

Malta's tiny wartime fleet:



HM Drifter Eddy in front of Senglea Marina, c. 1940

## HM Drifter Eddy

by Denis A. Darmanin

THE ROYAL NAVY has a long list of ships which made a name for themselves during World War Two, but we must not forget the much smaller vessels which were so essential to Malta's defence. An underwater documentary in the series *Dinja Oħra* shown on TVM on June 12 featured a sunken wreck off the Maltese coast. This wreck is identified as that of H.M. Drifter Eddy.

Eddy, pennant no. FY12, was quite a small vessel. She measured 94 and a quarter feet long and 18 and a half feet wide. Her hold was nine and a quarter feet deep and her engines were "triple expansion" of 270 horse-power, producing nine knots per hour. She was built in Aberdeen, Scotland, by Alexander Hall and Engineering Company Ltd. and launched on August 6, 1918 (completed August 27).

Her launching was late for any effective role in World War One, so she was attached to the squadron conducting mine-clearance on the south coast of England. After the war, and once all clearance work was completed, she was transferred to the Mediterranean Fleet and mostly based in Malta. On August 14, 1936, the Admiralty decided to place the Eddy on the Reserve List in Malta.

Once Britain declared war on Germany, Eddy was recommissioned as a "minesweeping drifter" and joined the 403rd Minesweeping Group (Drifters) stationed in Malta. Although of a different class from other vessels, she still took part in most mine-clearance and salvage work.

Eddy was armed with a small three-pounder gun at the bow and a Lewis gun above the wheelhouse. As a precaution against magnetic mines, she was fitted with an anti-magnetic cable all around the ship-side at water-level, to avoid any damage from the mines she hunted.

Leading Stoker Joseph Faurè\* had joined the Royal Navy along with his bosom friend Joseph Medina. They were both 18 and from Cospicua and were posted to HMS St Angelo. Faurè was actually two months short of his

18th birthday but was accepted through some assistance by the parish priest.

At the outbreak of the war, he was assigned to HMD Eddy in her duties to sweep the approaches to Malta's harbours for the much needed supplies which were now being attacked and sunk by the enemy.

Unfortunately, Eddy was not destined to survive the war. On May 24, 1942, Faurè was on leave and Eddy was on "stand-by". She left Grand Harbour under cover of darkness to sweep a channel further north which was mined by Italian E-boats the previous night. At 4.30 p.m. the next day, about a mile off St Elmo Point, while on her way back to port, she struck a mine and sank.

The skipper and ten of her crew survived, but eight others were missing and presumed dead. Among them were Able Seaman Emmanuel Cremona, Petty Officer Stoker Emmanuel Pizzuto, Petty Officer Steward Joseph "San Guzepp" Spiteri and Acting Petty Officer Salvatore Borg, who died of injuries the next day.

Stoker Joseph Medina was not as lucky as his old friend Joseph Faurè. He died

trapped in the steel wreckage when *Justified* struck a mine and sank less than a month later - on June 16, 1942.

**Acknowledgements**  
The late Joseph Faurè and Mrs Maryanne "Nelly" Faurè for the photographs.



JOSEPH FAURÈ (right) with Joseph Medina



THE CHIEF ENGINEER of Eddy and his cat (left) who were both lost when the drifter sank. Right: other crew members, of whom the two at right also lost their lives.



MALTESE minesweeping crews and their officers at the end of the war



THE divers noticed a tube-like object (Underwater photography by Sarah Carlton Gauci and Mario Gauci)



THE REMAINS of two coal-fired furnaces



THE BOW SECTION beyond the anchor winch is missing



A LARGE SHOAL of amber fish seems to occupy every inch of the wreck

# Underwater discovery

EMI FARRUGIA describes how "Deep 5", a team of local divers led by him, came across a World War One paddle steamer on the seabed off Malta

A BOAT equipped with remote sensing electronic instruments capable of mapping the seabed follows a steady trail up and down the coastline. Like a farmer ploughing a field, the boat combs the surface in a systematic pattern.

The sea must be calm, but the operation could take hours or even days. Fortunately the sonar picks up an echo of a strange, unnatural shape, possibly man-made. Standing two to five metres above an uneven seabed, this contact looks promising.

The decision is taken to investigate this strange elongated object lying 40 metres below a blanket of water some distance away from the Maltese coastline. To identify this structure a visual contact is essential. This could be achieved either by dropping a video camera on an umbilical line hovering over the wreck so that the investigating team can examine the images by means of a monitor on board, or by sending down scuba divers. Since the depth is not too great, the latter option is decided upon.

Divers from the "Deep 5" team equipped with an underwater video camera and an underwater still camera descend the first 30 metres before they make out the remains of a shipwreck in an upright position. Underwater visibility is not so good, the water temperature is much lower at depth. The wreck looks awfully strange but welcoming the divers is a large shoal of amber fish which seem to occupy every inch of this wreck.

The top structure is missing, having collapsed

over the years. Wooden structures do not last long in the water. A marine worm, *Teredo navalis*, eats away wooden structures until they eventually rot and collapse. Our first impression is that this wreck must be very old, possibly dating back to World War One. Time has stood still for this shipwreck for over 80 years. Placing our fins on this wreck seems like touching history, where the past meets the present.

