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LITTLE SHIPS SOUVENIR ISSUE

Dunkirk heroes

Caplin's Kiwi adventures

Wooden boats of Iona

Lady Aitken's powerboat days



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LITTLE SHIPS SOUVENIR ISSUE

Dunkirk heroes

The Little Ships returned for the 70th anniversary of the evacuation along with the vets they were sent to save. By *Dan Houston* and *Steffan Meyric Hughes*



Veterans with their medals including the Dunkirk medal, left



EMILY HARRIS

VETS: LES KERSWILL REMEMBERS HIS LONG WALK HOME

Presumed dead for months

Les Kerswill, 91, near left, met fellow vet Hugh Martin, 90, far left, this year on the beaches. Mr Martin, an RAF instrument specialist in 1940, was making his first return to the beaches at Dunkirk having escaped on the destroyer *Wild Swan* on 26 May when his decimated squadron was pulled out of Lille.

Les, of the Royal Berkshire Regiment, was captured near Dunkirk having fought in a rearguard action that saw his entire battalion wiped out in two hours. "There were 34 of us left who went to attack the Germans again, but in the end we were down to five," Les says, adding matter-of-factly that he'd been wounded in the leg by shrapnel. "My mother had a telegram saying I was listed missing presumed dead - it was months before she learned I was OK." Later in the war Les escaped with his mate Lofty and walked an estimated 1300 miles in six months through Poland and Czechoslovakia before meeting with an American unit near Regensburg in Germany well into 1945. "I still have my boots! And I feel so damn lucky to be alive, but I put the bad memories at the back of my mind. You need to do that."

return



RAY LITTLE

Lying as it does, jutting out into the North Sea on England's lower eastern bump, Ramsgate is one of the first places in England to see the quality of the rising sun, writes Steffan Meyric Hughes. It's a town steeped in conflict, with its grandest building, the harbour that took a century to build, used as a mustering station for British fleets in the Napoleonic wars.

The night before we leave, the sea is in calm, summer blackness, under an astronomer's sky, pinpointed by the syncopated silence of navigation marks flashing their way out to the unseen horizon to the continent.

Once, it would have seemed like another world. It certainly was in the early summer of 1940, when Ramsgate (with Dover) acted as a departure point for a fleet of about 700 Little

Ships to sail to Dunkirk to rescue the British army, on the run from the German blitzkrieg and praying for a lift home. Today, it can't look that different. Behind gaudy seaside bars are terraces of beautiful Georgian townhouses and grand hotels built for Ramsgate's other life as a place of tourism, while under the arches of the great wall cut into the Cliffside, chandlers and boat shops seem timeless with their painted hanging signs. Atmospherically, Ramsgate couldn't be a better place for the Little Ships to gather for their five-yearly voyage to the beaches of Dunkirk.

The next morning, 27 May, after days of good weather, it rained for our departure, but the seas were at least calm enough for the fleet's commodore, John Tough, to announce that we'd be leaving. Camera

Above top: The defaced flag of St George of the ADLS. Main picture: Early on the Tuesday following the commemoration, the boats prepare to sail home from Dunkirk

VETS: KEN BLAKE REMEMBERS THE BATTLE

A lot of it was chaos and we were not trained for it

Ken Blake, of Hemel Hempstead, was one of very few veterans who this year voyaged to Dunkirk from Ramsgate in a Little Ship. He joined *Mary Jane* (below) with owner Dave Murr for the crossing and enthusiastically describes the 42ft (12.8m) 1926 former naval pinnace as: "The best ship in the world!"

Ken was just 18 when he joined the army at the outbreak of war and served with the 2nd Battalion of the Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment), being sent to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force in 1939.

In May 1940 Ken was part of a rearguard contingent tasked to hold back the German invasion through France at Abbeville, to create time for British troops to evacuate at Dunkirk. "A lot of it was chaos, we were not really trained or ready for the storm that was going to break. We had a Lee Enfield rifle and 10 rounds of ammunition. We were totally outnumbered and the Germans pushed us back to St Omer and then Arras - a last line of defence before Paris. But we had communications failures and our radios didn't work - the batteries were flat. We were using runners!"

