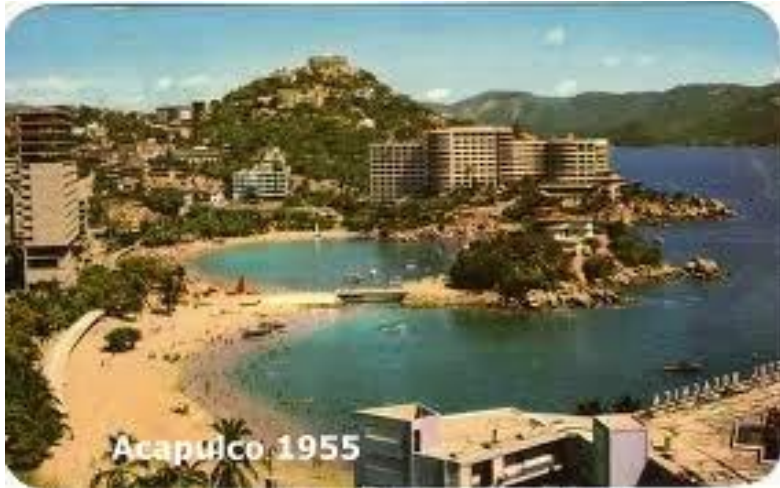


Hello Shipmates,

I read with some sadness the fall of Acapulco as a safe playground for the average Mexican and American visitor. Excellent Pacific beaches, tasty food for a few pesos, and ultra friendly to **Superb** shore-goers. Cannot recall any reports of unseemly or anti social behaviour; a source of satisfaction! The main Grand Hotel was, virtually, purchased by the famous names of Tinsel Town, for relaxed weekends away from the hard daily grind of film making in Hollywood; a hallowed halls not frequented by our lower tier.



Those who bussed up to Mexico City for the military parade were all praise for Mexican troops, who hosted them in their barracks. A common tale was their near poverty level, such that your 'duck suit' would be hand washed, ironed dry, then half an hour's sun for bleaching, back wearable in an hour and a half for ship's cigarettes; considered peak of luxury and enjoyment after a diet of Mexican 'lung busters'.

Years later, following a depot in the 'drug's wars' a Times report stated that Acapulco's death toll was 23,000 from rivalry between factions, murders and disappearances; second only in number to the real war under way in Syria.

Another lovely area we visited was Montego Bay; I recall the main hotel was declared 'out of bounds' to all but 'wardroom'. That only lasted until the manager of the place got to hear; all changed P.D.Q. How on earth could such a stupidity come about?



Shipmates John and Janet Ward holidayed there about six months ago. Prior to leaving I read Montego Bay was now the shooting capital of Jamaica; all young bucks carry a concealed weapon resulting in frequent and sudden mayhem on the streets. This I related to John and Janet, with caution to follow the old saying and 'Keep one hand on your 'ha'penny'. I did say the full meaning of that is lost in the mists of time, but it sounds dire*. On their return nothing was said, so can only assume 'ha'pennies' remain inviolate in any way.

That preamble reinforces my view that the world was 'a far nicer place'; we travelled to and visited lovely places and people thanks to 'Grey Funnel' cruises.

Now degenerated into tourist traps, unhealthy, injurious to one's welfare, crowded in the extreme when two or three cruise ships arrive with two or three thousand bodies it's time to cancel your own run ashore; Venice is sinking - from the weight of people I expect.

I do not need much persuasion when our Josie says, 'Let's get naked and dance on our roof'; any time spent polishing my military two-step is never considered a waste.

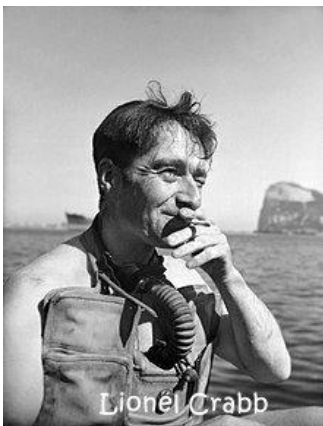
Following a couple of cancellations my scheduled visit to prostate clinic at Medway Maritime (old naval hospital) came good. From my village to Chatham at 09.15 is a progress from junction deadlock to junction deadlock, on edge in case you fail to make it in time. Found a parking space, booked in at the main entrance as commanded, there advised which section of the rabbit warren to try and find -booked in there, yet again - right - 'Go over there and take a seat'. I always carry a book so settled, in a state of blessed relief, to await my consultant.

20 minutes elapsed when a nurse called out a mangled version of my name, informs, 'Sadly the consultant is taking some unplanned leave'. Discarded right at source.

