

The Ship's bell from HMS Bandit in Sutton Poyntz Mission Hall.



Summary

Ship's name - HMS Bandit
Type - Brigand Class Tug
Pennant No. W.69
Armed - 1x3" - 1x2MM - 2 Lewis guns
Launched - February 15th 1938
Builder - Fleming & Ferguson Ltd., Paisley, Scotland
Tonnage: 840grt. Length: 174 ft. Breadth: 32 ft. Depth 10.8 ft.
Engine - 2-screw. 2xT3Cyl. 15knots. 3000hp. Oil fired steam
Crew - 43
First owner - The Admiralty
1947 - re-named Briton
Sold 20/4/1960 to Joseph De Smet at Antwerp and broken up.



HMS Bandit was fitted for fire fighting, salvage, rescue and target towing. She made a number of rescue attempts and target towing from 1939 to 1942. She spent a lot of time at Scapa Flow, a natural harbour in the Orkney Islands which by 1940 was an island fortress manned by up to 50,000 Commonwealth troops. HMS Bandit was involved in Operation Neptune on D-Day plus towing Mulberry harbour units in 1944.

Captains

March 1938 to June 1940 - Lt. R. H. Johnson
October 1940 to July 1941 - Lt. A T Board
December 1941 to December 1942 - Temporary Lt. J T Horsman
December 1943 - Temporary Lt. Phillips and Temporary Lt. Woods
June 1944 - November 1945 Temporary Lt. E S Phillips

A brief look at HMS Bandit's work

1938 February 15th - launched and delivered to the UK Admiralty. June 9th - commissioned at Chatham, Kent under Lt. R H Johnson.
June 10th - departed Chatham for Portland and replaced St. Cyrus as Home Fleet target towing tug.
1939 - Fleet Target service with Home Fleet . 5th November - in harbour at Scapa Flow, Orkney Islands. November 26th - despatched to aid crippled submarine HMS Triad off Lindesnes, Norway but recalled as heavy weather
1940 January 10th - left Ardrossan to stand by AMC Canton ashore off Barra Head, Scotland. January 13th - arrived with AMC Canton at Rothesay Bay on way to River Clyde to beach Canton in Holy Loch. April 15th - Bandit ordered to assist SS Port Hunter and SS Queen Maud, part of collision convoy, English Channel.
April 18th - towing HMS Suffolk off Torness, Orkney. May 16th - arrived Greenock after towing HMS Penelope from Skjelfjord, Norway to UK.
May 24th - departed Scapa with HMRT Buccaneer with salvage gear aboard for Skjelfjord. October 15th - attempted to salvage SS Awake torpedoed by U61, 10 miles NE Cape Wrath but vessel foundered.
1941 January - at Scapa Flow under Lt. A T Board. February - took crippled destroyer HMS Boreas with boiler problems in tow off Dunnet Head to Scapa.
October 20th - at Scapa Flow, assisted by HMS Alligator, attempted to pull HMS London away from boom defences and prevent her dragging anchors in a gale.
1942 January to November - based at Scapa Flow under Temporary Lt. J T Horsman.
1942 July 10th departed Scapa for Fraserburg. July 11th - departed Fraserburg for Scapa towing BPT 48
1944 July 20th - departed Seine Bay, France in convoy FTC42. July 21st - arrived Southend
1945 September 29th - at Rosyth, Scotland
1947 - renamed Briton, transferred to Simonstown, South Africa
1956 January 17th BDO Plymouth transferred to AS Devonport
1958 - laid up in Pembroke Dock, Wales
1960 April 20th - sold to Jos de Smedt, Antwerp for scrap.

Memories of working on HMS 'Bandit' by Lt. Commander James Allon from WW2 People's War, an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar

"The bleak period spent in Scapa was on occasion relieved by being required to perform duties outside of one's normal role. One of these was an interesting month spent in command of HMS Bandit, an Admiralty tug, a large and powerful vessel available for rescue services in the Atlantic or the North Sea. The Captain of Bandit had been without leave for at least six months,...The officer concerned was in civil life a master mariner, like myself, and, before joining the Royal Navy, he was managing director of a towage company in Middlesborough. We met on occasion in Dunluce Castle' and I said that, if he could get permission from the Admiral commanding the base, I should be happy to relieve him for a month. He got permission and, as I had an assistant who could manage for the time I would be away, I took over and my friend went on his well-deserved leave.

Towing targets - *We were never called on to provide a rescue service during my time on board. Our daily chore was to tow targets for the battle fleet shoots. This entailed towing an eighty-ton target mounted on a pontoon, height about eighty feet. We would proceed out of Scapa to the designated area with a spotting party on board to record the fall of shot for later analysis. Once in position - the target was towed with about 300 fathoms of towline - the signal would be given and the shoot would begin. All that could be seen of the battleships was the fighting top at about twelve miles. It is hard to believe, but the 14 inch shells can be seen in the air during the firing....., I saw the shells straddle the target and bounce away across the sea for miles. On one occasion the first salvo shattered the top of the target which had to be repaired on return to port.*

Massed destroyer shoots - *These shoots were reasonably safe, the ones which were not were the massed destroyer shoots which always took place at night. The tug and target were on opposite courses to the destroyers, both proceeding at high speed. The danger can be imagined as the destroyers were using four-inch guns as well as pom poms, which were quite high calibre. The safety provided was a row of different coloured lights across the ship from stem to stern. In the event of the firing becoming dangerous, which it often did, the lights were switched on with the effect that the shoot was stopped.*

A very interesting month - but I was happy to hand back HMS Bandit and resume my work with 14th A/S group. My friend was very grateful for his leave."

Some notable events involving HMS Bandit can be found at: uboat.net clydeships.co.uk / royalnavyresearcharchive.org.uk / thamestugs.co.uk /

HMS Bandit's bell hung outside the Mission Hall for many years. It was renovated by The Sutton Poyntz Society and then hung inside. An information sheet is on the wall below the bell with a photograph taken of HMS Bandit at work on October 20th 1941 (see above).

Nobody knows why or how the bell came to Sutton Poyntz. If anybody can add some information, please contact the Trustees of the Mission Hall.