

Polish Motor Gun Boats and Torpedo Boats from WW2

Before WW2, the Polish Government had planned to build 17 MTBs, financed from public subscription (one from each of the Polish provinces) and originally designated for operations in the Baltic. A commission was appointed on the 9th September 1938, to consider the different tenders.

The Polish Navy was well acquainted with the shipbuilders J Samuel White in Cowes on the Isle of Wight, and a contract for the building of the first two was signed on 24th January 1939, being due to be delivered in March 1940.

Originally, they were to be fitted with Italian Isotta-Fraschini petrol engines, manufactured in Monterosa, Milan, which would give the boats a speed of 41-45 knots. The British Admiralty supervised their construction and they were given yard building numbers 5308 and 5309.

In August 1939 four Italian engines arrived for the MTBs, and a Polish Naval Technical Delegate arrived to assist in supervising the construction. In Poland, war was finally declared on 1st September 1939 and work came to a temporary halt; the boats were requisitioned by the Royal Navy, hence the RN numbering (MTBs 424-429) in some official photographs.

The Isotta-Fraschini engines were fitted to the first boat, S-1, but spares proved a problem once Italy allied with Germany, and other engines had to be sourced, mainly from the USA.

Ultimately, ten boats were built, seven at White's (as Torpedo Boats, S-1 and S-5 to S-10) and three, (as Motor Gun Boats S-2, S-3 and S-4) at the British Power Boat Company in Hythe, Southampton.

The Polish coastal craft were based at, or visited, many English ports including Cowes, Gosport [HMS Hornet], Dover [HMS Wasp], Ramsgate, Felixstowe [HMS Beehive], Lowestoft [HMS Mantis], Portland/Weymouth [HMS Bee], Fowey and Dartmouth. Some also sailed around Lands End, as far as Holyhead [Anglesea] and Milford Haven on training exercises.

The Polish boats were commanded by junior officers, in their early 20's, who rotated frequently and often commanded more than one boat during their service. The officers and men had a fearsome reputation, and adapted quickly to their situation, many marrying local girls in the areas where they were stationed.

The boats were all wood, the hulls being 'double diagonal' construction, built and maintained with expertise and wartime pride.

At the end of WW2, most of the surviving boats were put into temporary storage, to be sold by a branch of the MOD, 'The Director of Small Craft Disposals' who offered them at reasonable prices. Many were still in wartime ex-service condition (minus their armament) and some had their original, very expensive-to-operate and somewhat dangerous, petrol engines installed. Some were re-engined with more economical diesel or petrol/paraffin engines, if they were to be used as motor yachts and some had engines removed to make more living space. After the war they made reasonably cheap living accommodation and at that time moorings were fairly easy to find at moderate cost.

BOAT DETAILS S-1 to S-10.

(Details/history/whereabouts of S-6 and S-9 have not yet been found).

MGB S-1 (the 'S' is Polish for **Scigacze**, meaning pursuer/destroyer) was ordered in January 1939 and built by the J Samuel White Shipyard in Cowes being delivered in

April 1940, at a cost of £31,000. She had the unofficial name of 'Chart' (meaning, 'Greyhound'). She served in the 3rd MGB Flotilla and was based in Fowey, Cornwall.

Technical data for S-1:

Displacement: 35 tons / 39 tons full load

Engines: 3 x Isotta-Fraschini petrol, total 3450hp/later re-engined with Packards

Dimensions: 75' x 16'6" x 4'6"

