

Maritime Museum of San Diego

MAINS'L HAUL

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A Journal of Pacific Maritime History



*MEDEA
& the Classic
Steam Yachts*



In Victoria in 1972, the Scottish steam yacht *Medea*, owned by oil millionaire Paul Whittier, awaits her voyage south to her new home in San Diego. Joe Jessop, the board member most involved, remembered in 1991 that *"when we put her on the ways, a couple of places you could almost put your thumb through the bottom."*

MMSD PC12436; cover photo by Maggie Piatt



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is published quarterly,
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"Mains'l Haul"—An order in tacking
ship bidding 'Swing the main yards'.
To loot, steal, or 'acquire'.

—John Masfield

DID YOU KNOW?

- that *Medea* was a warship for three navies? (pages 2, 42)
- that she survived at least one torpedo attack? (page 2)
- that the yacht *Medea* once mounted a huge 75mm deck gun? (page 3)
- that steam yachts were notorious as locations for illicit love affairs? (pages 8-9, 13)
- that a perfectly preserved steam yacht lies under 300 feet of water in Lake Superior? (page 12)
- that the millionaire who gave *Medea* to San Diego almost reclaimed her and converted her to diesel? (page 62)

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MEDEA & the Classic Steam Yachts

From the Helm
Ray Ashley

2



4



The Heyday of the
Steam Yacht
Ross MacTaggart



9

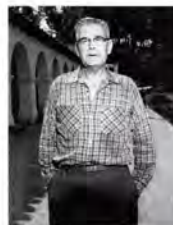
A Seaman's Encounter
with the "Dam Idle Rich"
John Bertonccini

14



John D. Spreckels' *Venetia*
Paul W. Gockel

21



A Deckhand's Memories of *Venetia*
Bert Shankland

22



My Father, Job Longson Wild
Bidi Evans

42



A Top Secret Wartime History
Olaf T. Engvig

62



Medea Comes to San Diego
Joe Jessop and Robert Sharp

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Just before moonset on the starry evening of May 30, 1917, the steam yacht *Medea* was running about two miles NW of the Harwich lightship when her captain spotted a phosphorescent trail lancing toward the starboard side of his ship. Within seconds her lookout reported the passing of a torpedo across her bow at a distance of four meters. "Under such circumstances," he mentioned later in his report of the incident, "it is regrettable to sail with a hull that bears a coat of brilliant white paint."¹ To her crew who were being hunted that evening, it must have seemed as though their vessel lived a charmed life.

She was herself descended from hunters. The word "yacht" derives from the Dutch *jacht* or "hunting ship." In the Atlantic world of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, ownership of a fast, well-armed private vessel signified one's intention to profit by hunting down and capturing enemy merchantmen during wartime. The practice of "privateering," licensed by formal letters of marque and reprisal, was endorsed by all maritime nations as a way to magnify naval power. The practice supplied a primary motive for the creation of fast yachts. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, yachting had been transformed through the combination of an international consensus that the business of war should be monopolized by governments rather than franchised to private investors, the advent of steam technology and the creation of vast Industrial Age fortunes. While formerly designed in part to seize wealth by force, yachts were now designed entirely

to display wealth conspicuously for pleasure. In 1856 privateering was outlawed by international treaty, and yachts thereafter became pleasure boats.² In her lean lines, clipper bow, and raked vestigial masts, *Medea* flaunts her

predator heritage, but by the time of her birth in 1904 no one would have seriously considered her a potential tool of naval war.

That role, it was presumed, had now been entirely preempted by purpose-built warships that were evolving into ever more massive, specialized, and lethal forms. A little more than a year after *Medea* was launched, one of them named *HMS Dreadnought* revolutionized the development of the capital ship, plunged the world into a

naval arms race, and contributed to the outbreak of world war. That war, as most envisioned it beforehand, would most likely be settled by a brief but thunderous clash of dreadnought fleets somewhere on the North Sea. No one dreamed that millions of young men would die in trench warfare, that cities would be bombed from the air, poisonous gas be used as a weapon, that merchant shipping could be wiped out by a new form of predator lurking under the sea, or that *Medea* and her kind might return to a strange and terrifying new world to be hunters once more.

Fully knowing that its actions would bring the U.S. into the war, in February of 1917 Germany authorized her U-boats to attack all shipping surrounding Britain, beginning an appalling massacre of merchantmen and cutting off

FROM THE HELM

by Ray Ashley

Director
Maritime Museum of San Diego



R O S S

H.W. F. & C. at

C. Wrath 7^h 30^m Sp. rise 15 1/2 ft.

Stornoway 6 46. 13 1/2 Np. 9 1/2 ft.



Britain's lifeline of supplies. A month before the torpedo narrowly missed *Medea*, Admiral William Sims, representing the still neutral American Government, was appraised of the situation at sea by British Admiral Jellicoe, First Sea Lord, revealing losses that were three and four times as large as those which were then being published in the press.

"It is expressing it mildly to say that I was surprised by this disclosure. I was fairly astounded; for I had never imagined anything so terrible. I expressed my consternation to Admiral Jellicoe.

"Yes," he said, as quietly as though he were discussing the weather and not the future of the British Empire. "It is impossible for us to go on with the war if losses like this continue..."

"It looks as though the Germans were winning the war," I remarked.

"They will win, unless we can stop these losses - and stop them soon," the Admiral replied.

"Is there no solution for the problem?" I asked.

"Absolutely none that we can see now," Jellicoe announced.

In fact there was a solution, attempted after everything else had failed. By arming trawlers and yachts like *Medea* as anti-submarine patrol vessels, sufficient numbers of destroyers then present with the Grand Fleet and soon to arrive from America could be freed to implement a convoy strategy in place of the independent sailings of merchant ships. For much of 1917 Britain's supply of fuel and food reached perilous levels. As the hemorrhage of merchant shipping slowed and then stabilized with the implementation of convoys, the fate of the world hung in the balance.

"A violent, heavy swell hit the bridge," wrote *Medea's* French captain shortly after his torpedo encounter. After smashing the glass screen on the bridge, "the sea hit the bridge again, and we couldn't remove the water easily; the cabins were filling with water and we couldn't pump the water out fast enough. The ship was being weighed down. I tried to cope as best I could. We altered course by 30°, but this course south did not enable us to double the Longship [off the tip of Cornwall]; we decided to take the opposite tack. The sea kept growing bigger, the big waves coming without interruption. The engine-driven pumps were working normally, but we did not have any adequate means of removing water from the cabins. The situation prevented me from climbing up onto the bridge to operate the hand pump." The yacht weathered the journey to enter French naval service as *Corneille*. In addition to this newly discovered account, perhaps a future researcher will uncover a photo of her on duty, armed with a depth charge and 75mm gun.

Painting by Richard DeRosset; 1913 chart (north is to the left), MMSD Coll.; translation by Gordon Lee.

Thus it is that the most unsuspected of actors can be the ones to make the difference. On a distant ocean, in an age now almost beyond living memory, when great battle fleets proved indecisive, vast armies stalemated in the trenches, terror rained from the sky and stalked under the sea, the world seemed to turn on the actions of a few little vessels that no one intended should fight the first Battle of the Atlantic. But perhaps what is more astonishing, given the significance of events, is that of all the ships of that time, large and small, which contended with one another for the future of the world we now live in, to my knowledge only one remains, still steaming proudly. We celebrate her centennial year on these pages. Perhaps it is not so regrettable after all "to sail in a hull that bears a coat of brilliant white paint."

NOTES

- 1 "To the Vice Admiral, Maritime Prefect of Cherbourg, 5 June 1917," photocopy in *Medea* Coll., MacMullen Library and Research Archives, Maritime Museum of San Diego. Translated by Gordon Lee.
- 2 Declaration of Paris.
- 3 William S. Sims, *The Victory at Sea* (London: Doubleday, Page, & Co., 1921), 9. Arthur Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era 1904-1919, Vol. IV 1917: Year of Crisis*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 148.
- 4 K7N. Gibsen and Marie Pendegrast. *The German Submarine War 1914-1918* (London: Constable & Co., 1931), 166. In a letter dated 14 April 1917, Sims estimated that national fuel reserves had dropped from the customary six to eight months to eight weeks and that grain supply in the country was sufficient for only three weeks, exclusive of grain products in inventory in retail stores. Sims, *Victory at Sea*, 376; Appendix II.



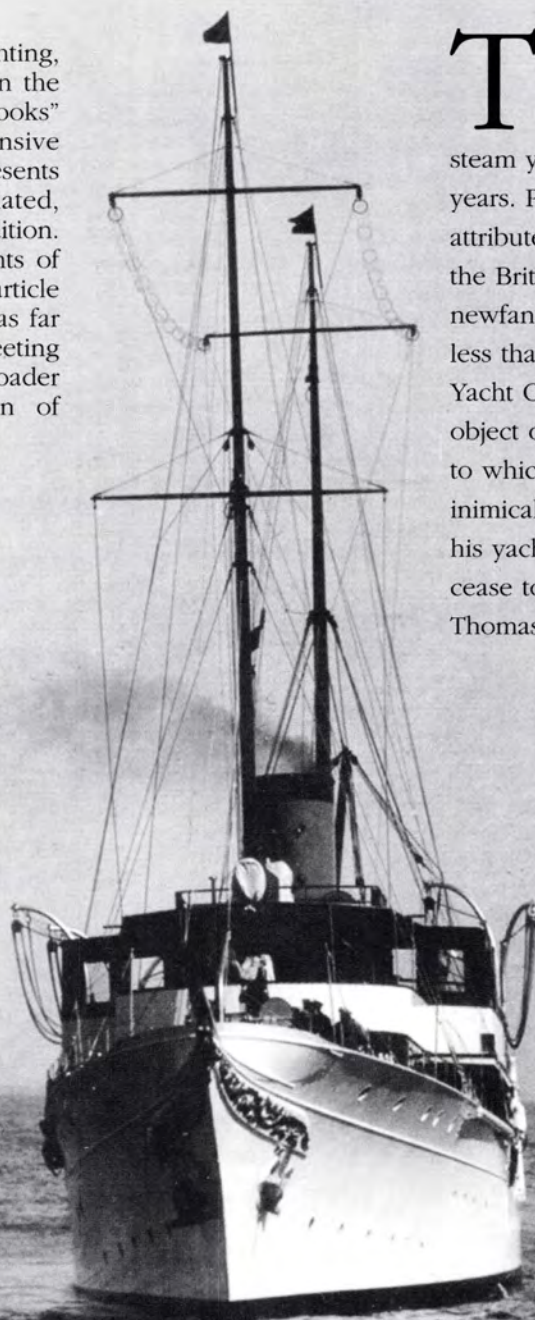
The Heyday of the Steam Yacht

Ross MacTaggart

Editor's Note:

Most histories of the pastime of yachting, which began with English Royals in the 1600s, tend to be "coffee table books" filled with pictures of expensive sailboats. *Medea*, however, represents part of a vastly under-appreciated, mechanized offshoot of that tradition. She is typical of British steam yachts of her day, though, as the following article makes clear, the 140-foot *Medea* was far from the grandest of her kind. Meeting her "kin" helps us see her in the broader context of part of the evolution of powered yachts.

*Postcard of unidentified yacht; MMSD
PC2875*



The first steam-powered vessel was launched at Lyon, France, in 1783, but the earliest-known private steam yacht did not appear for over forty years. Part of this long delay can be attributed to the social norms of yachting; the British aristocracy received this newfangled mode of travel with something less than enthusiasm. The august Royal Yacht Club passed a resolution that "the object of this Club is to promote seamanship to which the application of steam is inimical, and any member applying steam to his yacht shall be disqualified hereby and cease to be a member." Club member Thomas Assheton-Smith, however, bridled at

this “imposition on his personal possessions,” quit the club, and made maritime history by commissioning the first steam yacht: the 120-foot *Menai*.¹

When *Menai* was launched in 1830, transportation for the wealthy differed from the rest of society primarily in the degree, not the kind, of unpleasantness suffered by travelers. An elegant private carriage had to bounce along the same rutted roads as the poorest farm wagon. Whether one was John Doe or John D. Rockefeller, sailing from London to New York entailed weeks aboard a wave-tossed vessel—with no heat, no *en-suite* bathrooms, no refrigeration for food, and certainly no first-class dining rooms—and no guarantee of a specific arrival date. Millionaires—like steam yachts, a creation of the nineteenth century—could buy many things, but not the wind when and where they needed it. Things improved by the late nineteenth century, when steam trains (particularly private rail cars) offered plush accommodations and reliable timetables, but a person of wealth still had to accept the fact that trains went where they *could*, not where you *wanted*. Late-nineteenth-century ocean liners also were tied to predetermined landing and departure points, although much improved in luxury over their sister ships from a few decades before. But if one could not go *wherever* one wanted, *whenever* one wanted (and in comfort), what was the point of being a millionaire?

The steam yacht provided one answer to that question, for those who could afford it, on either side of the Atlantic. In England, those who took up steam yachting were typically the titled and landed nobility. Englishmen, having been won over (for the most part) from their initial disdain, far outpaced the rest of Europe in their rage for steam power: in 1896, almost seven times as many steam yachts were registered in Britain as in all other European countries and colonies combined.² Men and women whose wealth had been created over centuries took to steam yachting with gusto.

In America, the newly-minted “Titans of Industry” also took to yachting, although, unlike the landed gentry abroad who favored long cruises lasting months and even years, most tycoons liked yachting for one essential purpose: speed. Their yachts were rarely used for leisurely cruises, but rather for swiftly dispatching the moneyed few between their estates and their downtown offices.³



Steam yachts like the Prince of Monaco's *Princess Alice* were frequently used for scientific expeditions—but any excuse to go yachting would do.

PC2850, MMSD Postcard Coll.

Ross MacTaggart is the author of *The Golden Century: Classic Motor Yachts, 1830-1930*, available in the Maritime Museum of San Diego store. Watch for his *Millionaires, Mansions and Motor Yachts; An Era of Opulence*, a social history of yachting due out this fall. Ross is also an architectural designer, urban observer, and carpenter, and lives, of all places, in rural Kansas.



As examples of conspicuous consumption, nothing could match a steam yacht for keeping a millionaire in the public eye, yet hidden from view. Note that these postcards bear the names of yacht owners, not the names of the 318' *Iolanda* or the *Constitution* (shown at right in 1914) themselves.

PC2861 and PC2860, MMSD Postcard Coll.

Steam yachts also offered wealthy women an early form of emancipation. A select group discovered the advantages of ordering a splendid yacht and taking long voyages well out of eyesight and judgment of those determining “proper” social etiquette for ladies. The Duchess of Bedford (Mary Russell), preferred watching birds on remote islands (*sans* husband) to watching society, and was ably assisted by her 285-foot *Sapphire*, launched in 1912.

After once receiving an invitation to Buckingham Palace, she instead decided to “visit the King of Birds”—a White-tailed Eagle. She reported: “His Majesty was at home, and gave me a splendid view.”⁴ As steam yachts grew in popularity, exotic lands suddenly became accessible, even to the “delicate sex.”

The Heyday

Not even every millionaire could justify the expenses involved in steam yachting. When a young David Rockefeller was asked why his family did not own a large yacht, he replied, “Who do you think we are, Vanderbilts?”

Indeed, the Vanderbilts were *the* preeminent yacht-building family. The first American steam yacht appears to have been *North Star*, commissioned by Cornelius “Commodore” Vanderbilt in 1853 and costing a reported \$500,000 (about \$15 million in today’s dollars).⁵ Vanderbilt left a fortune of \$40,000,000 when he died (about \$1.2 billion in today’s dollars), so it may be presumed that the cost of yachting was not a principal concern, and this unprecedented fortune enabled his descendants to indulge in steam and sailing yachts with an extravagant passion.

While inherited wealth greatly assisted yachting, many American steam yacht owners (perhaps the majority) had risen from impoverished backgrounds. These vessels provided as conspicuous a status symbol as ever existed. Because the depreciation value on a yacht was considerable, quite grand vessels were also available inexpensively, relatively speaking. Alfred I. du Pont hoped for \$75,000 when he sold the mint-condition, twenty-year-old *Alicia* in the 1920s; he received \$24,000 for the 155-foot vessel.⁶ This, when a new sixty-foot motor yacht would cost \$60,000.

Even though the first private steam yacht was built in 1830, it took decades for millionaires to realize its significance. In 1863, over thirty years

after *Menai*'s launching, there were still only thirty steam yachts registered in Britain; this number had quadrupled two decades later. A decade after that, in 1893, the number was an astonishing 466—and within three years, would further rocket to 637.⁷ The New York Yacht Club was the center of American steam yachting, and it experienced a similar surge. Its members owned all of four steam yachts in 1870, twenty years later owned seventy-one, and in 1902, less than a



decade later, its rolls were crowded with 246 steam yachts.⁸ In 1896, *Lloyd's* listed close to a thousand steam yachts in Britain, Europe, and America.⁹ This popularity was greatly assisted by the fact that, while a private rail car could only be eighty-two feet long by ten feet wide (and ran on fixed tracks and timetables), a private yacht could be as spacious and luxurious as one could afford, and could go anywhere at any time, provided there was deep enough water.

Eventually, the very rich began to discern a few negatives about yachting. Financier J. Pierpont Morgan discovered one such problem with cruising in his huge *Corsair*. How many friends had the spare time, inclination, wealth (and sufficiently pleasant personality) to accompany you on your cruise? He once advised a prospective yacht owner: "Have you got one or two men whom you are fond of, that you can depend on always to go off yachting with you? Because if you haven't, don't buy a yacht, as it will be the loneliest place in the world for you."¹⁰ J. P. Morgan himself, and presumably other yachtsmen, solved some of this problem of loneliness; he found that a capacious steam yacht offered a discreet place to entertain another person he was "fond of"—his current mistress.¹¹

Another problem was that a costly competition of sorts developed. "In New York Society, a bigger and faster yacht was a better yacht, but the best yacht of all was the most expensive," as the yachtsman Lord Feversham observed, a touch snidely.¹² Emily Roebling Cadwalader, heiress to the fortune left by the builder of the Brooklyn Bridge, entered this race in the late 1920s with a passion, ordering five vessels in as many years. She effectively won the imaginary Grand Prize in this competition: on the verge of the Great Depression, she spent \$4 million (or \$120 million in today's dollars) on the 408-foot-long *Savarona*, which for over seven decades stood as the largest, most expensive private yacht ever built.¹³

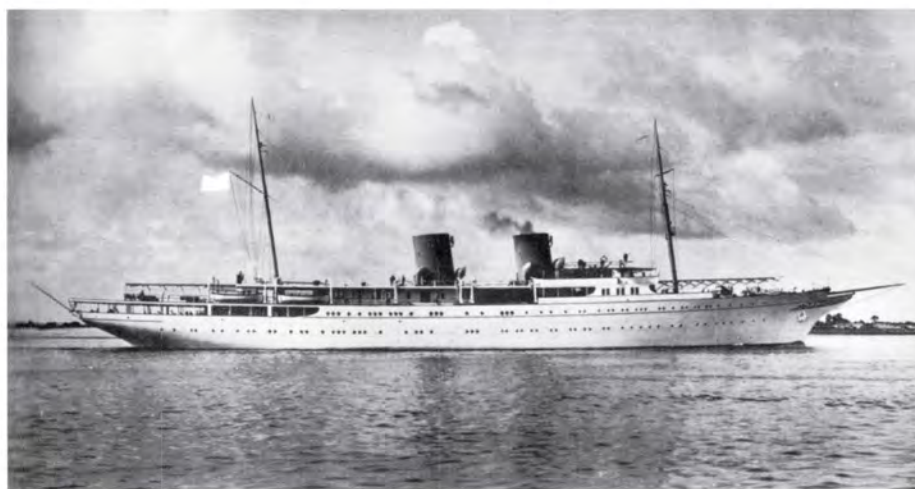


Even the Morgan family's 343' *Corsair* was dwarfed by the 408' *Savarona*.

PC2838, MMSD Postcard Coll.

The Design of Steam Yachts

"Few realize the difficulties of steam yacht design. The naval architect who would be successful as a designer of modern steam yachts must," according to *Yachting Monthly* in 1906, "possess sufficient artistic taste to combine a beautiful hull with an efficient one, and in carrying out his work he must exercise and draw upon sound, practical experience of a dozen trades. From the preliminary weight estimates to the finishing coat of topside enamel he must, theoretically and practically, have the work at his fingers' ends. His client will have comfort, economy, and with every modern luxury, and all within a floating house which has no two points equal in dimension or shape."¹⁴



Prior to World War I, the general consensus was that if one wanted a fast yacht, than an American builder was the preferred choice; if one wanted a reliable yacht with superior engines, a British-built vessel was the better choice, as Scottish engineers were widely admired for their technical prowess, and English metalwork was thought superior to American.

The interiors of virtually all yachts built prior to the First World War were, like *Medea*, graced with a high level of joinery, hardware, and fittings; there was little difference between American and British-built vessels in this regard. All that mattered was the willingness of the owner to spend—for then as now, yachting would quickly grind to a halt without the lubricant of money.

This focus on quality diminished after the war, and by the mid-1920s the decline had reached such a state that yacht broker Montague Grahame-White (who also maintained a fleet of steam yachts for charter), complained of expensive wood paneling being “replaced by the plainest of workmanship” in private areas below decks, while, to his horror, “in many instances, steel overheads and alley-ways were unlined in the guests’ quarters, and in the majority of the vessels the steel bulwarks were not paneled.”¹⁵ While yachts of the latter 1920s were still elegant and majestic *designs*, the high level of *finish* seen on prewar yachts was now largely extinct. By the early 1930s, naval architects had become enamored of a “streamlined” design aesthetic whereby yachts began to look less like anything with a nautical heritage, and more like airplanes.

The Eclipse of the Steam Yacht

Steam yachting effectively lasted a century, from 1830 to 1930, but its heyday was the three decades between the late 1880s and the advent of the First World War in 1914. Early in the war, the majority of steam yachts were sold or requisitioned by both the American and British navies. After heavy use and significant military changes to the yachts, few were *wanted* back by their former owners. On the eve of war in 1914, *Lloyd’s* listed 290 steam yachts registered to American owners.¹⁶ By the 1920s, their number had plunged by almost half, to 147.¹⁷

The last grand steam yacht built in America was the mighty *Corsair*, the fourth in a series of vessels of that name built for the financier J. P. Morgan and his son “Jack”. This 343-foot yacht was powered by advanced steam turbo-electric engines. A last spate of British-built steam yachts was launched in 1930, the three-hundred-foot *Nahlin* being the most famous. After the Second World War, less than a handful of steam yachts were commissioned.¹⁸

A Seaman’s Encounter with the “Dam Idle Rich”

John Bertonccini

March 18th [1888] I obtained a position as Quartermaster on the American steam yacht “Osage,” on a pleasure cruise to [the] West Indies. The cruise was tame, but not monotonous as far as the crew was concerned. Those dam idle rich demanded you be on your toes, at their service, every minute of the 24 hours. They did not consider the crew was entitled to any time to themselves for rest, or meals. It was just a case of “go,” whenever they got some damn fool notion in their empty heads. Sometimes they would try fishing. At all times they were drinking and gambling and conducted the most scandalous flirtation and at all times the Female element didn’t give a rap about modesty.

