



George Griffiths, Basic Training
June 1942

My name is George Griffiths. I was born on 7th May 1923 and brought up in Llandeilo, a small town in Carmarthenshire in South West Wales.

In 1941 I volunteered for service as a Wireless Operator in the RAF and in June 1942 was called up to RAF Padgate, a reception centre for new entrants to the Service. Here, I, along with other new arrivals went through the normal registration procedure and was issued with a uniform and the usual RAF kit.

Then followed a Wireless Operator's Course in Blackpool, and a further Course at No.4 Radio School at R.A.F. Madley, near Hereford.

I, then, made my first contact with the Air Sea Rescue Service, when, in February 1943 I was posted to A.S.R. Unit No. 23 Wells-on-Sea in Norfolk. The unit consisted of one Pinnace and one Sea-Plane Tender. However, my stay at Wells, was short-lived, as,

within about two months, I was posted to RAF Cranwell for a further Wireless Operator's course, after which, in October 1943, I returned to Wells-on-Sea. As I recall, there was little activity at this base, other than from time to time, for the pinnace, as required, to proceed to a point off Cromer and remain there on stand-by duties until ordered to return to base.

Early in 1944 I was posted to No. 28 ASR Unit at Newhaven, home to ten Mark 2 63ft Whaleback High Speed launches, nicknamed Whalebacks, due to the distinctive shape of the hull. It was at Newhaven that I first wore the official insignia of the ASR. This sew-on cloth badge, worn above the elbow, on the right arm sleeve, featured a side-on view of a High Speed launch, incorporating the letters ASR. Issued in 1943 and withdrawn in 1948, this badge was a rare item as it could only be worn by members of the Air-Sea Rescue Service. Consequently it attracted much interest and comment.



Initial Wireless Operator Course Members
Radio School Blackpool, 1942



Air Sea Rescue badge

Wireless Operator's badge



RAF Other Ranks badge Tropical



By now preparations for D-Day were well in hand, with the Unit engaging in regular patrols of the Channel, and I well recall D-Day, when the launch No. HSL134 that I was on, was alerted at 3 a.m., along with others, to patrol the Channel, keeping a watchful lookout from dawn to dusk for stricken aircraft. This pattern continued for some weeks but when operations on the continent moved northward, so the need for cover of the Channel declined and HSL 134 was transferred to 25 ASR Unit at Lowestoft.

I recall three incidents in which I was involved during our stay at Lowestoft. On one occasion we were lying at a pre-arranged position, when an aircraft appeared overhead, dipping its wings, a signal to follow. Fairly soon we spotted an aircraft, partly submerged with the crew of seven in a dinghy nearby. Fortunately, there were no casualties, and after having waited to witness the aircraft sink, we conveyed the crew back to Lowestoft.



Crew of HSL 134 Early 1944
AM Thomsett L Peters DJ Rushmer R Harwood S Howell RJ Rigby
G Brown LA Leech G Stevenson F/Lt Davies (Skipper)

The next incident I recall was on Sunday 17th September 1944. Launch No. 134 was one of many to provide rescue cover for the passage of the aircraft and gliders, carrying troops and equipment for the Allied Landings at Arnhem, which became known as Operation Market Garden. This assault against the German positions in Holland was to end disastrously and many lives were lost. Memories of that time and the sight of hundreds of gliders on tow overhead remain with me to this day.

On another occasion, No. 134, with another launch and a Naval vessel, were ordered to rendezvous at a certain position. No. 134 was then ordered to proceed to a position where two shot-down Australian airmen were known to be awaiting rescue, in a dinghy close to the Dutch coast. Unfortunately 134 failed to proceed due to a seized water-cooling pump. The other HSL took over and succeeded in rescuing the two airmen; a happy ending of course, but a great disappointment to our crew, especially when the incident was later famously featured in the Picture Post, a well-known magazine of the time.

By the end of 1944 HSL 134 had returned to Newhaven, by which time the Authorities had long been considering the need for longer range rescue craft, particularly for use in the Far East. For



LRRC 007 July 1945 Underwater Inspection at Poole



Crew of LRRC007
 EJ Chambers (Blondie) P Tomlinson (Killer) T Browlie (Jock)
 CS Bultitude (Charlie) J Cooper (Muff) AJ Bedford
 (Dagwood) Beswick (Shortie) JG Russell FJ Brew (Shaefer)
 AH Weller (Doc) GG Tuckerman

this purpose a number of 115ft Fairmile Motor Torpedo Boats were acquired from the Royal Navy for conversion to Air Sea Rescue needs. By March 1945, men were

being selected from various bases to man these vessels, and I, along with others, was in due course, posted to RAF Calshot, near Southampton, where a number of crews were assembling.