Range: 270nm @ 38kts./ 450nm @ 20kts. Fuel carried: 5.1 tonnes/100 octane

Armament: 4x 7.6mm

(As completed) 2x 12.7mm

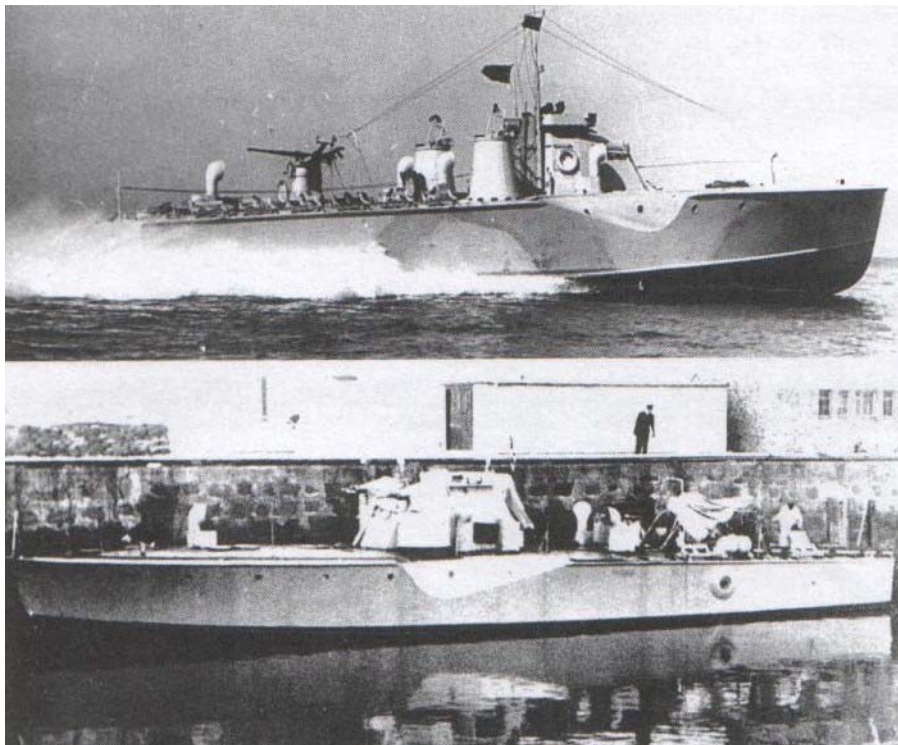
1x 20mm

Complement: 12

Speed: 38 – 42 kts.



Polish MGB S-1, 'Chart', ('Greyhound'), originally designed for use with torpedoes (note the 'scalloped' sheer line), but used as a MGB



Upper photo: J Samuel White's MGB 47

Lower photo: White's MGB 48, which became S-1

MGBs S-2 and S-3:

These 63'boats were designed by George Selman and built by The British Power Boat Company in Hythe, Southampton, originally as MTBs for Norway.

S-2 (unofficial name: 'Wilczur', meaning 'Wolfhound'), engaged 6 German E-boats on the night of 22nd June 1944 which were about to attack a British Convoy in the Dover Straights. The skipper, Lt. E. Wcislicki (nicknamed "Whisky", later to become Captain Westlake RN), was awarded the DSC and the Polish Virtuti Militari.



Polish MGB S-2 (as MGB 44)

(Illustration: 'Kartonowy Arsenal' card model of S-2)



Polish MGB S-2 (ex-MGB 44)

(Photo: Geoffrey Hudson Collection)

S-2 paid off on 5th July 1944 and was laid up in Devonport. A Polish Naval Mission inspected her there on 14th March 1947, but as she was in bad shape, decided not to

take her back to Poland. In 1951 she was apparently used as a 'target boat' for RN gunnery practice.



MGB S-2
(Photo: Geoffrey Hudson collection)



MGBs S-2 and S-3 in Ramsgate Harbour



Polish Officers on board MGB S-2.

*Sub. Lieut. T. Lesisz, Sub. Lieut. A. Guzowski and lying on deck,
Sub. Lieut. E. Wcislicki (plus one unidentified, probably A. Jaraczewski)
(Photo: T. Lesisz)*

S-3 (unofficial name: 'Wyzel', meaning, 'Pointer').

Commanded by Sub. Lieut. Andrzej Jaraczewski ('Andrew'), who later commanded MTB S-7 (now houseboat 'Thanet' at Shoreham Harbour, Sussex).

On 4th September 1940, S-3 ran aground on the Goodwin Sands, was re-floated and towed to Dover. In November 1940, she was damaged outside Fowey Harbour after an acoustic mine dropped from an aircraft, exploded close by, and had to have extensive repairs done to her hull in Falmouth. In May 1943, because of damage, she paid off and was stored until she was put up for sale.

In 1977, S-3, took part in the Royal Silver Jubilee celebrations as part of the Thames River Pageant, with Andrzej Jaraczewski and his wife on board.

Today, (February 2007), she is known as 'mv Freelance' and is moored on the River Medway in Kent, and is still in fully working condition, although she does not have the original Rolls Royce 'Merlin' engines. [She is owned by Gordon Cavell].

