



Snapdragon, Mirage & Invader  
Association



# **Snapdragon Mirage and Invader Association Journal**

Spring 2022

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This is your magazine - please write an article,  
send photographs, short tips or even funny things  
that have happened in your sailing career.

Fi Parker has been unable to commit to producing a  
magazine because of family and work  
commitments, so for the time being it is being edited  
by Lynsay Scott - send any copy to  
smasiteminder@gmail.com

Thank You!!

## SS Montgomery - Again

**Pat Lacey** gives us his take on the latest story around the old liberty ship.

To my mind about once in a decade there is the repetitive cry of panic about this broken backed American Liberty Ship that has lain just off shore of Sheerness in Kent since the 20th August 1944. The 3 protruding masts and surrounding wreck buoys have been a feature and useful navigation mark for all sailors ever since.

True to form the scare re-emerged at the end of the year in The Daily Telegraph under the heading, "**Navy called in to tackle Thames Time Bomb**".

This vessel was on passage from the USA with 1400 tonnes of explosives to support our war effort when it ran aground in The Thames Estuary, close to Sheerness. I first began sailing Graduate and GP14 dinghies around it in the early 60's and later my Snapdragon 21 *Querida*. How well I remember Commander Philip Gilbert, a founder member of the snapdragon association, with his Snapdragon 26 *Soljyst*, relating stories of putting to sea from Chatham in his own ship towards the end of the war and losing off his guns for practice on the S.S. Richard Montgomery on his way out. This story and others were a feature of our wonderful Snapdragon rallies in the summertime in Stangate Creek in the lower Medway. I have pictures of over 20 association boats at anchor in the early days when one could row ashore, build a bonfire and have a barbecue. Sadly, the RSPB put an end to that as they believed the public were frightening off the birds. Rowing ashore was banned. So we then rallied our boats together and ate sandwiches watching sportsmen with guns walking along the shore doing exactly the opposite to the RSPB's intentions. I don't

remember any snapdragoner taking a pop at the birds. Well, now there is a fear that the masts on the S.S. Richard Montgomery have eroded so much that they could collapse and set off an explosion that could cause "mass damage and loss of life". A report in the hands of The Ministry of Defence says the oil and gas facilities at Sheerness would be at risk and the explosion would send a 300 metre wide column of water and debris nearly 3,000 metres into the air and generate a 5 foot wave. Navy specialists have been tasked with the job of removing the masts starting in June and taking about 2 months. It has to be said that the risk of a major explosion is "remote" according to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. So Philip Gilbert, try as he might, never managed to do the job for them. Were his shells blanks or did he just miss I wonder. One thing, however, he never missed the opportunity to carrying home the Snapdragon Cup for many years at our annual races. That was always his main aim in his years of retirement.

I send you all my best regards,  
**Pat Lacy.**

## Strange Waters

For most of us the 2020 season was a washout - not because of the weather which, ironically, was pretty good for sailing but COVID and the lockdown meant that we were hardly able to see our boats never mind sail them. I did manage to potter in the Swale when lockdown eased and even managed a trip from Conyer to Canvey Island and the very hospitable Island Yacht Club.



The picture above shows *Saphira* - my Snapdragon 24 alongside at the IYC pontoon with a lovely sunset thrown in for good measure.

In November just before the second lockdown *Saphira* was hauled out to have some work done at Swale Marina at the head of Conyer Creek. We were stalled again and work didn't happen till the spring of 2021.

Eventually we launched in May 2021. More pottering in the Swale and Medway with visits to Chatham Marina. A longer trip up to the Colne for a few days. What a lovely place to spend a few days and a chance to have my first experience out of the Thames Estuary on *Saphira*. Brightlingsea visitors pontoon is very well sheltered and the harbour



master's launch runs a ferry service from 0900-1900 during the summer. We decided to pump up my Aquafax Superlite dinghy for the first time (see equipment review) and used that for shuttling to and from the town quay. The Yachtsman pub serves good food at reasonable prices. It gets quite busy on fine summer days so may be wise to book. This season I plan to take *Saphira* back to the Blackwater and Colne and stay for a week or two with a trip to the Walton Backwaters if time permits. *Saphira* is ideally suited to exploring the nooks and crannies of these waters.

## A Memorable Year

Farewell to an old friend - but still in the family. Shirley Baker tells of a parting with *Aeolus*

This is the year we said goodbye to you-  
We did not want to see you go.  
30 years of fun, adventure at one with the sea  
And the sky.

