing helpers in particular the villages of Kernilis, Plougernou, Treglonou, Coar-meal, Landeda and the market town of Lannilis; this coastal region was also well patrolled by the Germans. Help took the form of transport by vans, cars and even horse-drawn carts, meals and accommodation, and a rowing-boat with oarsmen for the final six hundred metres of swirling water between Ile Tariec and Ile Guennoc when Ile Guennoc was the chosen rendezvous. Jean-Francois Derrien, the policeman at Lannilis, in his story of the maritime missions, in which he was a central player, mentions dozens of men and women who were actively involved in the operations. It is a magnificent story of the fortitude, caring and courage of French patriots. Derrien received a special letter of commendation from the First Sea Lord expressing, officially, gratitude and thanks for his inestimable contribution to the Allied war effort,

Lannilis was the advance headquarters of the escape organisers and here, in an attic above Amédée Roland's café in the main square, where German soldiers were frequent customers, Mao, Sarol and Jeannot would tap out their messages to London and anxiously await the replies which came as coded messages in French at the end of the BBC's overseas news bulletins.

On the afternoon of an agreed mission the airmen, and their guides at low water had to cross the sandy bar between the mainland at Presqu'île Sainte Marguerite and Ile Tariec. This was the really tricky part of the whole operation. This mile journey was very dangerous for it was completely overlooked by three enemy defence batteries and mined above the high water line. Disguised as shell-gatherers and with their hearts in their mouths they journeyed to Ile Tariec, trying to appear unhurried and intent on gathering their harvest in buckets. A short extract from a report by US pilot Harold Thompson evacuated on 1-2 December 1943 portrays the picture:

"Here the truck stopped, we all piled out and were led to two huge haystacks near the house. We were divided up and once in, through a small opening, found each haystack hollowed out and, though dark, quite comfortable. After a while a man came by who spoke poor English but made us understand we would have a long walk on the beach to a certain large rock where we would be picked up by a boat without the Germans seeing us. The boat would take us to a nearby island named Guennoc. He explained that we would have to carry our shoes, tied together, to make the Germans think we had buckets, and pretend to be picking up seaweed and shellfish as the locals habitually did.

We were to stay close to the water's edge, single file, and keep the man ahead of us just in sight. We were taken one at a time to the road leading to the beach, Once out in the sand the first thing I saw was a big flat orange object sticking up out of the sand - a land mine with a pencil-sized trigger sticking up from its centre. That gets the adrenaline moving. I kept a sharp eye out to make sure I didn't pop one of those triggers with my bare toes. The walk to the big rock turned out to be at least one mile, all the time under the watchful

eyes of the Germans manning the gun positions on the banks above the beach.

When we got to the rock we found a small fishing boat. The fisherman would load five or six of us, throw some lobster pots on top of us and motor to Guennoc."

3-4 November 1943

On the night of 3rd November 1943, MGB318 proceeded on its first mission. The pinpoint advised to MGB318 was Ile Rosservor, another insignificant and uninhabited islet two miles westwards of Ile Guennoc. There was a misunderstanding between London and Lannilis regarding the pinpoint as the French people thought the chosen site was Ile Guennoc. The Australian boats officer "Tassie" Uhr-Henry DSC proceeded ashore and confirmed that the island was Rosservor but no-one was waiting. Two dinghies then loaded up with boxes of stores which were duly landed and hidden in rocky crannies and behind stones. They then returned to MGB318 and returned to Falmouth from where these operations commenced.

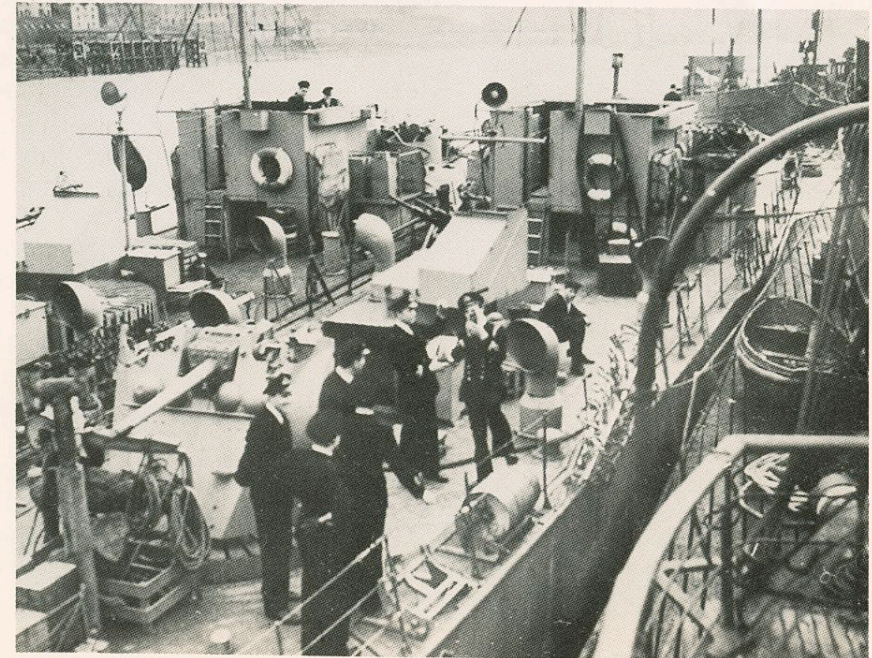
Believing that the operation had been a success, Mao and his team had already left the coast for Brest the next morning when they learned that the 15 airmen had not been picked up from Ile Guennoc. The airmen remained there for 3 days - a harrowing experience - as Mao tried to establish contact with London.

26-27 November 1943

Another attempt was made on 26-27 November 1943. The dinghies went as planned to Ile Guennoc but returned with the news that Ile Guennoc was deserted. An agent was rowed ashore on the Ile du Bec and MGB318 returned to England. From the French account no arrangements had been made to collect the airmen on the night of 26h November.



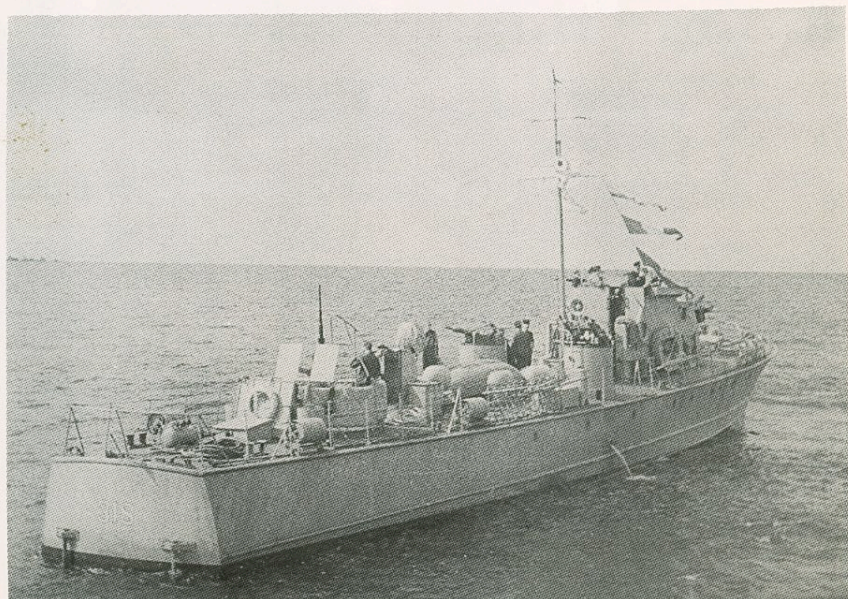
Lloyd Bott CBE DSC,
Lieutenant RANVR,
First Lieutenant MGB502.



MGBs 502 and 503 alongside Westward Ho on the Dart, looking towards Kingswear.



David Birkin, DSC, Légion d'Honneur.



MGB318.

1-2 December 1943

The next attempt was arranged for the night of 1-2 December 1943. The airmen were waiting on Ile Tariec. The BBC message confirmed that the MGB had already left and fixed the rendezvous at Ile Guennoc. Mao took a canoe to let MGB318 know that the men were at Ile Tariec. He was soon in bad trouble owing to the rising wind and heavy surf. After an hour of being lost he saw a red light flashing through the spray and paddled furiously towards it and, finally, exhausted, landed on Tariec to find the gunboat surf-boats already there. On this mission MGB318 was accompanied by MGB329 and about midnight they reached the pinpoint off Ile Guennoc and dropped anchor. The wind and swell were now becoming awkward. Finally three surf-boats left for Ile Guennoc - Lieut. Uhr-Henry in the first with two ratings (probably John "Coddy" Markham DSM and Jim Gordon DSM who were both lost when 502 (2002) went down in May 1945). Sub-Lieut. Michael Pollard, 1st Lieutenant of MGB318 in the second with two seamen, John Clancy and Roger Bartley DSM, and the Coxswain of MGB329, Petty Officer Jim Coles and two seamen "Lofty" Shepherd and Victor Williams in the third surf-boat. Uhr-Henry reported there was no sign of life on Ile Guennoc but he could see a flashing red light on Ile Tariec. He was told to investigate and 25 minutes later announced there were 20 evaders ready and waiting. He was told to unload the stores and return to the MGBs as fast as possible in view of the deteriorating weather.

At 0200 hours a violent squall of wind and rain hit. At the same time a radio message was received from England stating "Weather deteriorating rapidly, gale force 6-7 approaching your area". Wind was howling through the rigging, great waves rolling in from the Atlantic were smashing themselves onto the reefs and rocks, the sea was a mass of foam. It was a most awesome and frightening sight.

At 0220 Lieut. Uhr-Henry reported that all three surf-boats were starting back to the mother ships. From that moment onwards, no further word was heard over the walkie-talkie and the sea was getting worse every minute.

At 0335 the already tense nerves of those on MGB318 were jangled further by all MGB318's gun buzzers blaring out in unison and the navigation lights switching themselves on, having short circuited from inundations of sea water and pelting rain. The wires had to be cut to stop the noise and extinguish the lights.