Ken eventually escaped not through Dunkirk but on the last ship out of Le Havre 150 miles to the west. Some 200,000 troops were evacuated from French western ports after Dunkirk fell on June 4.

"Some people say the BEF were cowards but look at what we did after Dunkirk. We were posted to North Africa, the Far East, all over the world.

"I was posted to Malta from 1941 to 1943 - refuelling Spitfires. We kept 25 up in the air as an umbrella over the island while the Germans threw



EMILY HARRIS



RAY LITTLE

everything they had at us. The Spits would come down one after the other, for refuelling and armament. We drove next to them in a jeep and jumped onto the wings to refuel as they taxied along. If you didn't jump off you were going up! I received the George Cross for that. It was a hell of a time. There was this Canadian air ace, Screwball Buerling - people like him saved the war for us. Hearing we'd run out of smokes he took a

"Some people say the BEF were cowards but look at what we did after Dunkirk"

Wellington back to England one night and filled it up with beer and fags; he was back by 8am!"

Ken was surprised in Dunkirk to meet three pals from his time at training camp in 1939. "In the Town Hall I got a tap on the shoulder and there they were; we used to drink together and it was just as if no time had passed - we all recognised each other and started joking again!"

Bounty behind RIIS 1 in formation on passage to Dunkirk



EMOS/NOPICTURES/2010

crews from the BBC, Sky, ITV and others crawled over the boats, while a determined knot of patriots waited on the marina wall, as the boats fired up engines and slipped lines.

I was on regular attendee MTB102, 68ft (20.7m) of grey, wooden strike-speed missile boat, with skipper and owner Richard Basse. In 2005, I had watched her snaking at speed through the fleet, and was keen to experience the 25 knots-plus she's still capable of under her twin diesels (she was originally powered by three Isotta Fraschini petrol engines with a top speed of somewhere around 45 knots).

The crossing was in dull visibility, and there was not much for photographer Ray Little to train his lens on as he slipped around on the cambered aft deck, slippery



©KOS/PICTURES 2010

Fermain V

11th-hour purchase by a Dunkirk vet's grandson



This is one of the big, open passenger launches that make up a small part of the fleet. She's 40ft 6in (12.3m) in length and has been an active member in the ADLS fleet for many years. She now belongs to Joe Radmore (left), who bought her at the 11th hour - about two weeks before the crossing - and in seagoing condition. Joe, whose grandfather was on the beaches of

Dunkirk, rummages in a bag and pulls out a photocopy of a letter written by his grandfather to his grandmother after the evacuation in 1940: "The welcome that we got when we landed honestly nearly brought tears to my eyes. There were sandwiches, tea, sweets and cigarettes waiting for us." Joe has long been interested in boats and was looking to charter a Dunkirk Little Ship - but when none came up, he bought one instead. "She goes like a Trojan," says Joe of his new acquisition. "She's also very, very stable."

Mary Scott

Towed back home

Wiry roadworker and ex-jockey Michael Killoran is so full of enthusiasm he can barely sit still. "We've had the time of our lives - breakdowns and all" he says of his first Dunkirk return aboard *Mary Scott*, the 47ft (14.3m) ex-RNLI lifeboat he bought in 2007, after seeing her on a rainy day at Gillingham Pier, where he'd gone to look at a van. Like so many owners, he fell in love with the

boat before he learned of her Dunkirk heritage. At the time she was covered in rubbish, "a floating wreck", with wood blackened all over. "You couldn't even step aboard and walk about easily." Michael has done most of the restoration work himself, partly guided by Morris Tollhurst, ADLS treasurer and owner of Beacon Boatyard. Morris built the wheelhouse for

£5,000 when others were quoting four times that, and also taught Michael some of the lore of vintage boat ownership - "how to be the custodian of a historic ship". Jobs left to complete are the ketch rig and reinstating the drop keel. This year, *Mary Scott* left in a hurry and suffered engine and steering trouble en route to Dunkirk: The upshot was that the



ANDREW ROSTICHOV

Two lifeboats: *Mary Scott*, right, is towed by RNLB *Corinne Whitely*

boat had to be towed partly to Dunkirk and all the way back to Ramsgate by the Ramsgate lifeboat.