Tuning in to nature, her moods, her changes,  
Coping with a little skill and sometimes prayer.  
Holding on for the weather to change.  
Tossed about – friends with seals, and seagulls

Now you have been lifted  
Off your keels and onto a trailer  
Ready for your journey – by road this time  
Not by sea, to meet your new owner-  
Our son, who will love you as we did,  
Enjoy your sturdy frame,  
The wind encouraging your billowing sails.

When I saw you there, mast down and waiting  
For your long journey to Devon,  
I patted your stalwart hull  
“Goodbye old girl, I said.

*Shirley Baker*

## Locks, Tides - and French Brie

**Don Wark** tell of a circumnavigation of France by boat, Summers 2005-09

If you've got the sailing bug, you've got to do it ! Jacky and I have always owned boats and sailed. Latterly we had a 29' bilge keel Snapdragon 890 sloop ('Wise One'). We sailed the coastal seas of Britain and adjacent European shores for many years before deciding on a Grand Plan, ie the Circumnavigation of France.

So how was this going to work ? From Le Havre we planned to enter the River Seine. This gave us access to Paris and the Central Canals. A journey south took us to the Mediterranean, then westwards via the Southern Canals to Britany and the Atlantic coastline. From there, back to the Solent and home. Ahead of us were some 450 locks and 1300 miles, mostly of rivers and canals. No problem ! It took five summers and, of course, generated a book.

So in 2005 we crossed the Channel from the Solent to the River Seine and its Ports. The most attractive destination was historic Port Honfleur. This Port had been the major 17<sup>th</sup>/ 18<sup>th</sup>C Port from which French settlers left for North America, Africa and other overseas destination. For us it was far more attractive than the alternative and very commercial Le Havre. In Honfleur the mast was removed and stowed ashore. We festooned our hull with car tyres and inflated fenders all linked together with wooden

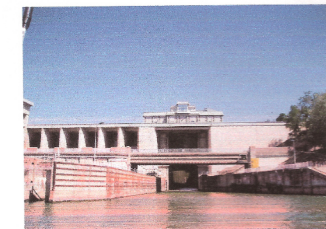
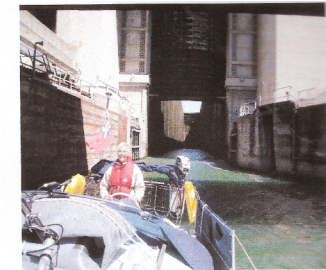
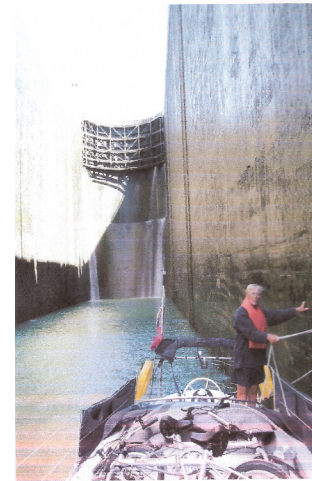
planks. Our proud vessel was turned into a slightly inelegant and underpowered canal boat.

From Honfleur the busy, tidal River Seine softens and mellows as it leaves behind the very commercial Le Havre and Rouen. Our lives became dominated by locks so you've just got to get used to them. Smaller and older locks may be about 93 metres in length, 8.3 m. in width with a rise and fall of 2 to 3 m. Watch out for the ones with sloping sides ! The large ones on the Rhone are of cathedral, boat-swallowing dimensions having a rise and fall of 22 m. But Paris called. Seeing Paris by small yacht and folding bike was just a unique experience. We were made very much at home in the Arsenal Marina in the heart of the City. We both knew Paris and enjoyed revisiting everything we loved. A little special was searching out the 16<sup>th</sup> C. Unicorn Tapestries (See Musee de Cluny).

Of course the story goes on. The next stage was Paris to Dijon; after that the R. Soane which led to the R. Rhone and the Mediterranean port of St.Louis for a winter's berth. The beautiful, historic Aigue Mortes rested and delighted us before our maritime close-down and winter retreat home.

As we enter 2006 and chugged from the Camargue to Royan, there is so much more to tell. I haven't mentioned new and old friends and family who joined us. There was, for instance, John, Jennie and Mike with their 60 foot Dutch sailing barge 'Vrouw Antje'. We spent a number of relaxed evenings together as we shared the same waters

for some distance. And of course there were many others encountered of many tongues. Our leisurely tour also enabled our diet to experience the slow changing French seasons and geography. The endless and enduring geographic panorama, the deeply ingrained history and unfolding culture all enriched our tour. The summer of 2007 took us from the Gironde to the River Vilaine. In 2008 we left the Villaine to explore the Golf de Morbihan.



