

RN Dunkirk Veteran Lofty Christmas sets the scene for the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships Return to Dunkirk In May 2010.

James 'Lofty' Christmas, the only known surviving Royal Naval veteran who as a young Rating took a Little Ship across to Dunkirk as a part of Operation Dynamo, has spent a day on the River Thames onboard a Dunkirk Little Ship, MV Fermain V. Lofty was interviewed by Dan Snow for a forthcoming BBC2 documentary due to be aired 5th June 2010. Operation Dynamo was the name given to the mission to rescue the British Expeditionary Force and French troops from the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940. It is from this event that the expression 'Spirit of Dunkirk' originates.

Fermain V, an open launch built in 1926, was brought from her base in Shepperton by Dennis Cox to HMS President where Lofty was embarked. The interview took place against a backdrop of the Houses of Parliament and HMS Belfast. Whilst being interviewed Lofty explained what it was like to be off the beaches in 1940; he vividly recalled the events at Dunkirk and insisted that those who did not return should never be forgotten.

The Association of Dunkirk Little Ships (ADLS) is formed by the current owners of Little Ships that were used to rescue troops from the beaches at Dunkirk. The Little Ships ferried their survivors to larger ships waiting offshore. In this way, and with larger ships rescuing troops from the Dunkirk Harbour mole, more than 330,000 British and French troops were saved and were able to return to the UK to fight another day. Nowadays, the ADLS are seen at various events in the UK and within Europe, showing the flag and displaying the 'Dunkirk Spirit' of those fateful days. Part of their commemorative events programmes are the returns to Dunkirk, which have taken place, with only one cancellation in 1970 due to bad weather, every five years since 1965. The ADLS was formed in 1966, the brainchild of Raymond Baxter, who owned L'Orage at the time. Ian Gilbert, one of the ADLS co-ordinators for the return, said "This year's event is the last that we expect veterans to be able to attend. Operation Dynamo is a most important historical event and an extraordinary feat that emboldened the British people to fight on, and should never be forgotten. We feel extremely privileged to be owners of these historic Little Ships and to be a part of these commemorations. We are very grateful to the Royal Navy for their support and are looking forward to embarking ratings from HMS Collingwood for this year's event".

The ADLS are returning this year to mark the 70th Anniversary of Operation Dynamo, leaving Ramsgate at 0700 on Thursday 27 May to berth at the Basin du Commerce in Dunkirk, returning to Ramsgate at 1530 on Monday 31 May. Upwards of 50 Little Ships are taking part, escorted by the Royal Navy Duke Class Frigate HMS Monmouth and the Archer Class Patrol Boat HMS Raider. The ADLS will have 25 ratings from HMS Collingwood embarked in their Little Ships, continuing their links with the Fareham Shore Base who provide assistance at the annual Veterans Cruise that is held on the River Thames each September. WO2 Spike Hughes from HMS Collingwood said "The HMS Collingwood Phase 2 training section is extremely privileged to be part of this important event that marks a significant part in the history of the British Isles, and particularly the Armed Forces and Royal Navy. My team are much looking forward to the challenge of supporting the ADLS and Veterans during this very memorable weekend".

The Association of Dunkirk Little Ships return to Dunkirk is set to be a momentous occasion benefiting from veteran attendance, support from the Royal Navy and from the towns of Ramsgate and Dunkirk, and a rousing send off and welcome from well-wishers in the UK and France.

Further details can be obtained from the ADLS website www.adls.org.uk or the Royal Navy website www.royal-navy.mod.uk, or from email webadmin@adls.org.uk. WO1 Mick Gentry RN can provide information covering the RN involvement, email nr-ee-arm2@rncareers.mod.uk.

Maybe you could offer your support and greet the ships in Ramsgate when they return?