I recall, on a Saturday early in May 1945, being one of a party joining the Southampton to Ryde ferry, the Medway Queen, that had made a special stop off Calshot to pick us up. From Ryde, we were transported to a boatyard at St. Helen's, where Long Range Rescue Craft (LRRC) 007, formerly MTB No 5014 in its Royal Navy days, had been converted and was awaiting a crew.



Crew of LRRC006 (part of a crew)
 S Honeyset (Rosie) George Griffiths KA Carroll (Pumps) E Ayres K Cox
 F Hanson SG Simmons J Argent AT Lovegreen Murphy (Big Murphy Job)
 A Holden AD Austin

After successful sea trials, including an underwater inspection at Poole, we proceeded to Plymouth to make up a flotilla of eight launches that became known as ASR Unit No. 101, the first long range Air Sea Rescue Unit.

On the evening of Saturday July 21st 1945, we set sail from Plymouth, heading for the Far East. After a short stay in Gibraltar, we arrived in Malta, where, within a few days, it was announced that Japan had surrendered, and



Christmas Day 1945 onboard
LRRC 006

fortunately, our voyage to the Far East was halted. I remember, whilst on the launch, receiving gifts from a Forces Comfort Fund, one of which was a gramophone and some records. We all enjoyed listening to Vera Lynn, Ann Shelton and The Inkspots, the stars of the time. The gift of a double-sized cotton sheet was of little use on a boat, but more useful when I got back home. I also appreciated the £5 sent every Christmas from a fund contributed to by the residents of my home town of Llandeilo.

By October 1945, I was transferred from LRRC 007 to LRRC 006, (MTB No.5012 when with the Royal Navy) I visited many places such as Naples, Ischia, Sardinia, and Benghazi among others. Whilst at Ischia, a number of my crew mates, Paddy Murphy, Rosie Honeysett, Yorky Parker, Jack Pope, Muff Cooper and I embarked on the Ischia to

Capri ferry for a day's outing to the island.

The highlight of the day was a visit to the famous Blue Grotto. Less of a highlight though, was when one of our party, in a moment of bravado, decided to knock on Gracie Fields' door asking to see her but needless to say, he was turned away.



October 1945 Outing to Capri On Ischia - Naples Ferry
Paddy Murphy S Honeyset (Rosie) George Yorky Parker
Jock Pope Muff Cooper



LRRC 006 October 1945
On Slip

Another outing I remember was when we were on a short posting to Cagliari in Sardinia, taking a train journey from Cagliari to Sassari in the North. Some organisation must have been sponsoring these outings for British Servicemen, as we were not asked for any payment.

In March of 1946, LRRC 006 was on the slip in Ischia and some time later, I remember being one of the crew taking her down through Suez to Fanara in Egypt, to be laid up, after which we were flown back to Malta, (I have a record that both LRRC 007 and LRRC 006 were converted to houseboats at



LRRC 006 off Benghazi N Africa
January 1946

Fanara in September 1947).

Following this trip, I was part of the crew that took another launch to Fanara, but with no record or photographs, I am unable to quote a Launch Number, or date, other than to say it would have been sometime in the Summer of 1946. Then, in September of 1946, I was part of a crew bringing a Hants and Dorset type High Speed Launch No. 2625 from Fanara to Malta and I have dated photographs of this.



February 1946 Benghazi
George, Carroll and "Cynthia" Clark



HSL 139 July 1946 off Port Said



LRRC 007 August 1945
Off Malta

In November of 1946, whilst on HSL 2625, we took part in an exercise in Kalafrana Bay, off Malta, and the following month, we celebrated Christmas of that year, still on HSL 2625.

Again, whilst on 2625, we kept a little dog we called Jeannie, on board. I still have a photograph of her and I recall how sad the crew was when we had to leave her, but we did ensure she had a good home when we left her in the good care of another crew.



Ship's dog 'Jeannie' on HSL 2625

Then finally, I recall being part of a crew taking another launch from Malta to Fanara, early in 1947, but again my memory fails me on the number of this launch.

In the Spring of 1947, the day of my demobilization arrived, and in late April I sailed from Port Said to Liverpool on the troopship, the SS Orduna. The voyage took two weeks and we slept in hammocks. It appears, that following a previous voyage, questions were raised in Parliament with the Secretary of State for War about the poor food and overcrowding on the Orduna. Luckily the conditions had improved for our voyage!

In mid-May 1947, the Orduna docked in Liverpool and the passengers were dispersed to various centres for the demobilisation formalities that included the issue of the famous 'demob suit'. Then followed the train journey back to Wales, arriving in Llandeilo at 7 o'clock in the morning. I remember the train was met by the local postman, collecting the mail and he was kind enough to deliver me and my baggage to my home.