Other supporting vessels were Type-23 frigate *HMS Monmouth*, university trainer *HMS Rakler*, a French

lifeboat, tug *Switzer Anglia* and *MVS Appleby*, a ship of the Maritime Volunteer Service.

and seemingly designed to tip you straight into the drink with no fence running around the gunwale. Skipper Richard clearly believes in common-sense to preserve life at sea, a philosophy borne out by the simple fact that it works: no one has fallen off *MTB102* in his memory.

A moment later, Richard called out from the helm, "Hold on tight," and pushed the throttle forward. The boat's movement smoothed out as she rose over her hump and started to fly, the engine note increasing to a fractured wail as the fleet's fastest boat rose to over 25 knots. Later, we hugged the French coast, a dimly visible line of heavy industry seen through persistent drizzle. We'd come, of course, to relive the poignancy of an event nearly lost to

memory. The only magic so far though, was in *MTB102* herself. A planned fly-past by a Hurricane was cancelled because of the rain and soon we were all waiting in the gargantuan lock at Dunkirk, built for the grandest liner of them all - the *Normandie*.

Eat, drink and party

In bad weather, it's better to arrive than to travel, and the people of Dunkirk, who hold Operation Dynamo very close to their hearts, turned out in numbers, hooting and waving, and with a motorcade of a dozen war vehicles, Jeeps and motorcycles among them. We passed the rusting hulk of a Sea France liner still afloat, and motored to the town's inner dock, mooring rafted up six deep. This is where the fun begins:

old friends hop from boat to boat, catching up over a drink and the dockside comes alive with visitors. I'd thought it strange, in 2005, that an event as traumatic as the evacuation could be marked by boozy Brits on motorboats and had felt uncomfortable nosing on good, French food where the men on the beaches had starved.

This year, it made sense. The return, though commemorative of men and boats, does not to claim the bravery of a bygone episode as its own. One boat owner, when asked what the Dunkirk spirit is, replied: "It's not this - or us. I'm just a boat owner."

The other great theme of the raft-up in Dunkirk is the constant exchanging of notes about members and their boats. The ADLS are a close group, from taxi driver to



EDDY HADDOBS



RAY LITTLE

Baxter's L'Orage

Former flagship restored just in time for her 9th return

L'Orage is the boat which belonged to the late Raymond Baxter, Spitfire pilot and TV broadcaster who was also a founder of the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships and its Admiral until his death four years ago. The famous 29ft 6in (9m) mahogany-on-oak Thames motor yacht was making her ninth return to Dunkirk.

L'Orage ('the storm') is now owned by John and Sally Calvert (above left) who acquired her in July last year. During the winter she has been restored by Colin and Steve Messer whose Classic Restoration Services, based in Windsor, specialises in these boats. They finished a week before the return!

"Since Raymond Baxter died four years ago, she had sat at Henley outside his house and no-one was looking after her," John says. "We had seen her at Henley and thought it would be great to go shopping in

Oxford and stay a night aboard. We used to sit on the bank and say 'here comes our boat!' We'd been told the family would keep the boat but then last year in the Trad Boat Rally Programme there was an ad for her sale.

We put in our offer, saying it was good for 24 hours and we got a phone call back saying we had got ourselves a boat. That was July 2009.

"She's had more than 100ft of iroko planking put in her bottom, new cabin sides, new wheelhouse and we wanted a light airy interior so we have cream bulkheads now. A lot of wood was recycled and has gone back into the boat: for instance the galley is made of the old bunks. We removed the outboard engine box in her cockpit and she has her 37.5Hp diesel Beta which Raymond put in around 12 years ago. Prince Michael visited us in Dunkirk and it was good to show him the boat again."



RAY LITTLE



**Above: HRH Prince Michael of Kent
Left: the boats at Ramsgate. Right: The 1935 *Hilfranor***



RAY GILBERT

prince, because there is, of course, a common strand; and to a man, they open their doors and their wine to anyone.