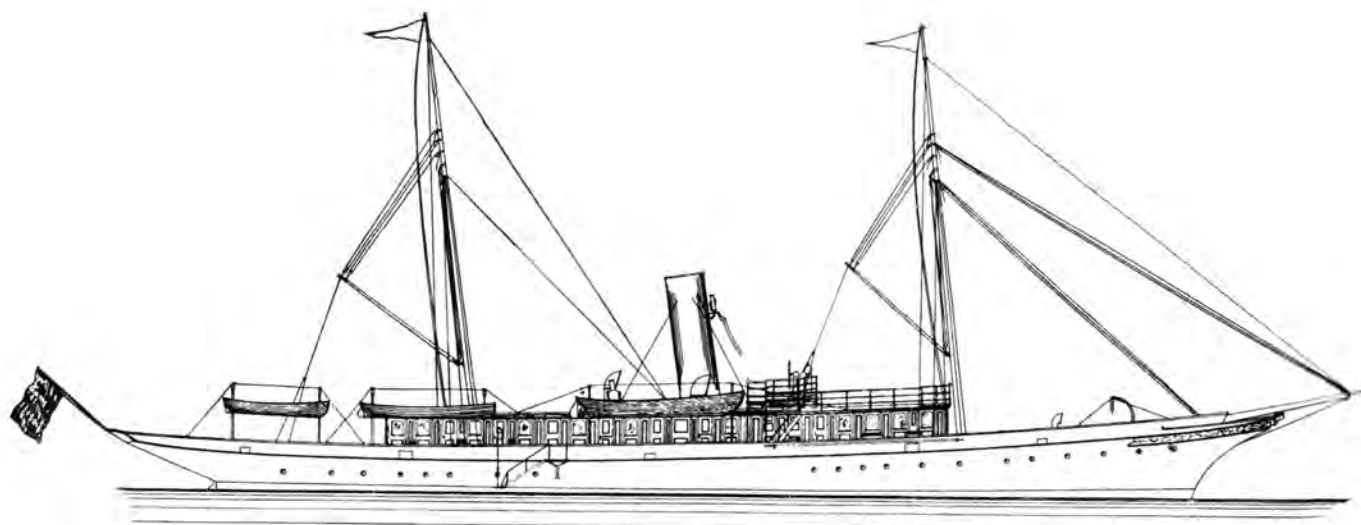
We visited everywhere . . . I was not in love with this cruise and on complaint [by] a young woman, whom I had insulted by refusing her the use of my stateroom, to use in a clandestine love intrigue. I was not in the least disappointed when dismissed in “St Thomas,” with an extra months salary and transportation, which I did not use, as I immediately shipped as First Mate on the American Hermaphrodite Brig “Ellen Hardy.” Bound for “Galveston,” in ballast.



Editor’s Note:

John Bertonccini, the mariner who penned this previously unpublished bit of social criticism, will be familiar to readers of the Winter 2004 *Mains’l Haul* for his reminiscences about winters spent at Herschel Island. Both accounts appear in his unpublished “Biography of a Deepwater Man,” probably written in the 1940s, on loan from the Paul and Linda Kahn Foundation to San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. We are grateful for the opportunity to print this excerpt.

Photo courtesy San Francisco Maritime NHP

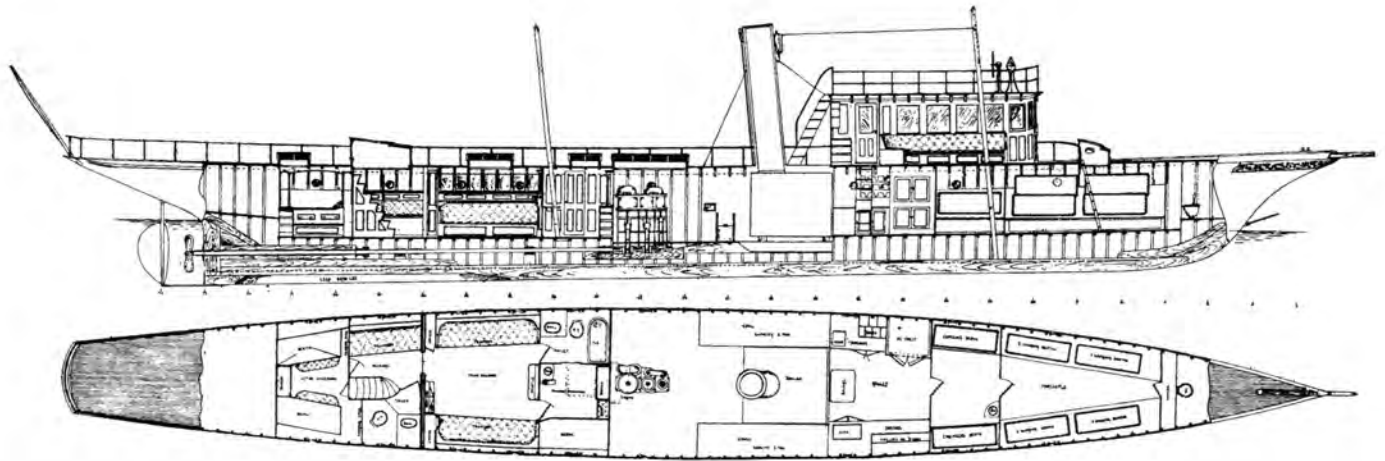


These three American-built yachts are comparable in size to the 140' *Medea*, and launched within a few years of her. The 170' *Dreamer* of 1899 was a very advanced design. Unlike her Scottish cousin, she featured a continuous deckhouse and a triple-expansion engine.

Author's coll.

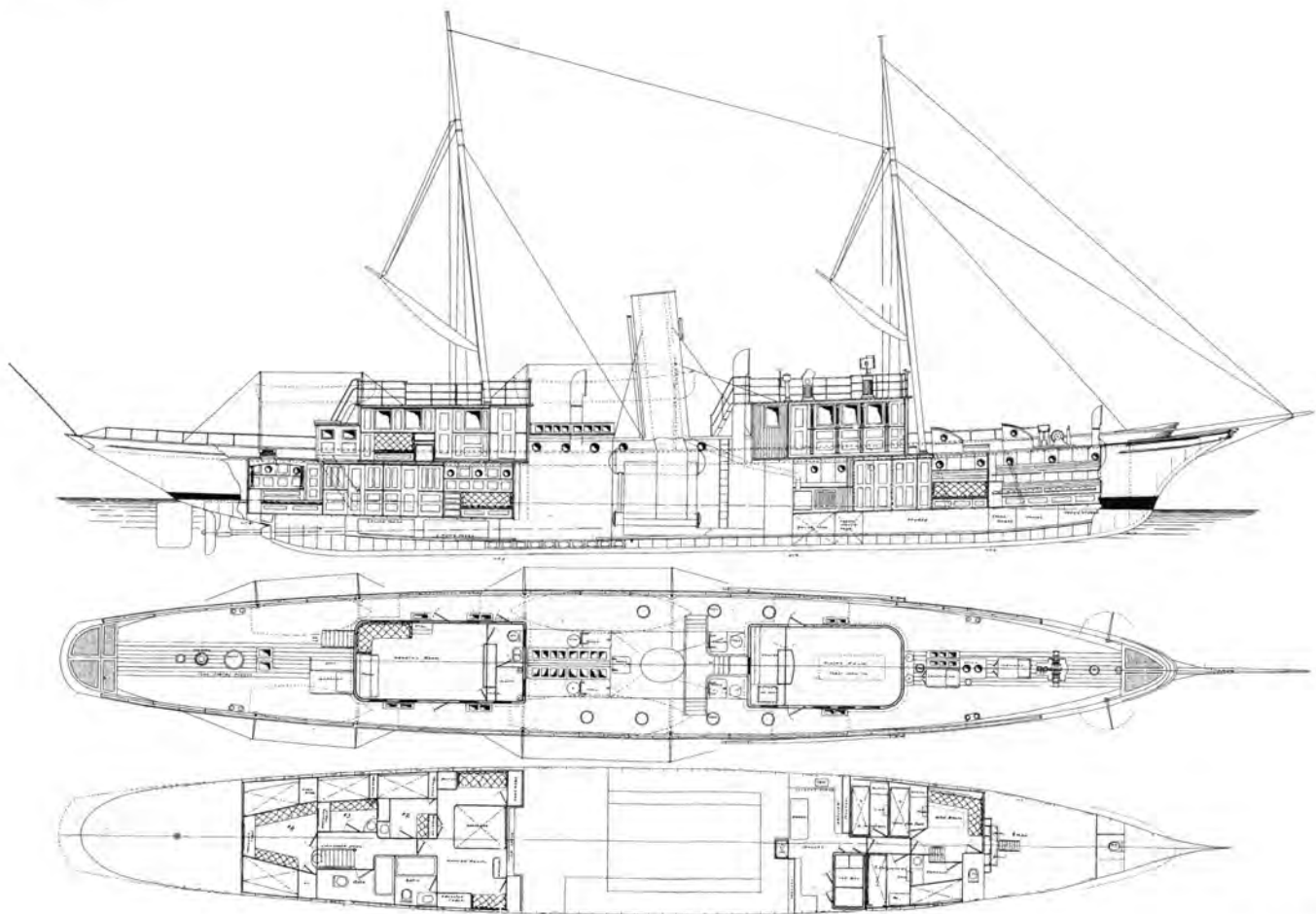
Steam lost favor for a variety of reasons. Although extremely quiet and rarely prone to mechanical breakdowns, steam engines suffered from three significant drawbacks. First, with their attendant boilers, they occupied a large amount of space, much more so than gasoline or diesel engines. Today, to stand in the extant engine room of *Nablin* is to experience sheer awe. The towering, three-deck-high space is cathedral-like in its proportions, and occupies the best part of this yacht—where the beam is at its maximum, and where rolling and pitching is least evident. Second, unlike internal combustion engines that could be turned on with the flick of a switch and didn't require much attention while underway, it took time to get steam up, and the power plant required careful, constant monitoring. Lastly, steam engines require larger crews than gas or diesel-engined yachts, and thus were more costly to operate. In the period of relative prosperity after the First World War, it became harder simply to find and keep good men for the yachting season—a variation on the complaint that “you can't get good help nowadays” that was frequently voiced on large estates during this period. Nor did serving aboard a yacht seem much to brag about. In the maritime pecking order, men who worked on cargo vessels felt superior to those aboard passenger liners; each felt above yacht crews, or “ice cream sailors,” as they called them. And life in a yacht's cramped foc'sle was not as glamorous as elsewhere aboard: when *Delphine* dropped anchor, one sailor recalled, the rush of heavy chain thundering through the hawsepipes sounded like “the world was coming to an end.”¹⁹ Some officers built close working relationships with owners: the captain of the 1903 *Venetia* worked twenty-two years for John D. Spreckels, and *Venetia*'s chief engineer served sixteen years, the employment of both terminating only with the owner's death.²⁰ On the other hand, officers aboard Alfred du Pont's yachts never stayed for long.

While steam was effectively replaced by gasoline and diesel engines during the 1920s, ever more tonnage was launched during the decade, reaching a fever pitch by 1929—the golden age of motor yachts.²¹ As with



The 1900 *Valda*, above, was less advanced than *Medea* or *Dreamer* in design, with her short, slender stack, and stumpy single cabin. At 116', she was substantially smaller than either, but her triple-expansion engine made her easily capable of 13 knots. Like the 140-foot 1903 *Calumet* (the same length as *Medea*), below, *Valda* and *Medea* steered from old-fashioned open pilot stations.

Author's coll.



A Sunken Edwardian Treasure



An additional survivor—if that is the correct term—of the age of steam yachting is the 195-foot, Cox & King-designed *Gunilda*, perhaps the most intact and original steam yacht in the world. Her Ramage & Ferguson engine is totally original, as is every century-old hemp line, piece of teak, shred of canvas, and interior fitting. Indeed, even her curtains, upholstery, and sheet music on the upright piano are all eerily well-preserved. She is, however, under almost three hundred feet of water in Lake Superior, perfectly preserved by the cold, deep, fresh water. In a classic moment of steam yachtsman's hubris, she sank in 1911 when her owner, an oil investor, decided not to pay for the services of a pilot and took the helm himself.

—Ross MacTaggart



12

steam yachts, this brief flowering was eclipsed when the Great Depression cast its shadow across the world's economy and industry.

These events, coupled with the advent of the automobile and good roads, U.S. income taxes (a 1914 creation), and the rise of air travel, brought an end to a century of grand steam and motor yachts. Once the crippling effects of the Depression lifted, and with the world scarred by a horrific war, Western civilization was fundamentally different. Six decades would pass before a resurgence of very large yachts occurred, a boom fueled, in part, by the tastes of the new robber barons of the Computer Age. None of these new behemoths are powered by steam; it is the diesel age.

Thus, it is remarkable that *Medea* survives. Like a species on the verge of extinction, her "herd" has been reduced from thousands to a pitiful few. There is the 100-foot *Ena* in Australia; the 130-foot *Cangarda* on the East Coast (slated for restoration); the 258-foot *Delphine* in Belgium (recently lavishly restored); and the magnificent 300-foot *Nablin* in Britain (awaiting restoration).²² For these survivors and others, public appreciation is slowly dawning, but for most, their moment in the sun passed nearly a century ago, and on them, the sun has set forever.

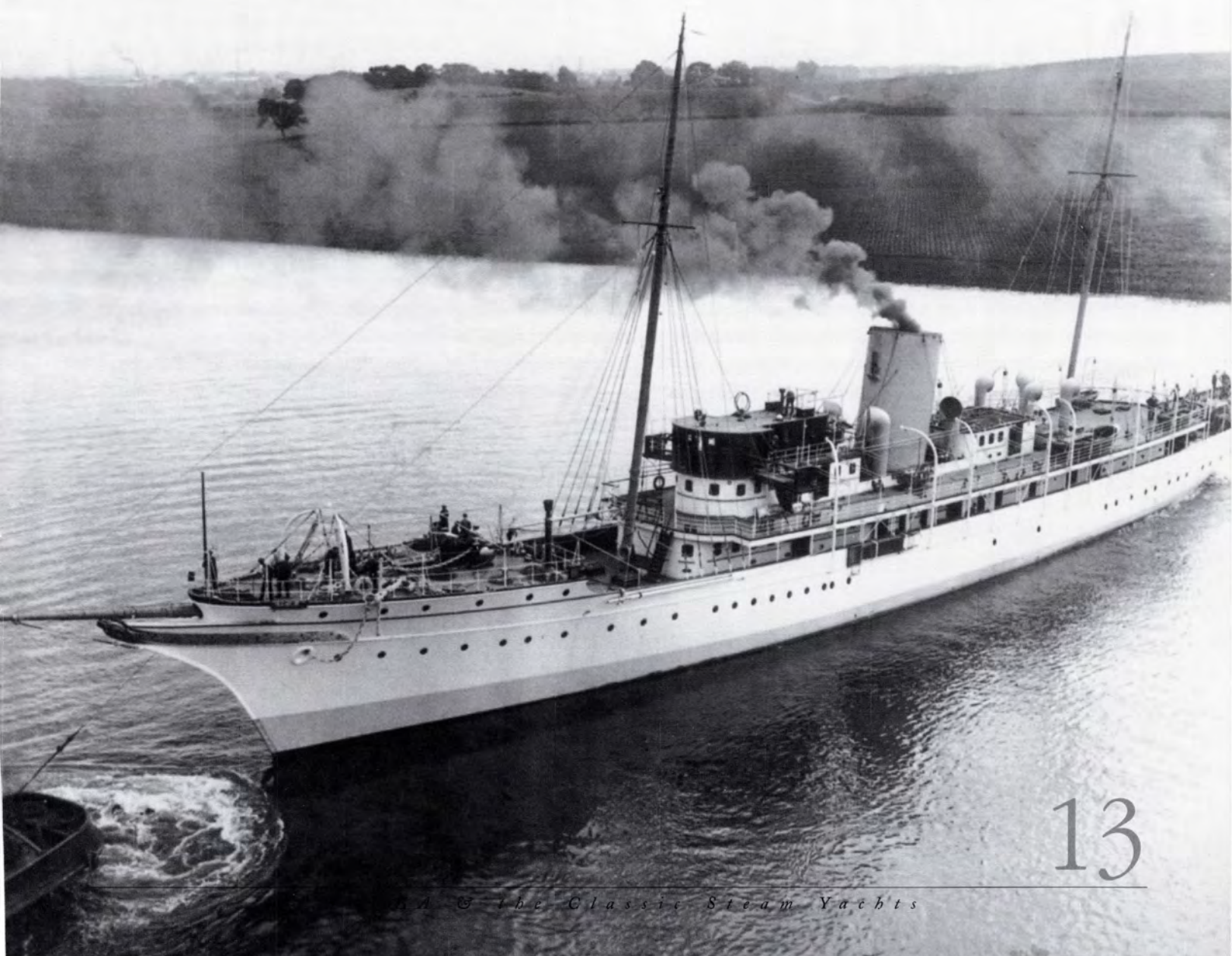
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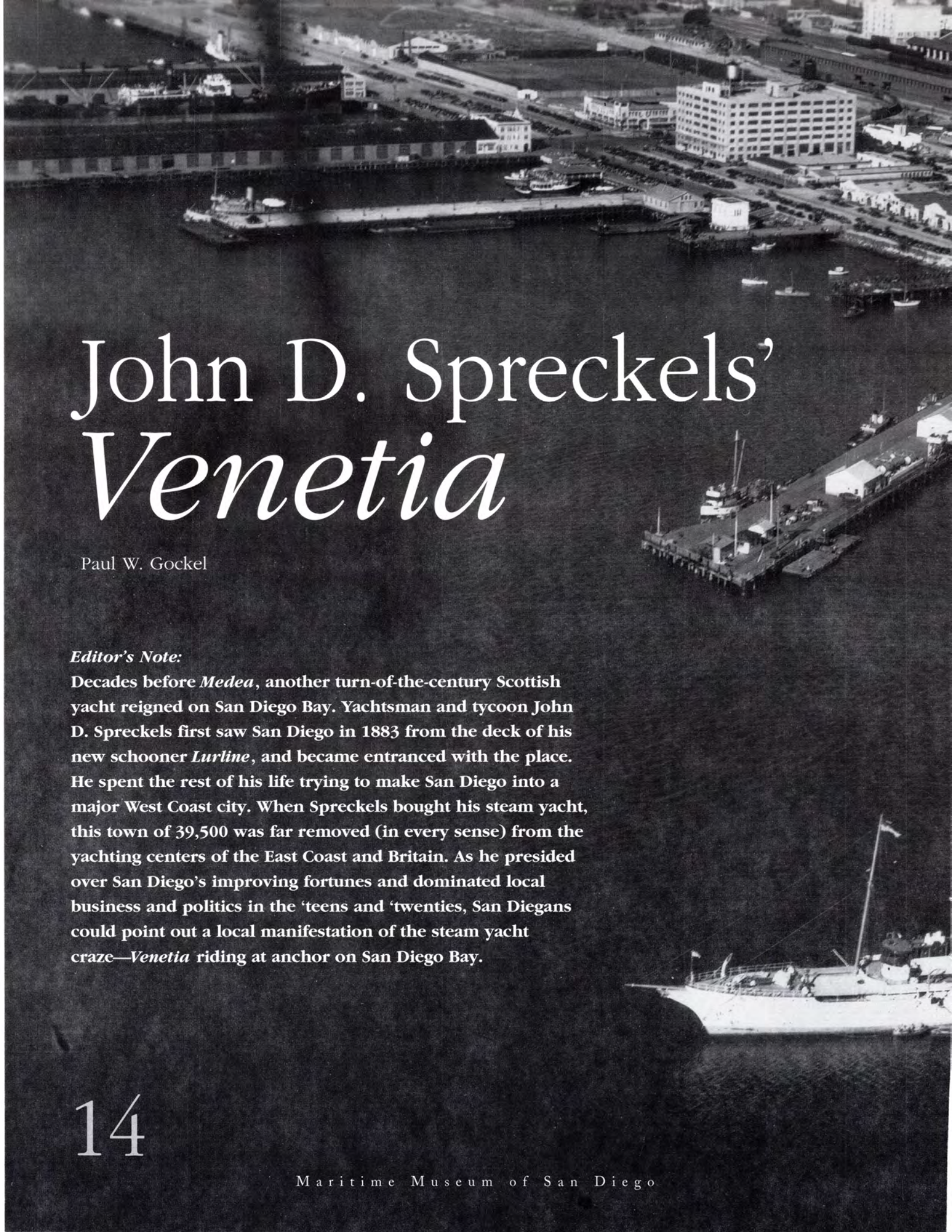
- 1 Erik Hofman, *The Steam Yachts: An Era of Elegance*, (London: Nautical Publishing Co., 1970), 3.
- 2 *Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping. Yacht Register* (Lloyd's: London, 1896).
- 3 On commuter yachts, see C. Philip Moore, *Yachts in a Hurry: An Illustrated History of the Great Commuter Yachts* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994).
- 4 John, Duke of Bedford, ed., *The Flying Duchess: The Diaries and Letters of Mary, Duchess of Bedford* (London: MacDonald & Co., 1968), 38.
- 5 Hofman, *The Steam Yachts*, 3.
- 6 Alfred I. du Pont papers, Washington and Lee University.
- 7 Hofman, *The Steam Yachts*, 3; *Lloyd's 1896 Yacht Register*. Of the 637 British-built steam yachts listed, most were built in Scotland, and many were built at Cowes, on the Isle of Wight. Only vessels over 50' long are included in these statistics. It appears that Hofman included only vessels longer than 75'.
- 8 The last statistic is derived from the *New York Yacht Club 1902, Official Yearbook, Volume I*. A minority of these vessels might be gas- or naphtha-engined, and under 50'. The degree to which the concentration of wealth in New York made it the center of American steam yachting is suggested by the fact that in 1896 *Lloyd's* listed a total of 323 American-built steam yachts, of which the New York Yacht Club claimed 246. (Note, however, that the New York list includes smaller vessels than the statistic compiled from *Lloyd's*.)
- 9 *Lloyd's Register*, 1896.
- 10 Jean Strouse, *Morgan: American Financier* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2000), notes many of his mistresses, several of whom were aboard *Corsair* for long voyages.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Baron Charles Feversham, *The Great Yachts* (New York: Putnams, 1970), 163.
- 13 *Savarona*, built by Blohm & Voss to designs by Gibbs & Cox, was the last grand private steam yacht built in Germany. She still exists, though her steam turbines were replaced by diesels in the 1990s. Her size (and expense) was finally eclipsed in 2003 by the 413' *Octopus* of Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen.
- 14 *The Yachting Monthly* (October 1906): 453.
- 15 Montague Graham-White, *At the Wheel Ashore and Afloat* (London: G. T. Foulis, n.d. [1934]), 397.
- 16 *Lloyd's Register of American Yachts* (London: Lloyd's, 1914). Many of these 290 yachts were British-built. Only vessels over 50' long are included in this figure. four of the yachts were over 300'; six were 275'-300'; seven were 250'-275'; five were 226'-250'; 14 were 200'-225'; 64 were 150'-200'; 64 were 125'-150'; 53 were 100'-125'; 73 (the most) were 75'-100' long.

