

The S130 RESTORATION PROJECT - SOUTHDOWN

The last surviving S-boat known as an Enemy Boat (E-Boat) by the allies from WW2, is being restored at Southdown, Millbrook, Cornwall, in a purpose built shed by a project restoration team of highly skilled craftsman including shipwrights, boat builders and engineers, named Roving Commissions Ltd. Under the project manager John Owles the project team will pay a lot of attention to detail to see her fully restored and at sea again. S130 was towed to Mashfords Yard at Cremyll from Southampton on the 6th and 7th November 2004 where she stayed until being transported to her new site at Southdown on the 16th March 2008. The boat is classed by the Germans as a Schnellboot or fast torpedo boat type S38b and is a fine example of German resourcefulness and engineering standards.



S130 on the site of the old brickworks at Southdown, Millbrook after just being removed from the lake by being dragged up the slipway, prior to the shed being erected.

This boat was built at Johann Schlichting Boatyard in Travemunde being first commissioned on the 21st October 1943 and was a part of the 9th S- Boot Flotilla, under the command of oberleutnant Zur See Gunter Rabe, with a call sign "Raven". Basically a scaled down warship, being heavily armed, extremely fast and more than capable of causing immense damage to much larger enemy ships. She is capable of a speed of 40 knots being propelled by 3 X MB511 V 20 engines each developing 2,500 horse power. She displaces 110tons is 34.94 metres in length and has a beam of 5.28 metres.

S130 was a very successful example of the Schnellboot with a lot of fantastic history attached to her. For it was on the 27th March 1944 that she was one of the E-Boats (S-Boats) that found and attacked the American invasion force in Lyme Bay during Operation Tiger. The 100 thousand American troops were on an eight day training exercise off Slapton Sands preparing for the D day landings. S130 was one of the nine German E-Boats that left their base in Cherbourg on a normal reconnaissance mission and after entering Lyme Bay she suddenly came into contact with a LST convoy for which she could not see any naval escorts. This was due to a communication mix up and British escorting destroyers were removed from the convoy leaving just a small number of MTB's to cover the exercise. The E-Boats quickly positioned themselves for a torpedo attack, made contact and fired. Just after 2.00am LST 507 was hit with the torpedo entering the auxiliary engine room cutting off all electrical power. The ship soon burst into flames, the survivors of the attack were ordered to abandon ship.

LST531 was the next craft to be hit; she rolled over and sank within 6 minutes. LST 289 although hit managed to limp back ashore after suffering many deaths and casualties.

The consequences of these actions accounted for at least 749 Americans to loose their lives, 946 in total during Exercise Tiger. Many trapped below decks going down with the ships. Many leapt into the sea and drowned, weighted down by their waterlogged clothing others succumbed to hypothermia in the very cold water. Most of the men were washed up on the beaches around Slapton Sands, buried in unmarked graves to try and hush things up.



S 130 in the newly erected shed at Southdown Millbrook, viewed from the stern looking towards the bow. You can clearly see the two torpedo tubes.

Several of the Americans survivors that were involved in operation Tiger and training exercises at Slapton Sands have recently journeyed from America to Southdown in Cornwall to view S130 the sole surviving German E-Boat involved.

In May 1945 she was taken by the Royal Navy as a British war prize being delivered by a German crew to Gasport along with various other small craft. The torpedo tubes were de-activated and blanked off and the gun was removed, additional fuel tanks were fitted to increase her operating range and powerful radar and radio direction finding equipment was fitted. The MB 511 V-20 cylinder diesels were removed and Napier-Deltic diesels rated at 3140-PS fitted which increased her speed to 45 knots. This paved the way for her new career in the guise of a fisheries patrol vessel on covert operations undertaking intelligence missions in the Baltic Sea during the cold war.



This Picture shows one of the original MB511 V-20 cylinder diesel engines.

During this period S130 would turn up in the middle of the soviet fleet during manoeuvres and in approaches to soviet bases, collecting very useful information, taking photographs, recording noise signatures etc. She made a thorough nuisance of herself but once detected, in spite of all the Russians efforts to intercept her she was able to escape by roaring off at high speed. She carried and wore a variety of insignia and ensigns just to confuse the situation further which made identification very difficult as several navies used former Kriegsmarine S-Boote's, given to them by the US and UK as war prizes.

She ultimately found herself returning to the German flag and was used as a test and training vessel in a variety of roles under pennant number EF3 until 1991 when she was decommissioned after 48 years service. She remained in Wilhelmshaven until 2003, being used as a house boat until her acquisition for restoration by her present owners for the princely sum of a £1 from The British Military Powerboat Trust.

S130 is now a part of the Wheatcroft Collection and Roving Commissions are restoring her to her original WW2 specification which includes the original engines, torpedo tubes and other armaments. The Wheatcroft Collection is one of the world's largest private held collections of military and other vehicles with over 200 items in various stages of restoration, including a wide range of boats, planes, tractors, tanks, steam engines and motor bikes. They are committed to make this project happen after a couple of previous private restoration projects had failed.

S130 is a very interesting project that will take at least 3 years to complete at a cost of around £5 million and will secure her place in history and no doubt form a part of Rame



S130 looking from the bow to the stern, note the exit from this torpedo tube now the blanking plate has been removed and the sleek lines of the hull.

Heritage. Once finished she will become a floating memorial to the soldiers and sailors that became casualties and perished, on both sides, during WW2. A tragedy that did not unfold to the world until 40 years later.

Members of the public are being offered the opportunity to become a part of this project by becoming an exclusive member of the S130 restoration club for which you will receive invitation to open days at the site each year and a quarterly electronic newsletter amongst other advantages.

Colyn Thomas
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For More Information visit:
www.s130.co.uk