The most common topic of conversation is other members and their boats. So-and-so couldn't make it this year. Such-and-such a boat has changed owners. What varnish did you use this year? (Many said Coelan.) And one of the pleasures is meeting new owners, like Michael Killoran (*Mary Scott*), boatbuilder Michael Dennett (*MB278*), John and Sally Calvert (Raymond Baxter's *L'Orage*) and seeing boats that are new to the event, or at least back after an absence (*Bounty*, *Bluebird of 1938*).

One such, boatbuilder Alex Ramsay of *Nyula*, a 40ft (12m) motor yacht built by Walton and Yacht and Launch Works in

1933, describes owning a Dunkirk Little Ship as "the dream of every wooden boat owner". Alex, nearly at the end of *Nyula's* restoration, enthuses about the changes he has made to the rig to enable her fine-entry hull to sail, engineless, at up to four knots.

Next door is Simon Palmer on *Hilfranor*, a yacht from the same builder in 1935. "I didn't plan to buy a boat till I retired," says Simon, who spotted *Hilfranor* in a CB ad. Simon is busy planning the big ADLS dinner for 340 people, and I kill some time chatting to a young naval weapons officer about the deck-mounted Goalkeeper system, a warship's last line of defence, a computerised Gatling gun that will automatically lock onto any incoming missile and tear it to pieces in a torrent of bullets.

Sitting on a boat that's all varnished mahogany, yet built only 75 years ago, it's giddy to realise how much the war accelerated the pace of technological change, to the point where Goalkeeper and *Hilfranor* can both have been modern in a single human lifespan.

I ask Colin Messer, my host from the 2005 return, who owns *Mimosa* and who, with brother Steve looks after many of the other ADLS boats, if there's any advice common to their upkeep, and he's emphatic about one thing. "Put a cover over in winter. It's not a new idea, but one that I can't stress enough. If you put a cover over in winter, you cut your work down by 90 per cent. It's the best £1,000 you'll spend. We put owners in touch with cover-makers



EMILY HARRIS

VETS: SCOTCH BROOK

I still carry shrapnel in my buttock

Scotch Brook served in the 5th (Yorkshire) Infantry Division. He praises the Royal Navy for the way so many troops were evacuated: "Most of us were lifted off in destroyers you know, the Little Ships did not arrive 'til later. When we got back to England we were taken off anywhere - I went to Wales - they just put us on trains as fast as they could. It was a couple of weeks later that my unit assembled in Scotland. In 1942 I was off overseas

again, en route to India when we were diverted for the invasion of Madagascar. Later I was wounded at the first battle of Casino, at the River Garigliano in January 1944. I still carry some shrapnel in my right buttock, but I am not showing you here! I came home in a hospital ship from there."

Scotch's beret badge is from St Dunstan's College, motto: *Albam Exorna*; 'adorn the white', meaning to fill the blank space (with character).

MB 278

Rescued from the chainsaw

MB278, a smart naval pinnace, nearly didn't make it. She was rescued from a yard that was going to chop her up by Thames boatbuilder Michael Dennett who, in February, started a thorough restoration to be ready for this year's event, proving once again the powerful motivation the ADLS returns provide for restoration and maintenance. She was built by W White and Sons of Cowes, Isle of Wight, during the first few months of World War One, and served as a tender to Royal Navy ships until 1948 when she was sold off.

She's built of two skins of teak on rock elm and oak frames with a partial third skin. In 1983, she was converted to a yacht with fore-and-aft cabins and a wheelhouse amidships - quite a lot of top hamper for a boat of 30ft (9m) with a beam of 8ft 3in (2.5m). Now she has a small cabin forward, open wheelhouse and large cockpit. She still has the scars of her wartime service, where machine gun bullets passed through her bows.



RAY LITTLE

Above: MB278
Left: Little ships and one great big ship in the shipping lanes.
Below: The largest and the smallest vessels in the fleet: Bluebird and Chumley

when we finish restorations. In general, it's much easier to keep boats looking good on rivers than on the coast - not as much wind."

The main event on the itinerary was the ceremony on the beach, which is where the veterans turn out in force to listen to the speeches and lay wreaths to the departed. It did not escape anyone's notice that this year would probably be the last event attended by the veterans - at least in any significant numbers.