- 17 *Lloyd's Register of American Yachts* (London: Lloyd's, 1921). Of these 147 yachts, three were over 300' long; three were 275'-300'; four were 250'-275'; three were 225'-250'; seven were 200'-225'; 20 were 175'-200'; 12 were 150'-175'; 39 (the most) were 125'-150'; 23 were 100'-125'; and 33 were 75'-100' long.
- 18 The most famous post-WWII private steam yacht is *Christina*, a 325' 1943 Canadian frigate lavishly rebuilt by Aristotle Onassis in 1954. She has been recently rebuilt, with her engines replaced by diesels. The 412' *Britannia* is the most celebrated postwar royal yacht.
- 19 Jay Ottinger, *The Steam Yacht Delphine, and Other Stories* (Sea Level, NC: Sailor's Snug Harbor, 1994), 19, 26.
- 20 *Venetia* Papers, South Street Seaport Museum Library, New York.
- 21 Even during steam's heyday, smaller yachts—50'-140'—were more likely to have gasoline engines, and a minority of post-WWI yachts were diesel-powered. The first diesel yacht was apparently the aptly-named *Pioneer*, launched in 1914 to designs by Charles E. Nicholson.
- 22 The last decade has witnessed restorations of several classic power yachts, but in the process the original grace and beauty of some has been lost. The Cox & Stevens-designed *Talitha G.* (ex *Reveler*) is a notable example, as is the ongoing rebuild of the famed commuter *Cigarette*.

Dwarfing *Medea* by 160', the 1930 *Nablin* survives today in Britain. Built for a jute millionairess named Lady Yule, this late steam yacht served one of the essential functions of its kind, as a site for romantic intrigue; Edward VIII romanced Wallis Simpson on board.

Courtesy University of Glasgow



An aerial photograph of San Diego Bay. In the foreground, the white steam yacht Venetia is at anchor. In the background, the city of San Diego is visible, including the waterfront, piers, and various buildings. The water is dark, and the sky is light.

John D. Spreckels' *Venetia*

Paul W. Gockel

Editor's Note:

Decades before *Medea*, another turn-of-the-century Scottish yacht reigned on San Diego Bay. Yachtsman and tycoon John D. Spreckels first saw San Diego in 1883 from the deck of his new schooner *Lurline*, and became entranced with the place. He spent the rest of his life trying to make San Diego into a major West Coast city. When Spreckels bought his steam yacht, this town of 39,500 was far removed (in every sense) from the yachting centers of the East Coast and Britain. As he presided over San Diego's improving fortunes and dominated local business and politics in the 'teens and 'twenties, San Diegans could point out a local manifestation of the steam yacht craze—*Venetia* riding at anchor on San Diego Bay.



Like a huge white swan, *Venetia* floats off San Diego's waterfront in the 1920s.

San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.

Paul W. Gockel lives in Port Carling, Ontario, where he builds and restores small wooden boats, and where he is master of his own steam yacht, *Seraph*. This article represents only the *hors d'oeuvre* of a coming yachtman's feast: he has completed a book-length manuscript about the story of *Venetia* from drafting board to scrapyard, for which he is seeking a publisher.

By the time John D. Spreckels purchased *Venetia* in 1910, she was already seven years old. Designed by Cox & King of London and built by Hawthorn's of Leith, Scotland, she represented the epitome of Edwardian, British-built personal luxury travel at sea. Of *Venetia's* seven owners throughout her sixty-year life, there was no man who put more fuel through her two boilers, more revolutions on her engine, or more sea water past her keel than John Diedrich Spreckels.

Venetia's fifth owner, the Titan of San Francisco, purchased her through Stanley Seaman's New York brokerage. Except for the yacht's extraordinary period of service during the First World War, he kept her until his death in 1926. This great business tycoon, whose interests extended all the way to Hawaii, seems to have been the owner who enjoyed *Venetia* most. He piloted her, entertained and traveled aboard her, and was generally delighted with his 227-foot plaything.

Spreckels purchased *Venetia* a few months after he hosted President E. H. Harriman of the Southern Pacific Railway in his Coronado home, where Spreckels agreed to act as Harriman's agent to construct the San Diego and Arizona Railroad.¹ That Spreckels found the time to abandon his new responsibilities in California and a fledgling branch line railway to go boating for five months suggests that his business acumen was matched by his ability to enjoy himself.

Rather than hire someone to bring his new yacht home to San Francisco from

New York, he did the job himself.² On October 3, 1910, *Venetia* departed New York City for her five-month, 18,000-mile trip to San Francisco. This was not a nonstop endurance run, but an extended vacation cruise for Spreckels and his family. They navigated through the Straits of Magellan—the Panama Canal was yet to be—and endured the tempestuous latitudes known as the Roaring Forties, with frequent stops to take in the sights, along with tons of coal. March 5 found them calling in San Diego, and a few days later, the party arrived in San Francisco.³

This trip was hardly a camping expedition. *Venetia* was a luxury yacht. There were hot- and cold-running showers spread between the six staterooms, elegant meals were served in the dining saloon, and passengers enjoyed ample reading materials in the smoking lounge aft. In the music lounge forward, piano music was supplied by the Weber Pianola or Mr. Spreckels himself. An abundance of servants saw to everyone's comfort. Central steam heat throughout the yacht came in handy as she dipped below the fifty-fifth parallel.

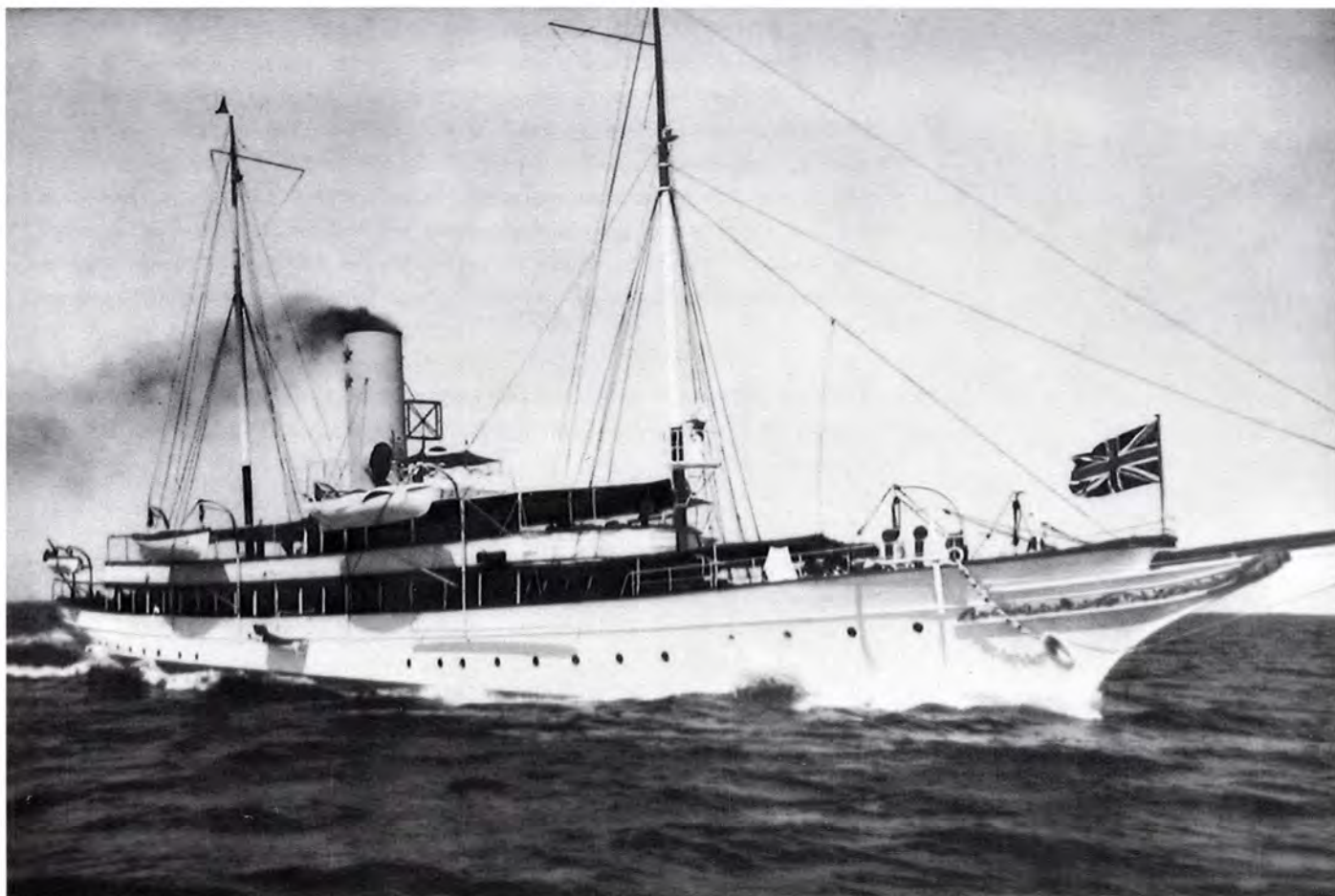
Being a mechanical engineer as well as a licensed deep-water ship's master, Spreckels no doubt enjoyed frequent visits to the engine room, where he could watch the flying cranks of the 1,000 horsepower triple-expansion engine as it propelled his 664-ton yacht toward San Francisco.

Venetia soon had a new captain, drawn from Spreckels' fleet, to oversee her thirty-member crew. Alfred George Thomson had piloted many of Spreckels' commercial vessels over the years. Working his way up through the ranks, Captain Thompson served aboard *Venetia* from 1911 to 1920.

"... to have watched his face as he stood on the *Venetia's* bridge gazing far out to the horizon, or bending thoughtfully over the charts in the chart room, was to have caught at least a glimpse of the real John D., dreamer and doer."

From Austin Adams' 1924 *The Man John D. Spreckels*





One of the first modifications Spreckels made to *Venetia* in San Francisco was to convert her from burning coal to oil. The conversion was completed in February, 1912 by Union Iron Works, of San Francisco.⁴ This action may have been prompted by Spreckels' recollection that his commercial shipping fleet had once been held ransom in Sydney, Australia by a mutiny of firemen.⁵ Furthermore, West Coast oil in California was cheaper than Pennsylvania soft coal.

The new 1,200-barrel oil tanks greatly extended *Venetia's* cruising radius. Dahl mechanical oil burners—simple, efficient and particularly suited to the heavy California oils—were installed in the doors of each boiler. Gone were the days of the “black gang” shoveling heavy coal into *Venetia's* four gaping furnaces. Though the oil burners were noisier than coal, among the advantages of oil were fewer and cleaner refueling stops, without clouds of all-enveloping black dust.

Once *Venetia* was converted, Spreckels was apparently anxious to try her out. Another cruise, naturally, was in order. After putting his California business affairs in order, the yachtsman made a one-month voyage to Alaska in July, 1912.⁶ By now, only two years after his purchase, Spreckels had sailed nearly the entire length of the Americas. In those two years, *Venetia* probably logged more nautical miles than in her nine years under previous owners. Spreckels was not one to sit at cocktail parties, waiting to be invited and admired. He went yachting.

The man referred to as “The Sugar King” had enormous land holdings in Hawaii, the site of his sugar plantations and refining facilities. Oddly, he had seldom travelled to Hawaii, given his constant business affairs in California, and had last visited the islands in 1876.

“Skipper Spreckels was happy: he now had a yacht large enough to go wherever he had a fancy to go, comfortable and luxurious enough to entertain his chosen friends in his own big-hearted way,” according to Austin Adams, his fawning biographer. Adams' high opinion of Spreckels was not harmed by his having been a guest on *Venetia* himself.

Venetia as a British yacht; courtesy of the author

On August 5, 1915, *Venetia* departed San Diego. Eight days later, with his wife Lilly, his family, and guests, the sugar tycoon returned to Hawaii for the first time in almost forty years, to much fanfare. Local newspapers were agog at the floating mansion of “the great capitalist,” anchored in Hilo harbor, where “she attracted much attention on account of her trim lines.”⁷ Spreckels boasted that the entire trip to Hawaii was made using only one of *Venetia*’s two boilers. The party took motor trips around the island to sightsee and visit his holdings. Some nights were spent in hotels, while others were spent aboard. The Spreckels party finally left the Hawaiian Islands on August 30, arriving back in San Diego at night on September 6, 1915.

Spreckels did the balance of his prewar cruising between San Francisco and San Diego. As Spreckels’ biographer noted, sailing refreshed him and offered “a way of escape from worries and a renewal of hope and courage and vision.”⁸ This five-hundred-mile, two-day passage undoubtedly gave Spreckels refreshment before he plunged back into business affairs.

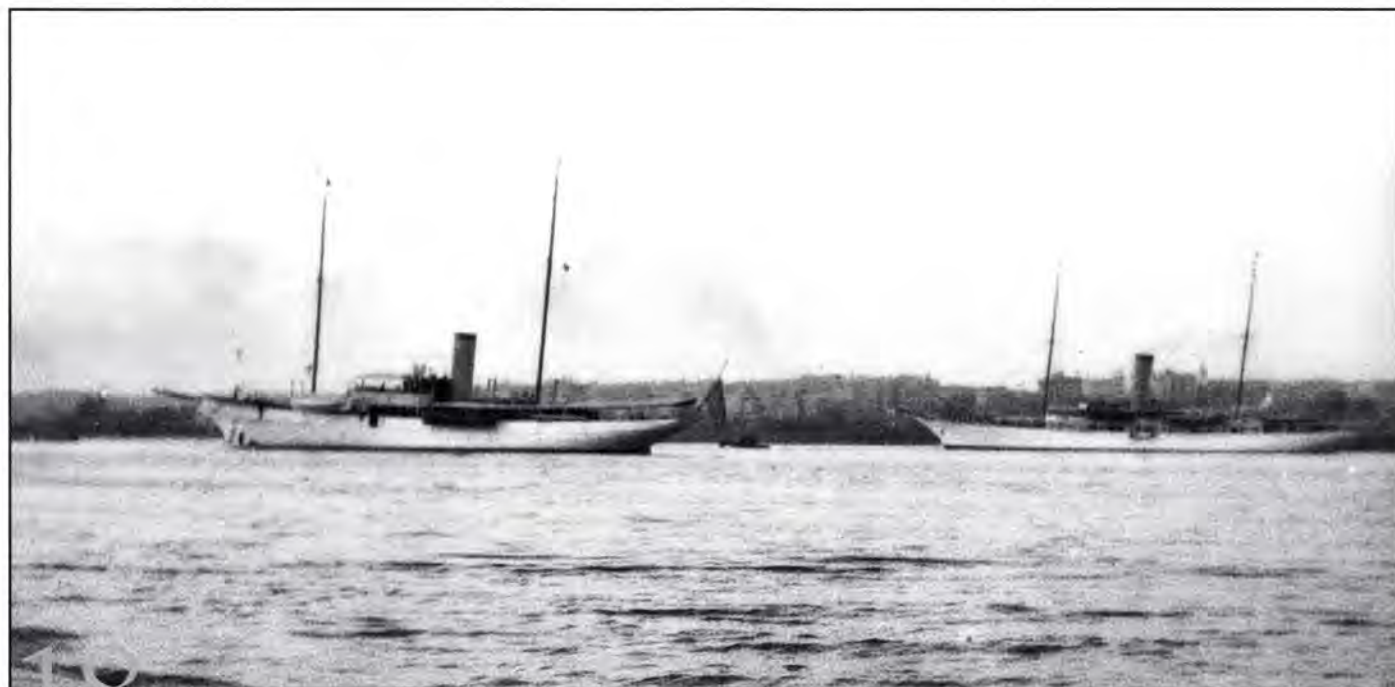
Spreckels voluntarily turned *Venetia* over to the U.S. Navy in 1917. After eighteen months protecting merchant ships in the Mediterranean, logging almost 55,000 miles, weathering huge seas, dodging torpedoes and sinking two U-boats, U.S.S. *Venetia* was returned to her owner at the close of hostilities. Spreckels was awarded a check for \$76,331.83 to restore his beloved yacht for peacetime use.⁹

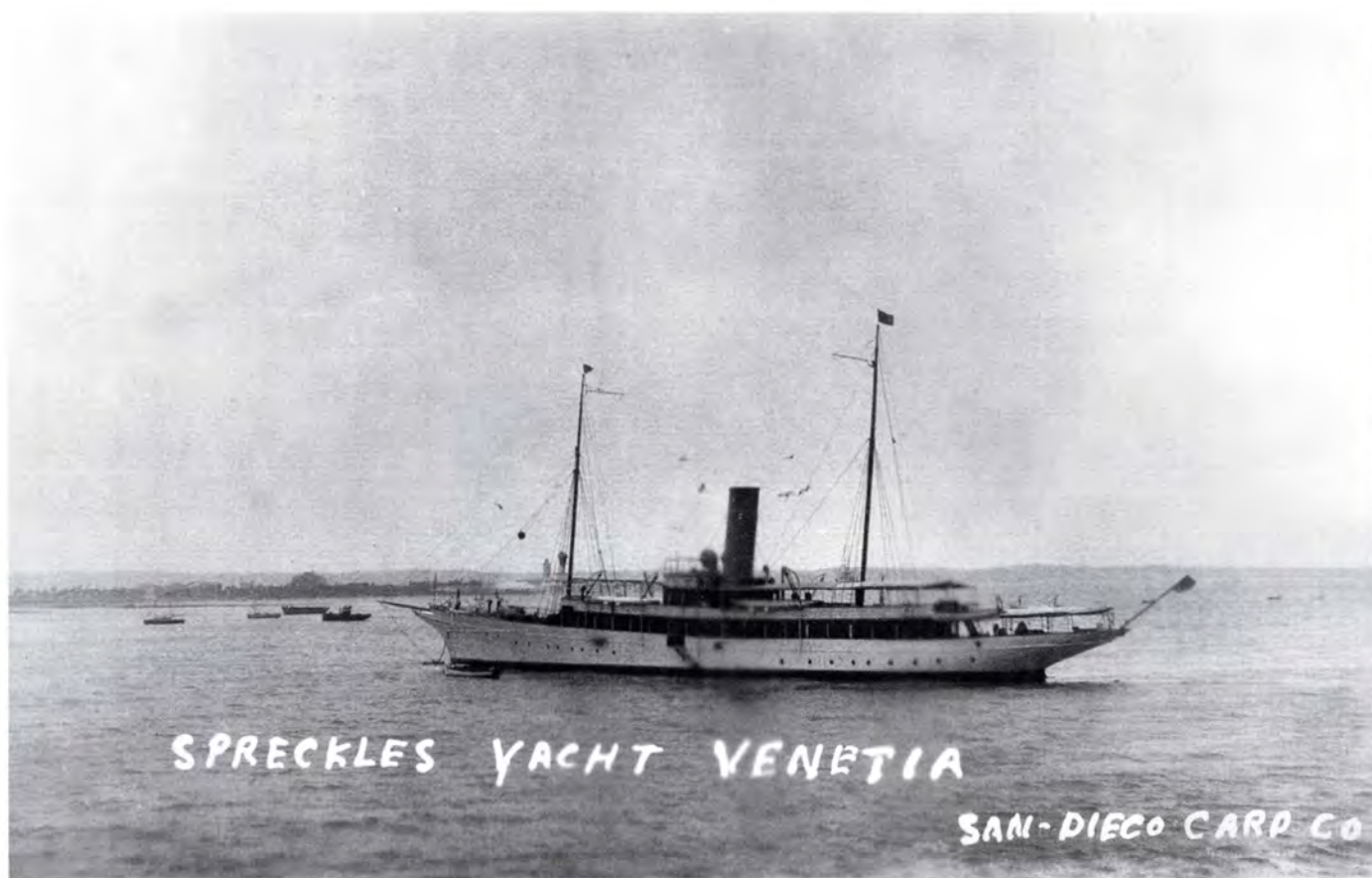
Completely refurbished, with her lavish interiors and possessions replaced, Spreckels used her as his pleasure yacht for the rest of his life. He was fortunate. Few pleasure steamers returned after the war. Ensign David V. Nicolini of the warship U.S.S. *Venetia* was now her master after her return to Spreckels’ service, and remained so up to the time of Spreckels’ death in 1926.

In May 1924, Spreckels, his biographer, the Reverend Austin Adams, and friends departed San Diego for a three-month cruise to New York and other Atlantic ports via the Panama Canal. It was also aboard this cruise that word came to John D. that his close friend, ally, and brother, Adolph B. Spreckels, had died. J. D. Spreckels disembarked *Venetia* in Miami and returned to California by train, leaving his guests to finish the cruise back to California without him.

“Ever since he bought her he has sailed from one desk to the other every two or three weeks; and it has been those two days of joyous relaxation at sea between the time of laying down one heavy burden at San Diego and taking up the other at San Francisco, that has saved him from breaking down under the load.”

Quote from Adams’ biography; below, oilman Edward Doheny’s Casiana with Venetia, MMSD P468





The cost of keeping and operating such a yacht was astronomical. Every year Spreckels used *Venetia*, the recorded annual costs for fuel, insurance, repairs, wages, uniforms, fresh water, food, and liquor totaled close to the \$24,000 mark.¹⁰ The last recorded cruise Spreckels took aboard *Venetia* was a voyage to San Pedro on February 27, 1926. A few months later, Captain Nicolini recorded in the yacht's log that "John D. Spreckels, owner of this steam yacht died in Coronado June 9th, 1926." *Venetia* was put up for sale and was never again owned by an American.

Spreckels' ownership of the *Venetia* represented only one chapter in the career of a long-lived luxury steam yacht. Few big steam yachts lasted so far into the twentieth century. But his ownership was exemplary. Spreckels lived his yachting life to the fullest. In April of 1928, his former yacht once again departed California, this time forever. As she turned another page in her log book, *Venetia* began thirty more years of steaming as a pleasure yacht, now far from the California coast.

After nearly sixty years afloat, including service in the Royal Canadian Navy, cruising the Great Lakes and eventually sitting idle for a number of years, *Venetia's* time came. In November, 1963, she was towed to a small, family-owned shipyard in Port Maitland, Ontario, set ablaze, and cut up for scrap. A few artifacts were saved. Today, her ten-foot-diameter polished bronze propeller and steel rudder lie in the shipyard's rock garden, far from San Diego Bay, whose waters they had once plied.

San Diegans proudly pointed out Spreckels' yacht to others—even if her owner frequently had to endure his name being misspelled.

PC2858 MMSD Postcard Coll.



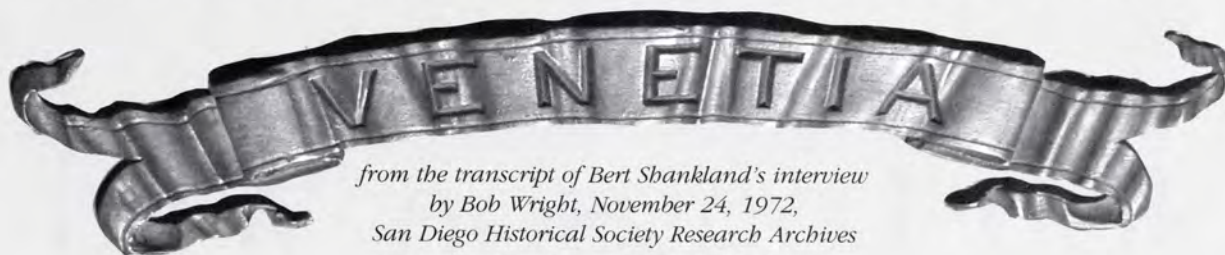
Tying up near the foot of Broadway,
the elegant yacht draws a crowd.

