

BANGOR

About two years ago, Mrs. Roberta Dunlop, a member of the Bangor North Ireland Chamber of Commerce and wife of the organization's president, was taking a casual stroll down one of the town's piers, when she noticed a small plaque that read: "From this bay launched the largest amphibious assault in history, June 4, 1944." Until that point, she had never given a thought as to the role her town played as a staging area for the D-Day landings. After some research, Mrs. Dunlop proposed to the Chamber that, since the 50th anniversary was approaching, the town should hold some sort of commemoration. From that simple suggestion, a 2 week gala event sprung up that was to include a modern day Coast Guard cutter participating in the commemoration of those Coast Guardsmen who trained in Bangor in preparation for the Normandy invasion 50 years ago.

USCGC Dallas arrived in Bangor in the early morning of May 27 and "let go" the anchor approximately 500 yards off shore. The fair weather Dallas had left in Dublin had followed her North. As soon as Dallas arrived, the ship and crew were immersed in a flurry of activity. Captain Hull was first interviewed and photographed by the local media and then immediately whisked off to an informal luncheon with Councillor Brian Wilson, the Mayor of North Down Borough Council, Chamber of Commerce President Michael Dunlop, and Northern Ireland Tourist Board Chief Executive Ian Henderson. Captain Hull then moved to an on-camera interview with the BBC and meetings with the Royal Navy's Senior Officer in Northern Ireland, CDR Ross Thoburn, and the District Controller of Her Majesty's Coast Guard, Colin Duncan. That evening Captain Hull returned the hospitality he had been shown earlier in the day by hosting an open-air reception for 150 people on the flight deck of the Dallas. Reception highlights included a Dallas WWII exhibit featuring Coast Guard memorabilia housed in the helo hanger, a Dixieland Jazz Band, and American style refreshments.

Public ceremonies started the next day with a memorial service held at St. Cromagill's Parish church in Bangor led by the Lord Bishop of Down and Dromore. During the service, the Bishop recognized the Dallas crew present and expressed the United Kingdom's "profound appreciation for your comradeship in the pursuit of freedom." He went on to say that "Owing to the sacrifices of the D-Day invaders, the ceremonies of the next two weeks were appropriate," but added, "True homage to those who went before is in the form of our uniting today to combat oppression in all its forms."

Following the memorial service, Dallas' 50-person Color and Honor Guard, which was made up of volunteers from the crew, led a parade from the church to the marina. The Royal Air Force, in memorial to the Battle of Britain, flew Spitfires in mock dogfights over the bay. This was followed by the RAF's Red Arrows Precision Flying Team and a joint search and rescue demonstration with Dallas' HH-65A helicopter and a boat from the Royal Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) station in Bangor. Before a crowd of several thousand, HH-6513 deployed their Aviation SurvivalMan, ASM3 Brian Smardo, recovered a volunteer "victim" from the water, and lowered the "victim" to two different types of RNLI lifeboats. After the demonstration, HH-6513 departed for Ballyholme Bay to place the helicopter on public display. Several thousand people toured the aircraft, with the most popular question of the day being, "Is that the helicopter from *Baywatch*?"

After the day's events, Dallas officers were invited to a luncheon at the town hall where retired Rear Admiral James Miller, curator of the U.S. Navy Memorial, presented the mayor with a bronze replica of "The Lone Sailor." Then, the mayor proceeded to recognize Jack Campbell, a former Coast Guard Gunner's Mate Third class who was assigned to Rescue Flotilla One at D-Day, with a commemorative plaque. As the veteran of D-Day approached the podium to receive the token of appreciation, all those present in the room stood and honored Mr. Campbell with a standing ovation. Mr. Campbell, who met Dallas in Dublin, Ireland sailed with her to Poole, England where he met up with fellow veterans.

Sunday found the Honor Guard marching in a small procession in Belfast to commemorate the 51st anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic, while others in the crew won honors for Dallas in a rifle competition against a local gun club. SN McAllister won particular recognition shooting 72 out of a possible 75 points. On Memorial Day, members of the crew attempted to distinguish themselves in both golf and soccer matches against local civic organizations. Though the soccer team fell a few goals short of winning, they had a great deal of fun and were treated like victors by the locals with food and spirits after the games.

Through all the activities and celebrations of Sunday and Monday, Dallas held open house for hundreds of enthusiastic tourists who braved the water taxi from shore to ship. And again, as in Dublin, the crew marvelled at the warmth, good humor, and hospitality of the Irish people. At 1800 on Memorial Day, with some heavy hearts and many fond memories, Dallas weighed anchor and sounded one extended, prolonged blast of the ship's whistle for the people of Bangor, and headed out to sea for Poole, England – the former home of Rescue Flotilla One.