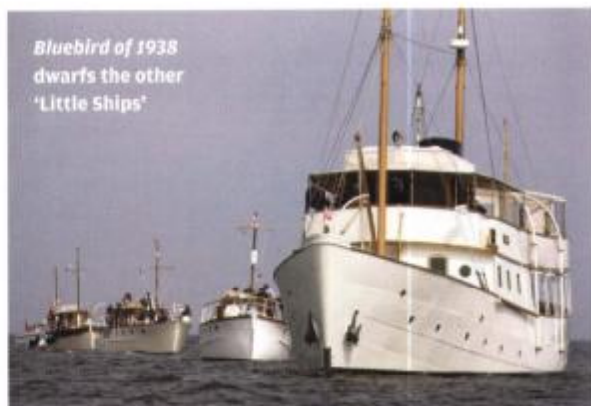
What was less obvious was that for some - knowing it would be their last chance - it was also the first visit, a final paying of respects while there was still time. The youngest were 89, and most were in their early 90s, though all we spoke to were down-to-earth, cheerful and completely



DICKSON/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Greg McLeish and New Britannic Saved the most lives

On *Fermain V*, there was a different sort of ADLS member: a gloriously dishevelled Anglo-Australian with long hair who was sleeping aboard (she's an open boat) in a tent. Greg McLeish plays rock 'n' roll (favourite guitarist Blind Willie Johnson) and spends the rest of his spare time restoring his boat which is, in terms of lives saved, perhaps the greatest Dunkirk Little Ship of them all. In 1940, *New Britannic* was a Ramsgate day-tripper, and her owner Joe Reed and son Walter were asleep in hammocks when they were approached by a representative of the Admiralty, who asked for their help. According to the story, Joe told Walter, then 15, to run home and tell his mother that "Dad had a very important job to do". The boy ran home, went to his mother and said, "We've got a very important job to do" - and the two of them went to Dunkirk. *New Britannic* saved a total of 3,100 lives, taking 200 at a time off the beach. Now, she's back in Ramsgate on the hard while Greg works on her. He recently had something of a coup: Perkins gave him a six-cylinder, 130hp diesel, worth £15,000 for just £2,700 + VAT. Greg is now making good progress on a limited budget.



Bluebird of 1938 dwarfs the other 'Little Ships'

ENCLOSURE/CT LABS 2010

Bluebird of 1938 Bluebird's 4000nM passage just to be there

Restored between 2004 and 2008 the exquisite *Bluebird of 1938* made a 4000nM round trip passage from St Tropez in the South of France to be part of this month's quinquennial return. "It's an honour to be a part of this rally," said owner Tara Getty, who was also hosting HRH Prince Michael of Kent during his stay in Dunkirk. At the time of the evacuation *Bluebird* was the third yacht of that name which belonged to Sir Malcolm Campbell, holder of land and water speed records, and whose first and second yachts, *Bluebird* (now *Chico*) and *Bluebird of Chelsea* also took part in the evacuation.

The 107ft (32.6m) 175-ton motor yacht was built in 1938 as *Bluebird II* at Goole Shipbuilding Company to a design by GL Watson and Co for Campbell's dream as an extended cruiser to search for treasure in the Cocos Islands of the Pacific (Australia). She could cross the Atlantic on her own tanks of fuel. She was even set up with a deep freezer.

Sir Malcolm only had a year to enjoy his splendid yacht with her oak and walnut panellied saloons before she was requisitioned for HM Customs Examination Service with a complement of RNR officers and 16 crew. He got her back in 1945, but never completed his treasure-hunting trip and died aged 63 in 1948.

Tara Getty uses *Bluebird of 1938* as a family cruiser for his wife and three children and has opened up the upper deck as an open-air day lounge where the ship's boats used to be kept. "She's dwarfed by all the superyachts in St Tropez but I love her, for both her history and her lines."