MMSD P466

NOTES

- 1 Austin Adams, *The Man John D. Spreckels* (San Diego: Frye & Smith, 1924), 270.
- 2 *New York Times*, 30 September 1910. He was assisted by several capable seamen, including his broker, Stanley Seaman.
- 3 Log book, *Venetia*, March 1911, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park (hereafter SFMNHP).
- 4 "Fuel Oil Tanks for S.Y. 'Venetia'," October 1911, Sheet 13548, Union Iron Works Coll., SFMNHP.
- 5 The mutiny is described in Adams, *The Man John D. Spreckels*, 131.
- 6 See *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, 6 July 1912, p. 8.
- 7 "J. D. Spreckels After Many Years is Island Visitor," *The Hilo Tribune*, 17 August 1915, p. 6. See also *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 18 August 1915, p. 7.
- 8 Adams, *The Man John D. Spreckels*, 148.
- 9 General Correspondence 1916-1925, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. Record group 19, file 1502 A 199. On her war service, see Clay M. Greene, *Venetia: Avenger of the Lusitania* (San Diego: privately printed, 1919). The book incorrectly asserts that *Venetia* sank the U-boat that had torpedoed the *Lusitania*.
- 10 Account ledgers of John D. Spreckels vol. 17, The Bancroft Library, Berkeley. For data on the ship's career, see her logs at SFMNHP.

Living “High on the Hog” at \$35 Per Month: A Deckhand’s Memories of



*from the transcript of Bert Shankland's interview
by Bob Wright, November 24, 1972,
San Diego Historical Society Research Archives*

In 1913 . . . I was wandering around and I went over to Coronado. I saw a beautiful little steam yacht lying over there. I didn't know who it belonged to. It turned out that it was the *Venetia* and it belonged to Spreckels. I was looking down at it while she was laying right near the pier at the ferry landing. She was beautifully maintained and a fellow came out and asked, “You looking for the skipper?” “No,” I said, “I was just looking it over.” And he said, “You looking for a job? I think the mate wants to get a deck hand.” . . . so I went right aboard and the mate talked to me for a while and then took me to the first mate, and he hired me on the spot. I stayed aboard three months. We made a couple of trips to San Francisco and went out to San Pedro.

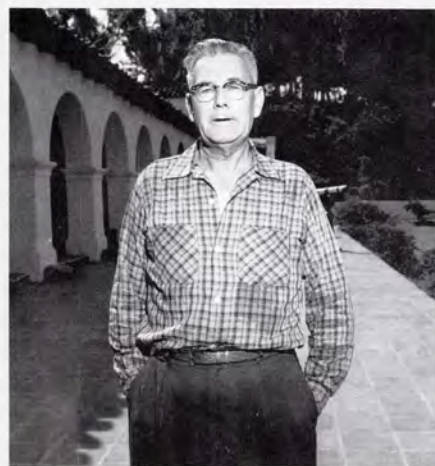
One episode that occurred on the *Venetia*: we took [Josephus] Daniels to San Pedro—he was Secretary of the Navy—he was an interesting kind of a guy, just like a farmer. Spreckels and Daniels were very good friends; Spreckels was acquainted with all of the Navy personnel; like Bill Kettner, for example, and liked to have them aboard. He'd like to have them go out fishing and they were always playing jokes on each other; real good friends.

[Spreckels] talked to the crew. He was very friendly. So was Bill Kettner, the congressman. But when a party was aboard there, the deck hands were not allowed back on the fantail. We stayed forward. We had our quarters in the foc'sle and we stayed there. We got on with the steward, John . . . [who] always provided us with the gossip and also the drinks, because the liquor flowed freely up there and if they didn't kill a whole bottle of wine, why he'd bring it up to the foc'sle and give it to us. We lived pretty “high on the hog” during the times that a party was on board.

He had a French chef aboard there, a wonderful cook, and when Spreckels had guests aboard he really put on a spread. This fellow could *carve*. For example, one time he carved a big eagle out of a cake of ice. Another thing that he did was make a basket of potatoes—like a woven basket—fill that with potato chips and dip the whole thing in grease—and when he set it on the table the basket was eighteen inches long, made entirely of potatoes. It was a beautiful thing. . . . we used to get meals from him, too. Johnny would always provide the foc'sle with good meals. . . .

[We] used to call San Diego a “one-man town,” as you know, and he was a wonderful man, this John D. Spreckels. I thought he was; I admired him very much. Certainly, his diplomacy as far as the Navy was concerned—any time a Navy official came to town he was entertained on board the *Venetia*: take him out for a fishing trip—have good dinners out there—their wives were entertained royally. His favorite spot was to go out around the Coronado Islands for a fishing trip.

As I say, he liked to play jokes. One day after they had had a meal—and Johnny told us this—he came up and Kettner was sitting in one of the big wicker chairs on the fantail and nodding, and was just about half asleep. He had a fishing rod in his hands as he had been fishing out there, and he just dozed off. Spreckels called one of the crewmen who was a good swimmer and he said, “I want you to get a can of sardines and some way or other hook it onto Mr. Kettner's line.” So he did and Mr. Spreckels went out there and said, “Hey, Bill—I think you've got a fish!” He woke up, he reeled it in—and he looked at that can of sardines with astonishment—and he was half asleep, anyway. Then he began to laugh, and they had a big laugh over this thing. . . . (Now, I did not see this, but Johnny told us a few minutes after it happened, so we thought it was quite a joke, too.)



Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels, Mayor Louis Wilde, and Congressman Bill Kettner all knew Spreckels' hospitality—and sense of humor.

Courtesy National Archives; San Diego Historical Society Photo Coll., top

Medea's “Wild” Years: My Father, Job Longson Wild

Dr. Bidi M. Wild Evans

Editor's Note:

In these charming reminiscences and family photos, the yacht *Medea* appears in a “supporting role” as part of the history of the author's English family, the Wilds. Bidi Evans, who spent girlhood holidays aboard *Medea*, has provided us with something special: rather than a typical “boat biography,” here we get to see this yacht in her real context, as a part of a wealthy family's life. *Medea's* history in the 1930s also gives us a glimpse of larger changes happening to the social fabric of Britain at the same time. Before the First World War, British steam yachts were playthings of the titled aristocracy. (*Medea*, for example, was built to take a Scottish lord hunting.) The author's father, however, was a new kind of yachtsman: a “self-made” businessman for whom a yacht helped symbolize his rise in the world. Happily, his daughter's memoir makes clear that *Medea* soon became something more special than a mere status symbol for him.



Job Longson Wild, my father, owned the yacht *Medea* longer than any other private individual. He was born on the day after Christmas, 1884, in Stalybridge, a town east of Manchester in the industrial northwest of England. His father Elias had been adopted by his elder sister and her husband, a former agricultural laborer named Job Longson. Elias's adoptive father had gone into business supplying farms with lime, used as a dressing for the acidic fields. Elias grew up to be a very good businessman and expanded the firm to become a builders' merchant. His company, Elias Wild & Sons, still exists, with one of Elias' great-grandsons in charge.

Elias fell in love with a neighbor, Sarah Harriet Taylor, a cotton spinner. The couple married just five months before Job was born. The family was scandalized, in part because Sarah, who worked in

the mill, was thought to be his social inferior. Elias' adoptive father Job Longson, however, supported the couple, and when the baby was born, Elias called him Job Longson Wild.

Three sisters and a brother followed Job into the world. The family was not rich, but Elias was able to afford a comfortable home and a good education for his children. He continued to prosper throughout his life, ending up as a magistrate. Elias moved the family from Stalybridge to a large house at Saddleworth in the Pennine hills.

Both Elias and Job were strong-willed, and so found themselves at loggerheads from the start. The problem was fueled initially by Job's conspicuous lack of academic ability, which left his teachers in some doubt as to his intelligence. In his later years he certainly showed no lack of intelligence, but had difficulty in writing letters or spelling quite simple words. It seems likely that he was dyslexic, a condition that has dogged several of his descendants. As a result of this, whilst his younger brother George was sent to a prestigious grammar school, Job went into the business to learn how to be a builders' merchant like his father, leaving school at the minimum age of thirteen. George later joined the company, and when both sons were established in the firm, Elias retired.

"Good things come in small packages" was a favorite saying of my determined, dynamic father, who grew to be only five feet four inches tall. He was always ambitious and liked to be the first to have new technological advances, owning, for example, the first motor car in Stalybridge. This delight in the new remained with him all his life; he was never satisfied with what everyone else had, but had to be different. Another characteristic remark of



It would be much easier to see through those binoculars if daughter Bidi didn't get in the way! At left, a more relaxed businessman contemplates the newspaper in his wicker chair on *Medea's* bridge.

MMSD P12514 and P13435; courtesy of the author



Bidi Evans lives in Surrey in the pretty village of Limpsfield, south of London. She trained as a doctor in Cambridge shortly after the war, and finished her studies in London. She married Geoffrey Evans, an architect, and has four children. A specialist in clinical neurophysiology, she ran a department in a major London hospital by the time she retired at age 70. Today, a large garden ("our chief amusement nowadays") and a brood of grandchildren keep her and Geoffrey busy. Until August, 2004, the grown-up girl in these photos had not stepped aboard *Medea* for almost half a century.

this driven businessman was, "You need to be a rebel to get on in the world." Likewise, Job was fond of saying that he was a "bastard," although this was not actually true.

Job's youngest sister was training as a schoolteacher, as was Hilda Edwards, the younger daughter of the proprietor of a brass foundry in nearby Duckinfield. As a result the families met and Job married the elder Edwards daughter, Lydia. The couple soon had two children, Marjorie and Roger. Job was becoming increasingly discontented with his life and prospects, however, and found his brother no easier to get on with than his father had been. He managed to persuade Elias to support him in setting up a London office for the company. Father and son found it easier to get along when they were apart, and Job would often consult Elias on business matters.

Father arrived in London shortly before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 and set up an office, which soon moved to substantial premises at 180 Piccadilly. He stayed there until

after the Second World War, running a growing group of companies from this central site. The outbreak of war provided great possibilities in the construction industry for an eager young man "on the make." Roads, army camps, harbour improvements and drainage schemes were urgently needed. Job, who for the rest of his business life was always known as JLW, immediately seized this opportunity and founded his own construction company, J. L. Wild & Co. It was not long before he could afford to move his family to what was then countryside, south of London. He rented a house called Maryhill, which still stands, in the small town of Kenley in Surrey, at the foot of the line of pretty chalk hills called the North Downs.

Not long after they moved, tragedy struck. On holiday in Wales with their children, Lydia suddenly became very ill and died. She was only in her early thirties, and it seems probable that she had a brain tumor, although at the

time her death was a mystery. Left with two young children, Job at once thought of his sister-in-law Hilda Edwards, a handsome and clever woman who was working as a schoolteacher in Duckinfield. She moved down to help with the children, and they married shortly afterwards. Job and Hilda's marriage was looked on askance by the relatives in Stalybridge. The law had only just been changed to make marriage to a deceased wife's sister legal and it still seemed barely respectable. Hilda and Job would have three children: Sonia, Michael, and me. I was very much an "afterthought," being born eight years after Michael.

After the First World War, my father expanded his businesses rapidly. Building on his wartime experience, he specialized in drainage work, although he was prepared to take on anything; he even bought a small chimney sweep's business in Whyteleafe, a town a mile or two from Kenley. Here he also established a builder's supply yard with a small local office. Amongst other staff he engaged a secretary, Mary Elliott, at this time a tall, rather plain girl of about nineteen. She was to play a significant role in the life of the Wild family.

In 1920 the family moved into a large Victorian mansion called Cumberlands, on forty acres of land in Kenley, with a marvelous view over the North Downs and beautiful gardens and woods. There was a water garden, an Italian garden and a tennis court with a summer house. A large kitchen garden supplied the house with vegetables. There were also grapes from a greenhouse, where a large tortoise called Geordy lived under the greenery. There was a stable block for horses and two pigsties. Six indoor servants, three gardeners and a groom for the horses looked after this small estate—not too bad for the academically backward boy from Stalybridge. In fact, however, the money only just stretched to this magnificence, and Mother was often in terrible anxiety about Father's extravagance. He believed



The author, at left, stands in *Medea's* bows alongside the yacht's original varnished wooden bulwarks. Above, Michael Wild found the bridge suitable for shuffleboard—played with a cricket bat.

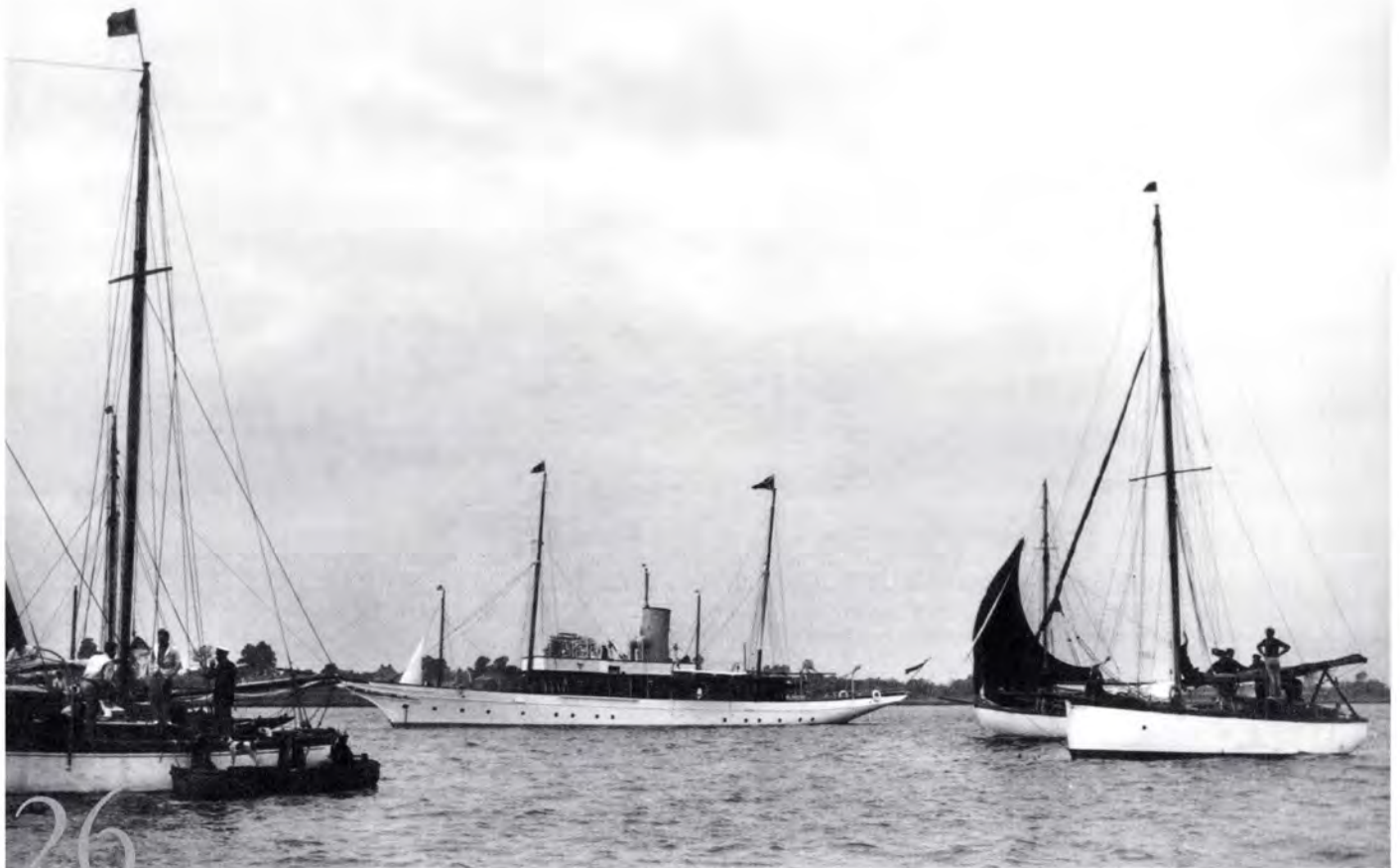
MMSD P12519 and P13436; courtesy of the author

in keeping up a show, sending us to the best schools, and giving endless parties presided over by my mother, who was forced to overcome her natural shyness. All this was at a time when the country was, together with the rest of the world, enduring the Great Depression. Hunger marches protested the low wages and unemployment caused by closure of work places. There were strikes, including the General Strike of 1936, which were ruthlessly broken. It was a charmed life for the rich, but no time to be poor. Many relatives felt the pinch.

My father suffered only one significant business reversal: an unsuccessful effort to complete harbour work in British Guiana (now Guyana) in South America. Job was eventually bought out of his contract and returned home only slightly chastened. As a result of this abortive enterprise he changed the name of his firm to J. B. Edwards and Co., after James Buckley Edwards, one of Hilda's brothers who worked for Job at that period. This company, always known thereafter as JBE, became his main source of wealth and was still active at his death in 1959.

A swan among swans, *Medea* lies in repose in her new home port of Brightlingsea.

MMSD P12510; courtesy of the author

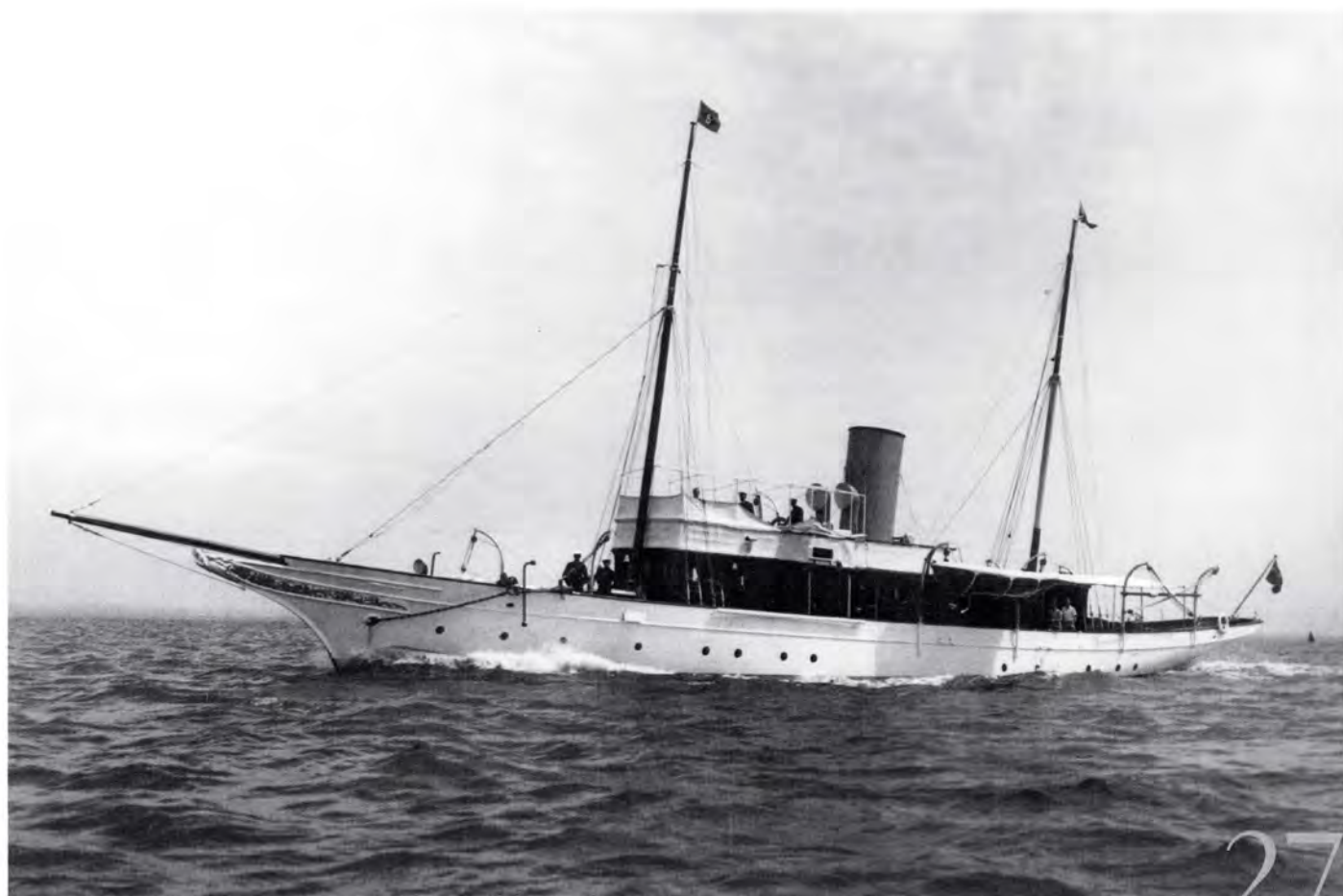


In the early 1930s, my father purchased the eighty-foot-long steam yacht *Sheila*, which had been launched at Cowes in 1904. A steam yacht was a very fashionable possession, and probably Job thought only of the business and entertaining possibilities when he made the purchase. He soon found, however, that he greatly enjoyed the sea and all the things associated with sailing. The family too loved *Sheila*, bringing their friends for holidays in the summer. Each year the yacht was commissioned at Hamble River near Southampton, where she was berthed in the winter. In the summer the first visit was to Cowes for the Royal Regatta and Naval Review. Then, during the summer, *Sheila* sailed down the south coast, stopping at all the suitable harbours. Job could not spend as much time on the yacht as his family did, since he had to attend to business and could come down only for weekends.

Job's enjoyment of the sea grew so great that that he sold *Sheila* and bought a bigger steam yacht, *Medea*, also launched in 1904. She had been built for the Scottish nobleman William Macalister Hall, and had since been purchased back by her builder, Alexander Stephen &

With Job's personal flag at the masthead, *Medea* cuts a sharp figure for a professional yacht photographer's camera off the Isle of Wight. "A lot of rich people's yachting," recalls the author's sister Sonia, "meant having a steam or motor yacht with a crew which took them from place to place. You had to belong to a yacht club, and there was a pecking order with . . . descending order of prestige."

MMSD P12511; courtesy of the author





Sons. In 1934 the Stephen family decided to sell her again. When *Medea* was advertised for sale that summer, Job, accompanied by my half-brother Roger, went up by train to Scotland. A bargain was struck and arrangements were made to bring her south. Job, Roger, Sonia and Michael went up to Glasgow to accompany our family's new yacht on the first part of her trip, in August, 1934.

"We would trawl for about an hour, and then haul up our catch on deck, and open the foot of the net. It was like finding treasure—every sort of bottom fish was there," remembers the author. Guests, deckhands, and Steward John Woolvett watch as the net comes up, about 1936.

MMSD P13438; courtesy of the author

Not only did Job's newfound love of the sea lead him to buy *Medea*, but he bought himself a shipyard to match. The yard, a long-established firm called Aldous Ltd., was at Brightlingsea in Essex on the estuary of the River Colne, north of the mouth of the Thames. Job re-christened it Aldous Successors Ltd., in order to take advantage of a familiar and respected name.