At 0428 it was decided the gunboats could wait no longer as dawn was not all that distant, for not only would everyone get caught but the pinpoint would be compromised if the Germans spotted them. With heavy hearts the decision was made to weigh anchor and the gunboats began a slow turn northwards. At that moment, one of the surf-boats was sighted astern. The surf boat was making no progress at all and heavy seas were breaking over her. MGB318 dropped astern towards the helpless boat and the reef which she had negotiated. All available hands on MGB318 dragged the men out of the surf boat (the crew of 3 and 7 airmen) and finally pulled the sinking boat on board. At 0450 MGB318 started on the long slog back to England, and looking back at Ile Tariec a red lamp was seen flashing from the island indicating that someone else had survived the ordeal. Then followed a nightmarish return journey in the worst possible weather. I must quote directly from Navigator David Birkin:

"Lashings parted and heavy objects started rocketing across the deck - the chart room became chaotic and I had to wedge myself against the chart table to remain on two feet. The table was an indescribable mess of rusty water cascading down the voice pipe from the bridge, sick and blood from the bashings of my head against every kind of projection. At such times, with pulpy charts slithering in every direction, parallel rulers careering madly across the table and onto the deck, pencils and notes flying through the air - navigation was, to say the least, a tricky problem."

It was not until 1720 hours that MGB318 and MGB329 were secured alongside the jetty in Falmouth Harbour.

Of the two surf-boats which did not return, one capsized and the other was smashed against the rocks. Remarkably there were no fatal casualties and all the passengers and surf-boat crews managed to scramble and swim to Tariec, where, battered and bruised, they had to spend the night.

An extract from the report of U. S. evading airman, Harold Thompson, completes the story of that extraordinary mission:

"I was in the boat of Lt Uhr-Henry, the officer in charge of the three rescue boats. We were supposed to be leading the way back to the MGB but it was impossible to see where the others were; it was pitch

black, with only the rocks sticking out of the raging sea being blacker. The other two boats quickly met the fate we feared, one hit a rock and sank, the other capsized in the mountainous waves. All aboard were able to get back to the beach and were successfully hidden until three weeks later when taken off the same beach by MGB318. How we missed the rocks was one of the miracles occurring that night. There was a string of others. For example, our boat had a leak in the bottom that took in the same amount of water that came in with every crashing wave. Someone had the bright idea that we could use our shoes to bail the water out. This kept the evaders' minds off how hopeless the situation was and gave us a feeling that we were helping to get the little boat back to the big boat. It wasn't long before the two young sailors pulling on the oars gave out. The officer asked for two volunteers to man the oars. Two evaders quickly took their places and for a few minutes did OK, but not being used to that kind of work, they soon tired, with another two taking their place. It was apparent to the British Officer that he had only two passengers with any skill at rowing, so it settled down that these two would relieve the sailors when they needed a rest. Everyone else continued to bail, hoping to keep from going under. The wind kept getting worse during these two long hours with still no MGB in sight.

I was wedged in the high bow of the boat and would every so often twist around and scan the black sea ahead for any sign of a light. The officer had said earlier that the big boat would be showing a light just above the water line so that it could not be seen from shore. After all this seemingly hopeless rowing in the raging sea, spirits among all of us, except for the officer, started to sink; so I decided to pick up our spirits by giving a positive answer when they asked again: "Do you see the light, Tommy?" "Yes, I see the light!" What happened then, I'm convinced, made the rescue possible. For they all ignited and started shouting "We're over here!" The sailors on the MGB who were on look-out duty heard us above the roar of wind and waves. The skipper of the MGB gave the order to ease toward the noise and then we could hear the boat's engines which gave everyone more lung power; finally a most beautiful sight for us was the outline of the MGB's stern easing slowly towards us. It would be nice to say that we closed the gap but actually the fellows rowing were too tired

to do much more. When we came alongside, rope ladders were thrown down (N.B. it would be a scrambling net) and the scramble up began. MGB318 arrived back at Falmouth 25 hours after sailing. (That 'Tassie' Uhr-Henry and his boat crew did a fantastic job was well and truly recognised by all of the flotilla)."

23-24 December 1943

David Birkin reports that Mao, never daunted, immediately began arranging another rendezvous with London, and a new attempt was fixed for the night of 23-24 December 1943. On the 23rd, Claude Tanguy in his lorry, picked up Mao, Sarol, Person, the shipwrecked sailors, the airmen and Jeannot and Pierrot - the radio operators of the group. They all got off at Bel Air in Landeda from where they were to be guided by Guillaume Le Cun, Louis and Francois Coun to Tariec.

So much correspondence had accumulated that it had to be carried on a horse-drawn cart guided by Amédée Rolland. Thus 32 people divided into three groups led by a Resistance member, set off for Ile Tariec. When the party reached Ile Tariec, Jeannot passed a message to London "Les troenes sont en fleurs" and London replied in the usual way that the operation was "on". The weather was reasonable and hopes were very high. The journey across by MGB318 was comparatively uneventful, though the swell was greater than forecast. As MGB318 proceeded down the L'Aber-Benoit Channel the wind was increasing. As MGB318 anchored the wind had increased to Force 5 and trouble again seemed imminent.

Contact via walkie-talkie was established with the shore party, which reported that a surf-boat landing was possible, though tricky. Thus encouraged, MGB318 moved in closer to Ile Guennoc and dropped anchor again. A few minutes later the anchor's grass line broke and a new anchor with a stronger line was dropped and, fortunately, it held. Two surf-boats were put in the water and with 'Tassy' Uhr-Henry in the first with his crew and the second surf-boat in tow, they left for Ile Guennoc. Five minutes later, due to the bad weather, MGB318's second anchor was lost and from then onwards position had to be maintained by using the engines.

Some time later, with wind and sea increasing in strength every minute, and anxiety on board MGB318 increasing similarly, 'Tassy' reported that he was returning but could make no headway against sea and swell. He was ordered to sink the surf-boat he had in tow. Twenty minutes later 'Tassy' and his crew had

made it and were hauled aboard, battered and exhausted. MGB318 had a very rough and dangerous Channel crossing back to Falmouth. After 22 hours of almost continual running, MGB318 had several defects that required attention.

25-26 December 1943

The next day, Christmas Day, was cheerless, grey and depressing. All on board MGB318 felt dispirited with the disappointment of the previous day. Moreover they were dog-tired. As was usual at Christmas a "make and mend" and a "splicing of the main brace" was the order of the day., in short, a day's rest for all coastal force craft in Falmouth Harbour.

At three o'clock it happened: a telephone call from London to say that the operation was "on" again that night as weather reports were good. But operating conditions within the stomachs of MGB318's ship's company was less than favourable and even the toughest constitution quailed at the prospect of at least 20 hours of tossing and rolling.

And so it was that, all necessary repairs having been made, about four o'clock in the fading light of a Christmas afternoon, MGB318 slipped unobtrusively from her moorings along Coastlines Wharf in Falmouth Harbour and, on the last of the ebb-tide, nosed slowly and silently downstream towards the open sea. She must have looked a very lonely speck against the dark background of a white-flecked leaden sea.

MGB318 stopped off the Helford River to pick up another boat crew (supplied by SOE) and a twenty-foot surf-boat to add to the small surf-boats which MGB318 carried. The large surf-boat was towed to France. Six hours later in a calm sea the watchers on Tariec saw MGB318 drop anchor a few hundred yards away and contact was made via the walkie-talkie. MGB318 had a trouble-free crossing and the weather was ideal.

The three surf-boats were quickly on their way to the island. They did two return trips and the operation was completed within two hours with 32 evaders and the load of mail safely on board.

The return journey to England in the early hours of Boxing Day gave everyone on board MGB318 a tremendous feeling of achievement and satisfaction - after five attempts, success at last. MGB318 slid back to her moorings at Falmouth creating as little interest as she had done on leaving the previous afternoon.

As the official report put it: *"This operation will long be remembered by those on board, not (only) because it took place on Christmas Day, but because of the smooth way in which the internal organisation of the ship ran. All officers and men fulfilled their duties in a highly efficient manner."*

David Birkin reports also that *"Congratulations were in the air. we even earned a good mark from General Eisenhower for the mail we brought back which included detailed information about the V1 and V2 rocket sites."*

MGB318 was an honoured ship with a very fine crew, a ship very proud of its accomplishments. She was also very ably supported by David Birkin DSC navigator and 'Tassie' Uhr-Henry DSC as Boats Officer.

But for the Resistance workers, with the end of the visits to Ile Guennoc and Ile Tariec, a disastrous period began. On 6 January 1944 Mao and his radio operator Jeannot were arrested by the Gestapo in Paris, tortured by the Masuy-Fallot group at the Gestapo HQ in Avenue Henri Martin and deported to Dachau. The same fate befell Sarol a few weeks later. Mao and Sarol returned and were alive and well in 1995. Dr de la Marnière and his family were also caught but after imprisonment and torture were eventually released. Joseph Mouden was arrested, subjected to ghastly tortures in front of local villagers and died during deportation. Boursier, Jean Person and Mademoiselle Rose Virot were also arrested and deported. Francois Coum died of wounds in the course of an attack on a German bastion on 6 August 1944.

So ended the activities of a heroic group who, in spite of crushing disappointments, had laboured for the repatriation of British and American airmen against almost overwhelming odds. What a reward for heroism - and what a horrible price to pay.

Chapter 3

OPERATIONS FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE (SOE)

The First Mission from Dartmouth

Baie de Fresnaie

Pointe de Saint Cast was one of the two main areas selected by SOE for its VAR operations. The beach selected in the St Cast area was called Grève-du-Mousselet and lay near the Pointe-du-Chatelet on the face of Saint-Cast peninsular overlooking the Baie de Fresnaie. It was also close to the home ("Les Feux Follets") of a promising local recruit, Aristide Sicot, which could be used to shelter incoming and outgoing passengers. The Mousselet beach, indeed the whole Baie de Fresnaie, was uncomfortably close to the major German coast-watching radar station less than 3 miles to the east.

The first mission, by a borrowed gunboat MGB697, on 25 October 1943 had to be abandoned because of her late arrival at the pinpoint in deteriorating weather. A second attempt on 28 October 1943 was completely successful. The two passengers, Paul Dent and his wireless operator Langard were landed with W/T gear and stores.

On the opposite side of the Baie de Fresnaie close to Forte-de-Latte, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) had plans to land two agents. MGB697 again was used, on 3 November 1943 but this failed because of her late arrival at the pinpoint area - a German convoy had delayed her passage. The next attempt was planned for the last week of the month when the moon had waned.

By this time, SOE had a task to be performed at St Cast so DDOD[I] decided to do the two missions in conjunction MGB502 (on its first mission) to do the SOE task and a borrowed MGB673 to undertake the deferred SIS mission. The night of 26-27 November 1943 was agreed.

MGBs 502 and 673 made their ways to the Baie de Fresnaie but were delayed for about 2 hours as a long, slow German convoy passed on its way to St Malo.

The gunboat anchored at positions suitable for their respective pinpoints and sent their surf boats ashore but in both cases there was no reception committee. Contact was made between MGB502 and Paul Dent and Aristide Sicot, who had waited on the cliff top, using the secure S-phone link. Dent advised that he had stood down the reception committee as he had concluded that the SOE operation would not take place that night. The four SOE agents and one of the SIS agents returned to Dartmouth, the other SIS agent decided to land.