VETS: GEORGE KAY REMEMBERS SPIKING HIS GUNS

Horrendous memories

At the time of Dunkirk, George Kay was in the Royal Artillery and had been based at the Albert Canal near Tournay. "We were spiking our guns - one shell in one end and one in the other, so the Germans couldn't use them and we left them. This is my first time back," said George who had driven himself from Sheffield. "It's touching when you hear the Last Post and think about all the lads that didn't make it." George, who got away on a destroyer, has some horrendous memories of Dunkirk: "We were just pleased to get off that beach. At any one time there were over a thousand men out there," he said. "The destroyer was bombed and at one point I couldn't even get up. I was smothered in blood. And there were blokes on top of me with their heads off.

"After Dunkirk I went to Iceland and then, much later, in 1943 I was in the Special Air Service and went to Arnhem in Operation Market Garden. That was a bridge too far..."



Looking good: many boats have had refits for this



compos-mentis. One told me that nothing of the days he spent awaiting evacuation was lost to memory, but those memories are, to this day, too painful for most veterans to talk about in any detail. One, with tears in his eyes, spoke of body parts rolling in with the waves on the beach.

Joe Radmore (*Fermain V* - see panel), the youngest boat owner at the age of 23, shows me a letter from his grandfather, sent after reaching Ramsgate: "The welcome we got when we landed honestly nearly brought tears to my eyes. There were sandwiches, tea, sweets and cigarettes waiting for us."

Colin Messer's yacht *Mimosa* revealed an unlikely stowaway who'd come for the trip: *Likely Lads* actor Rodney Bewes who was dancing Colin's mother Eve off her

Memorial

Lest we forget

Three local French children read an 8 June, 1940 report from *Paris Soir* which described the carnage left after the town's capture by the Germans. It was one of the most memorable commemorations at Dunkirk this year and was read out during the Beach Service on the Saturday - 29 May.

Zoe Hardy, 11, and Lea Gheerbrant, 9 with her brother Antoine, 11, read the report in French and English in front of the assembled vets, servicemen and women and dignitaries of the French and British governments, including HRH Prince Michael of Kent as well as a Czech contingent, commemorating their country's part in the liberation of Dunkirk in 1945. The three were chosen for the reading after the local council approached the local school of performing arts. Dunkirk is not seen as a victory by the French, but the town goes to great lengths to make returning vets and Little Ships welcome. The children were joined here for our photograph by veteran James White.



EMILY HARRIS

'a venture... insane, superhuman or absurd'

Try to imagine a harbour on fire in the night, with an enormous cloud of thick black smoke, on top of a wall of flames. Try to imagine the shock of explosions, the town forts shooting at the German columns and the German battery shooting back at the streets, the shore, the crimson rivers of the muzzle flashes of gun fire in the sky, and, still, the staccato sound of the machine guns.

Try to imagine, in addition, a narrow channel between impassable mine-fields, jetties pitted

by the bombings, skeletons of sunken ships, like holes in the sea's surface.

And there, amidst this unbelievable sight, in the misleading shadow of a false dawn, cut through by blood-red lights across a port spoilt by shipwrecks and traps, tens of vessels of all ages, of all grades are trying to dock hastily to take away the helmeted and silent human mass, standing there in the blazing lights, alongside the quay.

Cargo boats, trawlers, fishing boats, patrollers,

packet steamers, torpedo boats and destroyers were turning, were going backwards and forwards in a space so narrow and so cluttered that their hulls were forever colliding.

Try to imagine that, and you would have just the barest idea of what was the ultimate departure from Dunkirk, the last



EMILY HARRIS

episode of a venture, which, if it had been told a few days before, would have seemed insane, superhuman or absurd.

But then, thousands of helpless men, women and children, still lived in this slaughterhouse of a city. They were curled up in cellars, without food or water, poor souls listening

to the sound of Hell thundering above them. When they got out for a few moments to try and find a meagre amount of food, they couldn't even make out what used to be a street or a square or a crossroads. And the dead lay all around them. They could hear the injured moaning all around them. And all around them the troops of Flanders, defying the bombs and shells, were moving towards the beaches, and lying down in the dunes, they waited for an unlikely rescue.

And yet, Dunkirk was standing. Besieged from all sides, by land and from all angles in the sky, without medicine or anything to drink, they carried on defending themselves, quietly, orderly, resolutely. While trawlers, cargo boats, tugboats, torpedo boats and fishing boats were making for the coast of England with thousands of rescued men.