'Would the jobsworth in cubicle behind glass cancel my £2.00 parking fee for a visit aborted by you?'; of course not, written request, names named, times, type of vehicle, colour, cross ply or radials. A desperate urge to open a vein and become a real patient reveals itself in a purple mist.

Did you see the recent report on the world's biggest employers? As expected, the Chinese P.L.A. well up there, number seven (7) on the list is Great Britain's N.H.S. at 1.7 million- if that does not indicate a monument to inefficiency nothing will. Reading on, at number 8 the combined Indian Armed Forces - be aware, this is no spoof.

Was in Medway hospital with Jo one day, a year ago, for her scan. Sitting on a bench in the passageway was interested in uniformed and badged staff, those with files under arm, porters etc. Like kids on the motorway counting Stobart trucks, we counted staff; some passed and re-passed. 71 bodies passed in 15½ minutes. Recall the place is a rabbit warren, what total was wandering around the rest of the labyrinth is a 'very high' guess.

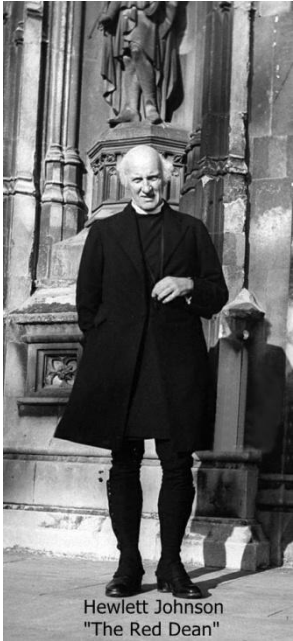


Return to tobacco and military friendship made a memory pop up where 'cigs' should have been the catalyst for contact, scrounged in the universal sign language for such things. At the time I was not a user.

The Fleet Review 51, or was it 2? Vernon pier serviced all those vessels, foreign and home for mail collection, bodies coming aboard and going and such like. I was on *Gorrigan* at the time, anchored with all the odd bods eastern end of line in Spithead - pier was busy, busy beyond belief. Two new Russian cruisers *Sverdlov* and *Ordzhonikidze* attending ignored 'gun salute orders' and fired theirs on main armament. Dressing with lights overall at

night, orders also ignored.

Senior of the pair had suspended between her masts an enormous lit up Red Star. We pulled into **Vernon** awaiting postie's return, behind us a very slick Russian ship boat squeezed in. 'Have you any smokes?' tic-tac started immediately by their dour, unsmiling crew. Hindsight tells you they were watched, monitored closely by those crew in the stern. You may recall this was the time Buster Crabb went missing, allegedly whilst measuring **Sverdlov's** inlets, etc.



Soon reason for their trip was heralded by a small flurry on the jetty. The notorious Red Dean over 6 foot tall, thin as a pike staff, dressed in Dickensian bishop's rig, tight leggings buttoned up to the knees, black dress coat, waist coat and hat - like a character from a comedy sketch. His lady wife had similar stature, in black, on his coattails, with her two daughters in train, six-foot-ish, thin enough to get air borne on broomsticks, with faces like hatchets. All assisted into the Rusky, then pushed off - without a wave, smile or nod of recognition to any of the mob of Her Majesty's hearts of oak, not a smile, not a wave - two fingers would have done! A true Christian spreading joy and bonhomie towards the U.K flock.

Recall he was very vocal at the time, leading the faction that accused the United Nation's contingent of germ warfare in Korea. Very pro-Russian, a Stalinist I suppose.

Any of our present company at that review?

So, cheerio for a wee while, hope Santa smiled on y'all.

- For those of us who didn't know (but probably guessed) the ha'penny refers to a certain part of the female anatomy that mums of old would tell their daughters to keep safe when going out with boys. It came from an old music-hall song and has been sung by Max Miller, The Wurzells and Jake Thackray to mention a few. To see the lyrics click [HERE](#)'.

KEEP YOUR HAND ON YOUR HA'PENNY

When Molly began to go courting
Her mother was anxious to tell
How certain young fellas would want her
To stray down the pathway to 'ell
So Molly's old ma used to say:

Chorus

Keep your hand on your ha'penny
Cover it well with your palm
Keep your hand on your ha'penny
And Molly will come to no harm
They'll hug you and kiss you so sweetly
They'll make you feel ever so nice,
But handle the fellas discretely
And follow this simple advice:

Chorus

Keep your hand on your ha'penny
Cover it well with your palm
Keep your hand on your ha'penny
And Molly will come to no harm
When Molly and I went out courting
I told her she'd nothing to fear
But down in the meadow last Sunday
I whispered these words in her ear
Take your hand off your ha'penny
Look into my bonny blue eyes
Take your hand of your ha'penny
And I'll give you --- a lovely surprise!