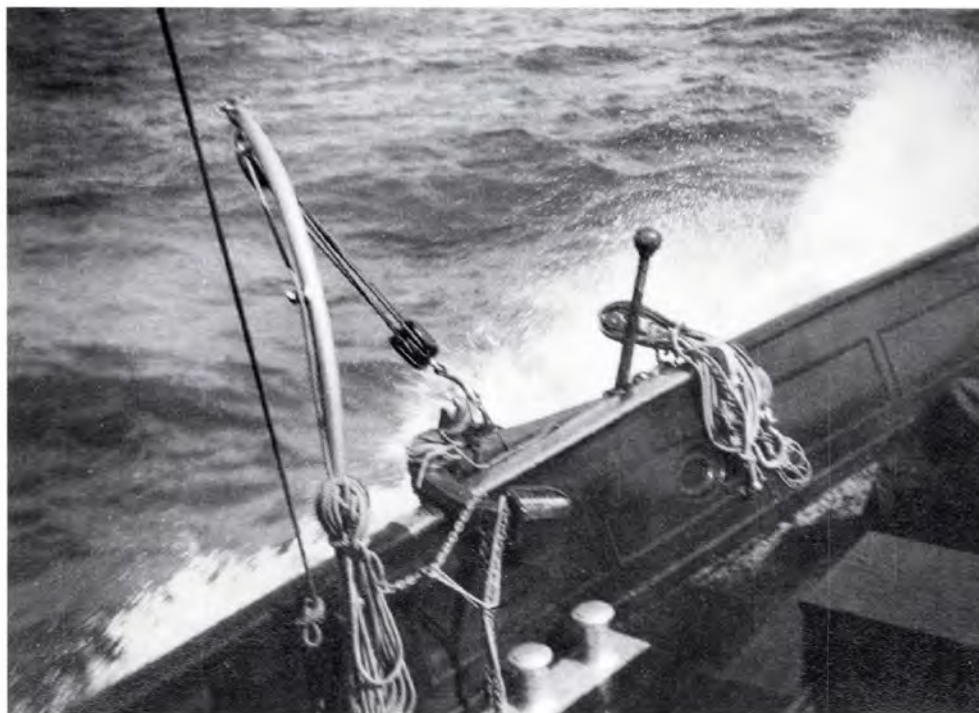
The landscape around Brightlingsea is completely flat, with sluggish creeks wandering between mud banks. Many flat, reedy islands lie in the estuary. In the 1930s fishing and oystering were the major occupations until summer, when Brightlingsea was transformed by the arrival of the sailing community. There was a yacht club that ran regattas and races. Most of the small sailing boats were of the same design—stout, wooden, rather heavy, clinker-built vessels, a million miles distant from today's racers. The family yard soon built two of these boats for us, which were christened *Mike* and *Bidi*. One great attraction that Aldous Successors held for my father was that, although itself rather run down, the yard provided very good "mud berths" for yachts in the winter, which suited *Medea* and helped defray her costs. Berthing a vessel in mud, a common practice, entailed running it up onto a mudbank at extreme high tide, then propping it in place.

The shipyard was building quite substantial boats at this time, but the market for boatbuilding was declining fast and most of the machinery was very old. The fitter's shop was still driven by steam, and I remember huge

belts running everywhere to the various machines. Along with a carpentry shop and the adjacent joiner's shop, there was also a marvelous chandler's shop, which I remember looking like Aladdin's cave, full of sails and ropes and wooden tackle and smelling of resin and tar.

The period that followed was one of the happiest for our family. At this time Job was a devoted husband and kind father. He was fun to be with, always devising entertainments and telling stories. He did have an uncertain temper, but at this time it was under control. He indulged his love of new things by buying a succession of cars, usually the latest from Rolls Royce and Bentley. At one time he owned eight bulldogs. In the late 1930s he bought a television set, and I must have been one of the earliest "telly addicts." Job also bought an airplane, a Tiger Moth, which he used primarily for flying to Brightlingsea. Roger had left school and was working at JBE. He obtained a pilot's license and often flew the plane, which was christened *Sarah*. Every year a motor coach was hired to take all the staff of JBE to the Derby at Epsom, about ten miles from our home.

Medea provided the most exciting holidays. She was commissioned from the



As waves smack against *Medea's* hull, girls prone to seasickness were liable to be dressed in oilskins by their mothers. Beneath the author's feet, the name MEDEA is woven into the mat.

MMSD P13432 and P13434; courtesy of the author



Brightlingsea mud each spring and took a short trip to Pin Mill, a pretty little fishing village to the north, usually at Easter time. In the summer the crew sailed her to the Hamble River near Southampton, where the family typically joined her. Each year we then crossed the Solent to Cowes on the Isle of Wight to attend the Royal Regatta and Naval Review. A great pleasure of visiting Cowes was the sight of the magnificent sailing yachts. One of the most beautiful, although not the largest, was *Tamesis*. There was also *Heartsease*, an enormous J-class yacht, which had originally been called *Adela*; both would later become part of my father's life. After Cowes Week there was usually a cruise in *Medea* down the lovely south coast of England, stopping at all the ports with sufficient draft to allow us in. With my father's personal flag flying overhead—a green flag bearing his lucky number “5” in white on a black diamond—we began by

At right, a sleepy Bidi stands by the aft saloon, toy bunny tucked under her arm. “The rabbit was called Harry. I went nowhere without him at that time . . . He was originally the rabbit from the Christopher Robin books, but had been so much mended and restuffed that he was no longer recognizable.”

MMSD P13433; courtesy of the author

sailing down the Solent, with the dramatic white chalk Needles and their red and white lighthouse at the west end of the Isle of Wight. The first stop was Poole with its huge natural harbour. Next day a short sail took us to Swanage where another chalk stack, “Old Harry,” guards the approach. Next was Weymouth, quite a smart resort where the sands were so fine that we could make especially elaborate sand sculptures.



The next journey was one I dreaded, because it took us around Portland Bill, a headland on the Isle of Purbeck. There the sea is almost always rough due to the racing tidal currents, which usually made me very seasick. Mother used to dress me up in oilskin and sou'wester, and keep me up on deck to prevent accidents. Father did not believe in seasickness, so it was as well to stay out of his way. Anyone with the slightest tendency to seasickness dreaded the passage of Portland Bill, but we did not dare to own up to our misery; my father prided himself on never being seasick and had little time for anyone who was less fortunate.

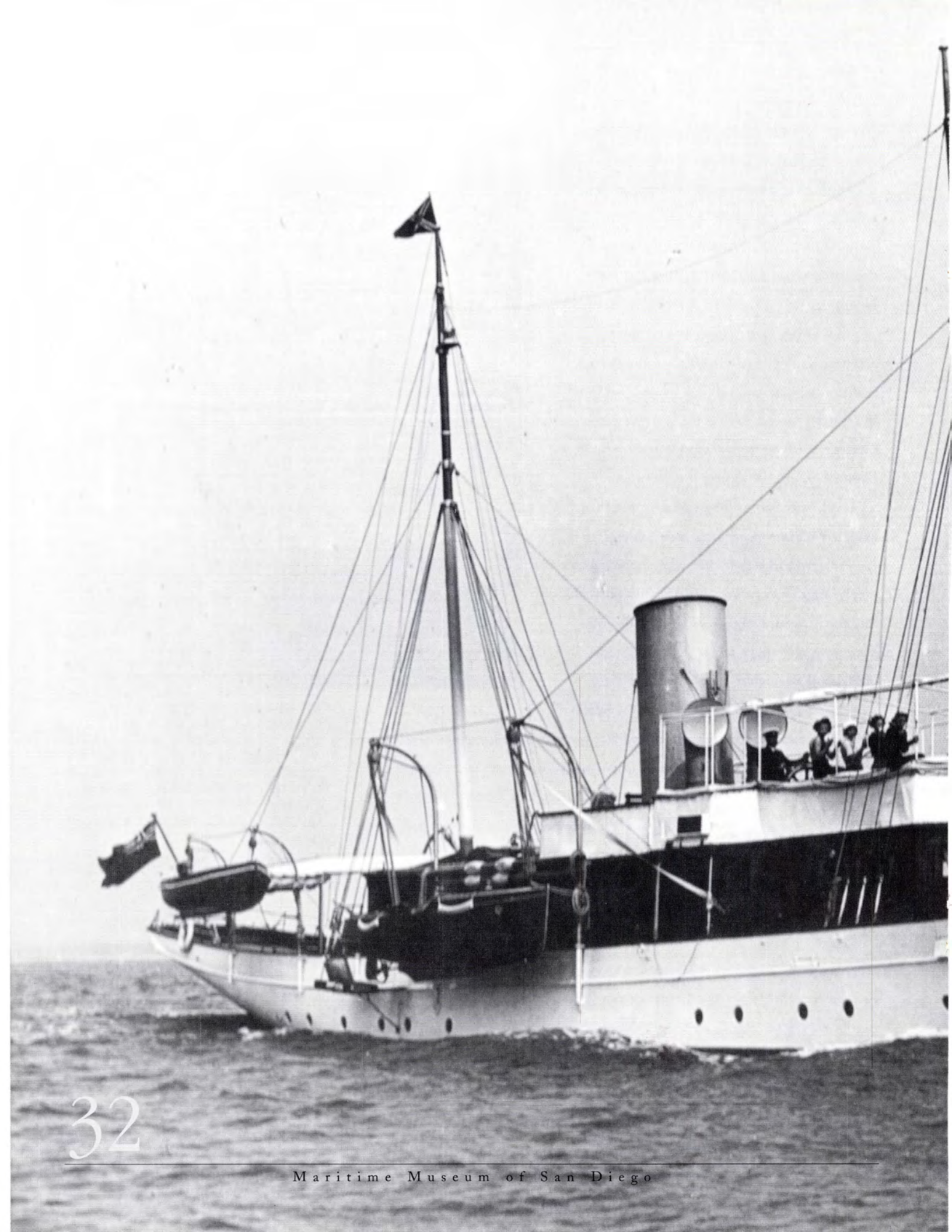
There was then a long sail to the fishing port of Brixham, with local trawlers tied up at the keystone and a daily fish market selling the catch. A short hop brought us to the home of the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, on a long narrow estuary where we could catch wonderful lobsters in a ring net. The final stop was Falmouth in Cornwall. In Cornwall the fishing was particularly good and we enjoyed fishing for mackerel with a metal spinner. Later on *Medea* was equipped with a trawl net to fish the sea bottom, which was hauled up full of an extraordinary variety of fish. There were always sea urchins, starfish and shells, which made unusual ornaments when we dried and varnished them.

On other occasions we undertook longer trips. In the early days visits were made to Deauville and Trouville on the French coast. Here my father could enjoy gambling, which was illegal in England at that time. The English Channel can be very rough, and on one of these trips I recall even Father feeling seasick. *Medea* was not the best boat for such weather, because she is rather long and thin, and as a result, tends to pitch and toss in even quite moderate seas. The next year, 1936, we took a trip through the Caledonian Canal, which runs across Scotland. The family joined *Medea* and her crew at Inverness on the east coast, and we



"Our most memorable holiday on the S. Y. *Medea*," the author's sister Sonia recalled of their 1936 trip, "was going through the Caledonian Canal and amongst the Western Isles of Scotland in a wonderful summer just before the war."

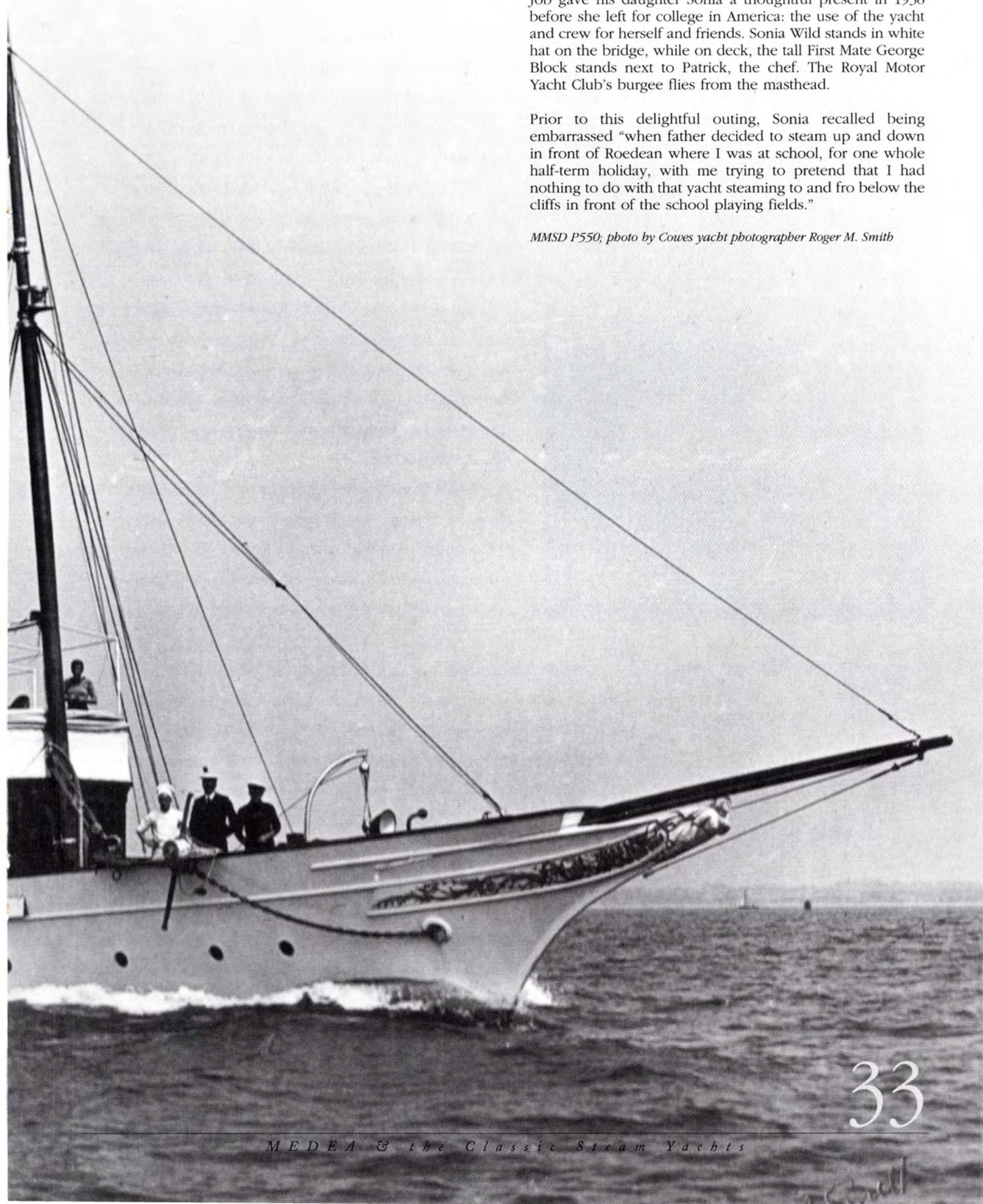
MMSD P13428 and P13433; courtesy of the author



Job gave his daughter Sonia a thoughtful present in 1938 before she left for college in America: the use of the yacht and crew for herself and friends. Sonia Wild stands in white hat on the bridge, while on deck, the tall First Mate George Block stands next to Patrick, the chef. The Royal Motor Yacht Club's burgee flies from the masthead.

Prior to this delightful outing, Sonia recalled being embarrassed "when father decided to steam up and down in front of Roedean where I was at school, for one whole half-term holiday, with me trying to pretend that I had nothing to do with that yacht steaming to and fro below the cliffs in front of the school playing fields."

MMSD P550; photo by Cowes yacht photographer Roger M. Smith





First Mate George Block was a great family friend.

MMSD P12513; courtesy of the author

sailed down through Loch Ness (where we watched fruitlessly for the appearance of the monster), to Loch Linnhe and the Western Isles. We then continued down the Irish Sea to Cornwall and round the Lizard point to Falmouth.

In 1937 we took a memorable trip to the Channel Islands, where *Medea* was nearly shipwrecked in a fog on the little island of Herm, off Jersey. Mists thickened as we approached the harbour of St. Peter Port, cautiously blowing our whistle, when the fog suddenly lifted to reveal Herm only yards from the bow. All along the quay stood a line of people who had seen our masts through the top of the fog, and thought we were going to be wrecked. We just managed to get away. The onlookers were, I think, quite disappointed about it.

When Sonia left school in 1938, my father arranged for her to have *Medea* and all the crew for a week and take a cruise down the south coast with a party of her friends. We also took trips to Cherbourg and Brittany and a final voyage, on the brink of war, to Rotterdam, in Holland.

Although Job loved the sea and liked to say he had salt water in his veins, he did not indulge in any "hands on" sailing. He believed in leaving practical matters to the experts. The crew consisted of a captain, a first mate, two deckhands, a chef, an engineer and a steward. These people came back year after year and became family friends. Most of the crew wore navy blue knitted sweaters with MEDEA embroidered on them in yellow, with blue trousers and peaked caps.

On looking back, however, I realize that those smartly-dressed crewmen endured considerable discomfort to ensure that our holidays were happy. Their living quarters were in the narrow fo'c's'le, where First Mate George Block and Steward John Woolvett occupied tiny cabins.

George was a great friend, and he taught me to tie many sailor's knots. John was the real mainstay of the whole establishment. He was a fisherman, as indeed were most of the crew, and he knew exactly where we were most

likely to catch fish and what to catch them with. Patrick was the chef, a small man from Ireland with a great sense of humor. The two deckhands scrubbed the decks every morning with brushes and seawater to make them white. (I found this very hard work when I tried to do it.) The captain had a small cabin located downstairs from the dining saloon. He took his job very seriously. He was kind to the children overrunning "his" boat, and allowed us to steer the ship, when he was quite sure we could do no harm.

In 1936, my sister Marjorie married, and the couple moved into a house belonging to Job at the bottom of the garden. The addition of a pair of grandsons should have made life complete for my parents, but two black clouds increasingly marred everyone's happiness. The first of these was the international situation. The rise of Hitler's Germany made war increasingly likely and my parents, with two sons of military age, were naturally anxious. The second cloud hovered over Cumberlands itself. Job and Hilda's relationship was under great strain as a result of my father's increasing reliance on Mary Elliott, by now his personal secretary. He felt that she was indispensable to him in business, and indeed this tall, gaunt woman with the uncompromising manner was virtually a



Captain Carter was consummately skillful, while Steward John Woolvett was "the mainstay" of the Wild household until Job's death. Note the silver from Job's growing collection.



MMSD P12516 and P12517; courtesy of the author



Michael and Bidi feed swans from *Medea's* landing stage. Inside the yacht, the smoking-cabin walls had a very trim appearance in the 1930s, with no paintings to break loose in heavy seas.

MMSD P13431 and P13441; courtesy of the author

human calculator. Job put her in charge of household expenses, which my mother understandably resented.

It might have been different if Hilda and Job had been able to stay living together, but the war finally erupted in 1939 leaving them with a dilemma. Should they evacuate me, their youngest child, then nine years old, to Canada as my school suggested, or should the family remain together? As a compromise, my mother and

I went north to live on the family property in the Peak District, whilst Job remained at Cumberlands. The danger of air raids was much less in the north, especially as Cumberlands was very close to an airfield, which would shortly become a target. Several bombs would fall in the Cumberlands garden. (One of these, my sister Sonia recalled, did not explode: it contained a message from Czech workers wishing England well.) It was not long before Job announced that he wanted to divorce Hilda and marry Mary Elliott.

This declaration caused an explosion from which the family never really recovered. Marjorie and Roger were furious at the callous treatment of Hilda, whom they thought of as their mother, saying that Mary was only interested in the money and that she would lose no time in dividing Job from his children. In the end they walked out, saying they wanted nothing further to do with their father. Job was as angry as they were and told them never to come back. This meant that Marjorie had to leave her home near Cumberlands and Roger his job at JBE. Marjorie and her children came north to join my mother and me, and Roger joined the Royal Air Force.



The outbreak of war catapulted Job and his new wife into a period of very hard work. JBE (whose headquarters had been evacuated from London to Kenley) had contracts with all the water companies in the south of London and also many local authorities. When the Blitz began, pipes of all sorts were blown up and the firm ran an emergency service that operated day and night to repair them as soon as possible. Airfields were bombed and had to be repaired and rebuilt.

Medea was called up right at the beginning of the war. She was requisitioned and later compulsorily purchased, serving both with the Royal Navy and the Royal Norwegian Navy.

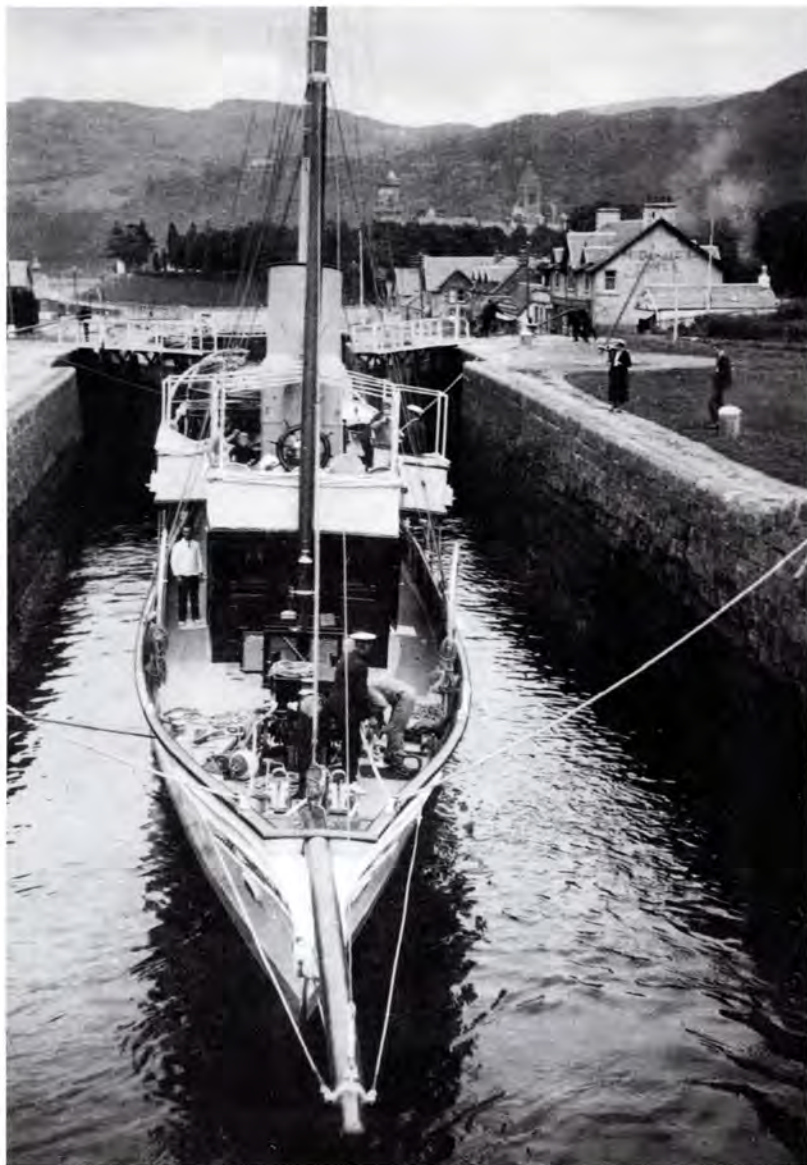
The shipyard, too, changed. Instead of pleasure craft and commercial ships, it built several armed motor launches and a motor torpedo boat, and pontoons for constructing artificial harbours used in the D-Day landings. Job was asked to provide mud berths for some of the famous sailing yachts he had admired at Cowes, which were of course useless once the war started. Two of these were *Heartsease* and *Tamesis*. *Heartsease* was most luxuriously equipped and had large paneled cabins below decks, so she became Job and Mary's living quarters when they visited the shipyard.

An unfortunate result of the strain of the war and the unhappy relationships in the family was that Job, always inclined to indulge, began to drink heavily. This did not affect his working life much, but it made his temper increasingly unreliable at home so that most people were afraid of him. Roger and Marjorie were correct in thinking that Mary Wild would do nothing to improve the relationships within the family. Job, however, both then and later was capable of acts of generosity, which came as a pleasant surprise when they occurred. Heavy drinking remained with him for the rest of his life, although he mellowed considerably in his later years. It caused several episodes of ill health that did, in the end, serve as a warning for him to cut down.



Bidi clowns with their guest and family friend Canon Gordon Rawlings. On the table, note the "souvenirs" netted in the deep.

MMSD P13437; courtesy of the author



Steward John Woolvett, in white, stands beside the dining saloon as *Medea* enters a lock in the Caledonian Canal in 1936. Note the men at upper right opening the lock gates by hand. On the facing page, two kneeling crewmen scrub her decks.