The Morbihan (Gallic for 'Little Sea') is accessed from the Baie de Quiberon and is a wonderland of unspoilt little, wooded islands and sheltered bays, all on a scale similar to the Solent. You could spend a lifetime here making friends and drinking wine. (And we did!) But winter found us back in the R. Villaine and holed-up for the winter in wonderful old Roche Bernard.

In 2009 we explored the Baie de Quiberon and its Peninsula and Belle Isle and many other islands and got sucked into the tumultuous 'International Festival of the Sea'. We had now joined up with our previous sailing trip to this coastline and could claim 'The Circumnavigation of France'. But it was now time for the winter's lift out in Roche Bernard. The mast was delivered from Honfleur by low loader and craned into its proper place on board and ready for next season. The hull was cleared of its layers of protection. We, however, had to head off to catch our homeward ferry from le Havre.

Our next (ferry) trip was home to Lyndhurst and:  
***Farewell France. Just for now.....***

*PS The hero of our trip was of course Wise One. Having come to the end of this project the future was much debated. Wise One found a new home with an ambitious French sailing family and is sailing French waters still. We believe she will be very happy.*

## Equipment Review:

### AQUAFAX 2.3 SUPERLITE dinghy.



Space is at a premium on SAPHIRA - a Snapdragon 24 so my Wetline 2.6 with a slatted floor was not the ideal tender for her. The search began for a new lightweight dinghy. There are several on the market but I narrowed it down to the Seago GO-lite and the Aquafax Superlite. Other makes are available but these two were available locally so I could take a look and feel the weight and build quality. Both are of a similar construction and weight about the same – around 14kilos. The Aquafax packs into a the size of a large backpack, having an airdeck floor which reduces the size and weight considerably.

The Aquafax won purely on the basis that Mark at Faversham Chandlery has the dealership and offered me a good price. The compact dinghy now sits comfortably in the port cockpit locker and doesn't require three Weetabix for me to manage it and it will happily take my Mariner 3.3 outboard.

### SEAGO RP500



As most of my sailing is coast hopping or creek crawling I thought long and hard about the value of a life raft – whether I should get one and if so which type. Forays on the east coast involve spells in the North Sea and the Thames estuary with its sandbanks and large ships. Weather too can be unpredictable despite the more accurate forecasts available to us today so in the end it came down to which type. Space on a Snapdragon 24 is limited especially as I carry a conventional dinghy in the port cockpit locker and the usual paraphernalia of fenders, ropes etc in the others.

After looking at reviews and demonstration videos I decided to compromise and ordered a SEAGO RP500 rescue platform. It is effectively a life raft without the canopy. At less than £400 it doesn't hit the boat fund as much as other models.

*Pros: Its small, light (an important consideration since my broad shoulders and narrow waist seem to have traded places. When deployed it is always right sight up and inflates in 5 seconds.*

*Cons: It doesn't have a canopy so no use for really blue water cruising. I carry a two person survival bag in my grab bag.*



## Radar or AIS? Either or Both?

Like many who sail in and around the Thames Estuary there are two things that make me nervous - fog and big ships and most of all the two together. Yes - if it's foggy I stay firmly tied up somewhere and put the kettle on, but it's not always a choice. The question was what to do?

Regarding the AIS v Radar question, I spent some time looking at the issue and came down in favour of AIS for the following reasons:

- The cost of a class B transponder has come down significantly in comparing to radar
- The power consumption is lower
- As most of my sailing is in and around the Thames estuary my concern is larger vessels. AIS enables me to monitor them and I have their details should I wish to contact them
- It is much easier to use than radar
- My shore contact can keep an eye on me via an internet app like Shipfinder.

For me it was cost, ease of installation and use that were the main factors. I'm sure radar is an excellent addition but not for me. Anyway, my little boat already looks like a floating satellite of GCHQ!

I was looking at a range of options for AIS but was also looking at the boat account balance. AIS transponders are available from around £300-£350 for the small (4.3in) Matsutec to the high end Vesper and Raymarine units which can run to four figures. In the end I settled on the ONWA H39A at £480. In its favour - it is a 7inch chartplotter with a good enough chart and very clear AIS screen.

As it transpired the unit is very easy to set up and comes with an external GPS aerial and only needs a VHF antenna in addition. I chose a separate antenna but you could use a splitter. I bought mine from East Anglian Radio Services and Paul, the proprietor, was a great help during the set up process.