We descend on the stern section. The rudder-turning mechanism looks large. The rudder itself is certainly larger than those on other WW I shipwrecks filmed by the team and seen on *Dinja Oħra*, the TVM underwater series. Nearing the bottom, the seabed is littered with boulders - probably the debris dumped into the sea from the ruins of demolished buildings during WW I.

Looking for the ship's propellers brings a surprise: the wreck has none. Have these been salvaged? Yet the hull has no mounting that took the propeller shafts. A ship without propellers seems very strange. Could this be possible, or are the divers experiencing lack of concentration, a symptom of nitrogen narcosis?

Finning along the ship's side, the divers notice a tube-like object sticking out horizontally, approximately a metre away from the main deck. Even more interesting is that the wreck has another identical feature on the other side.

On closer inspection the divers discover that these two features had a mechanical function. The answer to the mystery of a ship without pro-



A SWARTNY class tug similar to Stirling Castle

pellers is paddle wheels. Although the wooden paddles are now gone, a pair once stood on these objects. These wheels have rotted away and bits and pieces of them now form part of the seabed below.

Going through a broken-up section on the wreck's starboard side, a section missing from some form of explosion which could have been caused by a mine, the divers enter the boiler room area. Two coal-fired furnaces can be seen with their doors open, waiting to be fed with a continuous supply of coal which is still lying on the floor and in the coal bunkers nearby. Instead these are now being fed by a continuous flow of cardinal fish.

The boiler pressure gauge is still there, but the only pressure it gets at this depth is exerted by the 40 metres of water lying above.

What we have found is a wreck of a steam paddle ship. The boilers shared a single funnel, and although the funnel is gone the place where it once stood is clearly visible. A huge bollard at the stem indicates that the ship once carried out tug duties. A number of low-calibre ammunition shells were also found. Although no guns have as yet been discovered, we safely assume that the ship had them on board and they must be somewhere else, lying silently on the seabed.

The bow section beyond the anchor winch is missing. The wreck lies tilting down at the bow, and parts of it could be submerged under the silt. It is possible that as the ship's engine, boilers, gearbox, and connecting rods are situated towards the bow section instead of the stern, the ship was predominantly bow-heavy, so it could also be that when the ship sank she went down bow first; when the vessel hit the seabed, the bow was smashed with the impact. Another possibility is that the bow section could have been exploded by a mine.

When one mentions paddle-wheel steamships one would immediately think of Mark Twain and those steam paddle riverboats used

on the Mississippi. At the turn of this century paddle steamers were a common sight in our harbours as well. Their manoeuvrability in confined places made them a popular choice at the time.

Steam paddle ships were even built after World War Two. Two famous tugboats that chiselled their name in history during the last war were *Ancient and Robust* - both were paddle wheel steamers.

The use of coal as a driving force on ships was quite a handicap for war purposes. Besides requiring a massive infrastructure, loading this fuel was also slow. Another serious handicap was the black smoke the ships left behind when steaming along on open water. The black cloud was a giveaway which attracted U-boat attacks. So eventually coal was replaced by a much cleaner fuel.

No definite clues were found on the wreck spelling out its real identity, such as the ship's bell, which may be anywhere on the seabed, or the ship's name crest normally found at the bow, since this section is also missing.

To establish the identity of this wreck, the divers have only one other lengthy option. Collect as much information as possible about the wreck, measure its approximate length, and its beam. In this case we have a wreck which is slightly longer than 30 metres with a nine-metre beam, and by elimination one can reasonably reach a conclusion.

All the names of paddle-wheel steamships which once operated around Malta in the first half of this century were collected with the help of Joe Caruana, the team's maritime researcher. First to be eliminated were those with two funnels. Then we removed from the list those which were too long or too wide to fit the size of this wreck. Next we chose the ones which could have been used as tugboats and excluded, for example, the ferry boats, until we had only a few names on our list. The fate of each and every one of

them was then investigated.

During this interesting process the exercise becomes similar to the work of a forensic detective searching for any clues to solve a crime.

The team's conclusion at this stage, unless proved otherwise, is that this wreck belongs to the single-funnel steam paddle-wheel auxiliary ship *Stirling Castle* which sank off Malta.

*Stirling Castle* was an auxiliary gunboat of 271 gross tons. The ammunition shells found on the wreck are connected with this type. Most ships are capable of towing, so a bollard at the stem is a common piece of equipment found on most ships. Its low tonnage suggests that this could be the right size.

*Stirling Castle* was built by Scott in Kingham, UK and was launched almost 100 years ago - on October 7, 1899. The Royal Navy requisitioned it for World War One duties on May 18, 1916, only four months before she was sunk by a mine off Malta on September 26, 1916.

The "Deep 5" team has a video of this shipwreck to include it in a future mini-series of underwater documentaries that we hope to co-produce with a local TV station.



A HUGE BOLLARD at the stern indicates the vessel once served as a tugboat



AMMUNITION SHELLS found in the wreck indicate the ship was a gunboat



THE BOILERS shared a single funnel



THE "DEEP 5" TEAM, from left: Paul Ciappara, Mario Gauci, Sarah Carlton Gauci, Michael Cooper and Emi Farrugia