

## Medusa and VE day.

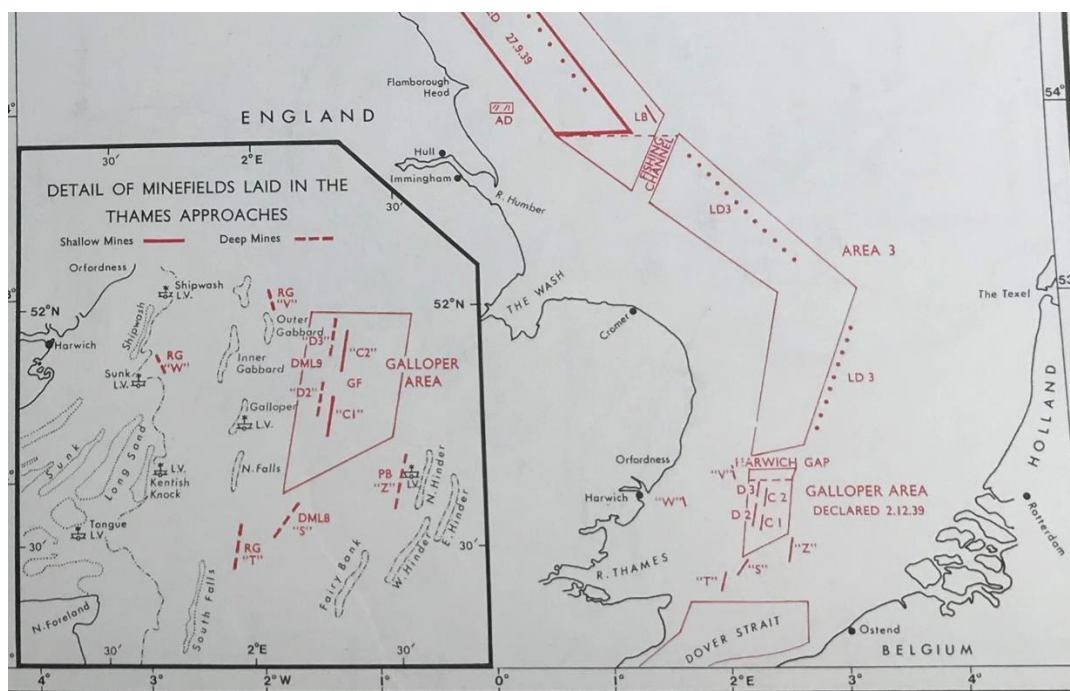


In the latter part of 1944, Medusa operated out of Granton near Edinburgh as part of the 185 Auxiliary Minesweeping Flotilla in company with the armed M/S trawlers St Olive and Windward Ho. On 3 December 1944, the flotilla transferred to Sheerness and Medusa was on passage there on 3 December arriving on the 10<sup>th</sup>. She operated out of Queenborough and Sheerness before a brief refit from 8-6 April 1945. Throughout the war a weekly publication called the "Red Book" listed all minor war vessels but sometimes the information is only the parent base to which the vessel is attached. The Red Book shows Medusa as operating from Sheerness from 15 April- 24 June but her actual whereabouts is very different.

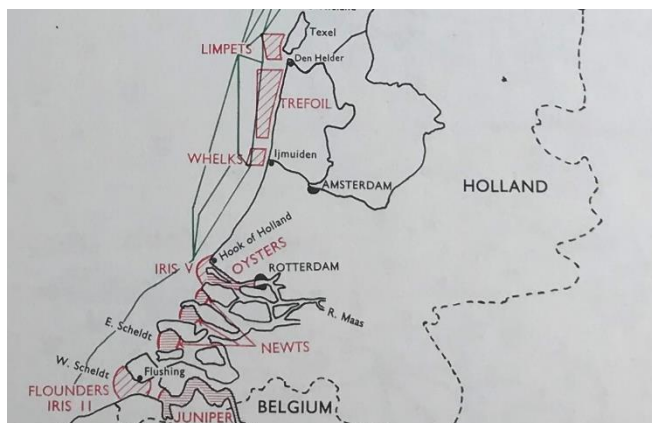
It has been possible to reconstruct her movements from spoken testimony from two of the crew, photographs and the timeline of events around VE day. Over time a few educated guesses will be verified as more information comes to light. Here is the narrative as we presently understand it.