Soon Dunkirk was nothing more than a kind of funeral pyre in the first light of a new day. *Paris Soir, 8 June 1940*

feet to the tunes of Vera Lynn. Bewes keeps a low profile these days. One boat-owner spotted him and asked him if he was indeed, Rodney Bewes, which he denied. The boat-owner, undeterred, replied, "A likely story - from a Likely Lad." A thousand vignettes like this made the few days spent in Dunkirk a wonderful rollercoaster ride through the humour of today and the more serious business of remembrance.

One moment a decorated war hero, coming down to breakfast in the cheap motel we were holed up in, struck a comedy body-builder's pose on the landing. "There 'e is - that's Eric!" the other vets said in delight.

The next, a French veteran, one of those lucky enough to escape in 1940, died on that same beach during the ceremony.

Another poignant strand of the event was the absence of Raymond Baxter of the BBC and RAF, the man who started the Dunkirk returns in *L'Ornye* in 1965 (see panel). Also present this year was the fleet's honorary admiral, Prince Michael of Kent, who came with the fleet and stayed throughout, on *Bluebird of 1938*, cock of the fleet.

The way home

On the way home there was some excitement in the lock involving a throttle left idling forward when its master thought it safely in neutral, leading to a snapped ensign, red faces and some foul language - to the delight of all watching. It's a tribute to the humour of most of the ADLS members that, although they take

their boats very seriously, events like this can be laughed off and enjoyed with a shiver of *schadenfreude*.

En route back to Ramsgate, a day late due to high winds, MB278 (see panel) fouled her prop on a lobster pot and young crewmember Roger Cherret went over the side, bread knife in teeth. He sliced his hand on the rope-cutter and caught a bit of a chill, but with a bit of help and tea from the attending RNLI boat, they were soon underway again.

Mary Scott, which broke her engines on the way to France, had to be taken in tow again to get back to Ramsgate. *Anne* (see p44) had the extraordinary luck to have onboard Andrew Rosthorn, a modern-day Fitzcarraldo who moves boats all over the

1940 Timeline

March 1939

Six months after Chamberlain proclaims 'Peace in our time' Hitler invades Czechoslovakia

27 April 1939

National Service call-up for single men aged 20 to 22 in Britain

24 August 1939

Bertram Ramsay promoted Vice Admiral in charge of Dover area

1 September, 1939

Hitler invades Poland

3-10 September 1939

Britain, France,

Australia, Canada and

New Zealand declare

war on Germany.

British Expeditionary

Force leaves for France

(from 4th). Battle of the

Atlantic begins.

October 1939:

Nazis begin euthanasia on sick and disabled in Germany.

8 January 1940

Rationing begins in Britain.

9 April 1940

Nazis invade Denmark and Norway.

10 May 1940

Blitzkrieg: Nazis invade France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands;

Winston Churchill

becomes British

Prime Minister.

14 May 1940:

BBC announces: "The

Admiralty has made

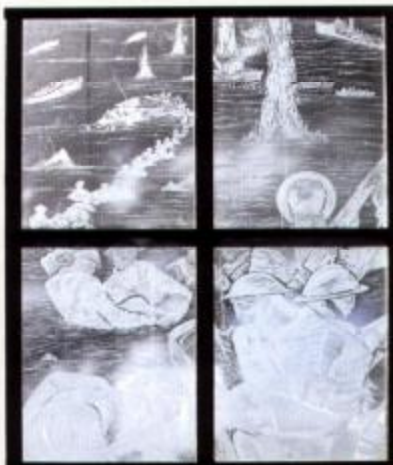
an Order requesting

all owners of self-

propelled pleasure

craft between 30

and 100 foot (9-33m)



LOA to send all particulars to the Admiralty within 14 days from today if they have not already been offered or requisitioned."

26 May 1940: War Office sends a secret

Close-up detail of the etched glass window by John Hutton at Dunkirk Military Cemetary showing the evacuation of the beaches

message to Admiralty stating emergency evacuation of troops from the French coast is immediately required. Codenamed Operation Dynamo the plan goes live, under Vice Admiral Bertram Ramsay. Churchill expects 45,000 troops might be saved.