A second attempt of the two operations was made with the same gunboats on the night of 1-2 December 1943. The SOE mission was successful; the four men were landed and five passengers were embarked. Again, there was no reception committee for the SIS passenger and he returned again to England.

The next operation took place on the night of 23-24 December 1943. (This is the date in "Secret Flotillas"; "Par Les Nuits Les Plus Grandes," by Roger Huguen, records 24-25 December as the date.) About a dozen people, many from the network looking after evading airmen were hidden in "Les Feux Follets", the Sicot home, when Felix Jouan, a flour miller at Bedée, who belonged to the organisation, came to advise that General Allard, whose wife was already in the hands of the Gestapo, urgently desired to get to London. Although not signalled to or approved by London, it was decided to accept the General for embarkation - the departure being imminent. Jouan then delivered him in his van. The party, now expanded to a considerable size, left "Les Feux Follets" and made their way in Indian file behind Aristide Sicot to Mousselet Beach to await the arrival of the surf boats. Contact was established by S-phone between MGB502 and the shore party which advised MGB502 of the increased numbers to be embarked. This complicated the already difficult task and Peter Williams decided to take MGB502 further inshore and anchored in his chosen position. The surf boats were lowered into the water. Then a white flare burst overhead lighting up the area. The surf boats were hoisted back on board, the grass rope was cut and the main engines started. MGB502 was under fire from machine guns and small arms as she adopted violent alterations of course as she headed to the open sea. Her only damage was a signal halliard severed by a bullet thus bringing the recognition signals crashing down behind the bridge. MGB502's luck was in and the heavy artillery shells fell harmlessly astern of her. The German blockhouses without doubt must have been able to hear the noise and see the silhouette as the visibility by starlight was good enough to have caused Peter Williams considerable concern as he ventured in.

Paul Dent and Aristide Sicot hurried those waiting departure from the beach to "Les Feux Follets". In the course of the following night Jouan transferred all the intended passengers in his van. General Allard left the van between Rennes and Pleston and the others rested at Bedée for some days until they were transferred to the highly successful SOE "Vic" escape line and in due course all got back to England via the Pyrenees, Spain and Gibraltar. It had been a near catastrophe.

On January 13, 1944 Jouan was arrested and deported to Dachau. He was liberated by the Americans when they overran the area but died two days later, victim of the terrible epidemic of typhus which struck the survivors of the death camp. He lived just long enough to write a letter to his family.

As an outcome there were no further missions to the Baie de Fresnaie; the centre of activities moved to Beg-an-Fry.

With Peter Williams and Sir Brooks Richards, I visited "Les Feux Follets" in May 1994 to meet with the sister of Aristide Sicot, Madame Renée Sicot Labbé, who still lives there, and her family - a really lovely family. The dining room floor still has a hollow sound over the excavation below, which was being made as an escape tunnel in 1943. Aristide could not be present as he could not leave his wife Raymonde - she was Raymonde Jacob - as she was quite ill. Aristide Sicot first met the Jacob family when he was looking for a "safe house" near Beg-an-Fry.

Began-an Fry

A new beach was soon found for SOE at Beg-an-Fry, a place near Guimaec, north-east of Morlaix. MGB502 did five missions there (one with MGB718 in company). The first, on the night of 28-29 January 1944 was unsuccessful because the reception committee had gone to a beach 300 metres further south which they considered to be better than the one chosen and agreed upon by DDOD[I] and the one on which the surf-boats landed. Thereafter, MGB502 did four successful missions and, according to "Secret Flotillas" MGB503 did two. Six successful missions on end from 26-27 February to 15-16 April 1944 was indeed quite a remarkable achievement. On 24-25 June 1944 US PT boats 79 and 199 successfully landed four OSS agents ("Secret Flotillas").

The landing point used was close to an occupied German pill-box and we could, on occasions, see lights flashing in the cliff-top as we came closer to shore. We

always used, as a navigation point, "Les Boeufs", a large pair of odd-shaped rocks located about one mile off the beach at Beg-an-Fry. Having confirmed our position we proceeded at slow speed looking for familiar landmarks feeling our way towards the anchorage. Finally, we were on station one mile offshore in the open arms of a wide rocky bay lying at our grass rope anchor. The beach lay in a cove in the western arc of the bay, its sides guarded by a myriad of small rocks. It was certainly far more protected than the landing points of L'Aber-Benoit.

A monument has been erected at Beg-an-Fry. In French it is inscribed:

"In this place and at night during the first months of 1944, Allied missions charged with preparing the offensive of liberation, disembarked with the aid of French Resistance forces."

Then it continues in English:

"This plaque was unveiled on the 25th anniversary of the liberation to commemorate the part played in this area by the Resistance Movement and the Royal Navy MGB502."

Colonel Maurice Buckmaster, head of the French Section of SOE wrote of MGB502's operations:

"The series of operations were of enormous importance in the liberation of France to which Resistance made a great contribution by minimising the part played after D-Day by the two German Panzer divisions Herman Goering and Das Reich which, in Eisenhower's view, shortened the war by six months."

Lieut. Commander Peter Williams DSC RNVR was the senior officer of the 15th MGB flotilla and I was his First Lieutenant. We had with us a Boats Officer Sub-Lieut. D.N. ('Dusty') Miller DSC, a South African, a first class young man. We all got on extremely well. It is quite extraordinary that the three officers of MGB502 should be an Englishman, an Australian and a South African. We also had a magnificent coxswain, a giant of a man Fred Smith DSM (he was one of those lost when MGB502 was lost off Norway) and an excellent crew. Brian Fraser was our navigator on most of these operations.

Peter Williams was a first class captain and had been in the Navy since the outbreak of war and, in fact, commanded MA/SB10 which was the last vessel to leave Dunkirk Harbour. One could almost say "last out and first back." Admiral Wake-Walker, who was responsible for organising the evacuation of the ships and craft from Dunkirk, flew his flag in MA/SB10 which was his means of transport during the evacuation period. On the last night after returning the Admiral to Dover, MA/SB10 escorted the blockships to Dunkirk and brought the crews of the blockships back to Dover.

MGB325 under the command of Peter Williams was made available to D.D.O.D.(I) for a number of operations. In one of them, the boat's crew was captured by the Germans on a beach in Holland in 1942. The First Lieutenant of MGB325, Charles Elwell, became a prisoner-of-war and Peter has informed me that the two sailors were shot as spies.

Network organisers, Agents - including François Mitterand and downed Airmen.

I must mention a few of the many people who helped MGB502 in these operations. Firstly Peter Harratt DSO MC, an Englishman who had lived for a long time in south-west France in the 1930s and Erwin Deman ("Paul Dent"), a cosmopolitan Jew born in Vienna in 1904. Together they organised the SOE "VAR' line to Brittany. They travelled with us many times, Peter Harratt as Conducting Officer for SOE and Paul Dent in his role as the organiser in Brittany. Dent had fought with the French in 1940, escaped from a German POW camp and, in due course, made his way to England and was taken on by SOE. Dent was landed in Brittany from a RAF Hudson on 19-20 August 1943 and returned to England in October by way of the Pyrenees and Gibraltar. He was back in Brittany a few weeks later (late October) travelling in an MTB. (At this time MGB502 would not have been ready) The VAR line was in place in Brittany. It is recorded in "SOE in France," by M.R.D. Foot, that Dent was recalled to London in February 1944 (via MGB502 26-27 February) as SOE London was concerned that the circuit was getting too big and security was being endangered. I think Dent also wanted to talk in London to push for another landing point 300 metres from the one London seemed to prefer. Dent returned to Brittany in March but was recalled again on the 15-16 April mission of MGB502 and MGB718. It is suggested that his nerves

were becoming severely frayed. He had done a good job at great risk under continual intense pressure. According to "SOE In France" he was awarded the MBE and an MC. He was very ably assisted by "Yves" (Louis Lecorvaisier), his highly-regarded second in command to whom much credit is also due.

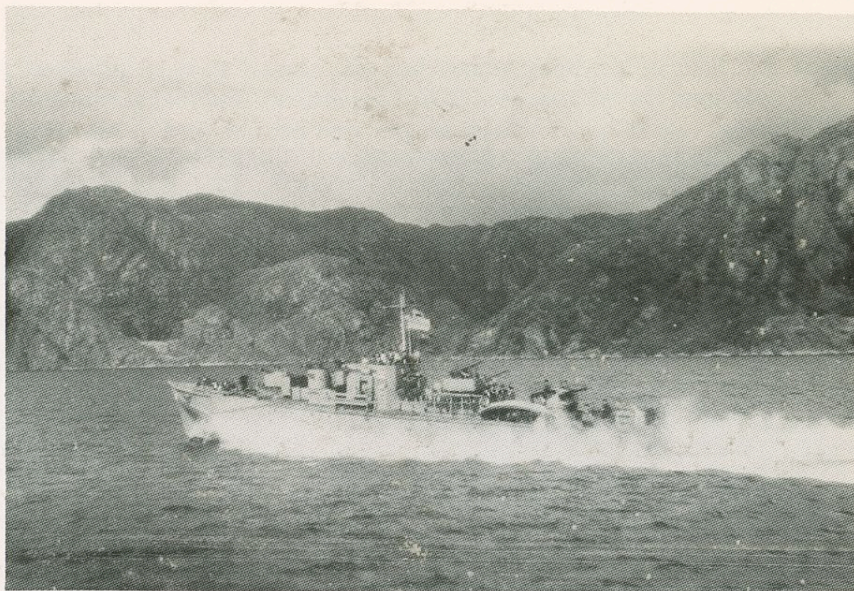
At Beg-an-Fry, Dr and Madame Le Duc were at the centre of things. I met Madame Le Duc in Paris many times after the war. Also the Jacob family of Guimaec. The two young ladies, Raymonde and Alice, were always at the beach escorting passengers to and from the boats. Many agents were sheltered at the Bureau de Tabac (tobacco shop) of their sister Yvonne Jacob, as also was General Gerard, the head of Belgium's Secret Army, and his wife and 2 children, who MGB502 carried on another operation. I shall quote an involvement of Raymonde and Alice in our mission of 26-27 February 1944 (from "Par Les Nuits Les Plus Grandes" by Roger Huguen):

"Having landed by parachute in the vicinity of Morlaix, Wally Mollet, a South Rhodesian, had been gathered into the SOE network and successively cared for by Dr Le Janne and the Boette sisters who were drapers. The Jacob sisters came to look for the airmen at the home of Dr Le Duc who guided them to the Boette home. The pilot reached Guimaec by bicycle accompanied by the two young Jacob ladies. They took him to be interrogated by the Chief of Mission, Paul Dent, and eventually accompanied him with the other passengers (including Paul Dent, his W/T Operator Langard and Aristide Sicot) to the beach. After their passengers were embarked on the surf boat, Raymonde and Alice (with "Yves") took over the two unknown agents who had landed from the surf boat. One was Francois Mitterand, member of the resistance movement "Liberation-Nord" and the other's identity it has not been possible to determine. They conducted the two agents through the mine fields and to the house of M. Lucas, a retired policeman, then on to Guimaec where Louis Mercier, fish merchant, came to take them in his automobile through the protected area to the home of Dr Le Duc at Morlaix. (Madame Le Duc received from Mitterand a food ration card in the name of Morland). The two agents took the train from Morlaix to proceed to the sector where they would exercise their clandestine activity."