Wartime actions by S-3, are mentioned in the books 'The Little Ships' by Gordon Holman, (first printed in October 1943), Sir Peter Scott's, 'The Battle of the Narrow

Seas (Published in 1945) and *Home Waters MTBs and MGBs at War 1939-45* by Len Reynolds. (ISBN 0-7509-2274-5)



*'Freelance' (MGB S-3) is now moored at Port Werburgh, River Medway in Kent.
(Photo: Gordon Cavell)*

Technical data for S-3:

Displacement: 24 tonnes / 31 tonnes loaded

Dimensions: 63' x 15' x 4'3"

Engines: 2 x Rolls Royce Merlin petrol @ 1100hp each

Speed: 36 – 40 kts.

Complement: 10

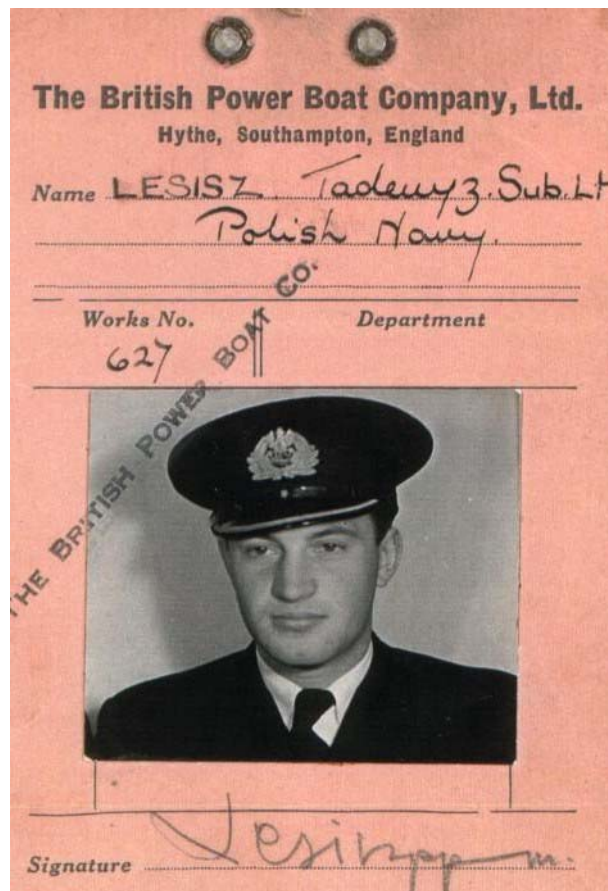
Armament: 1 x 20mm, 4 x .5" M/C guns, 4 x depth charges



*'Freelance'/S-3
(Photo: Tim Deacon)*



*'mv. Freelance' – wheelhouse
(Photo: Tim Deacon)*



*British Power Boat Company Shipyard Pass for Sub. Lt. Tadeusz Lesisz S-3
(Courtesy of T. Lesisz)*

In WW2, whilst operating in the Dartmouth/Fowey/Western Approaches area, the officers lived on board the accommodation ship Motor Yacht 'Sister Anne' in Fowey Harbour.



Motor Yacht 'Sister Anne' in Fowey Harbour

MGB S-4

Built by the British Power Boat Company, Hythe, Southampton, she was originally designated MGB 113 in 1943 and then as an MTB in 1944. The boat was loaned to Poland in July 1943 and served in the 2nd MTB Flotilla and returned in April 1944. For a short period she became Dutch MTB 432 in the 2nd MTB Flotilla and was apparently sunk in May 1944.

Technical data for S-4:

Displacement: 37 tonnes

Dimensions: 71'9" x 20'6" x 3'5"9"

Engines: 3 x Packard petrol, total 4050 hp.

Speed: 36/42 kts.