### 4 May 1945.

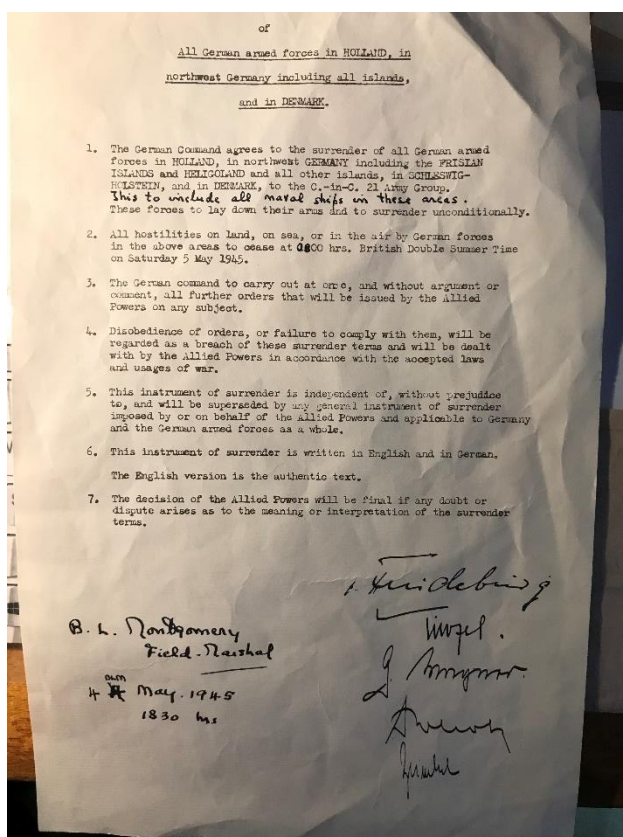
Medusa departed Sheerness and started on the 160 mile passage to IJmuiden. This involved a bit of a dogleg to pass through the East Coast mine barrier. At 1830 that evening the unconditional surrender of German forces in Holland was signed to take effect at 0800 on the 5<sup>th</sup> May.



*East coast mine barrier. Medusa would have passed through the Harwich gap.*



A British laid mine barrier off IJmuiden, there would have been uncharted German ones too.



Surrender document for Holland, NW Germany and Denmark.

5<sup>th</sup> May.

Medusa entered the port of IJmuiden. From photos it looks like she went alongside at the S Boat base which is just inside the river on the Starboard side. One of the concrete bunkers remains to this day but the S Boat pens appear to have been removed. The captain of Medusa, Lieutenant Maurice Liddiard RNVR accepted German commander's sword in surrender.

Medusa remained alongside and one of the crew was detailed as sentry. In best rig, he marched up and down with the ship's only rifle. All was well until he tripped, fell, and the rifle slid into the dock where it still is. This caused some consternation but some of the crew solved the problem by liberating quantities of German armaments in exchange for cigarettes. They came back with sub machine guns, helmets, pistols, bayonets, and knives. Many later took these home with them; one

crew member remembers burying an officer's pistol in his back garden as weapon regulations tightened.

From going into a port with little idea of the reception, the Germans could have easily blown Medusa out of the water, to realising that the war was virtually over must have been incredible for the crew. This can be seen in the photos of them in captured German helmets with German weapons pretending they have captured Hitler.



*Look who they captured! Left to right PO Dolan, Harry Andrews, Doug Withey*



*A souvenir kept by Doug, a Hitler Youth (HJ) dagger with swastika removed*



*More captured German arms*

### 6th May

Alongside at IJmuiden. The port had been extensively bombed and most port facilities destroyed. The as yet unfinished S boat pens had been badly damaged by bombing.



*Medusa at IJmuiden challenging an aircraft.*

### 7<sup>th</sup> May

Canadians arrived at IJmuiden.

Medusa set off for the 12 mile passage up the canal to Amsterdam with a party of senior officers on board. The Germans had done their best to make the canal unusable. Ships under repair had been run down slipways and other vessels sunk to block the canal. There was a huge risk of booby traps so Medusas dinghy was rowed ahead of her with two ABs on board who checked for obstructions and boobytraps with a boat hook. Medusa followed their path precisely. The passage took most of the day.

At Amsterdam, an unfortunate set of events had unfolded. The Germans were still much in evidence and still armed two days after the surrender. In Dam square a Dutch official tried to disarm two Germans, an altercation followed, and a German was shot. The situation rapidly escalated with the Germans opening fire from buildings onto the Dutch in the square. Twenty three were killed and



over 200 injured. This just illustrates how tense the whole situation was. There was an exchange of gunfire between the resistance and the Gestapo at the railway station.

Medusa arrived at Amsterdam and was greeted enthusiastically by the local population. Flowers were thrown down onto the vessel but were not much use to the crew. Their real needs were soon understood and cases of beer began to appear. At the time the crew were permitted one bottle a day as well as their tot, but cases of beer disappeared into the crew mess before the officers could take charge of it.

### **8<sup>th</sup> May.**

The surrender of all German forces was signed, and World War 2 in Europe ended. Medusas crew were able to explore Amsterdam and celebrate. It does not take a sailor long to find a bar!