15th Flotilla Members leaving Buckingham Palace after receiving their decorations, 25th October 1944.

Left to right: John Markham* DSM; Kenneth Peel DSM or Ronald Bracey DSM (hidden); James Gordon* DSM; Lieut. M.P. "Tich" Salmond DSC; Lieut. David Birkin DSC; Lieut-Cdr Peter Williams DSC; Roger Bartley* DSM; P.O. Fred Smith* DSM (hidden); Alfred Hibbert DSM; P.O. William Webb DSM; Cdr. Edward Davis DSO & Bar; P.O. H.E. "Nigger" Mould DSM & Bar; Charles Gadd* DSM; John Hayden* DSM; Harold Pickles DSM (partly hidden); Henry Banks DSM; Paul Lumsley DSM; Alfred Andrews* DSM. *Indicates those lost when MGB502 struck a mine off Norway on 12th May 1945.



MGB718 in Flekkefjord, Norway, July 1945.



Left, John "Coddy" Markham DSM with Jim Gordon DSM aboard MGB718. Both were lost when MGB502 was sunk in May, 1945.



Coxswains Mould, DSM and bar, (MGB318) and Smith, DSM, (MGB502). Smith was lost on MGB502 in May 1945.



Suzanne Charise, of the French Resistance, photographed in 1946 in the clothes she wore when she was picked up by MGB502 from Beg-an-Fry beach on April 15/16, 1944.



Left to right, Captain Slocum, Jean Tréhiou, Commander Davis and François Le Cornec, 23rd June 1946, at Bonaparte Beach over a year after the war in Europe was over.



Lloyd Bott, centre, in 1960 with Commandant Branchoux, Resistance leader at Guingamp and Madame Cellarie, a nurse, who at one time had 15 airmen hiding in her house La Chimère.

Sir Brooks Richards in "Secret Flotillas" records: "Sub-Lt. Lloyd Bott was in charge of surf-boats" for that operation. Francois Mitterand was to become President of France from 1981 to 1995.

A Woman Agent with a Wooden Leg !

I now turn to some of our passengers in March and April 1944. One of SOE's most highly regarded and outstanding personalities, Virginia Hall, "the principal heroine of the early days who had had herself taught Morse privately to make SOE take her back to France as a wireless operator as they would not use her as a courier" (from "SOE in France"), was landed from MGB502 on the night of 21-22 March 1944 with code-name "Diane" and remained in France until her area was overrun by the Allied forces. This was her second tour. She had escaped from Vichy France across the Pyrenees in November 1942. She was right to have left in a hurry as the incoming head of the Gestapo at Lyons said he "would give anything to put his hands on that Canadian bitch" - in fact, she was a US citizen.

Virginia Hall (code-name "Marie") was first put into France in August 1941 and became a key SOE operator. In "SOE in France," by M.R.D. Foot, she is mentioned on more than twenty occasions, e.g.. "saw Morel on to a line across the Pyrenees", "at one stage the only agent left at work", "always well-informed", "best means of communication was by courier through Virginia Hall" etc. As Cowburn, a renowned SOE agent, once put it: "If you sit in her kitchen long enough you will see most people pass through with one sort of trouble or another which she promptly deals with."

Virginia Hall was awarded an MBE for her outstanding work. I should mention that Miss Hall had lost one foot in a car accident before the war and had an artificial foot, named Cuthbert by the SOE French Section. Quite an extraordinary story. Quite an extraordinary lady - and she and "Cuthbert" walked across the Pyrenees.

At the time of an operation, of course, we had no idea who was travelling with us and what they may be engaged upon. I remembered we took across a lady with, I thought, an artificial leg. A few years ago I mentioned this to Suzanne Charise, who will be my next subject, and she said it would be Virginia Hall. I then confirmed this through "SOE in France" and "Secret Flotillas".

I think the only agent with whom I've had contact is Suzanne Charise. She was one of ten people brought out from Beg-an-Fry in the 15-16 April 1944 mission. Suzanne Warenghen, as she was then, lived in Le Havre, France and became involved in Underground activities from the fall of France, looking after British soldiers and airmen. She was then only 19 years of age. She was recruited into an Evasion network in Marseilles in 1941. She was arrested in 1942 but after some weeks in prison was released.

Suzanne was imprisoned again in January 1943 and escaped from Castres prison on 10th September 1943 as part of a mass escape of about 50 people, one of whom was Blanche Charlet, an SOE agent who landed in a Felucca in the south of France in September 1942 and taken prisoner on 24 October 1942. Suzanne and Blanche were hidden for three months in a Benedictine monastery of En Calcat (Dourgne-Tarn). They then got themselves to Paris and a few months later received instructions to proceed to London. They left Paris on 14 April 1944 with the crews of three aircraft. We embarked Suzanne on MGB502 on the night of 15-16 April 1944. I think Blanche Charlet travelled with MGB718, which accompanied us on that mission. The official report describes the operation as follows:

"Lieutenant-Commander Williams was in command of a force consisting of MGB502 and MGB718 engaged on evacuating agents and evading airmen from a difficult pinpoint on the north-east coast of France. Having completed the embarkation he was standing out to sea along a narrow channel fringed by rocks and shoals whose only outlet was to the northward, when he found his way barred by three enemy patrol vessels waiting at the seaward entrance. By a judicious combination of speed and use of the special challenge and reply procedure provided by DDOD[1] for such emergencies, the enemy remained in doubt regarding his identity until they were abaft his beam. They then opened fire, but being still uncertain, ceased firing 15 seconds later, with the result that the force escaped with the loss of one rating killed and superficial damage to both ships."

Able Seaman Williams Sandalls was our only casualty on these operations. I and others of the flotilla have visited Charlbury in the Cotswolds to see his memorial.

Suzanne brought with her two microfilms and some plans. When she was handed them she was informed that they concerned Hitler's West Wall. I feel she brought

out detailed material about the German VI and V2 Rocket installations but we will never know. I shall now quote from a letter I received from Suzanne in response to my book about the 15th MGB flotilla:

"It brought back so vividly my own escape from France : being smuggled into the forbidden zone in the baker's van, the walk in single file across the minefields, the stop at the little house for last minute instructions, scrambling down the cliff, mostly on our bottoms! The wait on the beach in total silence, staring at the sea until you thought you could see things - then the surf boats landing without a sound, people getting out of them and for the first time in four years, British uniforms, what a joy! Being rowed away still in silence, climbing up the net and hands taking me down to the cabin where I was given a cup of tea and a little kitten. The attack by three German boats, I thought we had bought it; but for me, it was a glorious adventure, only marred by the death of the young sailor; I felt so bad that he had been killed because he helped us to escape. MGB502 probably saved my life as three months later (July 1944) the Gestapo was combing Paris for me, interrogating many people, some very brutally and one tortured - a poor, old man who really did not know where I was. So, if I had stayed in Paris, it is nearly certain that I would have been arrested again. I could stand the prisons and brutal interrogations (I did) and I was quite philosophical about death, but I don't know how long I could have withstood tortures without talking - so you see what 502 means to me."

In recent visits to England, I have met with Suzanne and her husband André who was with OSS. Suzanne is a very nice person but has had indifferent health for a number of years following her wartime experiences.

In Brooks Richards' "Secret Flotillas," there is an excellent account of the 15-16 April 1944 operation and the extraordinary story of the activities of the six agents carried to Beg-an-Fry, of which the following is a summary.

Two of the agents, Captain Martin Rendier and Felix Duffour (Adolphe and Amédée) of SOE's French Section had been entrusted with the mission to sabotage and delay any redeployment of the armoured forces which the Germans had concentrated around Guers (Ille-et-Vilaine) in a position from which, in the event

of an allied landing, they could move either to the Channel or the Atlantic coasts to oppose it. Rendier and Duffour were so brilliantly successful: on the night of 5-6 June (i.e. D-Day), teams equipped and trained by them cut the four relevant railway lines out of Guers and destroyed fuel dumps and telecommunications to such good effect that the armoured unit had to proceed to the Normandy battlefield on its own tracks and took nine days to get into battle. A similar, and equally important, delaying action was taken by SOE against the "Das Reich" 2nd SS Armoured Division on its redeployment from Moutauban to the Normandy battle.

Two other officers of SOE's French Section were also carried, M. H. Rouneau, a Belgian, who was being sent in something of a hurry to try to get a circuit into Brittany to take the place of Anteline's "Bricklayer", and A. P. A. Watt who had been a W/T Operator prior to Déricourt's withdrawal to England. Watt was now on his way to join M. M. L. Dupont's "Diplomat" Circuit in the Aube, which was preparing to isolate Troyes when ordered to do so.

The other two agents travelling on MGB502 to France that night were on missions for De Gaulle's secret service by then based in Algiers. Colonel P. Ely was on his way to take over as Military Delegate for the old occupied zone in place of Col. Rondelay who had been captured and shot. The other emissary, Lazare Racheline, was a one-man politico-military mission of considerable importance. Lazare and his brother had been closely involved in setting up S.O.E.'s smoothly efficient "Vic" land-line structure in 1942 and was withdrawn from France late in 1943 as he was well known to the Gestapo in Lyons. Racheline's principal task was to persuade Alexandre Parodi to accept the position of Delegate to the National Council of Resistance for which he had been chosen by the French provisional government in Algiers to replace Emile Bollaert who had been arrested with Pierre Brossolette after being shipwrecked near Audieme on the west coast of Brittany while attempting to return to England in a small cargo carrier. Having persuaded Parodi to take the job, Racheline was to help him decentralise authority as far as possible and to make sure that he and his principal assistants all understood that it would be folly to precipitate a national insurrection once the Overlord landings began.