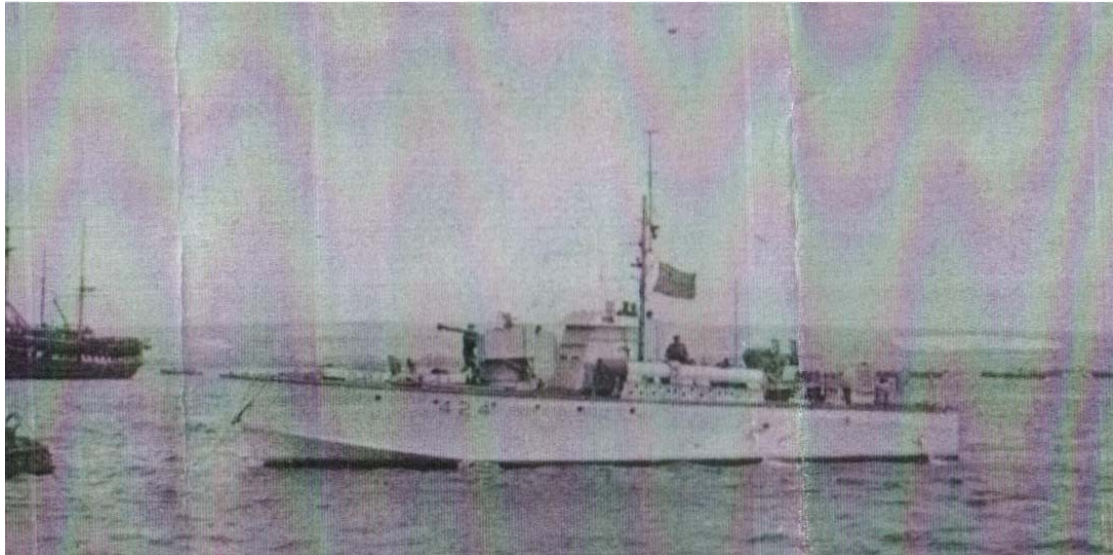
Complement: 12

Armament: 1 x 2 pounder gun, 2 x 20mm, 4 x .303 M/C guns.

MTB S-5 to S-10

These six boats were built by J Samuel White in Cowes, I.O.W, and launched during 1944, and despite extensive 'working up' in the English Channel, did not take part in any enemy action, to my knowledge. They served in the 8th MTB Flotilla, under the command of Lt.Cmdr. Witold Szuster.

The British designation of the boats was H.M.T.B 424 – 429, prior to handing over to the Polish Navy. They were well armed and carried 2" rockets mounted next to the 6 pound gun on the foredeck, as well as machine guns and two 18" torpedoes.



*MTB 424 (S-5) at her moorings
(Admiralty photo)*



MTB S-5, probably at Felixstowe

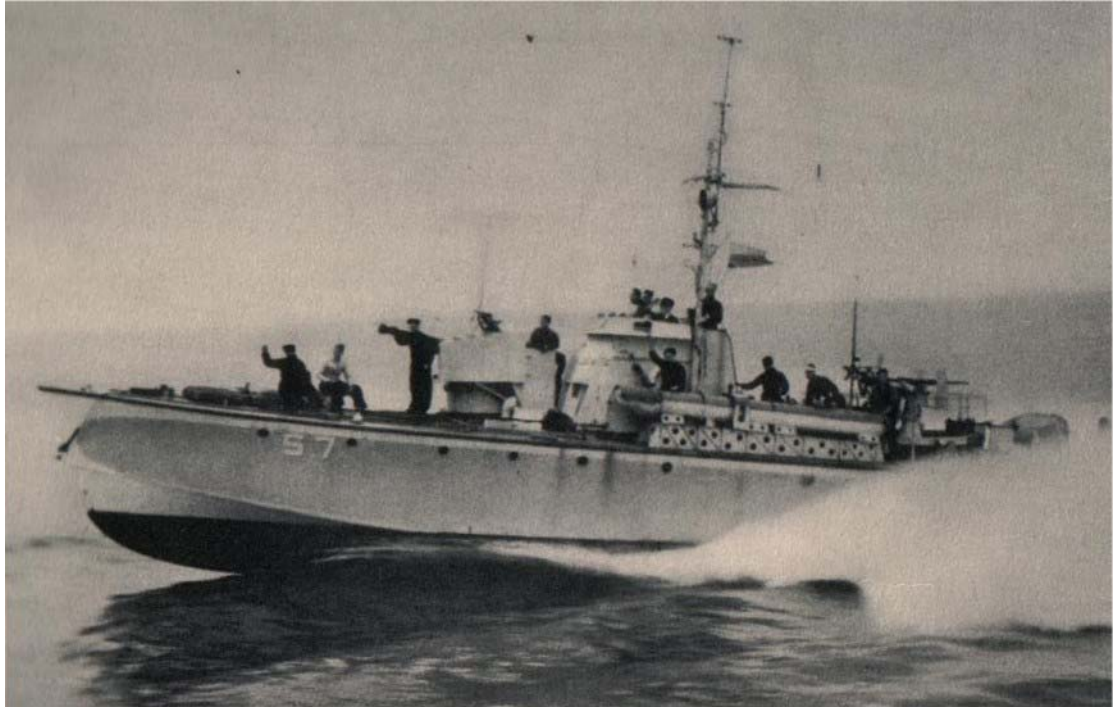
During the war, S-5 was commanded by Lt. Cmdr. Witold Szuster and Lt. M. Bochenski.

