



Channel Relay – 1983

Friday 26th August, the Hotel Ambassador Folkstone was taken over by Warrington Dolphins Channel Relay teams and their supports. It had already been decided that the teams would not be swimming the following morning, Saturday, so after dinner, they relaxed, some going into the town centre to explore and others remaining in the bar. Saturday dawned, it seemed unlikely that the swim would commence with the evening tide. However, a meeting was arranged for that evening before dinner. The 6 o'clock Shipping Forecast was not too promising, but after talking to the pilots Eric Baker and John Winyard it was decided that we would start the swim in the early hours of Sunday morning.

The swimmers certainly surprised the other guests staying at the hotel, by virtually clearing the sweeey table, on the night before the swim. The remainder of the evening was spent packing sandwiches, filling thermos flasks and trying to catch some sleep. At 2.00am everyone congregated in the "Reception" area, some more bleary eyed than others. Laden with sports bags, food and cameras etc., One team, David Jones, Bill Dutton, Paul Gwatkin, Andy Sandon, Dave Palmer and Trevor Symmons, had to make their way to Dover to meet their boat, whilst the other team, Carole Hunt, Chris Carter, Chris Green, Cathy Taylor, Sue Johnson and Ken Bailey, complete with golf umbrella and Alan Humphries made their way to Folkstone Harbour to meet their boat.

It was exactly 3.00am when Carole and David started swimming from Shakespeare Beach. For the first hour, about 500 yards separated them. It was only after Chris Carter had been swimming for about 15 minutes that we heard the other team had turned back having abandoned the swim owing to worsening conditions.

Our pilot Eric Baker, was not very optimistic about our chances, but we were determined to go on, hoping that the conditions would look better in daylight. As was said at the time, things could have been worse, it could have been raining. Dawn was beginning to break, as Cathy entered the water at 6.00am. From the swimmers point of view, first of all you were down in a deep trough looking up at the boat towering above you, a sort of fishes' view. The next time you were high up above the boat looking down on the rest of the team, a sort of birds eye view. The sea was running very high, and this created difficulty for the swimmer who was leaving the water, to get into the boat without being injured. However, Chris Green solved this problem, by gallantly riding rough in the dinghy being towed by the boat, extricating swimmers from the water for transfer to the main boat. Chris must have spent most of his time when he was not swimming, being tossed about in this way. Whilst all this was going on, one of the observers spent most of his time, asleep, trying to recover from a bout of seasickness. Ken Bailey spent most of his time not swimming under broolly. The critical part of the swim came, after 12 hours when we were still over 3 miles from France being swept towards Boulogne. The pilot announced, that unless progress was made during the next half hour, we would have to turn round. Carole took over from Ken. It had been running at force 7 for over 2 hours. Fortunately during her hour

Carole made nearly 2 miles progress, and the coast was quite clear as we continued with Chris Carter for the third round. By the time his hour had finished we were under a mile from the shore. It was Cathy, who at 5.33pm landed at a beach close to Boulogne, and our swim was completed after 14 hours and 33 minutes. Chris Green dipped the costume Sunny Anderson had worn 50 years ago on her successful crossing, into the water, and brought a handful of pebbles from the beach.

The journey back to Folkstone is one that will be remembered, bags floated around the deck amidst ham and cheese sandwiches. The going was rough and it seemed a long three hours before we finally reached Folkstone Harbour a rather wet, bedraggled team minus one golfing umbrella. We were met by relatives and friends. Back at the hotel, after baths and changes of attire, Mrs 'Sunny' Anderson organised a celebration party which was enjoyed by all. The champagne flowed, and seemed to revitalise certain members of the team and the celebrations continued into the early hours.

On the Monday, a luncheon was organised by the Channel Swimming Association at the hotel. During which Sunny Anderson was presented with a piece of pottery in the form of a pidgeon, by Mrs. Shipton, to commemorate the fact that it had been necessary to use carrier pidgeons, to communicate Sunny Anderson's progress, during her swim.

It was a memorable weekend, and we would like to thank all those who helped in any way to commemorate Sunny's successful crossing 50 years ago. Special thanks must go to Chris Carter and Chris Green for the terrific amount of organising this venture needed.

Sue Johnson