In summary, "Secret Flotillas" concludes that the "VAR' operations at sea at Beg-an-Fry were a valuable achievement. They provided SOE with a way into and out of France that was much needed at a time when the suspicions which had accumulated around Déricourt had led to his recall and thus deprived Buckmaster

of his main organiser of Lysander and Hudson landings by the RAF. Moreover, the line became available just when the pre-buildup of traffic was at its height.

To my mind the last "VAR' mission to Beg-an-Fry on 15-16 April 1944 was undoubtedly a magnificent strategic operation marred only by the death of Able Seaman Sandalls on MGB502. The agents we landed played significant roles in the success of the D-Day landings.

Maurice Buckmaster, head of the French Division of SOE, wrote to Peter Williams, CO of MGB502:

The efforts of the Resistance in minimising the part played by the two German Panzer divisions had, in Eisenhower's view, helped to shorten the war by six months.

I feel bound to add a little more in regard to Lazare Racheline. It is recorded in "S.O.E. in France," by M.R.D. Foot, that S.O.E.'s security section had forbidden his return to France because he was too well known to the Gestapo. There are also stories that Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces had rejected the suggestion as his capture might endanger the security of the D-Day landings. How the Gaullists got around the ban is not recorded, but somehow they did and MGB502 landed him at Beg-an-Fry as mentioned above.

After only four weeks in France, Racheline returned to England by his own VIC line, setting a new record by getting from Paris to London through Spain in six days. There is no doubt that Racheline, a Jew, ran terrible risks in going to France as he did.

In July 1944 Racheline was dispatched back to France by parachute to assist in getting the machinery of government in motion. The acting ministers had been agreed on months before. He installed himself, early in the fighting, in the minister's room in the Ministry of the Interior in Paris and held it in the Gaullist interest for a week. This was a very significant period. The French communists had planned on a mass rising to enable them to seize power but this was frustrated by the Gaullists, who, with superior skills, pursued a different line; they seized the railway and electric power stations and the places where ration cards were issued all over France and thus came to control the French state.

Chapter 4

OPERATIONS FOR BRITISH MILITARY INTELLIGENCE (M.I.9)

At Plage Bonaparte, Plouha

COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE AT PLOUHA
DEDICATED MAY 1991.
(Translation)

The Clandestine operations at Bonaparte and other beaches between St. Cast and L'Aber Wrac'h were carried out by Royal Navy Motor Gunboats of the 15th MGB Flotilla operating from Dartmouth during 1942-44.

The members of the Coastal Forces Veterans Association salute their comrades of the Resistance and Escape Networks honouring their dead along with those British sailors who died in HMMGB 502.

As the air war over German-occupied Europe built up in late 1943 and early 1944, Allied air crews who had been shot down and evaded capture, began to build up and become a serious problem to patriotic nationals of the countries who were sheltering them. To relieve the pressure and return the crews to England, British Military Intelligence shipped a number of agents into the occupied countries to help organise underground groups into networks.

It was late 1943 when two Canadian Army volunteers, Captain Lucien Dumais and Lieutenant Ray LaBrosse, were flown into occupied France in a RAF Lysander to set up an organisation to help Allied airmen escape. They named this organisation "Shelburn" after a county in Canada.

With the help of patriotic Frenchmen from all over France, they organised and executed Operation Bonaparte, certainly one of the most daring and successful escape operations of World War II.

Downed Allied fliers were gathered from all over France and systematically sent to the towns of Guingamp and Plouha in the Province of Cotes du Nord in Brittany. From here they were transported by small truck and on foot to the rendezvous point "La Maison d'Alphonse" and then to the beach La Plage Bonaparte at Plouha to await the British motor gunboat.

Colonel Branchoux of Guingamp was the Resistance leader in the area and Francois Le Carnec was leader at Plouha. They were assisted by Francois Kerambrun, André Chareton, George Le Cun, Jean Tergriet, the Ropers family, Madame Cellarie, Marie-Therese Le Calvez (a regular at the beach and shortly after the war suffered a nervous breakdown from which she never recovered), René Dagome, Francois Baudet and many others from the area around. Jean Gicquel was the owner of "La Maison d'Alphonse" where they all rendezvoused before proceeding to the beach. Joseph Mainguy served as a naval technician of the operation and was responsible for getting the airmen through the minefield on to the beach. Pierre ("Tarzan") Huet worked with Mainguy as a demining expert. In Paris, Marcel Cola, assisted by Anita Lemonnier, worked with the "reseau" to identify then provide shelter and identity papers to those of the airmen who got into the Paris area.

After the war General Eisenhower, when presenting Freedom Medals to a number of the brave people in France for their courageous work, said:

"It takes little imagination to understand the sublime quality of the courage that, during Hitler's occupation of France, dedicated French citizens displayed in undertaking to rescue Allied Fliers downed over France. They undertook the work deliberately and with the certain knowledge that they were risking not only their own lives but those of all they held dear. This they did far from the excitement and frenzy of the Battlefield. Their inspiration was their patriotism, the determination to see their beloved country freed from the domination of the hated Nazis and by their ideals of liberty and justice..."

I was the first wartime visitor to revisit the area and I met up with Colonel Mathurin Branchoux. He was a delightful, open man and it was great to be with him. (He died in 1965.) He took me to see Jean Gicquel, Pierre Huet and Madame Emilie Cellarie who, at one period, had 15 or 16 airmen staying with her and one, with a broken leg, had been with her for six months. Madame Cellarie had tears in her eyes as she greeted me - my visit was a recognition that the wonderful work she had done was not forgotten. She told me that even to provide the airmen with simple things like toothbrushes, she had to ride her bicycle all round the area buying them one by one and even at that time she would not have been a young woman. During the 1914-18 war she was a hospital nurse and because of her training a number of seriously injured or ill airmen were passed to her care. All those I met were so happy that someone should remember the sacrifices they had made and the risks they had taken.

There were nine operations in all to Plage Bonaparte and all were successful - a most satisfactory outcome - a tremendous performance by all concerned. There is no question that the great attention given to the setting up of the Shelburn line and the appointment of the experienced French Canadians Dumais and LaBrosse, paid handsome dividends. Dumais had been taken prisoner at Dieppe in August 1942, escaped from a German POW camp and left from the south of France in a felucca organised by O'Leary's "PAT" escape line. He was very security-conscious. LaBrosse had been a W/T Operator with an escape line in France and, when the circuit collapsed, he brought to Spain with him 27 evaders. "Secret Flotillas" has an excellent account of the operations.

MGB503 was the primary participant in this series of operations. Lieut. RM (Mike) Marshall DSC was the Commanding Officer and Andrew Smith DSC the First Lieutenant. I think "Tich" Salmond DSC did most of these operations as Navigator. Mike Marshall was an Oxford Blue who represented England at rugby immediately before the war. In 1943 he was my Commanding Officer on MGB607 at Great Yarmouth where he won his first DSC. He was quite an outstanding officer - big, tough, quick-witted, decisive and very competent. (It was Mike who recommended me to the 15th MGB flotilla.) Andrew earned a high reputation as a Boats Officer. MGB503 undertook five missions to Plage Bonaparte:

28 January 1944, 19 airmen embarked;
26 February 1944, 16 airmen and 2 volunteers for the Free French forces;
19 March 1944, 25 airmen and 1 French agent
23 March 1944, 30 evaders - but Roger Huguen, the French historian, puts numbers as 19 airmen and 2 young Frenchmen, LeBourhis and Tréhiou of the Plouha group.
12 July 1944, 15 airmen and 3 crew left behind by MGB718 on 15-16 June operation to Bonaparte.

All those operations went very smoothly indeed. perfect operations.

MGB502 had two missions, 16 March 1944 and 23 July 1944, both of which had unusual characteristics. When Dumais and LaBrosse arrived at Guingamp for the first of the March operations, scheduled for the night of 16-17 March 1944, they noted no fewer than four German radio direction-finding vans in the town and heard from Le Comec that there seemed to be a state of alert on the coast too; and that the local fishing vessels were not allowed to leave port. Dumais was worried enough to consider cancelling the mission but they were too late, so, notwithstanding the alert, they once more gathered at La Maison d'Alphonse and proceeded to the beach. There were explosions heard and they received advice from MGB502 that 502 was being fired on and proposed to withdraw and return later. This they did and 4 surf-boats were launched. According to "Secret Flotillas", Andrew Smith led the surf-boats and I took up the end of the line. The number we brought out was said by DDOD[I] to be 25, and by Dumais to be 30, but I believed there were more. Having in mind the machine guns and heavy guns that could have been brought to bear and the very low tide at the time, Brooks Richards states in "Secret Flotillas" that "considering the number of lives at stake, these were probably the riskiest twenty minutes in the whole cycle of wartime sea contacts with Brittany." He also states "By the time the surf boats returned to their mothership dawn was about to break." Frankly, I think if we had known the position ashore we would not have proceeded with the mission.

MGB502's second mission to Bonaparte Beach was 24-25 July 1944 to embark SAS personnel and any other evaders. Major Cary-Elwes of the SAS and his batman, Corporal Mills, made blind parachute drops into Brittany on 23 June 1944 and established contact between several French groups and London. At the conclusion of the operation they moved to Plouha, to La Maison d'Alphonse to embark for England through the Shelburn line. As they waited at La Maison d'Alphonse a small German patrol of two white Russian conscripts led by a German

arrived at the house and, spotting tell-tale equipment, demanded that Cary-Elwes and his group come out. The two Russians opened fire and in the confusion the German leader was hit. His companions were so concerned that they took him away for treatment. The five waiting in the house hurried out and were led by Gicquel to the safety of a corn field and the next day a safe house was arranged. At 0130 on 25 July, three surf-boats arrived from MGB502 carrying 15 suitcases of arms which were unloaded and then the five evaders and Jean Gicquel, who decided he should leave, embarked in the surf-boats for the return to Dartmouth.

When the German troops returned to La Maison d'Alphonse on 24 July, they blew it up and set the ruins to fire. Thus was the end of La Maison d'Alphonse, so important a link in the Shelburn operations.

MGB718 commanded by Lieutenant Ron Seddon had two missions to Plage Bonaparte - one on 15 June 1944 and the second on 9 August 1944. MGB718'S first cross-Channel operation had been when she accompanied MGB502 to Beg-an-Fry on 15-16 April 1944 in the most important, very successful last VAR mission.

Shortly after that operation MGB718 proceeded to Lerwick in the Shetlands to carry out a mission which involved rescuing the SIS agents manning one of a chain of clandestine naval reporting stations on the coast of Norway - a task successfully accomplished at the end of May. Eleven people were picked up from small boats off Batalden Island about 80 miles north of Bergen, without a hitch.