MMSD P13429 and P13439; courtesy of the author

At the war's end the country was on its knees. Every scrap of money had been spent in beating the enemy and huge debts accumulated. The winter after the war was one of the coldest ever; even the sea froze and the roads were impassable for months. It was fortunate that, in these circumstances, wartime rationing continued, for it remained possible for everyone to obtain some food and fuel. Just before the war finished a general election dismissed Winston Churchill from power. The people were grateful to Churchill for what he had done, but they felt that it was a time for social change, almost a democratic revolution in fact. The new government, keen to build up the industrial strength of the country, initiated an extensive building program, much of which was centered on the chemical industry. JBE won many contracts, of which the largest involved building an enormous factory for the Imperial Chemical Industry (ICI) at Wilton, in the far north of England.

Another large factory was built for ICI in Cheshire.

Aldous Successors shipyard was now mainly working for overseas clients, but still remained viable. Job was offered the opportunity to buy *Medea* back again after the war, which he took, and turned her into his accommodation at Brightlingsea in place of *Heartsease*, now sold. *Medea* was impossible to run as a yacht at this time. There was no coal, and the harbours and beaches were mined and covered with barbed wire and concrete tank traps. The whole spirit of the time was against luxury and it would have been impossible to find a crew. Job therefore consigned *Medea* to the mud and made her a comfortable houseboat. He enlarged the stern cabin slightly into a proper sitting room, and improved the sleeping quarters and dining cabin. She was fitted out in the style of the times, most of the joinery being made in the shipyard. She also continued to be used for holidays for Michael and me,

who were both living with our father. Job did not enjoy being without a yacht in which he could go to sea. He therefore bought a converted Brixham trawler called *Georgiana*. At about the time he purchased *Georgiana*, Job signed the contract for Wilton, and he hit on the idea of taking *Georgiana* to Whitby on the north Yorkshire coast as a place for him to stay when working up north. This did not prove a satisfactory solution, so he bought a house called Clockwood House in Yarm on Tees, a beautiful spot in County Durham near the Cleveland Hills.

It was not long before Job discovered that, before the war, the north Yorkshire coast had been famous for the large tunny, or bluefin tuna, that could be caught in the North Sea. He decided to try his luck. On *Georgiana's* second tunny fishing trip, I was the youngest member of the crew, at the age of eighteen. George Block, who had been first mate on *Medea* before the war, captained the boat. To catch these huge fish, the fisherman boarded a dinghy and strapped himself into a special seat in the bows to which the rod was also bolted. The boatman with his oars took his place on the stern seat; one of his jobs was to help by rowing the boat against the fish. A large hook, baited with a whole herring, was dangled a few feet from the surface. When the tunny struck, it was like hooking an express train—the line shot out at about fifty miles an hour and everyone hoped it would not run out and break. On one day we caught four fish weighing between four hundred and six hundred pounds each. On the final day, there was nobody keen to fish so I was allowed to have a try, and I had the thrill of catching a 714-pound fish, the biggest the expedition landed. Needless to say I was triumphant, and everyone else furious.





The Wild's yacht continues to provide a glimpse into a gracious, now vanished, early 20th century world of wealth and elegance.

MMSD P13430; courtesy of the author

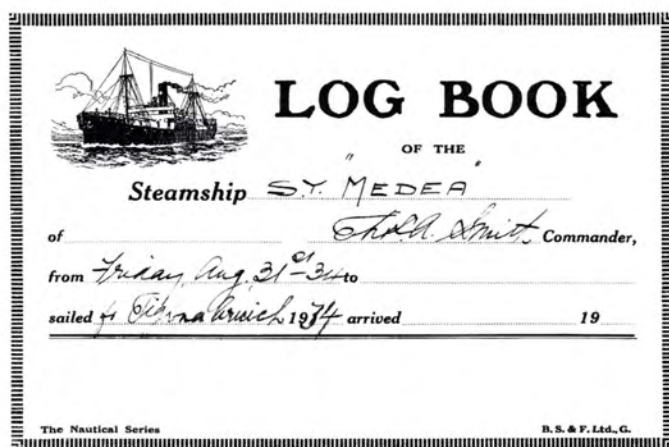
As things began to return to normal after the grayness of the war, it was possible once again to take holidays overseas. Mary preferred more luxurious trips than yachting. Job and Mary went on several cruises, on one of which their ship sank in the Indian Ocean off Madagascar, and all those on board had to take to the lifeboats. Luckily there were no casualties. Job "dined out" on this event for many years.

A new interest in my father's life, which began during the war, was collecting. He had quite catholic tastes, his major interests being silver and eighteenth century furniture. He turned Cumberlands virtually into a museum with a valuable silver collection and antique furnishings for all the principal rooms. Christmas now became a great show with all the candlesticks and silver plate on tables and sideboards and glittering chandeliers to light the rooms. There were some mixed feelings about all this grandeur, and some members of

the family remembered the old homely Cumberlands with affection.

At about this time my brother Michael married and Job asked him to take charge of Aldous Successors. This was not an easy task since shipbuilding was in continuous decline and work was hard to come by. I had left home to start medical school at Cambridge. Job at this time felt that some other members of the family had had rather a poor deal. He therefore offered to finance Roger in his ambition to become a clergyman. This action healed the long-standing breach between father and elder son. Sonia was helped to obtain a doctorate at Oxford to enable her to rise in the academic world. He became reconciled to his family, although nothing could restore the old happiness, and Mary ensured that relations remained strained.

Not long after my wedding in 1957 my father's health began to fail. He developed heart trouble and a blood disease. In spite of his illness he continued to control his business interests until almost the end, but he was no longer able so easily to undertake the long journeys to the north and had to rely more on his managers. He died at Cumberland in December 1959 after a short final illness, a few days before his seventy-fifth birthday; he always prophesied that he would not make seventy-five. My father was not loved by everyone, including some members of his family, but his determination and strength as well as his sudden kindnesses redeemed many of his faults.



A barefoot Job, nearly hidden from view, smiles down on Bidi and Harry in a wicker chair. In the foreground, the children have chalked a game on *Medea's* deck. Two of the yacht's wicker chairs now gather dust in the author's garage, a reminder of holidays long ago.

MMSD P13442; courtesy of the author, who also donated the original 1934 logbook to the MacMullen Library, Maritime Museum of San Diego

MEDEA and the Spies of Peterhead: A Top Secret Wartime History

Olaf T. Engvig

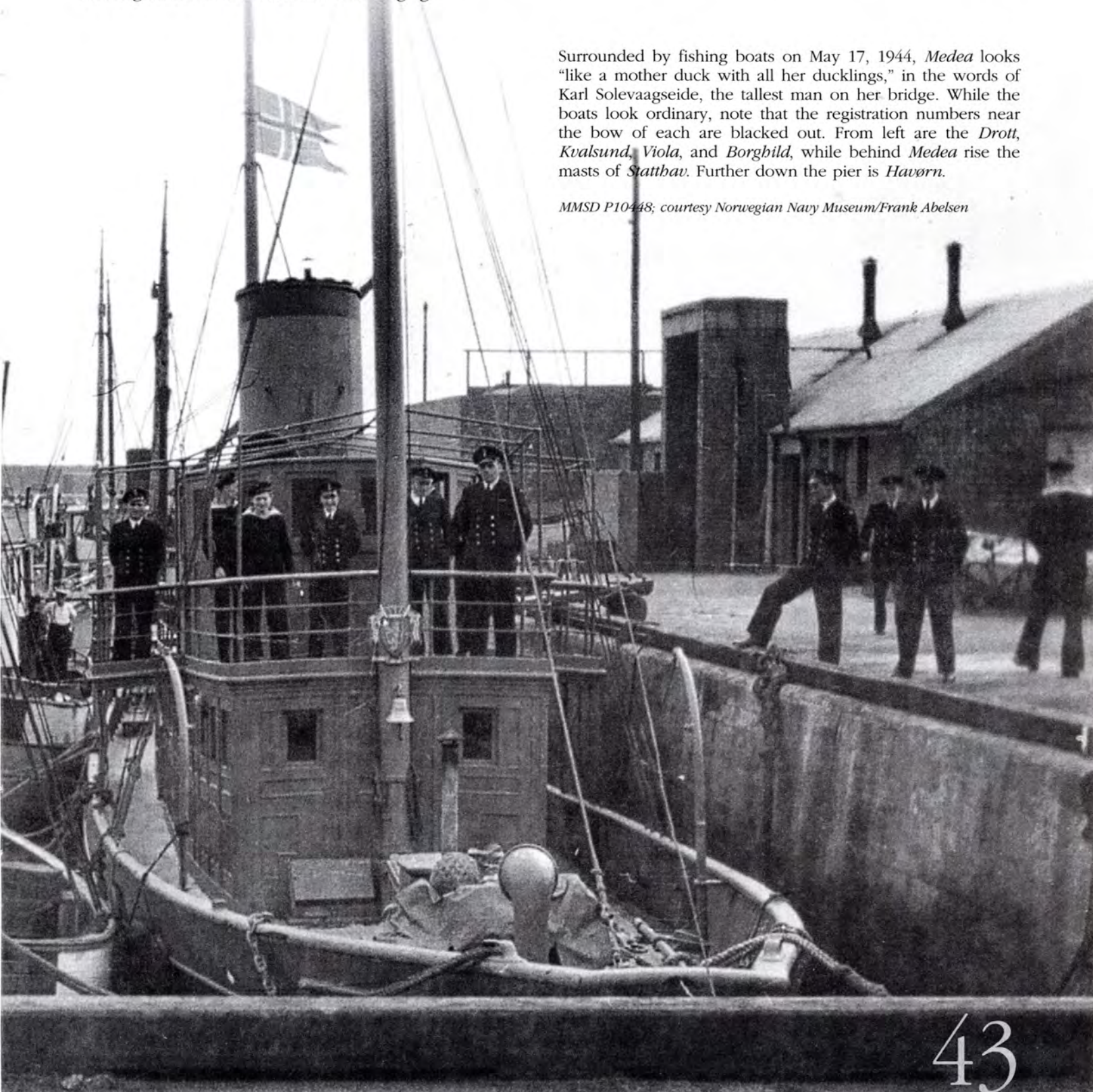
Olaf Engvig grew up in Rissa, Norway. In addition to his graduate degree in maritime history from the University of Oslo, he holds a deck officer's license. His writings include a *Mains'l Haul* article on stamp marks in the *Star of India's* iron. He and his wife Mona spend part of their year in Burbank, California, and Olaf has been known to take his Norwegian *faering*, an oar-propelled descendant of Viking longboats, on trips in the Sacramento Delta with members of San Francisco's maritime museum and our own small boat curator, Jeff Saar.

Editor's Note:

At first glance, *Medea's* role in World War II looks less exciting than her glamorous prewar years of yachting along England's southern coast: she spent most of the war moored to the Scottish pier below. But while tied up in Peterhead, *Medea* functioned as part of a top-secret intelligence-gathering operation. The Norwegian seamen standing aboard her led exciting and dangerous lives on clandestine missions, and some who climbed out of *Medea's* bunks in the morning did not come back. Their story, and the tale of the classified operations of the Peterhead base itself, has remained largely untold until now. The last known survivor of the men who lived aboard *Medea*, however, has now shared his story with Norwegian-American researcher Olaf Engvig.

Surrounded by fishing boats on May 17, 1944, *Medea* looks "like a mother duck with all her ducklings," in the words of Karl Solevaagseide, the tallest man on her bridge. While the boats look ordinary, note that the registration numbers near the bow of each are blacked out. From left are the *Drott*, *Kvalsund*, *Viola*, and *Borghild*, while behind *Medea* rise the masts of *Statthav*. Further down the pier is *Havørn*.

MMSD P10448; courtesy Norwegian Navy Museum/Frank Abelsen





On Constitution Day 1944, when the photo on the previous page was taken, *Medea's* Norwegian residents pose in their best uniforms atop their home—which is barely recognizable due to the wheelhouse added before her arrival at Peterhead. All are quartermasters unless indicated: From left are Ottar Sandvik, Lt. Stendal, Jens Nipen, H. Salvesen, Karl Solevaagseide, sailor A. Kristoffersen, A. Hansen, and Olav Kvalbein. Quartermaster Guldbrandsen is partly hidden behind sailor T. Sørvig, with sailor Åsmund Færøy standing highest; Ole Myrseth, Jakob Syltøy and Gunnar Gundersen are at right.

Courtesy Norwegian Navy Museum/
Frank Abelsen

During the Second World War, the yacht *Medea* functioned as a “mother ship” housing members of a small secret Royal Norwegian Navy unit at Peterhead, Scotland. These men braved the North Sea and German patrols to sail fishing boats loaded with contraband human cargo to the coast of Nazi-occupied Norway, under the noses of the watching Germans. The fishing boats of Peterhead carried specially-selected, highly-trained agents of the Secret Intelligence Service, or SIS—better known to students of espionage (and aficionados of the fictional agent 007, James Bond¹) as the British intelligence agency MI6. On *Medea's* decks walked MI6 spies, high-ranking officers, Norwegian royalty, and daring naval officers trained as commandos, as the yacht played her role as a staging area for these extremely dangerous missions.

After Norway was overrun by the Germans in April, 1940, the British desperately needed to monitor German military movements there. Strategically, Norway's long and rugged coastline offered the Germans countless hiding places partly out of reach of Allied bombers, in fjords and behind islands. Norway was increasingly of crucial importance to the German Navy, and probably the only place where they could feel relatively safe from Allied attack during the first years of the war. The German Navy represented a severe threat to Allied shipping, and keeping German ships bottled up in Norway tied up a major part of the British Home Fleet. British Intelligence was in great need of getting information out of Norway on the status of the major German warships sheltering there, especially the mighty battleship *Tirpitz*, sister ship to the renowned *Bismarck*. While the British to a great

degree trusted intelligence reports gathered by native Norwegians, SIS also needed immediate and reliable information from its own trusted spies, reporting directly back to headquarters. For this purpose a tiny but important secret operational unit of the Norwegian Navy was set up at Peterhead in the summer of 1941 to transport SIS agents to Norway using *motor-kutters*—diesel-powered fishing boats. A motor cutter from Peterhead delivered the agent who first pinpointed the *Tirpitz's* hiding place, a few months before *Medea* arrived on the scene.²

A handful of regionally-distinctive fishing vessels that could blend in with similar craft plying the Norwegian coast were chosen for special missions and commissioned into the Norwegian Navy. They were kept on stand-by at Peterhead, the closest point to Norway on the island of Great Britain, to be sent to designated parts of Norway whenever London required it. A small group of Norwegian men were selected after thorough testing and trained to secretly land and pick up agents and their equipment. They had to be professional and experienced fishermen and sailors with good knowledge of the Norwegian coastline. They also had to have the right dialect for the district they were going to, since the ability for a boat and its crew to blend in was crucial. Norwegian Nazis and the Germans were everywhere and on the lookout for suspicious activities. Each boat's true purpose was disguised by nets and fish, while an innocent-looking fuel-oil drum secured on deck was actually a cleverly camouflaged

When this photo of *Kvalsund* was taken just after the war, she had returned to fishing.

Courtesy Jon Storløkken, *Kvalsund's* present owner. To learn about her preservation, visit <http://tiblde.org/~persto/kvalsund/baatidx.html>



45

platform for the twin-barreled machine gun stored inside it, loaded and ready against attacking German aircraft. Every mission entailed a game of life and death if a boat was spotted at the wrong place at the wrong time; in October 1942 a directive from Hitler ordered anyone captured on board one of these boats to be shot. After November 1943, missions to Norway using motor cutters became a thing of the past, for losses were staggering and too high for the traffic to continue.

At the time, their efforts were highly classified. A woman who spent her girlhood in Peterhead remembered recently that "I first became aware of the importance of the operation when high security fences were built round the edge of the inner harbour."

Through them it was still possible to see the unusual boats with strange flags and pennants, and it was only gradually that we began to realize that they came from Norway. We were used to seeing the local fishermen setting out most evenings, but the movements of these strange craft did not follow a set pattern. They would disappear for a few days and sometimes when they came back the damage to their superstructure was clearly evident. Those broken masts and hanging spars had not only been damaged by mountainous seas, but had also seen enemy action. The respectful comments of the local bystanders on the quayside made us realize that we were in the presence of very brave men indeed.³

Cousins Arne and Karl Solevaagseide escaped Norway aboard the stolen boat *Harald II*.

Courtesy Karl and Helen Solevaagseide



One of those brave men was Karl Solevaagseide, who became a veteran in the delivery of secret agents to Norway, and was decorated with three British and three Norwegian medals, including one for "outstanding performance of a military mission," signed in 1943 by the exiled King Haakon and his prime minister. Today, he is eighty-six years old and lives in Solevaag, Norway. He is almost certainly the only member of the Norwegian Navy that lived aboard *Medea* who is still alive. Thanks to him, we can now learn a good deal about the operations of the Peterhead base, and this formerly classified part of *Medea's* past.⁴

Karl was an established fisherman and a ships' engineer when the war started. On June 8, 1941, the twenty-three-year-old fisherman and a cousin, Arne R. Solevaagseide, stole the motor cutter *Harald II* and escaped with fifteen others, including a young female nurse who refused to work in a German-controlled unit at the local hospital. They had no skipper, and like most Norwegians who escaped by sea, they pointed their boat toward the Shetland Islands. After arriving safely at Lerwick, Shetland, on June 10, they were interrogated. Karl, who had wanted to



join the navy since before the war, was shipped to Aberdeen, Scotland, where he enlisted in the Royal Norwegian Navy and received initial military training.⁵ His background as an engineer prompted him to volunteer for duty at the new base at Peterhead, and he was assigned to SIS and given specialized training. "During one course we learned how to blow up mines and the handling of different explosives," he recalls. "I went to a course for commandos. We were educated in secret service work and how to be an aide for the spies. We were always reminded not to talk and to keep all information we received a secret."

Karl arrived in Peterhead in the summer of 1941. "When I first came, we were not many, and were stationed ashore—not in barracks, but in houses in the town itself."

First I lived ashore right across from the police station, and stood watch at the gate with a loaded rifle. *Medea* arrived some time after I arrived, and I moved aboard the yacht. I picked a single cabin all the way aft on the starboard side. Workers were fitting her out with more cabins, but not in my area. I had that aft starboard cabin all the time I stayed at Peterhead, but I was not always there. My stay was on and off. I was away on training, then on missions to Norway and so on. When I was gone, someone else could use my bunk. Some people stayed aboard their motor cutters. The Norwegian officers stayed ashore. . . . We were petty officers, but some enlisted men also stayed on board the *Medea*. When I left the *Medea* after the war ended she was still moored at the same pier where she stayed during the war. The motor cutters were all moored outside and around her. She looked like a mother duck with all her ducklings.

Medea's residents grin beneath the Norwegian Navy's emblem on her foremast in May, 1944. From left stand sailor Kristoffersen, Quartermaster Gundersen, sailor Færøy, and Quartermasters Solevaagseide, Guldbrandsen and Salvesen.

*Courtesy Norwegian Navy Museum/
Frank Abelsen*

By the time the *Medea* arrived at Peterhead in late 1942, the yacht had already been transformed from her peacetime appearance. A wooden wheelhouse stood atop the bridge, and, Karl recalled, her “hull and topsides were painted panzer-grey all over outside. The bowsprit was taken off her—it would have taken up extra space along the pier. I think a figurehead was still there.” Little else, however, remained in her exterior appearance to suggest her prewar elegance.

“Like a Mother Duck:” Wartime Life aboard *Medea*

Medea’s arrival at Peterhead had a notable effect on Karl and his fellow petty officers: their food suddenly got much better, for now it was no longer brought cold from town but was prepared fresh in *Medea*’s galley by a Norwegian cook. More importantly, the yacht became the accommodations for the unit’s petty officers, an elite group of former fishermen and sailors trained as specialists by British Intelligence and given the rank of quartermaster.

Medea was unofficially renamed *Haakon*, to honor the Supreme Commander of the Royal Norwegian Forces, King Haakon VII, who had become the nation’s human symbol of freedom.⁶ Karl asserts, however, that he and his fellow quartermasters knew her as neither *Medea* nor *Haakon*: to all that lived aboard at Peterhead she was simply their *yaten*—“the yacht.”⁷

The yacht was marked as Norwegian by the ensign hoisted daily to a small gaff⁸ on her mainmast, and also by a new item of heraldic decoration. On the foremast, just above the ship’s bell, was a red Norwegian national emblem painted on wood, with a golden lion and royal crown on top, and two crossed Norwegian flags behind. It was located where everyone could easily spot it when arriving from the gate, to show that *Haakon/Medea* was the headquarters for a unit that, while operating under the umbrella of British Intelligence, was fundamentally Norwegian. Today, Norway’s embassies and consulates around the world bear the same shield, but without the crossed flags emblematic of the Royal Norwegian Navy.

Medea was Karl’s home from 1942 through the end of the war in Europe in May, 1945. Of the other men who lived aboard, he recalls,

some stayed on the *Medea* permanently, like the steward and the mess boy, in addition to some sailors who maintained the yacht. I suppose we were about fifteen or so on the yacht, and we were all Norwegian Navy men. The captain of the *Medea* and our commander was *kapteinløytnant* [Martin] Hellesund⁹ . . . He had an office ashore and lived ashore. The ordinary crew on the motor cutters could stay on board the *Medea* if there was room. I always had the single cabin aft next to a fine staircase going up. Forward of the stairs were more cabins. There was more space there. Some stayed in double or more occupancy cabins. The enlisted sailors lived forward—messman Sorvig and the watch and maintenance crew.

Our boss [Hellesund] was a fine man; he would come down and have a cup of coffee with us quartermasters. We planned new missions on board the *Medea*. It was always voluntary and never a problem deciding who should go. We tried to pick the right ones depending where we were headed. To know the area and have friends and contacts was important. Sometimes the skipper would ask for someone he liked to work with. Einar Kristiansen was the skipper on the *Kvalsund* and he asked me. We became good friends and did some long trips together.¹⁰

Medea’s interior was modified to serve us during the wartime situation. Originally it was very fine, as we could clearly see. . . . It was still a luxury yacht, with a big staircase going up and fine wood interior. But cabins were

added to accommodate more people. It took a while to have her fitted out to serve the purpose as our new home. The yacht became our headquarters during the war.

Orders were strict to keep everything shipshape at all times. Cleaning the exterior and the interior of the ship was important. We were required to keep the cabin tidy, make the bed, stow away our spare clothes and uniform when not in use. During duty we wore fatigues that were sent out for cleaning. Bedding was sent ashore once a week; we got new linen from the stores on the pier. The galley and mess room aboard were used and the steward and the cook made us good food—nourishing ships' food that we were used to—and as much as we liked.

Our steward did an excellent job. He operated with a crew list somewhat larger than [the number who were] actually present. Some would be away on missions, others on training or on leave. He got their share as well. We always had food enough—bacon and eggs and good coffee. . . . On the *Medea* the kettle was in the galley at all times with good coffee, just like on the motor boats. The local people only drank tea, so we had a lot of coffee to ourselves and to bring over to Norway [for gifts] when we went there.

There were two small mess rooms, one aft and one forward on the ship. As on the cutters we took turns on any job, even eating. On the *Medea* it was just the same, so the mess area was sufficient, even if cramped.

We had electricity from shore on the yacht and a donkey-boiler on board for central heating by radiators around the ship, and for hot water. It was warm inside even during winter . . . The main engine boiler was coal-fired and it was started up every now and then, about once quarterly. *Medea* had her own chief. His name was Ottar Sandvik. He came from the merchant fleet.