## Holding Tank.

Next year COVID permitting I'd like to take my boat to Holland and the canals. The sea toilet would have to be linked to a holding tank or exchanged for a Portaloo or composting toilet. I don't fancy either of the latter so I've been looking at the holding tank options. In my search I have come across this integrated unit made by Dometic. The model is the 711 and has an integrated holding tank.

More research is needed so I shall feed back in the next edition, on the website and Facebook.



Cost list is around £900 but can be had for about £500 if you shop around.

## Book Reviews

***Around the Island*** by Stan Lester; Avista 2007

Stan Lester tells of an adventure many think about (me included) of sailing around our island home. His Mirage 2700 "INDALO" was based in the river Dart – probably at Dittisham from his description. It is written in a chatty style with enough bits of historical, social and geographical asides to punctuate the "sailor" bits. There are no photographs or illustrations, but there are some small sketch maps at the beginning of each chapter which helps to locate the reader on the journey. Well worth a read especially for Mirage owners or those, like me, who hanker after doing the same trip.

***Swin, Swale and Swatchway*** by H. Lewis Jones; Lodestar Books

Those of us who sail the east coast will no doubt have enjoyed Maurice Griffiths' ***Magic of the Swatchways*** – if you are one you should get hold of this lost Victorian classic which has been resurrected by Lodestar Books – publishers of neglected nautical writings.

Born in the middle of the nineteenth century in Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey where his father was a naval chaplain. He was a physician who used to sail in what he calls "...a glorious playground near home.." In his chronicles of trips to the Medway, Swale, Crouch and other east coast haunts he recalls a time when sailing a small yacht was just that – sailing – no auxiliary engine or electronic aids to get you out of trouble. He recalls a time which was busy with smacks, bawleys, sailing barges and warships and the Thames and its environs were little explored by leisure sailors.

I'm sure like me owners of a Snapdragon 24 will appreciate his description of his ideal boat for east coast adventures.

*"Give us a boat drawing from three feet to three feet six and twenty feet on the waterline, strongly built, a full model and fairly high topsides; not too much keel..."*

Put it on your reading list for winter nights and with a glass or two of rum you can enjoy the salty yarns. Check out Lodestar Books website for other gems.

***Solitaire Spirit*** by Les Powles; Adlard Coles Nautical

For a very human story and a good read I managed to dig out a copy of Les Powles book. It is a story of determination, innocence, ignorance, humour and ultimately a learning about self. What some people will do to go to sea in a small boat if often difficult to explain to someone who has not the slightest interest in the sea or boats. However, if you are infected then you will relate to this man's dreams.

***Other titles from Lodestar Books worth a read:***

***In Shoal Waters*** by A C Stock

Tales of coastal adventures in Charlie's 16ft gaffer from his base in the Blackwater,

***Sea-country*** by Tony Smith - known to many as "Creeksailor" through his blog, Tony is now the keeper of *Shoal Waters* Charlie Stock boat which was the subject of the previous title

***Messing about in Boats*** by John R Muir

Tales of sailing between the wars - a different era which Muir captures superbly. One of his boats *Patience* is a shell awaiting someone looking for a challenge. She is ashore at Ironwharf Boatyard in Faversham.

## Facebook Facts and Snippets

There are now 590 members on the SMIA Facebook page - (as at 30/12/21).

Here are some discussions and photos from the pages:

Sharon Evans posted this unusual junk rigged SD24 which she was selling.



The two photos above are Mike DeRosa's SD26 which is based in New England. It is one of three

Which was shipped over in the early '70s

Viktor Varsanyi shared his tip for cleaning the mast track on his Mirage using an old toothbrush head!



Below is a fantastically restored Vire 7hp



which Bob Suruncle (yes I know - his mother's brother - it is an alias) is installing on his SD23.

Lots of other stuff on Facebook - check out our Facebook page if you haven't already

## Gadgets

If you have a Danforth Anchor then this bracket on the pulpit will keep it off the deck but ready to deploy when needed.



Manufactured in marine stainless steel it ships from China and costs approximately £46 available on Amazon.

Midship cleats are a great help if you are single handed docking. These were installed on my SD24 again shipped from China and cost £30 for the pair.



However if you fancy shelling out £140 each for Barton Marines version which slides onto the genoa cart then here you go - no holes to drill and easily dismountable.





Front Cover Photo - Sunset at Harty Ferry  
Back Cover Photo - “Suhaili” at Gosport Marina