As far as can be ascertained, after the war, S-5 was sold to the Thames Barge owners, Horlock's of Mistley, for their own use, but this has not been verified to date.

S-6 (HMTB 425), No details available

S-7 (HMTB 426)

Most of the official Admiralty photos of this class of MTB were taken of this boat. The photographer 'Beken' of Cowes also took some action shots of this MTB in the Solent when on builder's trials. She was also filmed by an official Polish Navy Film unit in 1944 at speed in the English Channel. The film clip was used in a short BBC Television programme in February 2004 in the series 'Then and Now' when S-7 (known as Houseboat 'Thanet') was filmed in Shoreham Harbour after being 'rescued' by Mike Gillespie and Therese Erikson. The boat was sunk and in poor condition when Mike and Therese found her and they repaired and fitted her out to make a comfortable home. To my knowledge, S-7 is the last Polish MTB afloat.



*S-7 at speed in the English Channel 1944
(Photo: Polska Marynarka Wojenna)*



*S-7(MTB 426) on trials in The Solent 1944
(Admiralty photo)*



*S-7 (September 2003) as 'Houseboat Thanet' in Shoreham Harbour, Sussex.
(Photo: Tim Deacon)*

S-8 was sold in 1950 by the 'Director of Small Craft Disposals' and became 'Houseboat Hippocampus', moored on the River Hamble, close to Bursledon Bridge, until 1974, when, due to a redevelopment of the foreshore, she was towed to 'Belsize Boatyard', on the River Itchen, and sold for £475 to Tim Deacon, who moved her to Priory Boatyard in St. Denys, Southampton.

She was renamed 'Whimsical Macgoffley' and over the next four years was extensively rebuilt, re-decked with ½" ply sheathed with glass fibre. New gunwales were fitted and the old wheelhouse structure removed in 1976, to be re-placed with a new one. A lot of internal work was carried out and she was made into a comfortable home, complete with coal fired central heating.

In 1979 she was sold to Hedley and Dorcas King for £8000, then had 2 or 3 other owners and was eventually broken up and burnt in a 'Viking Funeral' in 1996, on the Marchwood foreshore on Southampton Water.

Some fittings from the boat remain with Tim Deacon. One of the hammock hooks from the crew's accommodation in S-8 was presented to Marek Twardowski, the curator of the Maritime Museum in Gdynia, Poland in September 2005 to be displayed on the WW2 Destroyer 'ORP Blyskawica', still a serving ship in the Polish Navy. She was famous for 'saving Cowes', when on the night of 4 May 1942, under the command of Commander Roman Francki, 'Blyskawica', on a refit in Cowes, acted as an anti-aircraft platform when the German Air Force tried to destroy Cowes town, dropping over 200 bombs on the town. A commemorative plaque was unveiled on The Parade, West Cowes to commemorate the crew's efforts.



S-8 being towed into Priory Boatyard from Belsize Boatyard in November 1974, by local fisherman John Green and his boat 'Amazon'. (Photo: Tim Deacon)

The official number of the boat was unknown until, whilst removing the old deck, the boat's 'Piping Installation' plate from the engine room was discovered, with the number 'HMTB 427'. Since then I have been slowly discovering the history of the boat and the other boats in the Polish Coastal Forces Flotillas. Much of the original information about the boat came from the Sikorski Museum in London. Sadly, no records exist from J Samuel Whites as they were destroyed during the war. The East Cowes Heritage Centre has some information about White's Shipyard, together with the Maritime Museum in Cowes, based in the Library.