27 May 1940

Ministry of Shipping telephones agents and boatbuilders, like John Tough, around the coast, requesting they gather and prepare all craft with shallow draught that might be suitable for taking troops off beaches.

27 May - 4 June:

More than 388,000

troops, 140,000 of

them French are

rescued off the beaches and harbour mole of Dunkirk by a fleet of Royal Navy and merchant ships, aided by some 700 Little Ships, whose main role was in ferrying men from the beaches to the larger mother ships standing off in deeper water. Belgium surrenders 28 May. On 31 May 68,000 troops are evacuated.

4 June 1940 Dunkirk falls to Germans

10 June 1940

Italy declares war on

Britain and France.

14 June 1940

After 11 days of bombing,

Germans enter Paris

22 June France signs

armistice with Nazis.

10 July 1940

Battle of Britain begins.

HMS COLLINGWOOD

Recruits learn

Some 50 Royal Navy personnel joined the Little Ships in their return, for the first time this year commemorating the RN crews who for the most part commanded the Little Ships in 1940. They included 25 ABs from HMS Collingwood. Hayley Gould, from Taunton in Somerset came over on the *Wendy Ken*: "I have never done anything like this before," she told CB. "And I didn't know anything about Dunkirk from school, but coming on this trip I have learned all about the rescue and the boats - it's been very interesting, quite awesome!"



Hayley Gould, from HMS Collingwood was on the *Wendy Ken* Below: a wreath is laid at sea

THAMES SAILING BARGE GRETA

The oldest Little Ship

Built in 1891 the 80ft (24.3m) Thames Sailing Barge *Greta* is the oldest of the Little Ships and was already in use by the Admiralty in WWII as a supply vessel to deliver ammunition to ships in the Thames Estuary. She was one of



Left: Steve and a visiting veteran cut *Greta's* commemorative Dunkirk cake, baked especially for her arrival in the port.

35 TSBS which attended the evacuation of Dunkirk. Now she is used as a charter vessel and liveaboard by Steve Norris, her owner/captain who bases her at Standard Quay in Faversham. You can read more about *Greta's* exploits or charters on www.greta1892.co.uk

world with his firm Sealand Deliveries. Her original engines failed on the way to Dunkirk, necessitating a tow for the last part of the crossing - and Andrew arranged to have the yacht taken back to England by road, assisted by Norfolk Lines, who put the Little Ship on one of its ferries, free of charge. That seems to be one definition, at least of Dunkirk Spirit: the willingness to help out and improvise when circumstances demand. One can only imagine the passengers' surprise at seeing an antique 30ft (9m) motor yacht sharing their ferry home. Norfolk Lines also gave free transport to attending veterans and carers - aided by Lottery money.

I was on TSMY *Bounty* for the trip to Ramsgate, a glorious 1936 Camper and Nicholson teak-on-steel 78ft (24m) yacht,

recently restored at an undisclosed cost, though thought to be at least £5 million. The owner had left and the crew were generous hosts, placing the boat for our photographer Ray Little ("Reckon they'll give us any bacon sarnies?") and Lara Leslie, filming the event. We steamed home, arriving early, and soon the other 49 boats tied up.

We were due to have arrived the day before, but high winds put paid to that - and to the reported welcoming crowd of 15,000. Just half a dozen souls stood on the sea wall. One man had brought a huge St George flag to wave triumphantly at the fleet. Instead, he cut a sad figure with the flag wrapped around his head to shelter from the rain.

It's hard to place patriotism in today's global marketplace, particularly in a nation whose comfort allows a complete absence of it - but it seems that these brave craft continue to inspire it. May they do so long after the men they rescued have died.

As some of the ADLS headed off to the Temple Yacht Club for well-earned pints, the sun finally came out and Ramsgate, that forgotten gem on the Isle of Thanet, which isn't an island at all, shone.

Churchill called Dynamo a miracle of deliverance, the gods flattening the sea for a safe passage. Strange then, that it can occur every five years. But as one boat-owner put it: "It's a miracle every time." 