MGB718 had returned to Dartmouth only ten days before being sent on 15 June 1944 on her first solo cross-Channel mission to land three agents - Jean Tréhiou, Raoul Parent and Jean Hamon (W/T Operator) and equipment at Plage Bonaparte. This was successfully achieved. The surf-boat did not succeed in its return to MGB718 - the weather conditions were bad, the walkie-talkie R/T link was not working well, MGB718's anchor had dragged. Eventually, as dawn was approaching the CO of MGB718, Lieutenant Ronald Seddon DSC reluctantly decided that he must begin the return journey to Dartmouth. Guy Hamilton and his boat's crew Leading Seaman Albert Dellow and Able Seaman Rockwood heard the unmistakable sound of MGB718's silenced engines, as it gradually moved away from them, and then made their way to the shore.

The boat's crew was in due course found by Marie-Thérèse Le Calvez and housed by the local Resistance. They returned to Dartmouth on MGB503 on 13 July 1944. N.B. Jean Tréhiou embarked from Bonaparte Beach in MGB503 in March 1944 and returned in MGB718. He subsequently was a paratrooper in Vietnam.

Jean Harmon served as a telegraphist on HMS Nelson, later parachuted into France, came out through Spain and landed at Bonaparte Beach from MGB718 on 16-17 June 1944.

The other mission of MGB718 to Plage Bonaparte took place in daylight on 9 August 1944, after D-Day, and after the Germans at the block-house on Pointe-de-la-Tour had surrendered. One SAS agent and two French agents embarked on MGB718 and returned to Dartmouth.

I could not close this chapter on Operations at Plage Bonaparte without paying tribute to the US Air Forces Escape and Evading Society (AFEES) for the deep feeling they've displayed in thanking those people who helped them. They have honoured their pledge "NOUS N'OUBLIERONS JAMAIS". Ralph Patton, the President of AFEES, from its formation, in his speech at the 50th Anniversary Commemoration at Plouha in May 1994 paid tribute to Réseau Shelburn and the 15th Motor Gunboat flotilla and he also reminded us of the many unknowns,

"the peasants and nobles, the priests and teachers, the doctors and lawyers and the farmers and city dwellers who come to the aid of Allied airmen".

He could have added "policemen" to that list. Ralph went on to say "More than one hundred French men and women risked their lives to help me." And, of course, the same can be said about many men, women and children in Holland and Belgium. (It is interesting that when Ralph started up AFEES with a few friends, and wanted to know something about the gunboat operations he was referred to me by the French as I was the only one they knew.)

PLAQUE DEDICATED AT PLOUHA JUNE 1974

(English Translation)

**We, the 94 American Airmen
who embarked for England
from this beach during
the dark nights of 1944 say to
our Breton friends of the Shelburn network**

WE SHALL NEVER FORGET

U.S. Air Forces Escape & Evasion Society, 1974.

**"It takes little imagination to understand
the sublime quality of the courage that,
during Hitler's occupation of France,
dedicated French citizens displayed in
undertaking to rescue Allied fliers downed
over France. They undertook the work deliberately
and with the certain knowledge that they were
risking not only their own lives but those
of all they held dear."**

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER



By the sign to Plage Bonaparte in 1960, from left to right: Commandant Branchoux, Pierre Huet, Jean Gicquel (of La Maison d'Alphonse") and Lloyd Bott.



The actress Jane Birkin daughter of David Birkin embracing an old friend - 91 year-old Resistance veteran Job Mainguy - in 1992, after her father's ashes were spread on a beach in Brittany. In 1944 Job had led the airmen through the minefields at Plage Bonaparte by placing handkerchiefs to show where the mines were located.



At "Les Feux Follets" 13th May 1994. Lloyd Bott, Madame Renée Sicot Labbé and Peter Williams.



The commemoration ceremony for VE Day in May 1994 at Ile Grande. Harold Pickles DSM, (318), Bill Webb DSM, (503), Peter Williams DSC, (502), Norman Hine DSM, (503), and Andrew Smith DSC, (503) were made Honorary Citizens of Pleumeur-Bodou. Norman Hine, 2nd from right, was one of only two survivors when MGB 502 was lost.

Chapter 4

OPERATIONS FOR SECRET INTELLIGENCE SERVICE (S.I.S.)

Tréguier area

On 28-29 January 1944 MGB318 landed three agents at Ile d'Er on the west side of the Estuary leading to the ancient port of Tréguier. The agents, Yvon Jézéquel and two W/T operators were working for De Gaulle's BCRA. Jézéquel built up a ring extending from Brittany to Paris.

After he had collected a quantity of secret mail, a repeat of the 28-29 January operation was arranged to pick up the mail and land three more agents. The time the pinpoint was to be on the Toul-Tan side of the Ile-d'Er. The first attempt by MGB318 on 23-24 March was unsuccessful; R/T contact was established with the reception party but, owing to the low tide, the surf boats could not reach them and the operation was abandoned. A second attempt on 25-26 March 1944 was successful. The three agents were landed on the west side of the island and the mail collected.

In mid March the headquarters of the whole organisation was seized by the Germans and the circuit disintegrated. Jézéquel was picked up by the Germans at the Gare-de-Montparnasse in Paris on 24 April. He and his young sister died after deportation to Germany.

In "Secret Flotillas" Brooks Richards reports that, at the time of his arrest, Jézéquel must have been on his way to Brittany for the operation undertaken by MGB502 on 25-26 April 1944. On this mission MGB502 proceeded to pick up SIS agents at a pinpoint of the east bank of the Tréguier River considered by Peter Williams to be the most difficult rendezvous MGB502 ever had to make. Brian Fraser was our navigator on this most difficult navigational exercise. We waited at anchor for more than an hour without any signal from the shore. MGB502 then weighed anchor and began the homeward journey to Dartmouth; but the night was not to be without excitement.

The sky ahead was suddenly lit by star-shell as we emerged from the screen of rocky islets that fringe that part of the coast. We were confronted by a full-scale naval battle between RN cruiser "Black Prince" and four Tribal-class destroyers, RCN ships Haida, Athabaskan and Huron and RN ship Ashanti and three German Elbing-class torpedo boats, T24, T27 and T29. By the light of the star shell, three German vessels were revealed moving west at full speed not more than one mile ahead of MGB502 which had cut engines and waited as the destroyers closed in as flames engulfed one of the torpedo-boats T27, the last in line. T27, however, escaped under cover of smoke as did T24 but the leader T29 had been hit by a salvo which, among other things caused rudder failure. The destroyers concentrated on the stricken T29. She was now stopped and on fire and apparently out of action. whereupon, she suddenly came to life and "put up a spirited close range fire, in spite of the fact that the ship appeared quite uninhabitable. The destroyers were amazed that a German sailor with flames all around him should start firing at them." (This incident was reported in complete detail to me in a letter in 1994 from our Oerliken Gunner, Alfred Harris. When I passed the information I had received to the officer on the Ashanti who had written the report on the incident he was more than impressed by Alf Harris's powers of observation.) After torpedoes failed to sink T29 she finally sank from gunfire.

MGB502 was in an unenviable situation; clearly visible on both sides as star-shell burst overhead, a sitting duck for the destroyers and a silhouetted target for the German coastal batteries. We therefore re-started the engines and spent a strenuous time avoiding the melee. One of the Canadian destroyers, assuming we were an E-boat, fired on us. We switched on our navigation, masthead and recognition lights and fired two-star recognition signals from the Very pistol. These produced no immediate respite but fortunately the shells fell astern of us.

We returned to Dartmouth undamaged without further incident.

At Ile-a-Canton and Ile Grand - Operation Alibi

Captain Slocum (D.D.O.D[I]), our chief at the Admiralty, in a summary report on the wartime operations referred to the S.I.S. organisation on the Ile Grande as an example of the success which a determined and well-briefed agent can achieve.

It is surprising therefore that fifty years after the war's end, very little has been known of the activities of the ALIBI network.

I am indebted to the Breton author, Michel Guillou, for sending me a copy of research which he has undertaken on the Resistance group ALIBI and Operation GLOVER. His work and Sir Brooks' Richards' "Secret Flotillas" have made it possible for me to include some of this important history in my story of the 15th MGB Flotilla.

The ALIBI intelligence network, composed exclusively of French agents from French Combatant Forces, operated in direct liaison with the British Intelligence Service (S.I.S.) over the whole of France from July 1940 until the Liberation. It included during that time an effective force of about 450 recorded agents distributed into about twenty sub-networks and groups, and had about fifteen clandestine wireless operating stations. At the beginning of 1944, those responsible set up in the region of Ile Grande a group charged with maritime liaison with England as well as the intelligence in Brittany.

The Birth of the Network.

From 1936 George Charaudeau was in contact with the French special services. Following the German invasion in June 1940 he decided to go to England via Spain, because the Germans would not be long in looking for him. He crossed the frontier at Irun on the 22nd June, 1940 and met, by chance, at San Sebastian, the Chief of the British Security Services. The meeting changed, profoundly, the initial plans of Charaudeau. It was proposed to him that he should work in France on behalf of the British. He decided then to establish an intelligence network, managed from Madrid under cover of a house of fashion. Thus was born ALIBI on the 1st July, 1940.

On return to France clandestinely in August 1940, Charaudeau, after first contact with his family at Pau, commenced a tour of 40 days in Unoccupied France to weave the web of a vast intelligence network with, notably, some intimate contacts with a diplomat of the U.S. Embassy stationed in Vichy. This diplomat brought precious help for the transport, via the diplomatic bag, of messages, of funds, of radios for agents of the network and, it should be noted, for the friends of the network.

As early as October 1941 the network, which had stretched into the Occupied zone, suffered its first losses: on 24th March, 1942, five agents were executed at Mont Valerien; two others, one of whom was a woman, were deported to Germany. Charaudeau from Madrid was himself threatened. The German forces demanded that the local Spanish authorities should arrest that man, easily recognisable with his deformed left arm, a result of polio. The local authorities allowed him to escape from Spain on 5th May, 1942. It was necessary that he should return to France to reorganise his network.

New Reinforcements.

Charaudeau completed a new circle in the south of France and decided to establish his H.Q. in Auvergne. The invasion of the Unoccupied zone in November 1942, following the Allied landings in North Africa, resulted in the addition to this organisation of a large number of officers from the Armistice forces. The structure was also reinforced with greater security, indispensable to avoid the infiltration by enemy agents. ALIBI integrated in April 1944 with the MAURICE network, which had suffered numerous losses.