The remains of S-8: Engine room 'Piping Installation' plate, draught marks and brass and plastic identification plates. (Photo: Tim Deacon)



'Whimsical Macgoffley' (S-8), for sale in 1985, asking price £14500.
(The motor boat moored to starboard of S-8 is 'mv Glala', an ex-Dunkirk Little Ship, once owned by Sir Alan Cobham, the aviator and inventor of in-flight re-fuelling systems. She is now called 'mv Mahalia').

S-9

No details/history available



S-9 moored up, location unknown, possibly Dover.
(Photo: Polska Marynarka Wojenna 1947)

S-10

I am indebted to Marlowe Sprega-Morris, from Canada, who sent me some photos of S-10, as his father, Kasimiertz Sprega, a crewman on board S-10, took some photos when serving on the boat. The last CO of S-10, Roman Dulla still lives in West Sussex and helped in the making of the BBC film about S-7.



S-10 at speed, torpedo tubes removed
(Photo: Marlowe Morris, Canada)



S-10 leaving Felixstowe 1944
(Photo: Marlowe Morris, Canada)



Unknown Officer, possibly from S-10
(Photo: Marlowe Morris, Canada)

S-10, keeping her original petrol engines, went to Cornwall after the war and was converted to a private motor yacht, 'mv Taifun', at Falmouth Boat Construction, and subsequently used in the 1955 film, '*The Ship that Died of Shame*', originally a short story by Nicholas Monsarrat. The film starred George Baker, Richard Attenborough, Bill Owen and Virginia McKenna.

In the film, she was MGB 1087 'after the war'. Three different boats were in fact used in the filming, S-10, MTB 528 and MTB 'Gay Dragoon'.

Sometime after the film was made 'mv Taifun' was sold and skippered by Hugh Edwards, the brother of the comedian Jimmy Edwards, motored to Tangiers and was 'lost' in 'suspicious circumstances' in the Mediterranean. The story of 'Taifun' was told in the book '*Midnight Trader*' by Hugh Edwards (Published by George Harrap & Co. in 1959) and serialised in a national newspaper at the time; enquiries are currently being made to get more information about these facts.

Technical data for MTBs S-5 to S-10:

Displacement: 39 tons / 46 tons loaded.

Dimensions: 71'6" x 18' x 2'9"/5'6"

Engines: 3 x Sterling Admiral Supercharged petrol. Total 3360 hp.

Speed: up to 40 kts.

Endurance: 240 miles at 24 kts.

Fuel: 100 octane/2300 gallons

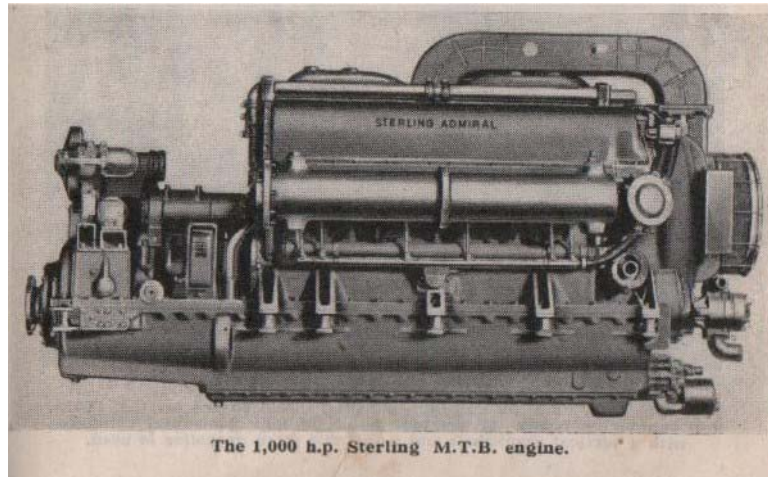
Armament: 1 x 6lb. gun on foredeck, 2" rocket launcher, 2 x 20mm cannon, 4 x .303 M/C guns, 2 x 18" torpedoes, rocket flare projector, CSA gas/smoke

Complement: 17, 2 officers, 15 men.

Communications: Wireless telegraphy, Echo sounder, 3 x radar sets, Inter-ship R/T. The hulls of these boats were of double diagonal construction, and the decks ½" ply, reinforced in high-stress areas. They proved to be not as strong as the British Power Boat MGBs.