Medea never left her place at the pier during the war. But she came alive when Engineer Sandvik raised steam. Then the windlass was operated and the steam whistle blown. Every steam function was warmed up and tested out until it worked properly. *Medea* was well-kept when the yacht arrived, and kept at the same good standard through all the years at Peterhead.¹¹

The atmosphere was friendly between all of us who stayed aboard. We worked well together. The enlisted sailors did much of the maintenance, and we shared the jobs of cleaning and keeping things in order. The sailors had inspection once a week. Then the whole ship had to be flawless. We all knew it was a fine yacht before the war, so we treated her with care, and were told not to damage anything. The main saloon on deck was not used much. Some of us would sometimes sit there chatting but it was usually vacant. It was used only when our commander wanted to talk to us.



"I worked together with Einar Kristiansen from the southern part of Norway," recalls Karl, who towers over his friend. "He was the skipper of *Kvalsund* on several missions. He picked me as his chief engineer. We became good friends." Karl has treasured this photo, probably taken in London, for half a century.

Courtesy Karl and Helen Solevaagseide

Medea's dining saloon "was used for detailed planning of missions to Norway. We entered from both sides and could seat four around the table. Larger briefings were held ashore."

If it was something everyone should know, or some general information, we would all be called on. Then we would get together and muster on the pier. But the planning was done on board the *Medea*. If it was something special, we would be called up to the commander's office on land.

"The yacht was our home," remembers Karl, "and the best place to be."

A Small Scottish Town with a Top Secret Base

Karl and the other Norwegians seem to have mixed well with Peterhead's townspeople. "I got married in Scotland towards the end of the war and had a daughter," he recalls; "My wife was from Scotland." One former Peterhead girl, however, recalls that her mother responded differently to the prospect of her daughter mixing with Scandinavian strangers: "Have nothing to do with these men! Don't even look at them!" According to her, "the Norwegian sailors stood out in the town because of their striking stature and their bright clothing, their cheerful banter and their camaraderie. Perhaps it is just as well that we didn't

Medea's berth was near the center of this picture, probably taken after the war.

Courtesy Karl and Helen Solevaagseide



understand a word they were saying, but, as ever, wolf whistles were a *lingua franca!*"¹²

"In the evenings or during weekends we could go ashore," Karl recalls. "Only the man on duty would stay behind" aboard *Medea*. They had money to spend; Karl remembers being paid between ten and twenty pounds after a successful mission.

We had to report where we were heading when we went off the base, but it was OK to go out when we were off duty. There was quite a bit of contact between the British and the Norwegians. We had a common 'cantina' ashore. We had ID cards stamped by the Norwegian Navy that we used at the cantina. There were places where the Scots served beer and wine. We often hung together with them. They were more friendly and closer to us Norwegians than the English. There were language problems, but we managed well with the Scots.

It was standing orders to be properly dressed if we went to the town. Nice and clean uniform, newly pressed—often by putting the pants under the mattress to get them in shape—and newly polished shoes. The uniform was the Norwegian Navy's and had "Norway" on one shoulder, and a cap with an anchor. The uniform was our passport through the gate. We didn't go out on the town of Peterhead all that often. We met friendly people that tried to understand even if most of us spoke little English. . . . But we never talked with the people about the base and our job there.

In town, seamen could visit the Norwegian Navy Society for reminders of home. Local people took Karl and others on walking tours and trips to the countryside. The Norwegians also received a few days of leave to see the sights of London. Occasionally they hosted distinguished visitors: "There were many dignitaries and important persons visiting the base. Crown Prince Olav came and inspected the *Medea*, I was told. His Royal Highness spent a good amount of time aboard looking around," on a day that Karl regretted missing.

Despite these boosts to morale—and the occasional dangerous visit home on a mission—Karl and his fellow exiles longed for Norway:

We missed our families the most during Christmas and other major holidays. We knew they had less than we had. All things were rationed. And no coffee—that was the highest wish for many Norwegians, to get a cup of real coffee. We got together and tried to manage as best we could. We had a Christmas tree in the *Medea*. We decorated it, and we sang Christmas carols and had an especially good dinner made by the steward. We visited Scottish families over New Year; they seemed to celebrate New Year the most.

As a result of the operation's secrecy, Karl, and presumably others who regularly risked their lives in missions from Peterhead, also felt misunderstood by his Scottish hosts and cut off from relatives back home:



Peterhead's men prepare to celebrate another Norwegian Constitution Day away from home, on May 17, 1944.

Courtesy Norwegian Navy Museum/Frank Abelsen



The little unit at Peterhead—plus crewmen from visiting torpedo boat MTB 619—pose on Constitution Day, 1944. Front row, from left: T. Sørvig, Adolf Helleset, Tor Mong (visitor), A. Kristoffersen, Chester Saltskaar, A. Hansen, Ottar Sandvik, and Olav Kvalbein. From left stand three visitors: Lt. A. Olsen, Sverre Gjeldsten, and Bernt Tjersland. Next to him is Gunnar Gundersen, Ivar Johansen (visitor), A. Andersen with flag, Jørgen Blankenberg, Jens Nipen with A. Færøy behind, H. Salvesen, Jakob Syltøy, Karl Solevaagseide, Guldbrandsen, an unknown quartermaster, Ole Myrseth, and Lt. Stendal.

Courtesy Norwegian Navy Museum/Frank Abelsen

We had to be careful and never talked to the locals in Scotland that we befriended when away from the duties at the base. The locals felt that we Norwegians mostly just hung around waiting for something to happen, an invasion or something. We never wrote letters. People at home did not know how we were doing.

The base at Peterhead was extremely small. While the exact number of men attached is still unknown because of the secrecy surrounding its operation, perhaps sixty Norwegians served there from 1941 to 1945.¹³ Probably fewer than half of these were gathered there at any particular time. In one of the series of pictures taken at Peterhead on May 17, 1944, twenty-five men face the camera in their best uniforms in honor of Norway's Constitution Day. Their actual number was fewer, however: seven of those posing are the crew of a motor torpedo boat from Shetland, calling at Peterhead for repairs.

The base was very secure and not known to the outside. It was guarded with a steel fence and a sturdy iron gate away from the end of the pier on the north side. It was called Coastal Forces Pier. A military guard at a guard booth was there at all times to stop visitors and check on us when going in or out. Only the ones that had permission could enter. We were only about thirteen-fourteen quartermasters in all and a few sailors. We were the highest in rank that would stay on the base inside the gate. A few Norwegian officers and the British military men all lived ashore. Workers would enter through the gate during daytime. They did repairs on the MTBs [motor torpedo boats] on the slipway. They also repaired our cutters if it was needed, or when they were hauled out of the water to be cleaned. Scottish workers mounted machine guns in oil drums on deck for our defense. All the boats were taken good care of. They were small, but good and seaworthy vessels.

Today Karl struggles to remember those vessels by name, and to recount details about their missions. He remembers *Borghild*, *Drott*, *Harald II*, *Havørn*, *Kvalsund*, *Statthav*, and *Viola*. Some of the boats were used less often, and others more, the choice depending primarily on the match between the designated landing point and the boat with the design most appropriate to that region.¹⁵ He also remembers two others, *Streif* and *Frøya*, which sailed from Peterhead and never returned. The *Streif* suffered an engine breakdown in bad weather and drifted for a week before she stranded in Holland and was captured by the Germans in October, 1941. The *Frøya*, with a crew of seven Norwegians and two British agents, was sunk by a German bomber off the Norwegian coast in April, 1942.¹⁵

When asked if he was ever afraid, Karl just answers:
"Oh, yes—many times!"

Secret Missions to Nazi-occupied Norway

Karl Solevaagseide skippered what may have been the first mission to return to Peterhead, arriving in the *Harald II* on July 6, 1941 after successfully landing a spy at Soleaag in Sula.¹⁶ From Peterhead to the nearest point in Norway the distance is 250 nautical miles, or about two days in a cutter with an average speed of about six knots. Most voyages to Norway, with the boat bound for a landing place further up the coast, lasted longer. Boats would usually return within a week, though bad weather and other obstacles could prolong a trip. The common motor cutters of that period were sturdy, though small, vessels between forty and sixty feet in length. Since their heavy and bulky one-cylinder engines often required counter-ballasting with iron and cement well forward, the vessels had one bad tendency, however—they rolled constantly in bad weather. They did not easily capsize, but even experienced fisherman had to hang on for dear life. Being outside the cabin or wheelhouse could be dangerous, and cooking impossible. According to Karl, more than one spy thought that "Germans are nothing compared to the torture in a fishing boat in bad weather!"¹⁷

From Karl's memories of many missions, we can reconstruct a typical mission, this one aboard "a good new boat," the forty-nine-foot *Harald II*, on which he had escaped with his cousin in 1941.¹⁸ "I went on two spy missions to my home area by Aalesund aboard the *Harald II*. Then I got to see my own people and bring them some coffee, flour and tobacco."

Preparations for these missions began for Karl with briefings by *kapteinløytnant* Hellesund at the table in *Medea's* saloon. Alongside or behind the yacht, *Harald II* was fitted out for her designated mission:

Our boats had their fishing registration number painted over. We got new numbers before each mission. *Harald II* was modified at Peterhead: the boat's appearance was changed by adding a teak front to the wheelhouse. On another boat, we would repaint the wheelhouse in another color and change part of the deck gear or the rigging. We even managed to change the sound of the engine, because the boat would be going to the same part of the coast from which it came. The skipper also had fake papers to go along with the new number.

At sea, Karl worked primarily as the cutter's engineer, ensuring that her one-cylinder Finnøy engine continued to churn out its designated 70 h.p. Engine failure could mean capture or death for the six or seven Peterhead men aboard, plus the spy. "I was in my dad's fishing boats and learned to take care of the engine from when I was a kid . . . On missions I was mostly

in the engine room keeping the engine running smoothly, when not needed for handling the weapon or other special jobs on deck.” Karl, who still stands over six feet, is remembered as “the big man” by the youngest survivor of the Peterhead operations, eighty-two-year-old Charles Remo. He recalled that Solevaagseide was in charge of the equipment and was “the man to talk to about maintenance of the boats.”¹⁹ Karl continues:

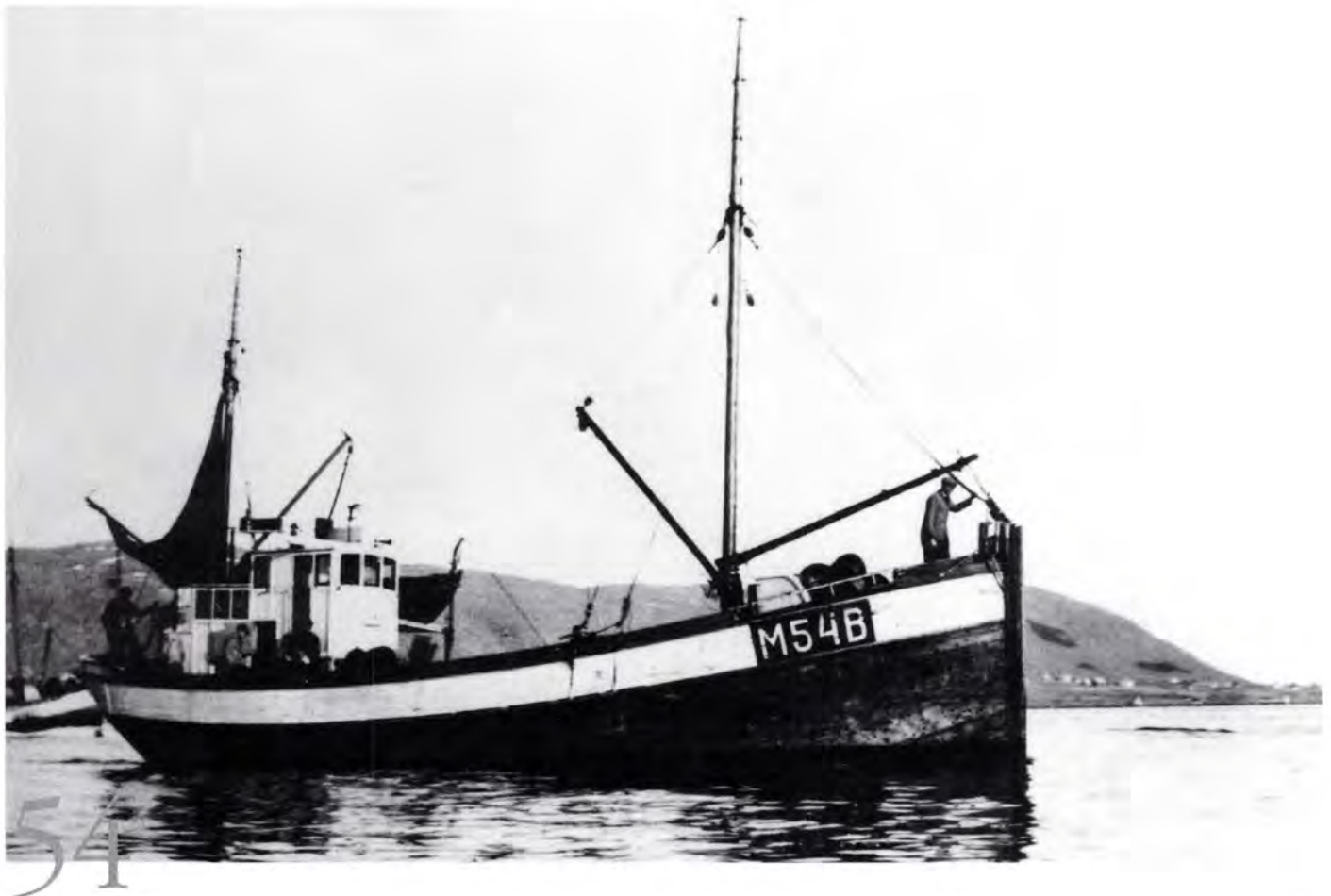
Upon approaching the coast of Norway I was needed in the wheelhouse to try to recognize the coastline ahead. Further inshore I was the one to tell where to go when we went to my home area. On departure we took a different route, going further inland and around some other islands in case the Germans were waiting for us coming back. Old people said they could recognize the sound of the engine even if we had altered it—as well as [changed] the boat itself and the registration number. They knew it must have been *Harald II*. Those men were not easily fooled, but they kept quiet about it until after the war, even if they knew that the boat was stolen.

Being locals, we knew of many places where a motor cutter could hide in a small inlet behind rocks where no Germans could see us, moored up against a cliff and camouflaged, or we could escape through skerries²⁰ where no-one dared to follow. Germans knew that fishing boats could pick courses where they couldn't go. That was a way to escape. We always had to be alert and ready to fight back if they opened fire. Then it would be a fight of life and death. We knew that torture and interrogations would follow if we were caught.

The motor cutter *Harald II* “was to be handed over to the Germans on a Monday. That was the orders,” says Karl Solevaagseide. “When friends in Norway learned that, they immediately planned an escape—and we left Norway the day before.”

Courtesy Karl and Helen Solevaagseide

“Local people,” Karl recalls, “would help out and warn us of danger, or of spies for the Germans. Even so it was always a gamble with people, talking to the wrong person,” because the lone agent aboard the cutter would have been of great interest to the Gestapo.²¹



Working with MI6 Spies

When *Harald II* landed at Aalesund, the crew assisted the agent in unloading his equipment and in making connections with local sympathizers:

My brother helped unload the boxes into the *faering*²² and took them to our boatshed and hid the spy. At night they would get the boxes from the shed, using horse and wagon, and take them to our hayloft and hide them in the hay. It was quite a lot of stuff. We would try to arrive and leave going different routes and as discreetly as possible, appearing just to be a fishing vessel making a port call.

Harald II then returned to Peterhead. "What later happened to the spy we landed," Karl says, "I don't know."

Contact between the spies and their trusted Norwegian transporters was kept to a minimum. The crew operating the boat during the crossing to Norway knew very little about the people they were ferrying across. Even whether their passengers were British or Norwegian was a mystery. "The British spies had such command of the Norwegian language that I couldn't really tell. Some were Norwegians. . . . We didn't ask them their nationality, and they didn't tell."

About the boxes he helped unload, Karl likewise knew not to ask, but speculates today that they contained "probably radio, food and coffee and cigarettes and other items for barter, I think. We never looked inside."

There was never much talk about Secret Intelligence Service and the work of naval intelligence, and we had no idea of what the agent would be doing after landing in Norway. We only did the jobs we were assigned to. We knew it was very important and could be extremely dangerous.

For the spies themselves, the ability of Karl and other Navy men to establish immediate connections with trusted locals was critical. So too was mobility, for a radio transmitter had to be frequently moved to a new location to escape detection. Transmissions would sooner or later be intercepted by the Germans and their origins pinpointed.²³ For SIS agents, a mission from Peterhead was an assignment sure to include great danger and much suffering. Some lived in tents on mountainsides during wet and cold winters, reporting daily to London about passing ship traffic. Even so, many reported that one of the worst aspects of their mission occurred even before they landed—the constant discomfort of days spent at sea, in a small, rolling vessel like *Harald II*.

Danger from Sea and Sky

"It was always dangerous," recalls Karl,

but we tried to approach the coast without being spotted by German planes or their patrol boats further inshore. They were faster than us, and noisy. If we were stopped we would just act natural, show papers, just chat about "bad fishing" and what not. We used navy fatigues on the way over; our good uniforms were in the cabin to put on if needed.

The only time Karl's "good uniform" was likely to have been needed, of course, was to hurriedly pull on before capture. Otherwise, he would not have been treated as a prisoner of war, but likely executed as a spy.

Perhaps the most dangerous part of a mission, however, lay in sailing beyond the limited zone within which the Germans expected fishing boats

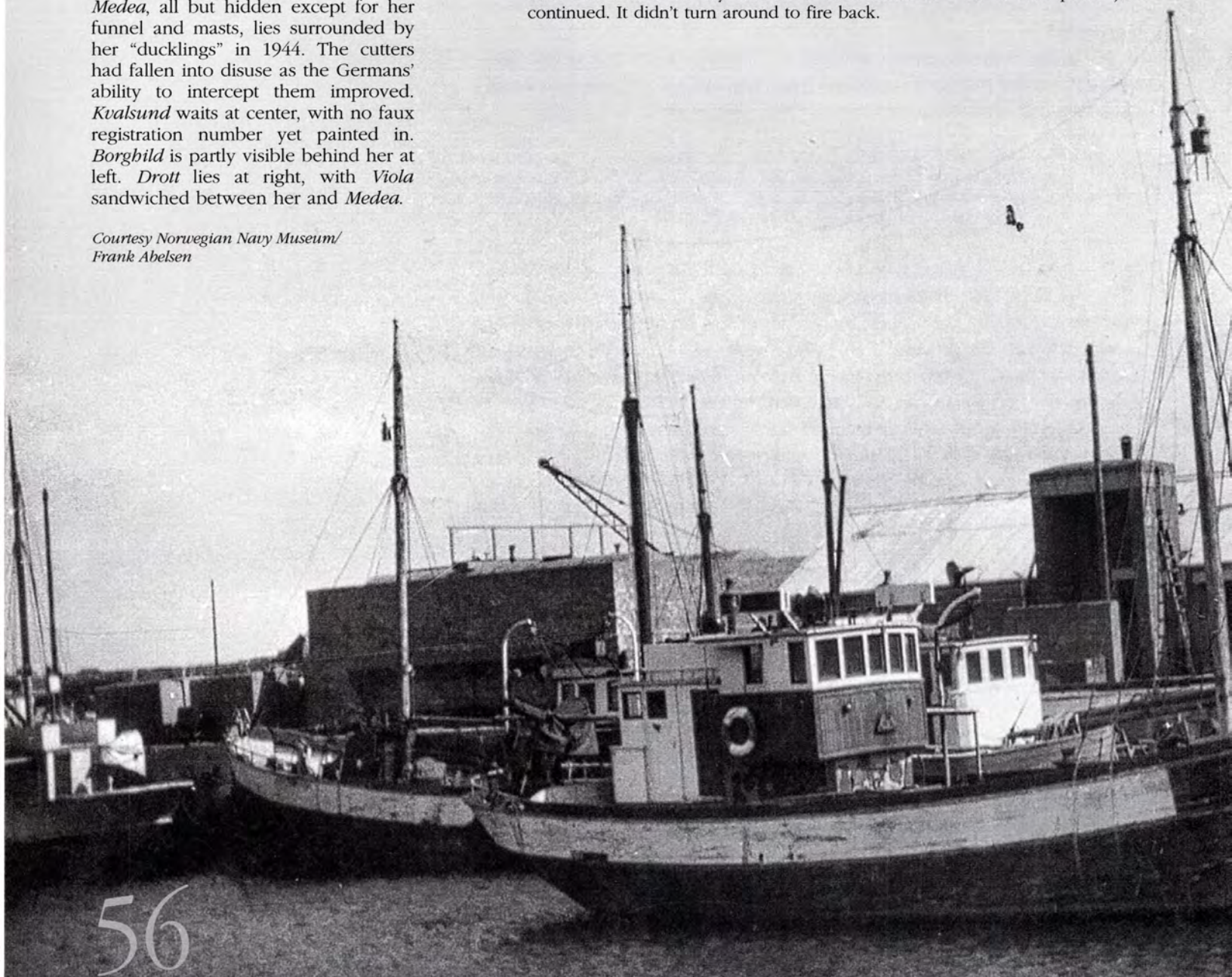
to travel. The motor cutters were especially vulnerable to long-range patrols by aircraft.

If we were spotted in that area, the plane would most likely attack. We saw [a] plane coming right at us. It was a Heinkel-111 with two engines, and it came in low on our port side. . . . We were sure it would open fire and we were ready to man the guns and fire back. But when he passed and he didn't fire, we didn't fire. He must have had something else in mind. We had great luck that time. Others were not that lucky. We had secured oil drums on deck for spare fuel on the motor cutters, but also extra fuel tanks under deck. Our drums on deck were camouflaged machine gun nests. We would use them in case of encounter with the Germans. They were Lewis or Hotchkiss, mounted on supports on deck inside the lid of the drum, and could quickly be elevated out of the oil barrel, mounted in a crib that could move freely. We could pull it up and it was ready for action with a full magazine.

We saw German airplanes on several missions and I was trained to recognize their silhouettes. Sometimes they were far away. They probably didn't see us. Yes, I fired our machine gun at a twin engine Heinkel that came right at us just like it would attack. We were up in the North Sea. I could see the tracer trails from some of my bullets. I don't know if I hit it—the plane just continued. It didn't turn around to fire back.

Medea, all but hidden except for her funnel and masts, lies surrounded by her "ducklings" in 1944. The cutters had fallen into disuse as the Germans' ability to intercept them improved. *Kvalsund* waits at center, with no faux registration number yet painted in. *Borghild* is partly visible behind her at left. *Drott* lies at right, with *Viola* sandwiched between her and *Medea*.

