



Sometime, late in the 1940s or early '50s, an M.T.B. (Motor Torpedo Boat) arrived on Prinsted shore. It was moored hard up against the sea wall, just east of Maurice Jones's bungalow 'Anchorage'. Originally this bungalow belonged to Harry Marsh who moved down from 'The Firs' a little further up the lane. The MTB owner was Mr Frank Martin, ex. Royal Navy I was led to believe.

The MTB number is not known

The MTB (68ft) was now the largest boat in the harbour. It was bigger than Dane, a Dutch vessel I was told was 'spoils of war' brought back by Mr Glass, who lived at 2 Sea Breeze Cottages, which was moored over by Andrews Boat Yard. His wife was a teacher at West Ashling school and also a cub leader for Southbourne Sea Scouts. Mr Martin spent all his spare time working on his MTB converting it into a houseboat.

He didn't have a time limit in mind but obviously wanted to finish as soon as possible. He didn't want us children hanging around his boat so he told us he kept wild animals in the hold. As children, you always believed what grown-ups told you. At night, when we walked along the shore past his boat, you could hear all these strange noises coming up through the boat, not realising it was drilling, sawing etc going on we thought it must be the animals so we would scoot by the boat just in case. His story certainly worked in keeping us away.

Whilst working on his houseboat Mr Martin was also looking for a permanent mooring for when his conversion was finished. He found one at Hayling Island, north of the road which ran down to the ferry. There were two options. One was an existing berth or one with permission where you could dig out your own mooring. I never found out which one he went for, but if it meant digging one out, that wouldn't have been a problem for him.

After about 3 years (not sure how long exactly) the houseboat was finally finished. On a Spring tide about a 16 footer, a tug arrived about an hour before high tide. After securing ropes to the boat, the Tug started pulling but with no effect. No movement whatsoever. After an hour it was decided to call it a day and the tug departed and to return the next day. As soon as the tide dropped Mr Martin began shovelling away the shingle surrounding the boat. Bear in mind, in those days the shingle on the shore was not just one stone deep, it was over a foot deep and a few years of the tide washing the shingle up had really wedged the boat in. He carried on the next morning. What a task that was when, if you look at the picture, you get an idea of how much shingle was involved. Once again about an hour before high tide the tug returned. Ropes were secured and the tug, started to pull and there was some movement. Then a loud squelch and the boat came free. A few more pulls and the boat was slowly hauled off the shore.

Now it was a race against the tide to get down the harbour and out across Pilsea before the water dropped too much. Failure to do so would mean going down past the Winner and then having to come back. They made it with about 6 inches to spare. Finally, the boat was towed to its new berth at Hayling.

A year or so after settling in, Mr Martin wanted to start an Inshore Rescue Service, and with his naval experience using inflatable craft. The authorities were not interested. Some years later, an Inshore Rescue Service was introduced, and guess what, they used inflatable craft. Mr Martin never got the recognition he deserved. Any errors in this story are entirely down to me, as this is how I remember this event some 67 years ago.

Photo, courtesy of Robert Marshall.

David Holman 2020



MTB 102 in the Dunkirk Little Ships section in the Diamond Jubilee Flotilla 2012

One of the boats in the "Dunkirk Little Ships" section of the Diamond Jubilee flotilla. The description from the official boat listings says: MTB's (Motor Torpedo Boats) were developed to be able to mount a quick response to threats from any sea-going vessel, either warship or submarine. MTB 102 was completed and launched in May 1937 and ran trials on The Solent. She saw active service mainly in the English Channel. During 'Operation Dynamo', the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force, she crossed the Channel no less than seven times. In 1944 she carried Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower to review the ships assembled on the South Coast for the D-Day landings and so saw both the end of the desperate evacuation of the British Forces from Europe and the start of their determined return.