### *In the bar!*

While in the bar, the crew chatted to local ladies who were very receptive. A local came over and said the crew should not be talking to them. A misunderstanding nearly ensued until the local pointed out they were all wearing headscarves; removing one revealed a shaven head which was the punishment to women who had collaborated with the Germans.



*Leading stoker Kenneth Lilley in Dam square*

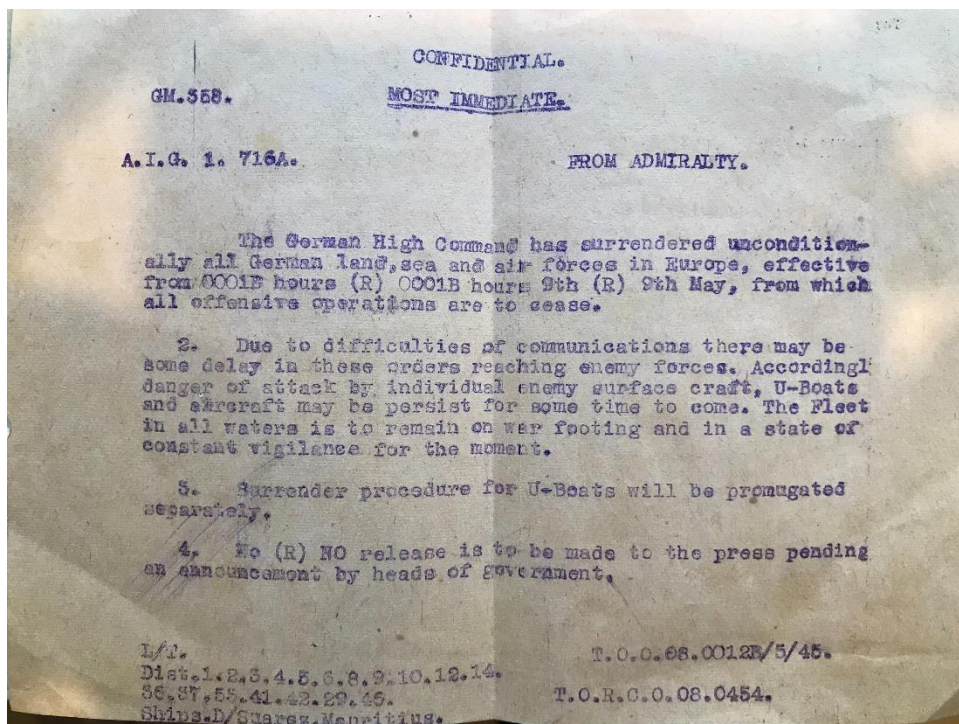


*German soldiers on virtually the same spot a few days before.*



*Doug Withey on the chart room with the flags out for VE day*

Back at Ijmuiden, the resistance assisted the Canadians in disarming 18,000 Germans who had surrendered.



*The signal that ended WW2*



9 May- 6 June.

Medusa worked in the area assisting with mine clearance and making the port useable (Operation Fireball.....an unfortunate choice of codename). She was ordered back to Sheerness on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1945 in company with ML1393. At some point she worked in the Scheldt estuary but the dates for this are not clear.

Minesweeping, My 012255B (Operation "Fireball").  
Dutch Ports. Intend to sail with Force A to U.K. tomorrow  
Thursday by H.K. and N.F. channels. LOCUST,  
157th Flotilla (B.Y.M.S. 2230, 2038, 2141), 19th  
M.L. Flotilla (M.L. 921, 236, 217, 906, 919),  
M.L. 221, 489, R.M.L. 522, 546, H.D.M.L. 1393, 1387 to Sheerness  
arriving p.m. tomorrow Thursday.  
(2) 102nd M/S. Flotilla (M.M.S. 113, 69, 1083, 57, 44, 40).  
117th M.S. Flotilla (M.M.S. 19, 265, 1084).  
101st M.S. Flotilla (17, 182, 219, 14, 189).  
B.Y.M.S. 2221 and WARDOUR to anchor Margate Roads tomorrow  
Thursday night, proceeding to Sheerness a.m. Friday 8th June.  
(Capt. M/S.F. A, 061723B to C. in C. Nore.)  
Operation "Fireball".  
(1) (A) LL/SA 5 M.M.S. Ijmuiden anchorage area completed.  
(B) Modified L/SA 5 M.M.S. over Ijmuiden anchorage area.  
(2) Nil.  
(3) Survey work in Ijmuiden approaches completed.  
(4) Nil.  
(5) Freight landing ship WARDOUR, 4 B.Y.M.S., 14 M.M.S., 9  
M.L., 2 H.D.M.L. to U.K.  
(6) Operation "Fireball" modified by your 080040 May completed,  
my 012255 refers.  
(Capt. M/S.F. A, 061741B to C. in C. Nore.)

*Extract from the Home Command war diary showing Medusa and 1393 back to Sheerness 6 June 1945*