The activity of the intelligence network - the reverse of the active networks like S.O.E. - was not spectacular. But the professionalism of the ALIBI agents made this very important network one of the most efficient operating in France; the number of agents lost - 15 deaths for ALIBI and 20 killed or vanished for MAURICE out of 450 agents - is proof of it.

Liaisons with London.

In order to transfer to London the information and couriers gathered from the whole of France, the network used several means - clandestine radio liaisons, land liaison by Spain, aerial liaisons by small Lysander aircraft and later maritime liaisons by gunboats from Ile Grande.

The forwarding of urgent messages was done by wireless. During the first half of 1944, the network made numerous radio liaisons from Ile Grande. To outmanoeuvre the enemy listening devices, they had to move the broadcasting position very often, using the gendarmerie at Lannion's vehicle, trailers transporting bundles of lichen, Tassick Briand's truck and other such means...even

a wheelbarrow. To provide the power for the wireless, a generator was sent from England. However, certain documents such as plans and maps required other means.

During the early part of the conflict the chief means used was by a track through the Pyrenees in the direction of Spain where there was located an antenna of the British Secret Service; or by Lysander aircraft or parachute at Auvergne.

The missions by Lysander were adequate enough but required continually finding new landing grounds in quiet areas and, besides, each landing point had to be accepted by the Services in London.

The means chosen to transmit information depended on its importance, urgency or nature. The preparations for the Normandy landings led to a growing need for intelligence and generated an important traffic between France and England. It was therefore decided to use maritime missions to reinforce the existing provisions. Charaudeau was at this time summoned to London by his supervising officer, Major Whitelaw, code-named "Thomas".

Mission to London.

Charaudeau, the chief of the ALIBI network, accordingly embarked at Auvergne in a liaison Lysander. Thinking about the possibilities of a maritime liaison, his first idea was to use submarines for evacuation of couriers by sea. However, as the Channel was not very favourable to the use of submarines the Royal Navy proposed liaison with motor gunboats. In order to check the feasibility of this mode of evacuation Charaudeau witnessed three operations on the Breton coast at St. Cast (Baie de Fresnaie) for the VAR network of S.O.E. (Special Operations Executive - the British "action" service).

Charaudeau returned from London in a liaison Lysander, very excited, on the night of 16-17 December, 1943, (Operation Diable near Chateauroux) with the new directives. On return to his H.Q., he confided to his assistant Pierre Lallart that Paul Dent of S.O.E. had suggested that they should look for suitable maritime landing places among the beaches of Normandy, or, better still, Brittany.

Reconnaissance in Brittany.

When he left the Armistice forces, which were dissolved in 1942, Pierre Lallart had kept for possible future use the names and addresses of his fellow officers. For Brittany he had one name only, Jean Pezron, living in Lannion. But that village was in the prohibited coastal zone, in which only those with special passes were allowed to travel. Lallart had no such documents. Nevertheless he went by train to Lannion via Guingamp. To avoid the control at the exit from the station, he left by another path and used the level crossing.

When he reached Pezron's home he was warmly greeted. After Lallart told him the reason for his visit, Pezron took him to Ile Grande where he had many friends. The first contact, François Le Goff, introduced him to his grandfather, Anastase Briand, a solid sailor who knew the coast well and managed a trade in lichens. More contacts followed, from kinsman to kinsman, among Pezron's relatives. Lallart suggested a visit to the coast from Morlaix to Mont St. Michel so that he could suggest a list to the British services of possible places for landing - which must not be too heavily defended.

There remained the problem of papers to enable him to circulate in the prohibited coastal zone. After a visit to the mayor of Pleumeur Bodou, arranged by Anastase Briand, Lallart was granted a permit to represent him in the specialised business of lichens and seaweed.

One incident, fortunately with a happy ending, showed the dangers of their reconnaissance activities. With Alexandre Duclos, a seaman of Erquy, Lallart was riding a bicycle near the beach of Sables D'Or Les Pins near Erquy, which was strongly defended by casemates and theoretically forbidden to the population. The information they noted was written on sheets of cigarette paper hidden in the lining of their caps. They were stopped by some Russian soldiers drafted into the German army, who understood neither German nor French. A German officer who understood French was rapidly called to the scene. False papers were a serious matter, if detected. The men pretended to be going to a cousin's house - on principle, in the ALIBI network, one always had to have an alibi as an escape. The story was sufficiently plausible and the German officer released them, after reminding them that they were in a prohibited area.

The tour of reconnaissance took about fifteen days. Early in January, 1944, their reports were sent to the English who flew many aerial flights at different levels of

the tide. After analysing all these factors, the site of Ile Canton to Ile Grand was chosen, and the first liaison could start.

The Maritime Operations.

The date scheduled was between 10th and 20th February at Ile-a-Canton, just south of Ile Grande. George Charaudeau, accompanied by his wireless operator Jonquet, made the journey to Ile Grande with Pierre Lallart to supervise the operation. The base was established at the outset in the house of the Briand family which was, at the time, a trading establishment for food, tobacco and a bar. The families of Briand, Le Goff and Vallée, under the leadership of Tassick Briand, the responsible local, were at the heart of the arrangements for the maritime operations, hiding of agents, the wireless operation posts and the store for material. A first tentative date was chosen, the 15th February, but the gunboat had to turn back because of bad weather.

Charaudeau had to leave hastily, at the request of London, for Paris. He received a message announcing the attack of the 18th February, 1944, on the prison of Amiens ("Operation Jericho") for which he had given the green light. His mission was to recover airmen, many of whom fell in the raid. He left the direction of the maritime operation to Pierre Lallart.

For the successful mission of 23-24 February 1944, the reception committee, provided with nets and sacks, took themselves to the same landing point pretending to be a party of fishermen. MGB503 with Lieut.R.M. ("Mike") Marshall in command, Andrew Smith, First Lieutenant and David Birkin as navigator, undertook the mission in difficult weather conditions. The surf-boat landed some stores, including a "walkie-talkie" radio telephone for use in subsequent operations and picked up the mail.

A short time after this mission the wireless operator Jonquet was arrested in Auvergne. Tassick Briand recruited two wireless operators experienced in the Navy: Isadore Duval who was to operate at Ile Grande and Yves Daniel who became the operator attached to Pierre Lallart.

MGB503 sailed again on 21-22 March, in good weather. As they approached the French coast they sighted 4, possibly 5, E-boats and had to proceed slowly away until the E-boats were out of sight. The surf-boat proceeded ashore but there was

no sign of the reception committee and no contact could be established with R/T set.

On 22-23 April MGB503 proceeded again to Ile-a-Canton, the only problem they encountered being patches of fog across the Channel. Close to Ile Losquet R/T was quickly established with the reception committee and the surf-boat proceeded towards the pinpoint. When they were getting close to shore, Lallant on the R/T warned the surf-boat to leave immediately as there were Germans at the pinpoint. It appears that a disturbance caused by the local Resistance had produced the strengthening of the enemy dispositions.

Ile-a-Canton was considered to be not a safe pinpoint - in fact, a veritable mousetrap, the access being possible only at low tide. The north coast of Ile Grande was selected. A first attempt was made by two American PT boats - PT71 and PT72 on 19-20 May 1944. Three PT boats, 71,72 and 199, had arrived at Dartmouth on 24th April, 1944 at the request of O.S.S. - Office of Strategic Services, the American secret service - and tied up alongside the paddle steamer Westward-Ho with the 15th MGB Flotilla. The mission was unsuccessful as the reception committee was not there to meet them, having been delayed by some difficulties onshore. A second attempt was made by the same two PT boats on 24-25 May. Peter Williams, C.O. of MGB502, travelled on board PT72 as commanding officer of the expedition. Andrew Smith and two oarsmen from MGB503 formed the leading boats'crew and David Birkin was the navigator. The surf-boats brought back two bags of mail.

This was the last mission before the Normandy landings. Shortly after the mission was completed the PT squadron moved to Portsmouth to participate in the landings on the night of 5-6th June, 1944. PT199 saved 61 survivors from a destroyer sunk after hitting a mine on 6th June. PT71 had the privilege on 12th June of transporting prestigious passengers - Admirals King, Start, Kirk, Wilkes and Moon - and Generals Marshall, Eisenhower, Arnold, Bradley and Hodges for an intensive inspection of the Normandy beaches.

Five further operations were carried out to Ile Grande, all by MGB318, with Lieutenant Jan Mason as Commanding Officer, and Lieutenant G.H.Bell as First Lieutenant:

17-18 June 1944

Successful mail embarked

16-17 July 1944

Unsuccessful. No reception committee

23-24 July 1944

Successful. Stores landed and mail embarked

29-30 July 1944

Successful in rough weather conditions. Agent Lemoine whose job it was to collect information from the battlefield travelled to England with MGB318

5-6 August 1944

Lemoine was landed back on Ile-Grande with a mission for him and his team including wireless operator Isidore Duval to proceed ahead of the advancing American troops to Brest, where he remained throughout the siege sending W/T reports on the state of the German defences. Recent researches in London have shown the importance of the work done.

The era of clandestine operations in France was at an end, the sea lines had served their purpose. And what better ending could there have been than for MGB318 to have the honour of being associated with Guy Lemoine's magnificent achievement?

The ALIBI network had provided a wealth of very valuable information on all sorts of subjects such as enemy order of battle, the coastal defences and radar stations, on bases for launching the V1 and V2 rockets etc. London did not fail to congratulate the network for the intelligence of high value.

One man, George Charaudeau, had shown his skill in organising an effective and united group of men and women of very different social origins, political and religious views and diverse philosophies, who all shared the same patriotism. For them one sole objective counted: to liberate France from the Occupying forces.

Chapter 6

Missions to Norway, May 1944 - May 1945.

MGB718 commanded by Lieut. Ronald Seddon DSC with Guy Hamilton DSC as First Lieutenant and John Townend as Navigating Officer with Lieut. "Tich" Salmond DSC as Specialist Navigator did all the DDOD[I] missions to Norway. In May 1944 MGB718 proceeded to Lerwick in the Shetlands on a mission which involved rescuing SIS agents at naval reporting stations along the coast of Norway. Eleven agents had been picked up.

In November 1944, MGB718 headed off again to Norway where she continued operations until the night of 28-29 April 1945 - one week before V-E Day. I shall report on two operations which Brooks Richards noted in "Secret Flotillas" as "two outstanding operations from Aberdeen to Norway.

The first of these operations took place on 2-3 November 1944 MGB718 proceeded to a pinpoint near Egersund (Skarvøy Island) to embark four Norwegian agents. They carried a Norwegian pilot with local knowledge of Egersund. In view of the length of passage MGB718 carried 500 gallons of 100-octane petrol in jerricans on deck. On the journey MGB718 encountered a German convoy escorted by an M-class minesweeper and 3 armed trawlers which challenged her and fired star shells. MGB718 took evading action and a Dornier Reconnaissance aircraft came to investigate and continued the search for 45 minutes at a height of 600 feet.

