

the ideal referee, sure of his ground, critical, articulate but always willing (when he thought it worthwhile) to help the author improve his paper, or the Editor to refuse it gracefully.

The Institute, of which he was a founding father, meant much to Donald Sadler and it was sad that he was just to miss the fortieth anniversary dinner, an event he was much looking forward to. As the President remarked on that occasion, perhaps no individual in the Institute's history has devoted so much time and effort to its well-being. His influence will remain.

M.W.R.

#### SALUTE TO DONALD SADLER FROM A FELLOW

It was on the night of the Annual General Meeting when I learned of the news about Donald. On getting back home, and locking up outside, and then looking up outside, the sky, the finest for many a long time, was studied. Not a cloud anywhere, and not one star was absent. How appropriate, and how glorious, a salute to an old friend!

## Blondie Hasler

Herbert George Hasler, universally known as Blondie, died in Scotland after a short illness at the age of 73. He was not a member of the Institute although he contributed to the *Journal* on a number of occasions. Through his invention of the first reliable wind-vane steering gear and his radical views on yacht design he had a profound influence on the conduct of long-distance voyages in small boats. The following is the text of the address by Michael Richey at the service of thanksgiving held in Portsmouth Cathedral on 19 June 1987.

One of the reasons I am here to pay a tribute to Blondie Hasler is that some 20 years ago, in 1965, I bought his yacht *Jester* after he had completed four single-handed transatlantic passages in her. I knew him before that, although not well, but *Jester* first gave me an insight into that brilliant, unorthodox and fertile mind. The boat, with her full enclosure and unstayed mast was a stroke of genius, of which Angus Primrose would later say she represented the only significant advance in yacht design this century.

With the boat I inherited a notebook relating to her design and construction which to someone of a more slap-happy disposition became a source of wonderment. The detail was extraordinary, from scale drawings of a man performing all the functions he might be expected to in a boat – sleeping, eating, cooking, navigating and so on – to the dimensions of a biscuit tin. *Jester* had been no shot in the dark but the result of careful thought and a radical approach to the problems of seamanship.

This measured approach was characteristic of Blondie in everything he undertook. Combined with an inventive streak it resulted in a wide range of original ideas to do with boats and the sea. *Jester* herself scarcely qualifies as an invention, but for her first transatlantic crossing in 1960 she was fitted with a wind-vane steering device which enabled her to complete the passage almost entirely under self steering. Nowadays when such equipment is commonplace it is difficult to realize how revolutionary a concept this was. For the first time in the long history of sail a boat could be reliably steered on all points of sailing without the help of a helmsman. If for nothing else Blondie would be remembered for that.

There were other developments, but most of his efforts over the last 20 years were devoted to designing, with his partner Jock McLeod, junk rigs for yachts and, he fondly hoped, commercial coastal sail. This is perhaps the area where he made the greatest contribution and his book on the subject, written with McLeod and now in the press, is certain to be the definitive work.

Blondie took to the sea early. As a boy at Wellington he cruised the Solent and surrounding waters in a flat-bottomed boat he had built himself. In 1932 he was commissioned as a regular officer in the Royal Marines and in 1940, at the beginning of the war, was awarded the OBE and the French Croix de Guerre for service during the Norwegian campaign when he was in charge of landing craft during the assault on Narvik.

His name will always be associated with Operation Frankton, the famous 'cockleshell' commando raid on Bordeaux which he conceived and led and of which he was one of two survivors. Anything I can say about the operation will be second-hand, but it is impossible to pay a tribute to Blondie without mentioning it. As a fairly junior officer he wrote a paper suggesting that enemy ships could be attacked in harbour by swimmers operating in canoes who would attach limpet mines to them below the waterline. The idea ultimately secured the support of Lord Mountbatten, who was then Chief of Combined Operations, and in due course on 7 December 1942, five two-man canoes (designed by Blondie along the lines of the German *folbot*) were launched from the submarine *Tuna* at the mouth of the Gironde river. Their task was to make their way 50 miles upstream, moving only by night, and attack shipping alongside the quays in Bordeaux. Winter was chosen for this hazardous operation because of the length of the days.

The story of the raid has been well told in a book *Cockleshell Heroes* by Brigadier Lucas Phillips based on official documents and Hasler's diary; it was also of course the subject of a film. Two of the canoes were overwhelmed by the tide race and of the ten members of the expedition eight were either drowned or captured and shot by the Germans. Only Hasler and his crew Marine Sparks, having attached their limpets, escaped to make their way back through enemy-occupied France and then Spain to Gibraltar and ultimately home. Hasler was recommended for the Victoria Cross but the award could not be made because of the technicality that he had not been under enemy fire. He was awarded the DSO and Corporal Sparks the DSM.

In 1946 Blondie won the Royal Ocean Racing Club's points championship in the 30-square metre *Tre-Sang*, and I like to think that the gruelling experience of driving this cigar-shaped boat with so little freeboard to windward persuaded him that there must be gentler ways of battling with the elements. He was invalided out of the Royal Marines in 1948 and until 1952 lived on board his boat *Petula*, a Fife-built 18-ton cutter. During this period he surveyed the north coast of Brittany and published his admirable pilot book *Harbours and Anchorages on the North Coast of Brittany*, which was the precursor of the splendid series of sailing directions later produced by Adlard Coles and a model of how such things should be done. He was responsible for the Single-handed Transatlantic Race, first sailed in 1960 and, in 1964, for the first two-man Round Britain Race, both of which have become permanent fixtures.

Blondie had many accomplishments. He was a good draughtsman and a competent painter; he played the piano and the ukelele; he wrote plays and at one stage thought he might make a living as a cartoonist. He was a fine seaman who designed many rigs and a number of boats, and when he took to farming it did not surprise me to learn that he could plough a straight furrow. He was also an extremely good writer.

He spent his last years organically farming in Argyll, at Lochgilphead at the foot

of the Crinnan Canal where he kept his little junk-rigged *Pilmer*. He had become intensely aware of the dangers to the environment from the industrial organization of society and sought to live with his family more in tune with the natural world. He found great happiness in his marriage to Bridget and from his children Dinah and Tom.

To some of us I think Blondie was himself his greatest achievement. He was a man of extraordinary integrity, upright if anyone was. His modesty was entirely sincere; he hated praise. He never referred to the war, nor used his rank or decorations. That for him was all over. His manner was mild; he had great authority but would never raise his voice. He was a delightful companion, with a dry humour never far from the surface, and on occasions a wit that could be acerbic, although never by accident.

I have had the privilege of knowing a number of great men in my lifetime, in widely different callings. It has often struck me that what they had in common was precisely the quality of greatness: the manner in which they achieved it was almost incidental. I would place Blondie Hasler firmly among that category of person.

M. W. R.