Polish Navy Association Crest



Sterling Admiral 1000 hp Supercharged Engine, used in White MTBs S-5 to S-10. They used 100 Octane petrol. German E-boats were powered by safer, diesel engines. (Illustration from 'Motor Boat and Yachting Manual' 1947)

As far as I can tell, MTB S-7, houseboat 'Thanet', is the last remaining Polish MTB in existence, and 'my Freelance', the last Polish MGB. My boat, S-8, was broken up in 1996, but I still have some artefacts from the boat. It is possible that other boats from the original six remain somewhere, but since 1974, when I started to collect information about the Polish boats, I have never come across any reference to them.

***Tim Deacon
Southampton, January 2004 ©***

If you have any photos, stories of the Polish MGBs or MTBs, please contact me on:

e-mail: tim@deacon427.fsnet.co.uk

Postscript regarding the 1955 film, 'The Ship that Died of Shame':

The black and white film made in 1954, produced by Michael Relph and directed by Basil Deardon at Ealing Studios (in fact the last film made there), was based on the story by Nicholas Monsarrat, and used three different boats in the film. The commissioned sequences used HMS 'Gay Dragoon', P1050, (without torpedo tubes). Designed by Vosper's, 'Gay Dragoon' was built by J. Taylor of Chertsey, Surrey in 1953, and could be fitted out as an MTB, MGB or minelayer. She was petrol driven (3 Packard engines), of wooden construction and capable of 40 knots. MTB 528 (a Vosper 73' 1944 design) was used in the 'laid-up' footage, filmed at Pound's Portchester scrap yard.

.....and lastly **S-10**, after she had been converted to a private motor cruiser, 'my Taifun', at Falmouth Boat Construction, Cornwall.

The film used the following locations: The Tidal Basin in Portsmouth Dockyard, Portchester Harbour and Poole Harbour, plus some high speed shots filmed in the English Channel. A local motor yachtsman, Dr. Gabriel Jaffe, an ex-Mayor of Bournemouth and an ex-RNVR Surgeon Lieutenant, used his own boat (an ex-RAF Air/Sea Rescue Launch, named 'Reward') as a 'water taxi' for the film crew and actors.

Nicholas Monsarrat (1910–1979)

Nicholas Monsarrat, author of ‘The Ship that Died of Shame’, was born in Liverpool in 1910, the privileged son of a successful surgeon. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge where he studied law. His career as a solicitor ended swiftly when he decided to leave Liverpool for London with a half finished manuscript under his arm and £40 in his pocket! He served in the Royal Navy and with the publication of his classic story ‘The Cruel Sea’, became one of the most successful novelists of the 20th century.

The following extract is from the front page of ‘The Falmouth Packet’ newspaper, dated September 24th 1954:

‘Taifun’ goes into action at last – on the films.

Last week, a craft built to take a vital part in the last war as one of the Royal Navy’s ‘little ships’, left Falmouth. She is to be used in a film of the adventures she herself was denied by the cessation of hostilities.

The ‘Taifun’, as she is known, is an MTB, and was to have been used by the Polish Navy. ‘V’ Day arrived before she was ready for action, and with many other naval craft, she came on the public market. Four years ago, Capt. G.F Yates of Crownick Woods, Restronguet, purchased her from the Admiralty and converted her for civilian use.

Mr. Yate’s affairs have necessitated him being away from the district latterly, so that he readily agreed to a request from Ealing Studios for the use of his boat in making a film. The title of the new film is ‘The Boat of Shame’. It deals with an MTB used for smuggling after being in the forefront of the battle of ‘the little ships’. Star of the film and skipper of the boat will be Richard Attenborough.

For two years the ‘Taifun’ has been laid up at a local yard. Last week-end her three 1100 horse power engines were overhauled as she rode her moorings off the Greenbank Hotel. Tuesday afternoon sea trials were carried out, and after refuelling, she left Falmouth on Wednesday afternoon for Weymouth and a life of pseudo adventure.

Her crew for the voyage were Cmdr. L Perry, naval adviser to Ealing Studios and war-time commander of an MTB flotilla; Chief Engineer C.H Bromley, two deck hands and a Merchant Navy skipper employed by the studios.

Wednesday night was spent at Fowey, and the following afternoon Richard Attenborough and a number of other film stars greeted her arrival at Weymouth. Average speed for the voyage was 17 knots.

It is hoped her career as a film star will be unmarred by storms as violent as that described by her name, which is Polish for typhoon.
