

D-DAY

JUNE 6th 2020.

The last 6 years have seen the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust put together a team of volunteers, who have taken the Trusts World War 2, restored Coastal Forces boats, MGB81 and HSL102 across the English Channel, to France, to commemorate the anniversary of D-day.

Sadly, this year 2020 we are unable to undertake the crossing due to the virus restrictions. We have however made plans to be there in spirit. Hereafter follows an overview of what we have achieved over the years.



MGB81 in company with HSL102, off the Isle of Wight, early morning, en route to France.

The purpose has always been to remember, and pay our respects, to those who gave their lives for our freedom, during those dark days.

After many months of planning, early on a June morning, the boats, some years accompanied by other WW2 boats, would form up inside Portsmouth harbour, and head out to sea, on the 98 mile sea voyage across the English Channel, to France.



Departing Portsmouth, before sunrise, heading for France.

After a 5 hour run at high speed, we arrive at Ouistreham, and after a short wait, have permission to enter the lock.

The lock entry has always an eventful time, as we compete with a myriad selection of local yachtsmen, all wanting to be first out of the other end of the lock.

The Port manager has always been there to meet us, and on most occasions the Mayor of Ouistreham has paid us a courtesy call on arrival.



MGB81 approaching the lock.



Mayor and Port Manager Ousitreham.

On leaving the lock, we proceed up the canal toward Caen, with our destination being Pegasus Bridge, Benouville. It is about a half hour trip to our berth, and in the early years we were allocated a berth quite far from the Pegasus Bridge,



On our berth at Pegasus Bridge.



The combined crews.

Having settled in for our stay at Pegasus Bridge, Benouville, we get started with our daily round of events.

Normally all the crews gather at the Café Gondre at 0800 each morning. We are greeted by Madame Gondre, who ensures we are well fed with very welcome croissants, tea and coffee.

The day's events are discussed, and at about 0900 we disperse to our boats, and prepare them for the day's opening to the Public.



Morning meeting venue.



Evening meeting venue..!

During the days leading up to the 6th June, we take many veterans and their families for a short trip on HSL102, up the canal toward Caen, and return. Every year we make a point of taking the Benouville school pupils for a trip, as well.



Veterans, and Benouville pupils, on board HSL102.

There are a number of commemoration events over the days leading up to the 6th June. On the evening of the 5th at 2300, the recording of Major Howards "Talking the Gliders down" is read, at the memorial on the landing zone.

On the 6th June, the first happening is the gathering of Benouville School pupils at the Mayor's office. Led by a Piper the pupils walk up the hill, preceded by the Mayor, to the village Church yard. Here the pupils place flowers as well as crosses, on each grave, as the name of each serviceman is read out.

We have over the years, arranged for 23 crosses to be annotated by school pupils here in the UK, to be transported on our boats, across the English Channel to Benouville.



Poppies leave the UK.



Poppies landed in France from MGB81.



On arrival at the Church yard, the ceremony proceeds, and the pupils lay the flowers and crosses on the graves.

The Brucourt ceremony is a separate event, attended by the Mayor of Brucourt, and this year, by Steven Oldrid, on our behalf.



Benouville pupils lay down crosses.



Brucourt graves.

After the ceremony at the Benouville Chuchyard, we all walk down the high street, turn left at the roundabout outside the Mayor's office, and head down to the Landing Zone. By now we are joined by many who will be paying their respects at the Howard Memorial. Led by the Police Band, we cross Pegasus Bridge, and muster on the memorial parade ground. Many speeches are made, and wreaths are laid.



Crossing the Pegasus Bridge.



Laying wreaths.

The next ceremony is held within the grounds of the Pegasus Museum. On completion of this, we all walk back over Pegasus Bridge, and up the hill to the Memorial opposite the Mayors office.



This year however we are unable to attend France, but we have arranged for the 23 crosses for Benouville, 6 crosses for Brucourt and a wreath for Benouville, to be annotated here in the UK, and sent across to France.

Our good friends in Benouville, Steven Oldrid and Mark Worthington, have agreed to take the crosses to the churchyard, in both Benouville and Brucourt, and laid down on our behalf.



2020 Benouville crosses.



2020 Brucourt 6 crosses.

And so our annual pilgrimage comes to an end, and from our peaceful berths at Pegasus Bridge, we have returned to Portsmouth.

It remains only to say a huge thank you to all those who have helped us achieve our aims over so many years, and especially this year, when Steven Oldrid and Mark Worthington have gone out of their way to make sure our remembrance initiative has been carried out on our behalf.



*They shall not grow old, as we who are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning,
We will remember them.*