Courtesy Norwegian Navy Museum/
Frank Abelsen



Even once safely back in port, the men were still never completely free from fear:

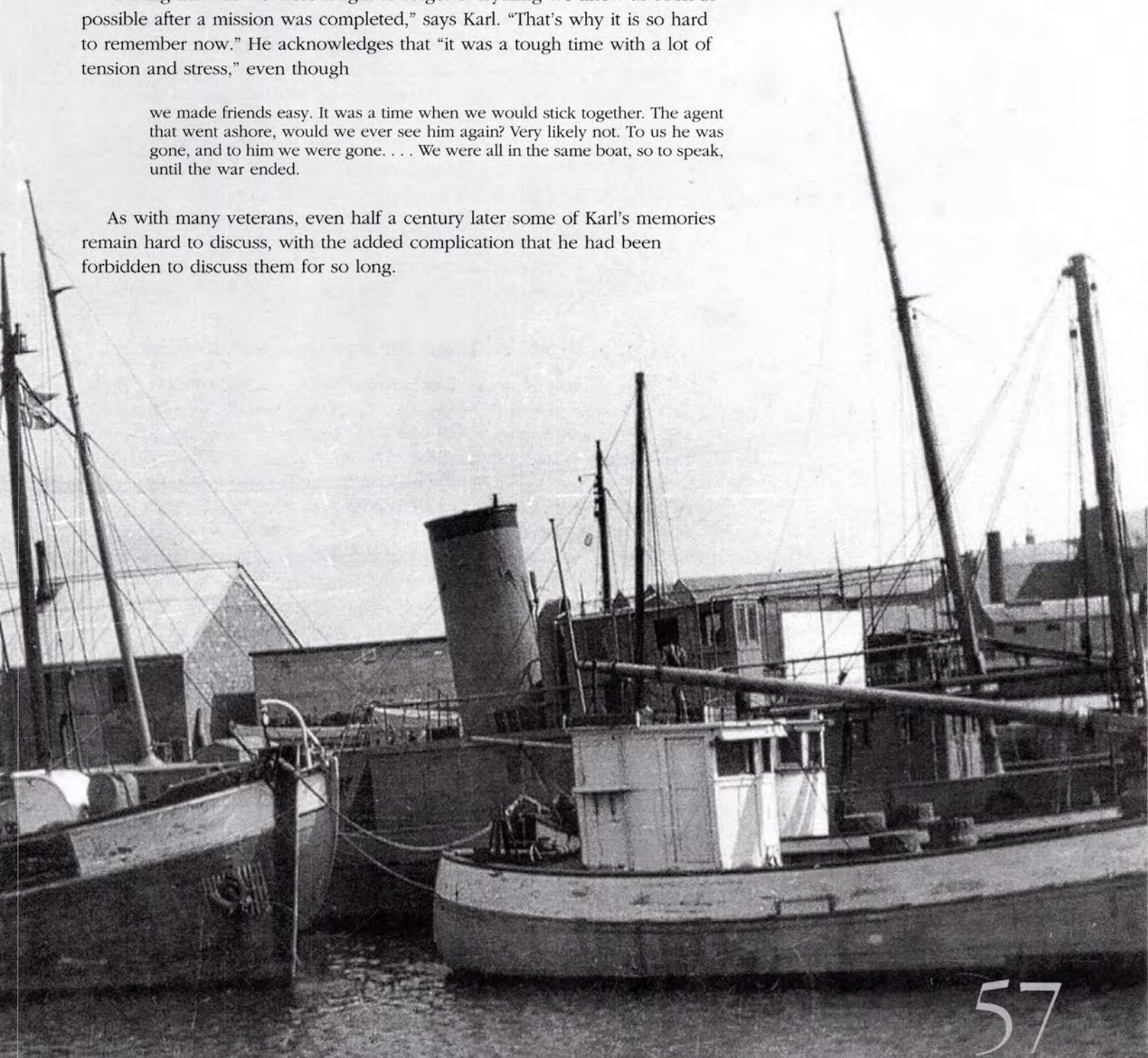
We were extremely afraid of agents or spies for the Germans. They could be everywhere. Not just behind enemy lines over in Norway but wherever we went during the war, even in Scotland. It was a dangerous time and we were all afraid of being captured and tortured, to break down and to tell anything . . . We were always reminded not to talk, not even to visiting Navy men.

After the War

"During the war we were taught to forget everything we knew as soon as possible after a mission was completed," says Karl. "That's why it is so hard to remember now." He acknowledges that "it was a tough time with a lot of tension and stress," even though

we made friends easy. It was a time when we would stick together. The agent that went ashore, would we ever see him again? Very likely not. To us he was gone, and to him we were gone. . . . We were all in the same boat, so to speak, until the war ended.

As with many veterans, even half a century later some of Karl's memories remain hard to discuss, with the added complication that he had been forbidden to discuss them for so long.





At his home in Norway in March 2004, Karl holds a magnet used to attach a limpet mine to a ship.

Photo by Olaf Engvig

After the war we did what we were taught—we tried to forget. We never talked about it for a very long time. My thoughts were always centered on the fact that I was one of the lucky ones that survived the war. So many I knew had lost their lives. I was privileged . . . It was not an easy thing to survive like I did. My own brother lays buried in an unknown grave in Germany.

I remember all my comrades. I miss them, and my own brother Ole. He could not come along when Cousin Arne and I fled Norway. I had to tell him “no.” My father told me not to bring my brother along when we left. My brother later died in Germany. He was arrested by the Germans and sent to Germany.

The circumstances of Ole’s arrest and death are unknown, but one possibility is that the Gestapo linked him to his activities in helping hide the spy and equipment Karl brought on the *Harald II*. His brother’s death is the hardest memory for Karl to talk about; he starts crying when talking about it.

Not surprisingly, many of the Norwegian Navy men, along with those active within Norway in the resistance against the German occupation, developed post-traumatic stress syndrome after the war. They struggled with guilt, had nightmares, or relived being hunted, torpedoed, interrogated or imprisoned. Doctors had little or no treatment to offer many of them. They often did not speak about it but suffered in silence. Many became heavy drinkers, others ended up in mental institutions, and some committed suicide. A patient and understanding spouse provided salvation for many. Karl is one of the lucky ones.

The Spirit of the *Medea* and the MI6 Unit at Peterhead

Along with a few worn veteran motor cutters still in Norway²⁴ and the memories of Karl Solevaagseide, the yacht *Medea* is one of the last scattered reminders of the men who risked their lives sailing from Peterhead. While Peterhead’s operations are little known, even to avid historians of the war, the exploits of another secret Norwegian/British naval operation have become relatively well known from films, several books, and numerous articles—albeit primarily in Norway.²⁵ The “Shetland Bus,” a much larger operation based in the Shetland Islands, ferried agents, weapons, and other war materiel into Norway and carried refugees out. This “Shetland Gang” was under the umbrella of Special Operations Executive (SOE), an organization disbanded after the war, whose documents have been declassified. Peterhead, on the other hand, operated under the SIS, today’s ultra-secret MI6. Few documents have been released, and many seem to have been destroyed.²⁶ In short, the “Shetland Gang” could talk about their war experiences and often did, but until very recently, the veterans of Peterhead have not. During the war, they were forbidden to discuss their work even with their countrymen based in the Shetlands, and their own base’s existence was not even acknowledged until the mid-1980s.²⁷ In the words of Royal Norwegian Navy Rear Admiral Baard Helle, “All members of the Norwegian Navy’s motor boat division at Peterhead deserve credit and honor. The fact that their war efforts are almost forgotten—especially compared to that of the Shetland Gang—is due to the special demand for secrecy of SIS activities, which was adhered to long after the war. Well-deserved official recognition for their contribution has come very late.”²⁸ For nearly all of the Norwegian men who lived aboard the *Medea*, who took chances with their lives in the interests of their occupied country’s freedom, recognition *has* come too late. It is never too late, however, to salute heroes.



Celebrating the war's end, sailors and a Peterhead girl clown around on *Havørn's* wheelhouse.

Courtesy Karl and Helen Solevaagseide

NOTES

- 1 Agent 007's creator, Ian Fleming, was himself an SIS agent in London during the war. He was apparently connected to Peterhead operations, at least tangentially; he once hosted Norwegian SIS agents upon their safe return at an exclusive dinner at the Savoy. Bjørn Rørholt and Bjarne Thorsen, *Usynlige soldater: nordmenn i Secret Service forteller* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1990), 59-64, 238-239.
- 2 Richard S. Fuegner, *Beneath the Tyrant's Yoke, Norwegian Resistance to the German Occupation of Norway* (Edina, MN: Beaver's Pond Press, 2003), 125-135.
- 3 Sheena Archdale, quoted in "Memories of Those Norwegian Secret Agents," *The Buchan* (Scotland) *Observer*, 10 September 2002.
- 4 Karl O. Solevaagseide was born March 17, 1918 in Borgund, today Sula, not far from the town of Aalesund on the west coast of Norway, and was stationed at Peterhead during the base's entire period of activity, from summer 1941 through May 1945. All undocumented quotations and other material in this article are my translations of extracts from a series of interviews in Norwegian with Mr. Solevaagseide. Each paragraph in block quote form is from a single interview, but the order of some paragraphs has been rearranged for clarity. These interviews began with a series of telephone conversations starting in February, 2004, continued with an interview by my wife, Mona, in the subject's home in March, 2004, and concluded with my interview there in June, 2004. A longer version of this article, containing a more complete text of these interviews, is in the *Medea* Collection, MacMullen Library and Research Archives, Maritime Museum of San Diego (hereafter *Medea* Coll.).



His dangerous missions accomplished, Karl Solevaagseide grins at the end of the war.

Courtesy Karl and Helen Solevaagseide

- 5 Solevaagseide attended several courses and schools for special military training, graduating from gunnery school at Dumbarton. Along with anti-aircraft artillery and machine guns, he trained with various handguns, submachine guns, and grenades. From gunnery school he was sent to Glasgow to be engineer on *Kvist*, a large Norwegian sealer from *Vestisen*, the drifting ice off Newfoundland, taking her to Aberdeen. There, he was asked to make a trip to Norway on *Kvalsund*, returning to Peterhead.
- 6 Born in Germany but raised in Denmark and England, Haakon VII became king in 1905. The King, his only son Crown Prince Olav, and the Royal family escaped the Germans, thanks particularly to the delay of several hours in the invasion of Oslo caused by the sinking of the new heavy cruiser *Blücher*. Taken to England, they became crucial in building up Norwegian Forces as part of the Allied struggle against the Nazis. To my knowledge no other Norwegian merchant or navy vessel carried Haakon's name during WWII.
- 7 Karl recalls no nameboard bearing the name *Haakon*, as has been reported elsewhere. Arnold, *MEDEA*, 171.
- 8 Prewar photos do not show this small gaff, which Karl believes may have been added during wartime to carry the colors.
- 9 Hellesund, of the Royal Norwegian Navy (RNoN) succeeded the Royal Navy's Commander Newell (formerly head of the SIS Scandanavian section) as officer in charge of Peterhead. A. Struan Robertson to Mark Allen, 19 June 2004, *Medea* Coll.
- 10 Kristiansen and Solevaagseide are mentioned in Arnfinn Haga, *Natt på norskekysten, 1940-43* (Oslo: Cappelen Forlag, 1979); Kristiansen is discussed in Baard Helle, "Peterhead-basen, En lite kjent og påaktet marineinnsats under den annen verdenskrig," *Norsk Tidsskrift for Sjøvesen* (June, 1994). An English translation, "The Peterhead Base: A Little Known and Recognized Norwegian Naval Contribution During WWII," is on the internet at http://tihlde.org/~persto/kvalsund/peterhead_eng.html.
- 11 Solevaagseide could not recall whether *Medea* was hauled out at Peterhead, although there was a slipway next to her pier where cutters, Norwegian motor torpedo boats from Shetland, and British MTBs and other military vessels were hauled out.
- 12 Archdale, "Memories."
- 13 Helle, "Peterhead-basen."
- 14 Solevaagseide states that *Harald II* and *Kvalsund* were among preferred vessels for voyages to Norway's west coast and points further north. *Drott* and *Viola* were of the South Norwegian *skoyte* type, used for missions to the southwest region. Crews were likewise chosen to be blend into the chosen region: "*Viola* and *Drott* were sent to districts south of my district," he recalls. "The local dialect spoken there is far from the one we use in the Aalesund district. Other quartermasters than me would be coming along on voyages to that area."
- 15 Solevaagseide consulted a list I made of cutters that might have been at Peterhead, and was certain of these, the presence of several of which are borne out by photographic evidence. Additionally, he believes that *Gangar* made one voyage to and from Peterhead, but does not remember that *Bjorg* or *Dagny I* ever were there. A significant number of the motor cutters used clandestinely by the Norwegian Navy during the war were stationed at Peterhead, either on a permanent transfer, on special assignment, or on loan and under command of the SIS there. Frank Abelsen, *Norwegian Naval Ships 1939-1945* (Oslo: Sem & Stenersen, 1986), 273. On *Streif* and *Frøya*, see especially Rørholt, *Usynlige soldater*.
- 16 Robertson to Allen, 19 June 2004.
- 17 Solevaagseide, interview. The author has also heard this comment, expressed with similar vehemence, from other informants.

Helping Win the Second Battle of the Atlantic: Naval Intelligence from Norway

When Hitler's "Lightning War" (*blitzkrieg*) rolled over most of Europe before 1941, the Germans seemed in sight of winning the war. Only England, badly bloodied but not yet bowed, stood in the way.

While the *Luftwaffe* did great harm from the air, Churchill and his cabinet knew that the real threat to the British Isles would come if the German Navy succeeded in cutting off their maritime supply lines.

By occupying Norway, the Germans gained a safe haven for submarines and, especially, for their big surface warships. *Scharnhorst*, *Prinz Eugen*, *Lutzow*, *Admiral Scheer*, *Hipper* and the mighty battleship *Tirpitz* sheltered in the same fjord, waiting for the opportunity to break out and smash the British convoys. *Tirpitz*, especially, unnerved the Allies. *Bismarck*'s sister ship was the strongest and most advanced warship ever built in Europe. The American *Iowa*-class battleships were designed specifically to challenge her.

To find and keep watch on this fleet was critical, and this was the job of SIS spies from Peterhead. *Tirpitz* remained a threat until sunk by aircraft in November, 1944.

—Olaf Engvig



- 18 *Harald II* had been built in 1935. Other missions Solevaagseide recalls participating in include one to Hordland or North Rogaland, probably on *Streif*, and another mission to Sogn og Fjordane, and a long voyage on *Kvalsund* to Nord-Trøndelag. He also completed a third mission aboard *Harald II*.
- 19 Charles Remø, of Remøy, Norway, was a civilian who lived in a Peterhead hotel during the base's formative period. He left because operations were "not well organized" to attend radio school and join the merchant marine, after a mission on the *Drott* home to Remøy in December 1941, well before *Medea*'s arrival. Remø recalls that *Drott*, *Harald II*, and *Streif* were stationed there at the time, all of which had engine trouble which required Solevaagseide's work. He also sailed on *Kvalsund*, which was attached to Peterhead after his departure. Remø, telephone conversation with the author, 20 July 2004.
- 20 *Skerries* are rock pinnacles or reefs that break the ocean surface.
- 21 A *faering* is a traditional Norwegian longboat usually propelled by four oars.
- 22 Solevaagseide recalls two exceptions to the usual practice of delivering a lone agent, once when he helped transport two spies, and once when he landed a spy and picked up another on the same voyage. On another trip, he risked his life to make a run to Norway "empty" to pick up a spy. Failing to locate him, they were forced to make the return trip empty as well. Unlike the Norwegian unit in the Shetlands, the SIS did not permit refugees to be carried aboard Peterhead's boats or onto the base.
- 23 One trick used by clandestine radio operators to avoid detection required perfect timing. When a tracking airplane approached the site of a hidden transmitter, a watchman signaled the operator to fade out his transmission, hopefully resulting in the plane turning and searching in another direction. Conversation between the author and his father-in-law, radio operator Frederik V. N. Beichmann, alias "Oscar," of Company Linge, a Norwegian special forces unit under SOE command.
- 24 *Kvalsund* survives today at Surna, Norway. *Viola* exists in Southern Norway, while *Harald II* is said to survive at Bualandet. *Hitra*, an American-built sub-chaser that served at Shetland from late 1943, has been restored at the Norwegian Navy Museum, Horten.
- 25 Joint Norwegian/British naval operations from Britain are known collectively as "the Shetland Traffic" or "Englandsfarten" (England trade). This category often includes boats from other British ports than those at Shetland, such as Peterhead and Aberdeen, along with voyages to and from the Orkneys, Faeroes and Iceland. Some sources note that different units operated out of Shetland and Peterhead, though few note the distinct differences in organization between the two. Ragnar Ulstein, *Englandsfarten*, 2 vols. (Oslo: Samlaget, 1965/1967). The fishing boats of the "Skøytefarten" ("cutter trade") are known from several books, articles, and films, almost all in Norwegian. The best-known source in English is David Howarth, *The Shetland Bus* (London: Nelson & Sons, 1951).
- 26 Little has been declassified on the SIS unit at Peterhead, according to an email to the author from researcher Rolf Dahlo. Clearly, a great deal of research on the operations of this significant unit remains to be done.
- 27 Remø, telephone conversation, 2004.
- 28 Helle, "Peterhead-basen." Translation by the author.

Medea Comes to San Diego

Joe Jessop and Bob Sharp

Over thirty years ago, legendary San Diego yachtsman Joe Jessop and Maritime Museum President Bob Sharp were most responsible for bringing *Medea* to San Diego as an active historic ship. Their challenges came both from without—from strong-willed millionaire donor Paul Whittier—and within—from financially-worried fellow museum board members and the increasingly discontented Restoration Director, Ken Reynard. Joe Jessop and Bob Sharp are gone now, but *Medea*, their legacy, still plies the waters of San Diego Bay.

In 1991 they told their story to an interviewer, excerpts of which are published here for the first time:

Joe Jessop



I had cruised with Paul Whittier up in the Pacific Northwest, and on one cruise he said that he had become quite interested in maritime history, and that he had learned of a steam yacht in England that would be for sale, and he wanted to know if I thought the Maritime Museum would be interested, and of course I told him I thought we would. He described the terms: that it would be acquired and put into shape in good condition and turned over to the Maritime Museum. . . . He showed me a picture of the *Medea*—we'd had a cocktail or two that night—and he said, "You know, I'd like to buy this and give it to the Maritime Museum." Well, I didn't think too much about it until the next morning when we got up at five o'clock to get through certain narrows up in that area, with the proper tide, and the first thing he said when he got out of bed, he said, "Now Joe, don't forget. I really want to go through with this program." So then I knew at five o'clock in the morning he was for real.

. . . The problem was, the owner at the time was an alcoholic, and every time Paul would try to make a deal with him, the fellow was "not in a position to talk," so this went on and on and on. He went to Europe to make the deal, and finally when he got it all consummated, then Gordie Frost [Trustee Gordon Frost] and I flew up and met with Paul Whittier and his attorneys in the airport at Los Angeles, had lunch together, and agreed that we would be very happy to accept the gift, with no strings attached, with no guarantee on our part that we would keep the steam yacht, [but] when it was turned over to us it was "our baby."



At Goudge Island.

MMSD P13444 and P13443

He lived on Goudge Island [British Columbia]—he owned the whole island. . . . He does things like, "Oh—if you broke the handle on that cup, well, we'll get some glue and put it back. We won't go buy a new cup, we'll just put some glue on that. It'll be all right." Rope—he'd go to war surplus and buy a whole coil of rope . . . whether it was the right size or not, but he got it for a bargain!

I kind of gained the impression that Paul was getting a little tired of the job. The ordeal he went through in Europe trying to get the boat, to make a deal with this guy, the winter was cold, and then the problem of getting the ship here, then the strike [which stranded *Medea* at the Port of Long Beach for over a month]—lots of obstacles. He loves projects but this turned out to be quite a bit more than he bargained for, and I gained the impression he was getting a little tired of it: "Let's finish it off and put a coat of paint over it and send it down there. . . ."

. . . I don't think anyone realized what poor condition she was in, and it was somewhat of a patch-up job: "Ok—here's a plate that ought to be replaced." Well, they replaced that plate. Then the deck: "Well, we'll fix up the deck where it looks the worst." No discredit to Paul, but what should have happened was put her on the ways in Long Beach or San Diego or someplace, and really put her in first-class shape.

The original . . . signed agreement, was that we accepted the *Medea* with no strings attached. We could do anything we wanted with her . . . there was some concern among our members and even among members of our Board as to whether the *Medea* was suitable: "Could we afford to have this luxurious yacht here and going?" And there were different schools of thought . . . in fact Gordie Frost wrote a letter saying to the Board . . . "We're not quite sure where the *Medea* fits into the overall picture of our museum's long-range program." So that was going on and Paul was without a boat, and, being of the nature he is, he wanted to take the steam engine out of the *Medea* and set it up as a museum piece, and take the *Medea* up to his area in the Pacific Northwest and put in diesel power . . . it would revert back to the Maritime Museum . . .

. . . the Board voted to do this—they voted to go ahead and give it to him [but] The next meeting they reversed themselves.

[Museum Restoration Director Ken Reynard] had two sides to him, two definite sides. One very genial, very amiable guy, and a real genius in many ways . . . What was happening, unfortunately, was that we were doing one thing and the news was going to Paul, not from us, but from Ken Reynard, and the first thing we knew there were things going on that were not exactly what the *Board* wanted to do, and *very* unfortunately Paul blamed the Board, because Ken had a very charming side to him . . . and that's the side that Paul was getting.

Captain Kenneth Reynard.

MMSD P205



July 14, 1973

Bob Sharp,



At San Diego Yacht Club on July 14, 1973, Paul Whittier is at left, Bob Sharp at right.

This article is extracted from a May 2, 1991 interview by Craig Arnold, MacMullen Library and Research Archives. Transcribed by Joan Semler.

... there must have been one hundred yachts out there behind us, all whistles blowing, and soon ... the *Medea* went alongside ... the front float of the yacht club, and I insisted that they have some kind of a tugboat—in case anything went wrong, why, the tugboat could ease them in. Oh, Ken didn't want any part of that. I said, "Ken, you're making a mistake." Ken wanted to do it all himself. I said, "You know, there's always the chance of an accident: some little kid goes out in a little boat and gets in your way—we've got to get him out of there. Ken, you're going to have a boat there, period." There was a little disturbance about that. ...

Museum President, was on one of the boats welcoming *Medea*:

... I hollered over to Ken and said, "You're early—you've got lots of time to get to the club. Why don't you slow down and let the people stay with you?" Well, he wouldn't do it. He wanted to show off *Medea*. (Well, I don't blame him for that.) ... They had free eats and drinks, and I cautioned somebody ... not to open that up until the event was over. I guess they got eager ... so they opened the bar and the free food thing, and all these yacht club people, who didn't give a hoot about *Medea*, rushed over and started eating this food and talking, and they drowned out Mayor [Pete] Wilson. Nobody could hear him. There were a bunch of people who had gathered out on the float and they couldn't hear a thing that was going on up on the front porch because of this rabble that was gobbling up the food.

We were working on acquisition of the *Berkeley* at the same time, so we had our hands full with only one major ship in the museum for all these previous years, and all of a sudden two of them appearing on the horizon, and you can imagine there was a lot of discussion about it, but the Board finally said, "Yes Joe, go ahead and finish your negotiations with Paul."

Well, I think the first thing ... was to tie this somehow to San Diego history, and that was done through the Spreckels yacht [*Venetia*]. She was a familiar piece on the waterfront when Joe was a young man, and we thought a steam yacht of this type was not out of place in San Diego. ...

I see her being used as a living example that we can readily move around the Bay and make our statement of presence in San Diego. ... I think we should keep using her that way, and that's why I'm happy she's up to steaming capability now.



64

4169. "Venetia," Private Ocean going Steam Yacht
of John D. Spreckles in Harbor, San Diego, Cal.



After initial restoration at Goudge
Island, *Medea* went to Victoria in 1972
for hull restoration before her stormy
voyage to San Diego.

MMSD P13425 and PC2859