The four agents were picked up in a surf-boat and embarked on MGB718 which then set course for Aberdeen arriving there to end the mission of 35 hours. A message from Admiralty was received. "It is desired to congratulate you on your execution of Operation Aquarius which appears to be a copy-book example of a faultlessly-executed operation."

From 12-15 February 1945 MGB718 undertook a mission to land two Norwegian agents and 1½ tons of stores in southern Norway near Christiansand South to set up an Observation Post and W/T station (Sando Island). This was the longest operation undertaken by MGB718 involving a passage into the Skagerrak. It unfortunately coincided with the worst weather she had encountered.

As well as the two agents, Muller and Larsen, a Norwegian navigator, Lieut. Hansen RNNR, was embarked. 2000 gallons of 100-octane petrol were carried in jerricans on the upper deck, together with 1½ tons of stores, 1 surf boat and 1 Norwegian 14 ft boat - additional dead weight of 13 tons.

MGB718 departed Aberdeen at 2200 hours on 12 February 1945 and started fuelling the 2000 gallons from the deck at 1430 hours on 13 February in very rough sea conditions. The fuelling took an arduous 2½ hours. MGB718 crossed the convoy route at 2224 hours on 13 February in heavy snowfalls which reduced visibility to zero at times, which made the final approach to the pinpoint extremely hazardous. In fact, the island of Odden was first sighted when MGB718 was within 30 yards. MGB718 picked her way through islands and rocks for an hour until the landing point was identified at 0035 hours on 14 February. The anchor was dropped 50 yards from shore and the surf boat was launched with Muller as passenger to check landing possibilities. Due to the heavy swell on the beach, it was decided to proceed to the other side of Sando Island. A lead-line was used from the bow at this time.

At 0130 hours, MGB718 anchored again and after the surf boat investigated a safe landing area, landing of stores by surf-boat commenced at the new pinpoint. Heavy snow made ferrying of stores extremely hazardous in zero visibility and took 2 hours to complete.

The two agents had been ill for the past 24 hours in company with most of the ship's company, so hot soup and sandwiches were prepared in the galley and they went ashore in good spirits. MGB718 left their surf-boat with them as the Norwegian boat was unseaworthy.

MGB718 left the pinpoint at 0400 hours and encountered very heavy seas in return passage. Ship's company was stood down to Cruising Stations at 0800 hours after they had been at Action Stations for 14 hours. The maximum speed possible at this stage was 6 Knots due to weather.

MGB718 returned to Aberdeen at 0830 hours on 15 February after being 58½ hours at sea and with 5 feet of water in the bilges and mess decks.

In his report, Ron Seddon commended wholeheartedly the spirit, resourcefulness and conduct of the ship's company in the appalling conditions, far in excess of the

normal requirements of these craft, and was physically exhausting to the men as it was to the ship. A subsequent signal from the Admiralty asked the Commanding Officer to convey to the ship's company "most grateful thanks for this splendidly conducted expedition and to tell you that this potentially very important station is now operating and likely to be completely successful."

Chapter 7

MGB502 (RE-NUMBERED MGB2002) LOST 12 MAY, 1945.

Clandestine operations had ceased; the war in Europe was over when we suffered the great tragedy: MGB2002 struck a floating mine in the Skagerrak, close to the Norwegian coast, four days after V.E. Day and was lost with only two survivors.

The crew of MGB2002 was a composite crew from all boats of the old flotilla. Since the last operations in France in late 1944, the flotilla had been reorganised in preparation for transfer to the Pacific theatre of war. Mike Marshall had been appointed Senior Officer of the flotilla and had taken command of MGB2009, a new gunboat of the same class as 502 (2002) and 503 (2003); Jan Mason had assumed command of MGB2002.

MGB2002 sailed from Aberdeen at 0800 hours on 11th May 1945 bound for Gothenburg in Sweden where she was due 36 hours later, i.e. at 2000 hours 12th May 1945. Mike Marshall was in command of 2002 for the mission as Jan Mason had a prearranged appointment to attend an investiture at Buckingham Palace to receive the Distinguished Service Cross from His Majesty King George VI. Additional to her crew of 25, MGB2002 had on board the Flotilla Engineer Officer, Lt-Comdr E. Hughes-Coppins, Lt-Comdr Brian Reynolds who served as Brian Bingham in the Royal Naval Reserve, and three men from the Ellerman Wilson Shipping Line, namely Captain Herbert Jackson, First Mate C. Newton and Radio Operator G.V.Morgan. Bingham and Jackson had been engaged in the wartime blockade-running of ball bearings from Lysekil (Sweden) to the Humber in craft of the same hull design as MGBs 502 and 503. They were travelling to Gothenburg

I believe to arrange the transfer to the U.K. of two merchant vessels which had been used in Sweden as storage ships for their wartime operations.

At 0345 hours (approx.) on the morning of May 12, 1945, MGB2002 struck a floating mine in the Skagerrak. The two survivors Petty Officer Motor Mechanic Tom Sheehan and Able Seaman Norman Hine DSM, in a most moving letter dated 28th May 1945 from Christiansand Hospital in Norway, wrote of their grim experiences. (Their letter was published in the Coastal Forces Veterans Association newsletter of December, 1978.) All the forward part of the ship, which included the crew living quarters and the bridge, was gone - "blown to smithereens" - and the part remaining (engine room and aft) was sinking fast; they couldn't cut away the surfboat as it was well lashed down; the dinghy had a great hole in it; the time came when those left aboard had to abandon. Tom Sheehan and Fred Bristow (acting leading stoker) who had been in the engine room when the explosion occurred, found a damaged Carley float among the debris in the sea. It could not support their weight for long, so Sheehan swam, against the tide, to recover another intact Carley float and brought it back to Bristow. Searching for survivors, they found Norman Hine hanging on to a hammock and pulled him aboard the raft. They continued shouting and looking for others. As Tom Sheehan wrote: "The sights we saw were something terrible. I felt like spewing and crying." Everything went quiet and the Carley float drifted away from the wreckage. They had no food and very little water and what water they had was stale with a horrible taste. It lasted for a couple of days, then they had nothing. Added to all their problems they had of course been soaked to the skin when they jumped into the sea from the gunboat. The three were becoming weaker and more exhausted. They saw air planes pass over; they were very close to some fishing boats and the tide carried them away; they finished up losing their paddles. Eventually Fred Bristow slipped off the raft into the sea after drinking "mouthfuls of salt water" - the others were too weak to stop him.

The two survivors were picked up by the Norwegian M.V. "Urana" at 2200 hours on 15th May, 1945 - three days eighteen hours after the explosion - in a position approximately six miles north west of the Lista light. At the time Norman Hine was unconscious and Tom Sheehan "was laying there talking to the water". They were taken to Christiansand Hospital where they were admitted suffering severely from exposure. There is no doubt they were picked up just in time.

Both men had to have all their toes amputated in Norway because of gangrene. Later, after being flown back to England, Tom Sheehan lost both legs below the

knee as the gangrene had spread. They had helped each other through a terrible, harrowing ordeal. Their caring for each other and strength of character saw them through. They have given permission to the Author and Editor for their memories to be printed here, and are still enjoying life fifty two years afterwards. We are all very proud of them and they have earned the great respect with which they are held.

All those of the flotilla still have very deep feelings of warmth and sadness for the top quality men who were lost and for their families. We could never forget them. It was a terrible tragedy to occur when the war was over.

**NAMES OF THOSE LOST ON MGB502 (2002)
ON 12TH MAY 1945.**

OFFICERS

			PREVIOUS SHIP
Marshall R.M.	DSC and bar	Lieutenant Commander	503
Bell G.H.		Lieutenant	318
Boissier J.		Sub-Lieutenant	-
Meakes J.		Sub-Lieutenant	-
Hughes-Coppins L.H.		Lieutenant Commander (Flotilla Engineering Officer)	-

RATINGS

Andrews A.A.	DSM	Leading Stoker (Tz)	503
Bartley R.	DSM	Able Seaman	318
Bleasdale O.	DSM	Acting Leading Seaman	502
Bristow F.J.		Acting Leading Stoker	502
Charlesworth D.		Wireman (L)	-
Gadd C.K.	DSM	Acting Leading Telegraphist	318
Gordon J.J.	DSM	Able Seaman	318
Gourley D.		Acting Leading Telegraphist	-
Hawksby B.		Leading Seaman (Radar)	502
Hayden J.	DSM	Able Seaman	318
Hearn E.G.		Able Seaman	502
Hearn C.F.	DSM	Acting Chief Motor Mechanic	502
Hill G.I.	DSM	Able Seaman	502
McLanaghan L.I.		Acting Able Seaman	502
McNulty A.A.		Ordinary Seaman (Radar)	-
Markham J.S.	DSM	Able Seaman	318
Pender J.M.		Leading Motor Mechanic	718
Smith F.S.	DSM	Petty Officer - Coxswain	502
Wren C.W.	DSM	Able Seaman	503

(Four passengers being carried were all lost.)

SURVIVORS:

Hine, N.T.J.	DSM	Able Seaman	503
Sheehan T.H.		Petty Officer Mechanic	Base Staff

POSTSCRIPT

It was a privilege to be part of the 15th MGB Flotilla in its vital role in the liberation of Europe and I am proud of the skill and dedication with which we performed our tasks so successfully in dangerous waters, and, quite often, in hazardous weather conditions which placed considerable demands on our resourcefulness and physical endurance.

I feel very humble when I think of the feats of bravery and sacrifice made by the agents carried into and out of France and by the patriotic nationals of many countries of Europe who actively and passively supported the operations in which we were engaged.

This book was written to honour and remember the men of the 15th MGB Flotilla and their families; to honour and remember the brave men, women and families of the Resistance; to honour and remember the brave agents and airmen we carried across the Channel; and to place on record this small but very important piece of the great 1000-year history of the civilisations beside the River Dart.

I wish also to express thanks to the people of Dartmouth and Kingswear for providing a haven for us in the River Dart during the Second World War and to state how much I have always appreciated this most beautiful part of England and its peoples.

I also wish to record my special appreciation for the support and encouragement I have received from Mrs Ray Freeman and the Dartmouth History Research Group; and to thank Major Dick Parkes of Kingswear for his great support in the planning and building of the Remembrance plaque unveiled at Kingswear in April 1995 and for his efforts in building and extending the bonds between the 15th MGB Flotilla and the peoples of the Dart area and Brittany.

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