

Rescue & Target Towing Launch Mk 3

Information

RAF BOAT NUMBERS:	4001 – HMAFV Sunderland 4002 – HMAFV Stirling 4003 – HMAFV Halifax 4004 – HMAFV Hampden 4005 – HMAFV Hurricane 4006 – HMAFV Lancaster (ex Harvard) 4007 – HMAFV Wellington (ex Hudson)
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The new generation of steel craft were a long time coming. In 1970 the DDMC decided on a replacement program for the wooden boat fleet, among these was a steel hull, aluminium superstructure, 73ft RTTL with enhanced range and all weather capabilities.

The prototype HMAFV SPITFIRE arrived in 1970 and from the outset she was something of an ugly duckling. Short and stubby, with a bluff bow, chunky superstructure and twin funnels. These did nothing to enhance her appearance or her sea keeping abilities. After a disappointing few months during which her trim was difficult to maintain, and her design speed could never be met, she was returned to the builders. Trim wedges were fitted aft which increased her speed 22 knots. The downside being they kept her head down, causing her to ship even more water over the bow. Trials continued and she went back to the builders again in 1973 for further modifications. She was lengthened by some five feet and a new flared, cut away bow section fitted, along with spray rails and new stern section. This gave her a new lease of life and allowed her to meet all the design requirements. Her cut away bow was eventually replaced by one similar to that of the later MK.3 craft. She spent the rest of her RAF service at either Mountbatten or Holyhead being contracted to the civilian contractors when the Marine Branch closed down. When Smit Towing took over the contract in 2003, she was put up for sale.

After the problems with SPITFIRE her 'sister' ships were a long time in coming. They eventually came into service in three batches, firstly SUNDERLAND, STIRLING, and HALIFAX followed by HAMPDEN and HURRICANE and finally LANCASTER and WELLINGTON.

These Mk.3s saw service at most of the home MCUs, with HMAFV STIRLING being allotted to 1104 MCU Bridlington and later at 1102 MCU Gibraltar.

HMAFV SUNDERLAND went straight to 1102 MCU Gibraltar being the first launch under 100ft in length to make the trip under her own power.

These two boats were handed over to the Royal Navy prior to the closure of the Marine Branch on 28th August 1985, renamed HMS HART and HMS CORMORANT respectively.

HMAFV HALIFAX was initially allocated to Mountbatten where she served until the closure of the Branch.

The remaining five craft were transferred to Fishers, but remained under RAF control as AFVs.

In February 1991, control was passed to DSM(N). The civilian contractors changed over the next few years, with VT Marine Services finally losing the contract to Smit Towing in 2002. (SMIT had been operating LANCASTER at Pembroke Dock for some time before the change-over.) Smit, after winning the contract, felt that newer more up to date craft were required and subsequently all these former RAF craft were sold off by late 2004.